

# Twenty Years of Active Politics on the Upper Main Line: Experiences, Observations and Trends September 21, 2008

**Earl M. Baker**

**Introduction by Dennis Leeper**

*We are fortunate to have Earl Baker speaking about active politics on the Upper Main Line. There is no one better prepared to speak to us on this topic. He is a well-known, highly respected person as related to public affairs, management, leadership, and advocacy. In his public service career, Earl was elected sixteen times without ever losing an election. From his longtime hometown of Malvern, he first served as a Borough Committeeman. He was a Chester County Commissioner for a rare three terms, between 1976 and 1988, and a State Senator for two terms between 1988 and 1995. In 1980 he chaired the Ronald Reagan for President campaign in Chester County and in 1984 he headed the entire southeastern Pennsylvania campaign. He also served as the Republican State Chairman of Pennsylvania from 1986 to 1990, and was a member of the National Committee. He was elected as a delegate to three National Conventions and was a Presidential Elector in the Electoral College in 1988, the year that George H. W. Bush was elected the forty-first President.*

*Earl also taught on the Political Science faculty of Temple University for twenty years until elected to the Senate. Prior to that he was a Staff Associate at the American Political Science Association in Washington, D.C., and was a naval officer. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Master's and Ph.D. degrees in Government from The American University in Washington, D.C. When Earl left the Senate more recently, he became Vice President of the Unisys Corporation for five years, and then President of Presbyterian Homes for five years. Since then, he has founded his own firm, which provides government relations, marketing, and strategic planning to his clients.*

*Earl and his wife, Jackie, live in Wayne. They have two grown children, a son Todd and a daughter Toby. Earl is currently serving as the President of the Chester County Library System Board. Earl, thank you for sharing with us some of your reminiscences about politics on the Upper Main Line.*

## **I. Introductory Comments**

**L**et's look at the last twenty-year segment to review what has happened politically in the Upper Main Line during that period. The changes are considerable. I think that is true for society as a whole. I think it's true for our culture. I think it's true for our political system, if we look nationally, regionally, or statewide. Even as a small region we are not exempt from those changes.

My ancestors came to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as Quakers who were escaping from political oppression in England. And although we have thankfully inherited many English traditions and terms in our culture and our politics, in the late seventeenth century, the English drove out the Quakers, who wanted to emigrate anyway to form a new kind of simple egalitarian society. Like their colonial counterparts a century later, they believed in the British concepts of rights and representation, took them

seriously, and simply carried them a step or two farther.

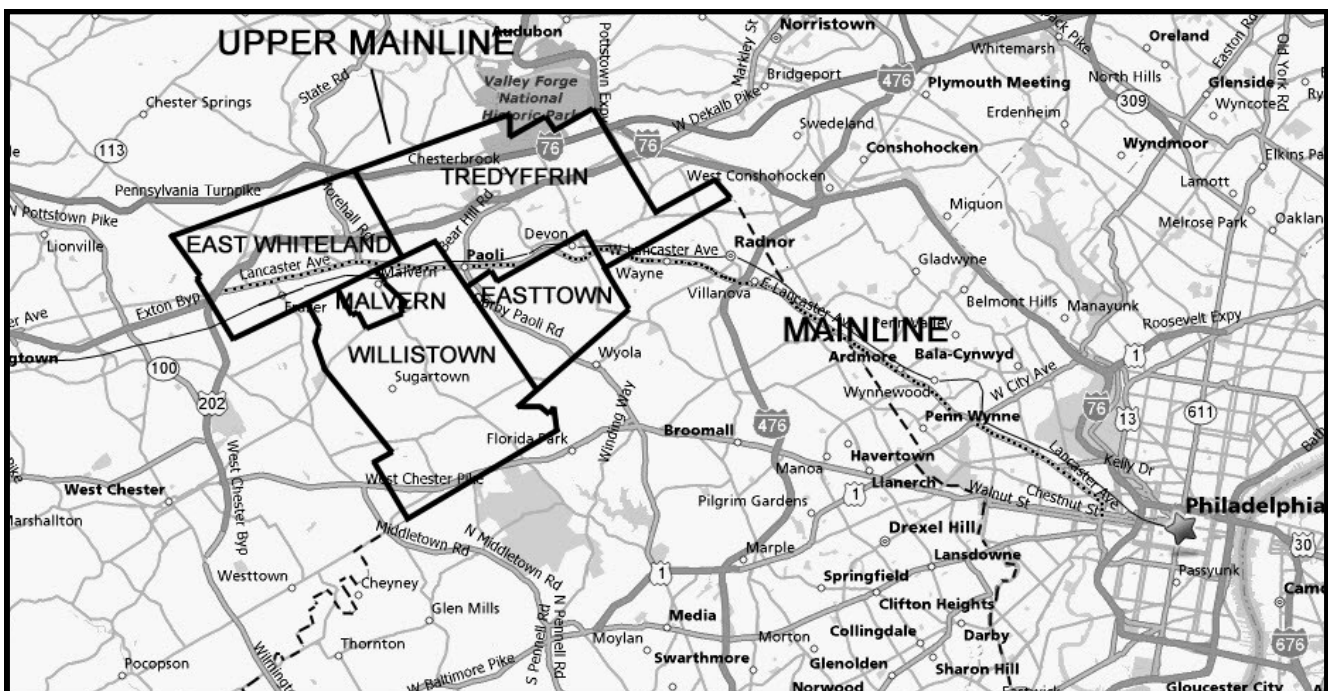
My ancestors on both sides belonged to the Falls Meeting in Bucks County. Eventually the Bakers relocated to Cecil County, Maryland. They skipped over the Upper Main Line, but I ended up here – in between - much later. My grandfather Earle was born in Oxford, Pennsylvania, and my father Earl was born in West Chester (both are buried at Providence Meeting near Media). I ended up moving back into the Upper Main Line, living in Strafford as a teenager, Malvern for twenty-seven years raising our children, and Wayne today.

What is the Main Line? Many people say it's the railroad but it isn't. The "Main Line" is a term for the "main line of improvements westward," from back in the early eighteen hundreds; where people were heading when they left Philadelphia. They were going right along the Lancaster Pike, through the Great Valley. Sometimes they were settling around here, and sometimes they were continuing west. Eventually the railroad became the expression of the Main Line. It parallels Lancaster Pike pretty closely, but the real Main Line was already there.

Dan Ehart, for many years the Editor of *The Suburban and Wayne Times*, used to have a theory. "I'd

like to have a county in Pennsylvania called Main Line County." His idea was that there were parts of three counties, Montgomery (Lower Merion Township), Delaware (Radnor Township) and Chester (Tredyffrin, Easttown, and Willistown Townships), that should actually be a single county by themselves, because they are more like each other than they are like the counties in which they exist. Today, rock-ribbed as he was, he would be decrying the incremental movement of voting for Democrats at the national, state, and local levels as it creeps westward along the Main Line, and even to the "upper" portions of the Main Line.

I don't know when the term "Upper" Main Line began to be used. However, I associate it with Dan Ehart, past Editor of both *The Suburban and Wayne Times* and *The Suburban Advertiser*. Bill Andrews, founder of Andrews and Pinkstone Realtors, has informed me that preceding *The Advertiser* there was a paper called *The Upper Main Line News* that fizzled out. Dan Ehart tried to buy the name but they wouldn't sell it to him so he started *The Advertiser*. In his mind, there was a difference between the Main Line itself, say from the city line to about Wayne, and the Upper Main Line, which was west of Wayne. West of Wayne seemed to be less urban, more open, and more ripe for growth than the "lower" Main Line where development had pretty much stabilized. It was less



Map of the Upper Main Line and surrounding area.

Google Maps, with annotations by Mike Bertram.

established wealth and more middle class. Dan assumed they were all Republicans (which in the post-War world of that time they mostly were), but he could also see that the overall politics of the three counties involved, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery, were also different from those areas within them that we are labeling the Upper Main Line.

*The Suburban Advertiser* covered the Upper Main Line, or as they would sometimes abbreviate it in the headlines, "Upline." The Upper Main Line I would characterize as Tredyffrin Township, Easttown Township, Willistown Township, Malvern Borough, and East Whiteland Township. East Whiteland is on the boundary to the west, with Radnor Township including Wayne on the east. I don't include Upper or Lower Merion or the other parts of Delaware County.

The Main Line itself is right along the Schuylkill, Lower Merion Township being the heart of the Main Line as it was: Wynnewood, Haverford, Narberth, Bryn Mawr, Villanova, St. Davids. The term Upper Main Line is really the extension, if you want to look at it that way. Through the middle is the Lancaster Pike, which, if you look at the map, holds the Main Line and the Upper Main Line together and is the spine, the central thread that runs through the middle and to which people relate for circulation, shopping, and social facilities. It also refers to the railroad, which of course was originally the "Paoli Local." Paoli was the end of the Main Line. We and many of the region's residents looked at the commuter train as the popular expression of the Main Line. Especially in the days of "whistlestop" campaigning, prominent railroad stations were common political campaign rally locations. Paoli, as a main stop and as an important locus of Republican votes, was often considered a "must" stop by Republican Presidential candidates such as Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon.

Malvern was one stop beyond. Being from Malvern for so many years, I'd like to tell you an important fact about the geography of this area, and yet it is one of which you're probably not aware. Malvern is the highest point along the railroad between Philadelphia

and Harrisburg. That tells you a little bit about the topography, which was of such interest to your former TEHS President Bob Goshorn, who had a theory about history and development. As I recall Bob's theory, there were cycles of development between the ridge along which Lancaster Pike runs, and the valley, where U.S. Route 202 was constructed (where Chesterbrook is now.) Bob was such a history buff. He lived in one of the many interesting homes in Malvern, which we called, respectfully, "the Goshorn Place." It was along King Road, which was for a long time a main east-west route and the main street of the Borough. I lived at the other end of the Borough on the West Chester-Paoli Road, now called Paoli Pike. It may surprise you to know that Paoli Pike was U.S. 202 when we first lived there. We had bought our house from Robert Pattison, son of the former Democratic Governor of the same name. Robert, the son, was once a candidate for Lieutenant Governor himself, running with David Lawrence in 1936. That was not the time, unfortunately for Bob Pattison, that David Lawrence was successful in running for Governor, although Lawrence was later successful as a gubernatorial candidate in 1958.

What first drew me into politics was a zoning issue in Malvern Borough. The Republican Committeewoman\* and my neighbor, Betty Burke, recruited me to help fight a zoning ordinance. That was the precipitating event that got me involved in politics. It had to do with the relationship of the Borough, not only to its own elected officials, but to the surrounding area as well. Anybody connected with Upper Main Line politics or community libraries knows Betty Burke, or at least knows who she is. She is on the System Library Board at the County level as a Trustee Emerita. For many years she was the Tax Collector of the Borough. She typifies the Republican activist and community leader of the Upper Main Line as we knew it historically. Malvern Borough would not fit the stereotype of the "Main Line," but it is sitting there comfortably as a middle class small town in the "Upper Main Line." When we use the term Upper Main Line, it doesn't mean that everybody who lives along the Upper Main Line is identical. There are

\*In Pennsylvania election law, each party elects members to its county committee, two per precinct. The committee members serve as the representatives of that party in their precinct, which is normally composed of approximately 600 voters. These committeemen and committeewomen are expected by their parties to man the polls on election day, to promote their party's candidates, to distribute literature and sample ballots prior to elections, and to recommend candidates for party endorsement in primaries.

pockets of lower income people, middle-income people, and the most affluent people in Pennsylvania, all living within the Upper Main Line area that we're discussing. The same thing is true of the Main Line itself, though not often recognized.

## II. Forces for Integration and Change on the Upper Main Line

These then, are the forces for integration of the Upper Main Line: the railroad, Lancaster Avenue, *The Suburban Advertiser* (the paper that everybody read to find out what their township was doing or what was happening in the region), and the school districts along that path. They are all high-performing school districts, districts to which their graduates (and their parents) and their supporters and friends are very loyal; Radnor on the east, Tredyffrin-Easttown, then Great Valley on the west, which includes Malvern Borough, Willistown, East Whiteland, and Charlestown Townships. Great Valley School District had been carved out of what was originally a much larger T-E, about fifty years ago. Another later force for integration was the coming of the four-lane highway, U.S. 202, taking much of the previously growing heavy traffic off of Lancaster Pike and other local roads and speeding it through, while also enhancing access to other regional roads like the Schuylkill Expressway and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. All these forces, which had characterized the Upper Main Line of the past, were also making it possible for it to enter the world of change.

One of the things that has changed, which I noticed on the way here today is that somebody had an "Obama" sign in their yard. There was a time when you would have rarely seen a sign for a Democrat. Occasionally somebody had the "nerve" to put a sign in their yard or a bumper sticker on their car, but you didn't see very much of that. It was accepted that almost everybody was a Republican. Factually speaking, it's become clear that competition now characterizes the communities in the Upper Main Line. What had been the oddity of a Democrat being elected or appointed to a township board, a borough council, or to another minor office, quickly became a normal challenge to Republican hegemony. Serious competition has come to the local level along the Upper Main Line.

When I left this area and went to college at the University of North Carolina, I discovered that Republi-

cans were rather rare. They were viewed as a distinct, odd, and strange minority. I began to see that North Carolina would vote Republican for, say, President, but they'd still vote Democrat for Governor, Senator, County Commissioner, and so forth. That began to change incrementally. They began to vote for Republicans for Congress or for the Senate, but state legislators and county commissioners were still locally Democratic. Fast forwarding, by now of course, the South has become virtually the one party South, Republican, pretty much top to bottom, with some exceptions, the same way it used to be the one party South, Democratic, with some exceptions.

I don't analogize what is happening here to that completely, but one of the ways that you can tell when the other party is making some noise and maybe getting some traction, is to look at the Presidential election to see if Democratic candidates for President are scoring far better than their same nominees or candidates for other lower offices. It's a "distant early warning" sign that you may have a problem in your own backyard in the future. Also, I think it is characteristic of political people, that "Generals always fight the last war," not the war that they are in today. And I think political people are no exception to that. Until the wake-up call comes, we tend to do things the way they've always been done.

Take Tredyffrin Township as an example, which in the last gubernatorial election went sixty-six and two-thirds percent, so it was literally two to one, Democratic. That's just Tredyffrin. I'm selecting Tredyffrin because of where I now live, but also as the heart of the Upper Main Line. When John Kerry ran for President, I was amazed at the election results. In one of the Tredyffrin precincts, as I recall, the results were something like Bush 986, Kerry 986. It was literally tied. I thought, "I live in a changed world." The Tredyffrin Republican organization used to be considered the backbone of the Republican Party of Chester County. Some of us who live in this area know that Chester County actually does extend beyond Exton. As a County Commissioner I certainly learned the seventy-three municipalities of our county and that many of them are unlike the Townships that I was so familiar with on the Upper Main Line. If we took Chester County as a whole, we would find these changes also, but not to the extent that we have here.

One thing that led to the switch is a decline in organizational strength. The decline of political parties as

organizations is nothing new. We have been tracking that for a long time. I'd say that the thing that changed it dramatically and probably forever is the coming of mass media. Radio began to cut into that, but television really changed it. Now you didn't need a Committeeman or a Committeewoman in your precinct to tell you who is running for President, or what they might be like, or some of their characteristics. You can see them for yourself on TV. You can judge them as people. One of the original reasons that we had political parties was to carry the word out to the people: who was running and why we should vote for them and so forth. That may be as simple as a sign that you put up at the polls, that old-fashioned as well as modern practice; or it might be as elaborate as a platform and a biography. The Committeepersons were supposed to tell you what was going on and they would hopefully influence your vote to support their party, not only through information, but also by doing favors such as running interference for the individual voter with the "powers that be." That was true of both parties. This area was Republican. The city of Philadelphia since 1949 has been Democratic. There are many areas where one party has traditionally dominated. Part of the ability of a party to be successful is to identify their voters, know who they are, relate to them at the local level, provide service to them if it means information, or helping people get a dog license. I use this minor necessity as an example, but there are many little favors like this that are similar.

When I was elected a Committeeman in Malvern, the man who had preceded me had held the position for years. One of the ways he helped people would be to get their dog licenses at the Courthouse in West Chester. In those days somebody had to carry the three dollars to the Treasurer's Office and get the license that you would put on your dog's collar. Today you can probably do it on the internet.

Delbert Dehaven was his name. He had been there for many years. He was a wonderful guy, a great public servant, and a real friend to me and to my family. He was my mentor as a Committeeman and he worked in the Courthouse. That was part of the idea, that if you really worked hard in politics you might get a job in the Courthouse. He was the Director of Veterans Affairs, a fine one, and he was certainly qualified for the job, but it also didn't hurt that he was the Republican Committeeman in Malvern Borough. My dog license example illustrates his attitude toward helping his

constituents. He listened to people's complaints, referred them to the proper place for resolution, whether the Borough Hall or the Courthouse, and followed up. So when he said, "I hope you'll vote for my candidate," if you didn't care too much or if you didn't know who the people were or if it was a job that you didn't have any idea about, like State Treasurer or County Prothonotary, you'd say, "Okay, great. Thanks, Delbert." I think I can reveal this now: Delbert had other techniques, too. He had a "bottle" behind the firehouse and he knew the particular people who came and expected a shot when they got to the firehouse. (Then, as now, law prohibited the sale of alcohol while voting polls were open.) Those days have changed. I don't think anybody would expect that anymore.

To summarize the way things were vs. the way things are today, where people get their information is not from their Committeeperson. Hopefully, (I say this as a former Committeeman) somebody comes to your door and gives you literature about candidates, such as a sample ballot. That's what they would be doing if they're doing their job. When you go to the polls, they greet you and say, "Hi, I hope you'll vote for the Republican ticket." It's the same for both parties. That's what Democrats are now doing around here. They have made a strong effort. They said among themselves, "The Republicans are fat, dumb, and happy, and if we work hard we'll be able to make inroads." Three years ago there were two Democratic Supervisors elected in Tredyffrin Township. Again, when I read that in the newspaper, my reaction was, "How did that happen? How could that ever have happened?"

We are in a new era. The Democratic Party realized that a lot of the Republican Committeepersons were sitting back and figuring, "This is a Republican area. The voters go to the polls on their own. We don't have to get them there. We don't have to give them too many pieces of literature or send them things through the mail because they're Republican voters and they're going to go cast a vote." That mindset developed gradually. I would say that, particularly over the past five years, that has changed dramatically in response to the challenge. The Democratic Party in Tredyffrin is of the attitude, "If we work hard and get our Committee people to be active, we can gain votes." In the old days if you looked at the Democratic list of precincts, there would be one after another

where nobody even wanted to be a Democratic Committeeperson. Maybe they were discouraged or maybe there were not enough people to draw from. Anyway, the Democrats made a conscious effort to get a Committeeperson in every precinct and to contest each office and to put literature out and to go to the polls. They got the results that you would expect. That would not have happened thirty years ago, twenty years ago, but four years ago it happened. Since that time, the Democrats have lost one of those supervisory posts, so there was a bit of a bounce back. In other words, if you send a message to the majority party, they may begin to do the things that they had neglected to do, and try to renew their strength. It's obvious to the Republican Party in this area that if we want to continue to be the majority party, if we want to continue to get recognition in the state as far as Chester County being a strong Republican Party, we need to address this situation.

Having said that, keep in mind that many people today, while still valuing the precinct work of the party faithful, are more and more likely to consider themselves to be "independent" in attitude, if not by party registration; to be influenced as much by national as by local political trends; and to consider their education and their exposure to other sources of information as allowing them to rise above the need for petty favors or handouts about candidates, to influence them. We will probably never see the "organization" the way it used to be.

Going back to the map, we can see that other causes of change are demographics, population growth, and population movement. Transportation improvements such as the Blue Route (Route 476), Route 202 and the Exton bypass have all made housing and job access more open to movement west in the suburbs. I am proud that I had something to do with the bypass, including getting the original \$25 million for it. I flew the Pennsylvania Secretary of Transportation, who had been opposed to it, in a helicopter over the Exton crossroads about 4:00 PM and he said, "Earl, you're right." It took several years after that to get all the money to construct the road, but we eventually did.

The population of the Upper Main Line remains about the same as it was, but there's a lot more movement to the west. In a way, the pressure was relieved in terms of where development was. We can trace it out Routes 422, 30, and 1. U.S. Route 1 had been



Earl with President Reagan at the White House, 1983. *All photos courtesy of the author.*

finished prior to the bypass because one of my predecessors in the Senate seat, and my good friend, Senator John Ware, was from Oxford. He wanted U.S.1 finished and he had enough persuasion, let's say, to get U.S.1 paved as a four-lane highway when, as they used to say, there were more cows than people in southern Chester County. Now that U.S.1 is there, with its attractive land costs, there's much development along it, particularly in Kennett and farther south.

The Blue Route finally opened. The Blue Route had been planned right after World War II. It took them twenty years to get over the political fighting. As a teenager, I lived on Homestead Road in Strafford. I remember writing a letter in the 1950s to the Secretary of Highways. "Please don't let the Yellow Route go through here." We were successful in avoiding that particular color of route. We got the Blue Route instead. They finally got the dollars that they needed to build it. In my opinion, it had minimal effect on the Upper Main Line because the Upper Main Line is an east/west corridor. There wasn't much in the way of roads that went north and south. When the Blue Route opened, it certainly provided that but I don't think it had a lot of impact per se like some of the other developments did, as far as transportation is concerned.

Let's look at the coming of Chesterbrook, where I live. In the 1970s, Chesterbrook was a controversial development. I'm sure some of you remember that. But it did turn out successfully. In a way, its success guaranteed that there weren't going to be any other developments like it. Dick Fox, the developer, had a rare ability to envision where the future would lead and of how to work with the various levels of authority to achieve that vision. Townships began to be tighter on their zoning ordinances. Those of you from Easttown may know that some of the taxes you pay go towards some high priced lawyers, of which I'm sure you would approve, who prevent any growth from occurring in Easttown. That's overstating it, a little hyperbole.

When I was on the Malvern Planning Commission, I had an opportunity to look into the question of zoning laws. Mind you, I'm not a lawyer but I found that most of the tough zoning cases that the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania had decided came from one township, Easttown. Now there are some from Willistown. Maybe that's not a surprise since Willistown and Easttown are similar in terms of makeup and of the interest of the people who live there. Easttown got the brunt of development first so some of the cases from the '60s, '70s and '80s are Easttown cases, in terms of having tough zoning. I think that spurred the population movement to the west. Ground was cheaper for one thing; that was a big draw. Transportation corridors were there but I think it was also that zoning got tougher on the Upper Main Line because the Townships began to realize that they wanted to control in particular multi-family type housing. So while Chesterbrook is here and is successful, when Willard G. Rouse, another visionary, came along and wanted to have a similar type of community in the White-lands, which would have been called "Churchill," he was never able to get traction - even with that positive historical reference!

### **III. People and Politics in the Upper Main Line Area**

Now I'm going to talk about some of the people that I've known in politics on the Upper Main Line and relate them to the trends that I've described. The seat for the Pennsylvania Senate District in this area is held by a Democrat, Connie Williams. Connie happens not to be running again so there is quite a race going on for her seat. When I was familiar with the

person in that seat, it was Dick Tilghman, an Iwo Jima Marine veteran. Many of you may know Dick Tilghman or may have met him. He and his wife are in Beaumont [retirement community] these days and are doing well. Dick was the Senator for thirty years. When he left, I think many people assumed a Republican would succeed him, but it wasn't to be. My seat was held sequentially by John Ware, John Stauffer from Phoenixville, me - Malvern, then Bob Thompson from West Chester. People said, "That's the Republican seat." Now it's held by a Democrat, former Commissioner Andy Dinniman. Dan Ehart would have been shocked to see that. There's a major change, not only in the vote for President, not only in the vote for Governor, but in the vote for Township, the State Senate, and the State Representative levels as well!

An example that isn't particularly Upper Main Line is Montgomery County, which used to be known as the best Republican County in the State. They now have a House of Representatives delegation that has six Republicans and five Democrats. It's almost a split. The organization has declined as a force in politics. It's still there, in the sense that the law provides that there be two Committeepersons for each party in every precinct. We're not going to see the Committees go away, but in terms of their ability to perform as organizations within today's environment, they have declined. It's all relative. Delaware County still is reputed to have more organization than Montgomery or Chester County does but it has declined as well. Montgomery County was once solidly Republican. Fred Peters was the old "boss" in Montgomery County, then Drew Lewis. In Delaware County it was John McClure, then John McNichol. In Chester County it was Bill Scarlett, a Senator from Kennett, and then Jim Hazlett. He was still alive and was still available to give advice and so forth when I was a young person in politics. Then Ted Rubino became the leader. I daresay, after those names that I've mentioned, you'd be hard pressed to name the "boss" of any of the counties because there really hasn't been a boss in the same sense. And were there to be one, they wouldn't want to be referred to in that way.

Another thing that changed is the amount of money that it costs to run. In the previous era, the party was the main fundraiser and campaign spender. Now individual members of Congress, state legislators, and other candidates often have their own committees,



which both spend on their campaigns and contribute to the party. Duane Milne is a young representative, as you may know, from the Willistown-Malvern area. I was curious one day when I was talking to him and asked, "How much did you spend on your campaign?" I was thinking of the days when I ran a Senate race for about \$50,000. At the time, that was a "safe seat." I often didn't have more than token opposition, but I'd spend for signs, parties, and so forth, the usual things for which you would spend. Duane ran for a house seat with

about 60,000 population. My district in the Senate had a population of 250,000. I asked, "Did you spend up to \$100,000?" He said, "Actually, it was \$360,000." This is for one House seat in one set of small communities. This is an obvious change that I learned of in talking with Duane who, if I may give him a bit of a pitch, is a very fine young representative and a Professor at West Chester University. He's running hard, I can tell you that, because he won by about 117 votes last time. That tells you about the level of the competition. To the south in West Chester, the Democratic candidate won by a small amount. That race took long to decide because it was determining whether the House of Representatives in Harrisburg was going to go one way or the other, so people were paying close attention to Chester County. A lot of people said, "Chester County is not like it used



Earl and family, wife Jackie, Todd and Toby, with President Reagan on September 17, 1987, in Philadelphia on 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Constitution.

to be" when the Democrat won here and thus in the overall count in the state.

One thing that is notable about the Upper Main Line during this period is the first woman ever to represent Chester County in Harrisburg: Pat Crawford. Does that name bring back memories to you? She was the first woman elected to that level of office in Chester County. To me, it was indicative of the fact that the demographics of the Upper Main Line is highly educated, relatively affluent, and maybe one of the places where people would have first recognized that women have a place in politics. Pat went on to run for State Treasurer on the Republican ticket. She didn't win in the year she ran but she did achieve a statewide level of recognition and aspiration, even though she didn't attain the office.



The Upper Main Line was an important source for Republican Party leadership during this period, with both Bill Lamb (who later became a Supreme Court Justice of Pennsylvania) and Al Massey (well known and respected attorney and civic leader) becoming Chairmen of the County GOP. Dick Schulze of Tredyffrin became a member of the U.S. Congress after serving in county office. The Upper Main Line Council of Republican Women was another source of leadership in the region, county, and even at the state level. Martha Bell Schoeninger of Tredyffrin became the first woman State Chairman of the Republican Party and Bea Menig of Willistown was a strong area leader. The Upper Main Line has always had important "behind the scenes" leadership figures such as Jim Matthews in the "old days," and more recently Buck Riley and Jim McErlane. It would be hard to name all of the fine people who were engaged in politics on the Upper Main Line over the period when I was active, but in addition to those I've discussed, some notable people who should be mentioned are long-time popular state legislator Rep. Carole Rubley; T-E School Board member and then County Commissioner (and possible candidate for Lieutenant Governor) Carol Aichele; and the late Florence ("Floss") Hunt, who was elected County Recorder of Deeds.

#### IV. Personal Reflections

I loved being in politics. I had been a Professor. I got drawn into politics. I told you about Betty Burke corraling me. Those of you who know of Betty know how persuasive she could be when she was fighting a cause. I first met her when she was collecting petition signatures for the library. Later came the conflict over borough zoning. I joined in that cause. I was happy to do it because I felt she was right and I felt like somebody needed to stand up for it. At one point, several of us were sitting around and somebody said, "We need a leader for this group. We need somebody to be the spokesman for the group." We all looked at Betty and she said, "I'm a spokesman for too many things already." We asked so and so, "Why don't you do it?" "I'm too busy in my business." Then they looked around and said, "Earl, would you do this?" I was a young college professor with little kids. I wasn't sure I wanted to get involved, but I said, "Yes, I will." So I became the leader of the group that fought the big zoning case in Malvern. We won it. Our group was called "Malvern Citizens for Planned Development."

We eventually had to take it to Commonwealth Court. We didn't win everything but we actually reduced the overall impact of the rezoning and got them to establish a Planning Commission, which was a great idea. They hadn't had one before, so I got appointed to it.

Then along came something called the Chester County Government Study Commission. Ted Rubino at the time was the leader of the party. He said something like, "Baker, you're a Professor, aren't you?" Yes. "We need some kind of Professor on this thing." That's how I got on the ballot for the Chester County Government Study Commission. Nan Mulford was the head of the League of Women Voters. She lived here in Easttown. She was also chosen because Ted felt we needed a "smart woman from the Main Line" who was involved with the League of Women Voters. Weren't they supposed to know something about government? That tells you a little bit about how the decision-making went on. We had a ticket of nine people from around the County. We all won, except one. It wasn't easy. There was a ballot with about forty-five names on it. Because it was a non-partisan ballot, you didn't run as a Republican or Democrat. It was separate from the other ballots. Anybody could run. You could just walk in the door and say, "I want to be on the Government Study Commission." But because the party supported us, eight of us won out of the forty. I was listed on the ballot as the thirty-sixth or something. You had to have some reason to go vote for old Baker, because the ballot itself didn't tell you Republican, Democrat, or anything else. It just said where you were from. I was elected. One Democrat won. It happened to be Leo McDermott. Leo was the Democratic Commissioner in Chester County for many years. Because people knew his name and they didn't know any of the other names, they voted for Leo. Leo bumped off the one person on our ticket who didn't get out and hustle like the rest of us had done.

The Commission met. There was a young man on it named Robin West who had decided he wanted to beat John Ware for Congress. He thought the way to do so was to get on the Government Study Commission and become the Chairman. Little did he realize that we were going to be in for some tough votes down the line and that if you wanted to be popular and wanted to run for some higher office, you would not have gotten on the Government Study Commission. But he didn't know that. He wanted to be the

Chairman. There was also a lawyer from the eastern part of the County who wanted the Chairmanship so those two individuals tied four to four. Leo being Leo wouldn't support either one and voted for himself. At the impasse, they said, "Is anybody going to change their vote?" Nobody said they would change their vote. Both of the people who were running turned to me and said, "Earl, would you be the Chairman because we can both support you?" That's how I got to be Chairman of the Government Study Commission.



Victory celebration of Baker for Senate campaign, 1988. From left, Chairman of Campaign Dick Kurtz with his wife Jackie; Honorary Chairman of Campaign David Eisenhower with his wife Julie Nixon Eisenhower; Earl and Jackie Baker.

The following year, our Government Study Commission worked hard, we studied hard, we held hearings, and so forth. We eventually proposed a form of government change that was voted down. We proposed it as something that you should decide for yourself, not something that we were trying to force upon everybody in the County. People thought it would raise taxes. I think it's probably about that simple. We had proposed a County Manager and a five member Board of Commissioners and some other things that are of interest only to an historian at this point.

A year later, when the Republican Commissioners announced that they weren't running again, people naturally came to me and said, "Earl you've just spent a year studying the County government. You must know about it." I said, "I do. I know more than a little bit." They said, "Why don't you run for Commissioner?" It was logical that I did. I was from the Main Line and there had been Commissioners before for Chester County from Malvern, covering almost thirty years: Jesse Cox for eight years, then Ted Rubino for eight years, then I was there for twelve years. It was customary to have a Commissioner from the southern part of the County, too. 1975 was a hot year with seven people running for Commissioner in the Republican primary. One of them was from around here, on the T-E School Board. There were two peo-

ple representing the "regular" Republican Party. I was one of those. Then there were two "independents." It was a watershed struggle in the Republican Party. Everybody thought the independents would win or the regulars would win. It was a battle because the independents had been getting stronger, even electing some row officers. To everyone's surprise, one person won from the regulars, me. One person won from the independents, Bob Struble. So in a sense, neither "side" won. Bob and I became the successful Republican ticket for Commissioners in the General Election in November.

In our unusual form of Commissioner government in Pennsylvania, there are two elected majority party members so obviously if they don't get along that's not good because you've got the "minority party member" who is also declared to be elected, even though he wasn't voted for by the popular vote. That is how the majority and minority commissioners are elected, but of course any two or all three can vote as a majority on specific matters that come before the Board of Commissioners, regardless of party. Since our law requires that there be a minority member, that was Leo, the Democrat. Bob Struble and I learned to work together well. We had hardly known each other and even though we were opponents in the primary,

we got along compatibly and we did change a lot of things in Chester County. We changed the way the government was set up, we reduced the role of politics in the Courthouse, and we introduced the role of professionalism. We guarded our taxes carefully, keeping them low. My motto, which was on my desk, was "Good Government is Good Politics." We even got to the point where we got along with the Democrat. That didn't come with Leo, but it came when Bob Thompson and I were Commissioners together. We got along so well with Pat O'Donnell that the Democrats defeated him because he didn't fight us enough. It tells you how bizarre in practice is this three Commissioner form that we have in Pennsylvania. But we have it and until we adopt a new statewide structure or locally adopt a new plan or charter, we will continue to have it.

I was fortunate at the end of my third term to have the opportunity to run for the Senate of Pennsylvania. When I ran for the third term, some people said, "You're not supposed to run for a third term." A lot of people said, "Well, you should. You're doing such a great job. There are unfinished things to do," and so forth. So I ran. But I knew my horizon was going to change after that.

John Stauffer announced he was stepping down the year I left the Courthouse so I went right from my last meeting in the Commissioner's office to a press conference to make an announcement that I was running for the Senate. I served two terms successfully. I was able to tell the Chester County story, about how we created the conditions that led to 50,000 new jobs during my tenure as a Commissioner. I worked for a state that would not have to see as many young people leaving to go to other states that had more business friendly policies. At various points in my politi-



Earl with sculpture of President Reagan on first day of its exhibition in Rotunda of U.S. Capitol, June 4, 2009 .

cal career, there were potential opportunities for me to credibly consider statewide office, but I decided the circumstances weren't right for me to put my name on the ballot at those times. I had two kids in college when Unisys recruited me to be a Vice President. My salary increased significantly from what I had been paid as a Senator. I enjoyed that role because the Unisys practice group I established and led was proposing, designing, marketing, installing, and operating large computer systems for cities, counties and states. I felt I was still doing good work; I was still doing something that was in the public interest and something that took advantage of technology, which I had come to believe was a strong way of

making a more efficient and responsive government. From there I went to Presbyterian Homes, serving twenty-five hundred residents in 23 facilities in the Delaware Valley, from the upscale in Rydal Park and Rosemont to the facilities for the needy at 58<sup>th</sup> Street. That was a wonderful mission. Now I'm in government relations. In a way, I've cycled back, on the periphery of politics. I represent companies in healthcare, information technology, and engineering, here on the Main Line, in Harrisburg, and in Washington.

That's my career. It's not necessarily unique to the Upper Main Line but I think I found a fertile support system in the Upper Main Line in this important and in some ways special region in politics. I was able to be elected over the course of twenty years to significant political leadership positions and to bring good ideas and beliefs to government; and I worked hard and effectively at representing our area, whether it was in Chester County, Harrisburg, or Washington. It's been a wonderful career for me and I hope that

## **How Earl's Phone Changed the World**

**Michael P. Rellahan, Daily Local News, Sunday, June 3, 2007**

Roger Lerch, perhaps my favorite teacher, told us students in his Modern European History course at Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, back in September 1974, that the world had changed more in the past 150 years than it had in the previous 2,000.

And at the time, he hadn't even ordered a sandwich at Wawa without ever having to actually speak a single, solitary word.

The memory of Mr. Lerch, and of his remark, came to me upon the visit to the Daily Local News of Molly Morrison, the president of the Natural Lands Trust and former head chef and chief bottle washer on the fifth floor of the Chester County Courthouse, the aerie of the commissioners and their staff.

I hadn't seen Molly in a long while, and she hadn't been to the Daily Local News offices in a decade or more. So with others in the room, our reunion led to a series of memories about past tribulations between the newspaper, me, Molly and, of course, Commissioner Extraordinaire Earl M. Baker, Molly's original patron.

The story we both remembered and liked the best was the saga of Earl's car phone.

The year being 1984 or so, mobile telephones were something new to the landscape. And Earl, being a man who craved communication of any kind, (He once told me the sentence he least liked reading in the newspaper was: "Baker could not be reached for comment.") decided he needed one. So he got the county to ante up.

For us in the press, it seemed the story of a lifetime. A phone for his car? Who did Earl think he was — the President of the United States?

So we took the ball and ran with it. Story after story, day after day. Who else in government had car phones? Who did Earl talk to on the thing? What were the Chester County taxpayers shelling out for him to jabber whilst cruising down the Schuylkill? We even got a cartoonist to draw a picture of a Princess Phone on wheels, with Earl's photo superimposed on the dial.

The phone itself was — so I have heard — enormous, bigger than a small dog and about as easy to manipulate.

And today? Governments hand out taxpayer-funded cell phones like politicians used to hand out lollipops. If the Daily Local News were to opine on the nonessential nature of government-paid cell phones, readers would look at us like we were publishing from the planet Neptune, not Lionville.

So I thought about how times had changed, and how technology has sped up so incredibly that something which was shockingly unnecessary 20 years ago is today considered hopelessly out of date — like Earl's massive car phone.

The next day, I found myself standing in line at the Wawa wanting to order a sandwich, and being completely ignored by the deli staff. I noticed a screen or two near the counter and realized that ordering now had to be done by means of a touch menu. Within a few moments I had my salami with provolone paid for and in a bag and out the door.

But I had not spoken a single, solitary word to anyone involved in the process, nor did they expect me to.

And that, Mr. Lerch, makes me yearn just a little for the days before the world changed.

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*Comments from Earl, September 2009:* Reading Mike Rellahan's account of his interview with Molly Morrison was great déjà vu! Here is how the telephone idea developed. Ever since the Three Mile Island incident had occurred, with potentially hundreds of thousands of evacuees ending up in Chester County, which thankfully of course never happened, it had seemed important to try to provide as much "real time" (as we would say today) communication between Commissioners and Emergency Services as possible. So when some department equipment was going to be replaced with newer models, I asked Tim Campbell to have me try it out, so there would be no additional cost to the county. Everyone had a lot of fun with this idea. Once the DLN ran a cartoon with me zipping along in my car with "White House Calling" coming over the airwaves. Of course in today's world of instant communications through PDA's, the internet, and ubiquitous cell phones, this all seems so technologically primitive as Mike's column aptly and humorously points out.