

Interview with John T. Kosloske
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Interviewed by Calvin Gower and John Waldron

Gower: This is an interview for the Central Minnesota Historical Center, conducted by John Waldron and Calvin Gower on March 18th, 1974. Today we're interviewing John T. Kosloske, who served in the state legislature of Minnesota in 1949, 1951 and 1953, from District 45. Okay, John, you want to start out here?

Waldron: Mr. Kosloske, we start out with general questions, your family background, when you were born, where you were born, your educational background, things like that.

Kosloske: Well, I was born in Sauk Rapids which is only a matter of a block and a half from where we are being interviewed. I lived here practically all my life. I was born in December, 1907. I attended the parochial schools in Sauk Rapids and a public school. I also took courses in commercial law in night school. My folks were born in Germany, they came to America when they were very young people. They have been residents of Sauk Rapids the rest of their years.

Gower: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Kosloske: Well, I think there were nine in our family of brothers and sisters. There were only two sisters and the rest were brothers of seven.

Gower: You had two sisters and seven brothers? For a total of nine in the family.

Kosloske: Yes a total of nine in our family. See, we were a short dozen.

Gower: Sure, right, okay. Now, was there anyone else in your family who was interested in politics it all?

Kosloske: Well, no. one in our family has been interested in politics to the extent that I have. My dad used to go and campaign for other candidates and friends of theirs, which was either on the county or local level. I'm the only one who started out on the field. I started out when I was fifteen years old.

Gower: About what time would you say that your parents got to the United States? Just, off hand.

Kosloske: Well--my aunt is 72, no, 92 years old on March 1st. She came to America when she was two, which was to Chicago, and she come to Sauk Rapids when she was five. That would make it about 65 years ago.

Gower: Now that would make it about, did you say she came when she was two years old?

Kosloske: She came to Chicago when she was two years old and she lived there three years so if--

Gower: So. She's 92 now, so she came 90 years ago to the United States.

Kosloske: United States.

Gower: And your folks probably came about the same time?

Kosloske: My grandfather was here first, then my grandmother, and the rest of the children came afterwards. They all settled in Chicago first and then came to Sauk Rapids.

Gower: Do you know why they came to Sauk Rapids?

Kosloske: Well, they all came from this one particular portion of Prussia, Germany. One started to come here and the letters would be going back and forth and first thing you know, one family followed after another and we got a little colony here now.

Gower: Okay. That's a familiar story. That's the way many immigrants came over. Why do you think you got interested in politics?

Kosloske: Well, I don't know, but my dad would come from work and then there would be a fella, like LaFollette, Senator LaFollette of Wisconsin, Borah from Idaho, Bert Wheeler and Walsh from Montana, and Vandenberg from Michigan. I would hear him talk about what great men they were. Then when, people would come around campaigning for Senator Shipstead, they would put their poster on the telephone pole and I'd be looking at it. I guess I just got interested in it.

Waldron: Then would you say you got your political ideas and conceptions from these progressive Senators?

Kosloske: Yes, I would say so, because after that I got to thinking that people were somewhat backwards in expressing themselves. If they had somebody with some grit and gumption behind them, they could speak for them and if I could do something for someone it would make me pretty happy.

Waldron: When was the first time you entered into politics?

Kosloske: Oh, let me see, I was in Spring Valley in '36, '37, '38, '39. Oh, the first time I got into politics, my goodness, I got into politics when I was 21 years old. I got elected to be Justice of the Peace and I carried that for twenty years. In fact, I was the youngest Justice of the Peace elected and then afterwards, I talked my wife into it. So we were one of the first teams of man and wife Justices of the Peace in the state of Minnesota. Well, then I carried that for 20 years, 1948 was when I got elected to the House of Representatives. That gives me twenty years. Then, when I got elected to the House of Representatives, I didn't resign, but I just didn't run office for Justice of the Peace, because I couldn't hold both offices. So that made twenty years with the Justice of the Peace, and I served six years in the legislature, in the 1949, '51, and '53 sessions.

Gower: What year did you get married, what was your wife's maiden name and how many children do you have?

Kosloske: Well, I married my wife in 1936. I don't suppose I'll ever forget the day, because Bernie Bierman coached the all stars at that particular time. He was a famous coach, we had him at the University of Minnesota and at that time, I guess, Minnesota was a championship and, of course, he had the honor of coaching the all stars. So we got married September 1, 1936. Not at Spring Valley, Minnesota. We were living there, but we got married at Austin, Minnesota. Then we moved from Spring Valley, I was employed by the state of Minnesota, and we were moved to Mora, Minnesota, from Mora, Minnesota, we came, back to Sauk Rapids, and I've been here ever since.

Gower: How many children do you have?

Kosloske: Oh, we have a boy and a girl. The boy is a captain on the University Police Force and starting the first of April, he qualified to attend the FBI Academy, which is in Virginia for a six weeks course in law enforcement with several other outstanding men in the law enforcement of Minnesota.

Gower: What about your daughter, what does she do?

Kosloske: Well, my daughter is an administrative assistant at the Xerox Corporation. My grandson graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College, at the present time he is a probation office for the County of Carver and Scott.

Gower: What was your wife's maiden name?

Kosloske: My wife's maiden name was Marcela Brunz of Leroy, Minnesota. Matter of fact, I might say, she graduated from Leroy and she attended Austin Normal.

Gower: Okay, fine.

Waldron: Can you start off telling us something about the election of 1948 and the method you used to win the election?

Kosloske: Well, I was a candidate for the legislature six years prior to that and then I didn't run for office, until 1943. People wanted me to run the two years before that, but I was in no position at that particular time.

Gower: Who was your opponent in 1942?

Kosloske: 1942, we had the Mayor of Foley, he was one of the candidates, and then we had the man that today is the member of the Supreme Court, he was a candidate at that particular time and so there were six of us. I just can't tank of the other ones.

Gower: That's okay. And what kind of methods did you use in 1948?

Kosloske: 1948 I used what you might call the general method of beating the bushes and going house to house and talking to the people. At that particular time we didn't have too much on the issues. I think the people were upset through a piece of legislation that was passed in regards to school consolidation. Although I feel that the legislature was right in passing this type of legislation, it wasn't meeting the eye of the voters. Of course, that was a big issue in the campaign. I was just fortunate enough to win the campaign by 62 votes.

Gower: Who was your opponent?

Kosloske: At that particular time was when my fellow townsmen, close neighbor, and church member was Walter Rogosheske.

Gower: Now he's in the state Supreme Court. Do you think you ran as a liberal, is that correct?

Kosloske: In 1942, there was no party designation and there wasn't much being said whether you were Republican or whether you were a Democrat. You used the word liberal and conservative. At that particular time some didn't even know what the word liberal was or what the word

conservative was. The fact is, if you'll take a liberal Republican against a conservative Democrat you'll have the same kind of person.

Gower: Yes, but what did you run as?

Kosloske: Well at that particular time we didn't use any party at all.

Gower: You didn't run as a liberal, or a conservative in '42 or in 1948?

Kosloske: In '48 I was running as a liberal.

Gower: Now, do you think in that election that the campaign of Fred Marshall had any effect on your campaign?

Kosloske: No, I don't think Fred Marshall had any effect on that campaign. I didn't get to know Fred Marshall until afterwards and then of course we did campaign together in 1952 I would say. In 1948 we didn't use any particular tactics of campaigning. We would go house to house in the towns and in the country we would go from farmhouse to farmhouse and attend raffles and different other meetings to be with the people and have individuals go and talk for you to their friends.

Gower: Would you say that you probably had the support of both labor and farmers in that 1948 campaign?

Kosloske: Oh, in the 1948 campaign, yes, I'm certain I had labor support and I had farm support. Matter of fact, the country was my biggest stronghold, because as we got back into our own home town we were pretty even and the country votes were the ones that carried the margins of victory.

Gower: When you went to the legislature did you have any trouble getting adjusted to how it operated and so on in your first session there in 1949?

Kosloske: Well, yes and no. The reason for that is I would go down to the legislature years before and observe them. One session after another and then you get the idea that you know just exactly how it's being operated. But the old saying that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, until you get there, and then you find out it's not that green and it's the same identical thing in the legislature. You can go and observe but you don't really get into fine, technical insides of it and the parliamentary procedures that are being used unless you are a member of the legislature.

Gower: Did you feel that the more experienced legislators were real helpful to you when you first started there in helping you get into the swing of things?

Kosloske: One of the first things I did is to find a seat alongside of two well experienced and two well balanced legislators who were more for the common people and their community of the, well I would say, the average citizen. I was very fortunate because they were both very helpful. One thing I would also like to mention is that a lot of people have the idea that you elect a representative or a congressman, a man in office for one term and then get him out, and get somebody else in there, I think that's one of the biggest mistakes that's ever been made, because the longer a man is in office the better he gets into a position to have more influence over a committee either as a chairman or as to other forms of government. He is being more respected by the interests from firms and industry and it is much easier for him to operate and understand what type of legislation is coming, what to expect, and what it will do.

Gower: Can you tell us any important bills that you worked on during the first session?

Kosloske: Well, of course one of the important things in those days and I'm sure it is even today, is always taxes. The people are all worried as to their taxes going up. Well, in the 1949 session, I remember that we were six million dollars over in expenditures on taxes. In order to make it up

we put a few more cents on cigarettes. So the cigarette people were really paying the additional amount that was necessary that operated the state in 1949. In 1951 we set the first history in the state of Minnesota when we operated with all the expenditures in the state of Minnesota and did not raise any taxes. Well, then in the 1951 session, we managed to close the business of the state the first time in the history of the state on time, usually you would go over the clock.

Gower: 1951 that was?

Kosloske: That was the 1953 session. '49, '51, '53, the three sessions that I served. I would say probably the most difficult task I had is when the Twin Cities Industry was attempting to belittle the St. Cloud Reformatory the manufacturing of license plates. They made every effort to relieve the Reformatory of the license plate manufacturing and take it into the cities. That was one of the most nerve wracking affairs I had in trying to beat down this opposition which I happened to finally do and we are still operating in the manufacturing of license plates in the Reformatory this very day.

Gower: Did that come from industry or from labor?

Kosloske: Well, labor was the investigator on that, for the simple reason that they were trying to get it over to a union shop. Well, in a reformatory you didn't have a union shop, but what you did do, you had people that could take care of themselves on the outside and they were on the inside and rather than just let them sit around and try to hatch ways and means of doing more evil and wrong, It was thought that the best thing to do was to give them something to do and that was when we decided to give them the job of manufacturing license plates, which was a great savings. I don't recall offhand, but I think it runs into millions of dollars today as to the savings of the taxpayers of Minnesota.

Waldron: Do you have any amusing stories during your time in the legislature?

Kosloske: Stories?

Gower: Amusing incidents that happened while you were in the legislature?

Kosloske: Well, one of the little amusements we get is on St. Patrick's Day. Well, they'd come in and entertain the legislators for an hour or so, with music and songs and they, the one familiar song that they always used to sing on St. Patrick's Day, and I just can't think of it. It's so familiar. The songs would generally be played by the assistant auditor of the state would be the McNamara's Band. And that was one the legislators would get quite a little wallop out of. And that's about all the entertainment we'd have there outside the Aquatennial people from Minneapolis who would come down to give the legislators a button. But otherwise it's all business and we would operate until the wee hours of the morning sometimes.

Gower: What about, I thought I saw in some of your papers here a bill maybe it was just a joke, but for a French LaBrosse to play music during the session or something. What was that all about?

Kosloske: Well, that was the late representative of Duluth, Senator Frenchie LaBrosse. He was one of the members of the legislature, was a good piano player, and of course, we would have an evening gathering and why, Frenchie would be the man that we would prevail upon to play the organ, well not the organ, the piano, and he'd turn around and wheel off a few and we'd get a lot of fun out of that.

Waldron: You made a few attempts at running again for the state legislation in 1972, just last election. Do you plan on doing any more running?

Kosloske: I kind of get a little wallop out of this, you saying, you know, do I figure on doing any more running. I've been running for a long time, both frontwards and backwards. And sometimes you wonder if you don't run out of gas. And of course, right now we've got this gas shortage and

I'm wondering which way I'm gonna run. I don't know. I can't tell you, it is a little early. But the bug is there and I'm just thinking that perhaps this is gonna be the right time. The people are again in an uproar. They are not happy. Both from a national and a state level. So maybe if I do, I'll know probably in July.

Gower: Let's just get it on the record here. You ran in 1942 for the legislature and then in 1948 and you were elected, in 1950 you were elected and in 1952 you were elected. Then you ran, how many other times did you run for the legislature?

Kosloske: Well, I'd run whenever opportunity came its way. One or the things that kept me always going is that when I was in the legislature I had given the people in my district everything that I had for the good of them and I always felt that I would come back and tell them. But sometimes it don't make much difference how much you do or how much you tell them what you have done, they always say, we don't want to hear what you've done, we want to know what you're gonna do. And each time the contests have been so close -- that's one reason why each time I've been tempted to continue. One of the registered deeds of our country that ran and ran and ran and he always got beat and got beat and got beat and he continues to run and finally he won one time and after that you couldn't get him out. The only time he got out is when he passed away. Now just in 1972 I was a candidate for the legislature, I missed the primary by 58 votes. And the man that squeezed me out by 58 votes went on through the general election, and got elected. And so that's one of the things that are holding. And you've always got to look and see how the atmosphere is in a political field, how the people are and how they feel, whether or not you should come and try it again or whether you should just take and forget it. So Sir as I'm personally concerned, it don't make any difference to me, I'm in a position right now that I could just go up north and go into the woods and stick my head into the sand like an ostrich and enjoy

myself by the nice quiet waters, the blue waters of Minnesota. But always the interests of the people of the community in which I live and if there's anything I can do and this is one thing I remember so well, as one of the fellows that was with me in the legislature some years back I said to him, Fred, do you know that we're losing money being in the legislature? And he said, "Yes John, I know we are, you know we are, but I like to have a little say in how our state is being run." And that's just the way I feel. If I can have to do in how to run the state of Minnesota for the best interest of the people for the least amount of money, I'm willing to do it.

Gower: Okay. Now what, you were mayor of Sauk Rapids for several years. Would you tell us what years you were mayor, and anything else you want to tell about in regards to that?

Kosloske: Well, I could write a book on this one. And the biggest part of it all, it makes me feel so good, that " I thought I turned and had the council opposed to me, for trying to make a progressive city out of Sauk Rapids, I was well pleased, matter of fact, surprised when just a recent village election, one of the council men who opposed me the hardest has patted me on the back and urged me to run for mayor and that he would support me. When I told him about how they would sit on my back before and wouldn't give me any support, he said they had too much hindsight, and not enough foresight. Then another thing is the man that gives me all the trouble, the assistant Chief of Police, who sued me at that particular time for 120 some thousand dollars practically for nothing, which was later thrown out of court, was one of the men that was urging people to come to see me here just a few short months ago and wanted me to run for mayor again. He, himself would support me. How I've felt that the man was trying to redeem himself but yet he didn't have the courage to come and tell me.

Gower: Yes, recently there have been a few changes in the legislature and we'd like your opinion on them. One is party designation. Do you see this as a hindrance or a help to the people?

Kosloske: Well, I've always been opposed to party designation. Why, number one, in a primary, you cannot switch parties, you will either have to vote as a republican or as a democrat. I used to have that same identical thing in Minnesota before '49 I believe it was and I think it must have been in the 1949 session, when we changed, that in the fall of the year you could cross lines, before that you would have to vote straight ticket. Well, the reason for that is, that if you vote, if you had a good man on the Republican side and you wanted to vote for him, and you had a good man on the Democratic side and you couldn't. If you did you'd spoil the ballot. Now in the primary election, here, which we are going to have this coming year, the present session of the legislature, that's the 1973 which was extended onto 1974, passed a bill to have party designation for legislators. Now that is going to mean that here in St. Cloud, for instance, just alone, you will vote for a congressional candidate as a Democratic but if you want to vote legislator in Republican ticket in a primary election you couldn't do it. And that is one of the reasons that I'm opposed to it, for the simple reason that you are taking away the rights of people. If it was an open primary then I would say it's alright. But then again you have another thing that was done by the legislature, that is they refused to rotate the ballots, the names on the ballots. They feel, that the majority of the votes that the party got, their candidate would be the first name on the ballot. That is another thing that I don't feel is right: for the simple reason that a lot of people don't go any farther down than the first or second name and that, way they don't search down to see who all the candidates really are.

Waldron: Also during the '73 legislature they had opened the committees and that. Do you view this as a help?

Kosloske: I myself think it's a joke. Why do I say that? Because I have never seen anything closed in a committee meeting. Other than what you might call the rules committee, any committee that I have been on or any other legislator has been on has always been open. If we had a ticklish bill that was controversial and took a lot of interest we would move it into the auditorium if the state office building so the general public could come in. Now when you talk about openness, they are having that problem themselves the present session of the legislature is talking about openness in government and here you just had a meeting here not over three, four, five days ago, on the abortion issue in the sub-committee and that was a closed meeting. It was in the sub-committee chairman's office. Then you had another legislator lady that was introducing an amendment to the thing. Then another thing about it, this openness in government, is catching on so good that we are even having people opening up their clothing so you're having the streakers running from one campus to another.

Gower: That's real openness. What about conference committees though, were they open before?

Kosloske: Oh, on conference committees, no, I don't think they were. That's when you'd appoint a conference committee from the House and Senate with three to five people to iron out a bill.

Waldron: Do you think those should be open?

Kosloske: Now I am questioning that very much and I'll tell you why. It's because you're running into a lot of people and running into a lot of legislators who will not express themselves so much openly as they will more so confidentially but in other words what they're trying to do is not have every little word that's being said, recorded, but the facts of the bill, where it comes in,

where it's pounded together as one bill, where it meets satisfaction on both sides, that's the important part.

Gower: So in principle you're opposed to open committees, would you say, is that correct?

Kosloske: No, I'm not opposed to open committees, the only point that I get a big wallop out of is that they're making such a big issue out of it and I don't think there's no need for it. As far as I am personally concerned, I don't care you can have any committee open you want, if I got something to say, I'm gonna say it, and from what I can see on the legislature, I've been there for six years and I haven't seen much closed stuff in there that anybody can holler about.

Waldron: Okay. One of the problems that we've ran into in talking with legislators is that the pay isn't sufficient enough to be a good representative. How do you view that?

Kosloske: Well, I wouldn't say that, I know when I was employed at the car shop and I ran for legislature, I was only getting \$2400 for two years. And I mentioned to my colleagues in there that we weren't getting enough money, that we were losing it, but they said, "Yes, we know we are, but we want something to say about how our state is being run." But I will say today, now you see the mini-session is in for the first time, and right away the pay doubled, from \$4200 I think it went to \$86-80, something like that, and then you're getting \$33 a day for expenses, so I don't know, the ones that are really complaining a lot are the lawyers who can make a lot of money if they are any good as a lawyer. But I don't think the expense down in the Cities is so great that you can't make any money or don't make a living out of it. You'll notice that some of them said that they weren't gonna do any work at all. I think that one of our local legislators isn't doing any work now because they're gonna be full time legislators because they are drawing enough money as to what the people here in the car shops in Franklin are making.

Gower: What about the idea of splitting the session up, the way they've done. Do you think that's a good idea?

Kosloske: Well, you talk about the splitting of the session now they passed all the money bills before in the first session. That is the most important thing of anything, is to run the state of Minnesota in the meantime while the committees would be having the meeting special on a House Under Appropriation and in the Senate Under Finance that is the two committees that diagnose all the complaints that are in ail the demands for money that are coming in from all departments of the state of Minnesota, and when they take and hammer these bills together, each one brings them into their own body and if there's a big difference, then they go into conference. But they--it takes them almost to the tail end of the session to come through with those bills. Well then in the meantime, the legislators are working on other bills, local bills and there is so much being said of a local fireman's bill which was in the first part of the mini-session and it got licked and now it came out again and finally it got passed and they're making a lot of publicity out of it, and the fact about it is, it was inexperience that caused it in the beginning, because it should have been a passed right, off the bat, for the simple reason it was a local bill and the leaders of the legislature generally take local bills and bunch them together, and go have a session in the evening and you'll pass over 60 bills in a couple hours time in an evening because there are none controversial. You're only helping out a legislator of a bill or amending something for his own territory.

Gower: So you think you don't need to split the session maybe, huh?

Kosloske: Now you had a split session, you had what you called a mini-session, you had them going down once a week, out of every month and for committee hearings and then you have them throughout the state. And then the committee members would get \$33 a day whether they

attended or whether they didn't attend a meeting all summer and now they came back on the 15th of January and you thought they were going to be ready to go right off the bat and close this thing up in a short time because all the major bills were out of the way, with the exception that they wanted to have a no fault, or a no fault divorce case or they wanted first coming with it now and their session is two months old we're almost to the very end of it, we're in the legislature in fact, and all that time was being spent, all summer long, having for what? They haven't accomplished anything outside of the passing of the highway speed bill which the governor signed last week. That was the first one, now they just came out with a couple more, but this is one of the most spendious sessions we've ever had in the history of Minnesota.

Waldron: Yeah, recently there's been an idea of an unicameral legislature has been brought up, one, because it cuts down on the number of politicians that have to be paid, and two, because it would be more efficient to have one legislator instead of two. How do you view this?

Kosloske: Well, I think there's only one house session in the country and I think that's in Nebraska but if I remember correctly it was only here about a year or two ago, I think it was in Montana they had a one house session I believe it was and it came up to the votes of the people, and they voted back to a two house session again. Now I don't know who's hatching these ideas up or why they figure only one. You're having a good example here on the no fault insurance bill, the senate wanted it one way and the house wanted it another way and the house deal was better than the senate was and the senate didn't want to give any ground but they finally yielded here after our friend Brinkman from Richmond was stubborn enough and just held out. And if we have a two house session in Washington and that's good, I cannot see why we should change to a one house session in Minnesota or any other state.

Gower: You were down there six years in the legislature, did you like the work there and did you like the people and so on?

Kosloske: Well, sometimes I wonder why I would like the people that I worked with. Because I have had the same experience with legislators there that would horse around with a bill and completely take the time of the legislature. That's one of the reasons why you see a picture in television of the legislators reading a newspaper and you know that they are not paying any attention. And the reason behind that, they've got their mind made up on bill and all the speaker is doing is wasting the time of the house, in fact, all of them. And if they would just call a vote, they would vote it up or down. And another thing, is that this session of the legislature has horsing around with the legislation where they would introduce a bill, it would come up on the floor and when the author would see that the bill was being defeated, it would turn around, he or she would turn around and vote against the bill in order to be able to get a chance to reconsider it the next day; and so help me, they would reconsider the bill and vote on it a few days afterwards and once it was defeated badly, the next time it'll come through and smother the defeat and come out victorious. That's one thing. And then another thing about it. Do I like to be in the legislature? Well, I could, as I have said before, well, I could go and enjoy myself socially and not worry about anything being done in the state of Minnesota, but I have been so dedicated to the going-on in the state and in the national capitol that if there's anything that I can do to help make the state and nation better, a better place to live in, I will do everything that I can. And that is one of the reasons why I enjoy being in the legislature, because there you can do something and as I say it again, if I can do something to make somebody happy, it makes me happy.

Gower: By doing something, do you mean there you'd have some power?

Kosloske: Well, yes, you see, as you get into the legislature, and after you get in there for two, three, four terms you get yourself into a key committee assignment and there's a lot of things that you can do. And then when you meet with the other heads of different committees that you plan the strategy for the state and then you find out whether or not these different departments have come in for lavish appropriations whether or not they really need it, or whether they have these appropriations to do things the way they want to and those are the things you've got to be very alert on. First thing you know, you're going to have the Minnesota indebted, which they are today, we are bonded. This last session of the legislature has bonded everything that they could bond, so that the people would be hit by a tax increase, but this bonding business that they've been doing is gonna hit the taxpayers of Minnesota in 1975. So we like to do our business on the level so we get the good things done for the state and for the least cost of money.