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Clifford, Robert oral history interview

Marisa Burnham-Bestor

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Interview with Robert Clifford by Marisa Burnham-Bestor

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Clifford, Robert

Interviewer

Burnham-Bestor, Marisa

Date

March 29, 1999

Place

Auburn, Maine

ID Number

MOH 077

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Biographical Note

Robert Clifford was born in Lewiston, Maine on May 2, 1937. He attended the public schools including Lewiston High School. He then went to Bowdoin College followed by Boston College Law School. He served in the Seventh Army stationed in Ludwigsburg, Germany. He then practiced law with his father, two brothers and a cousin. He served three one-year terms as alderman. He was president of the City Council from 1968 to 70. He was the mayor of Lewiston from 1971 to 1972. He served two terms on the Maine State Senate. He was chairman of the Lewiston Charter Commission from 1979 to 1980. He was appointed to the Maine Superior Court in 1979. He was First Trial Court Chief Justice of the Superior Court from 1984 to 1986. He was then appointed to the Maine Supreme Court.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: the Maine Democratic Party from 1952 to 1954; 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; Muskie's first term as governor from 1955 to 1956; Muskie's 1958 US Senate campaign; Muskie's 1968 Vice Presidential campaign; Muskie's 1976 Senate campaign; Muskie's appointment to Secretary of State; environmental protection; urban planning and development; Vietnam; Model Cities in Lewiston; social clubs in Lewiston; a speech at Paul Dionnes's inauguration; Maine Commission on Legal Needs; William Clifford, Sr.; John Clifford I and II; the Clifford family's trek to the US; Lewiston and Bangor city halls; the

“Clifford clique” as myth; the necessity of Democratic affiliation in Lewiston; municipal elections and politicians as typically being non-partisan over partisan; the old and new charters in Lewiston and the mayor’s role under each; changing the election date and term limit for Lewiston major; eliminate party requirements for boards; issues Clifford faced while alderman; fluoridation; the location of the Vietnam Memorial Bridge; budget; public works strikes; police and the “blue flu”; conservative Democrats in Lewiston; Klan activity in the 1920s; the elevated position of Mayor in Quebec; Maine Municipal Clerk and Lewiston City Clerk; a bill for Unicameral state government; criminal code revision of criminal laws; the Probate Revision Commission; impression of state politics as partisan; State vs. local politics; the first non-Franco-American mayor in 40 years; Brennan’s first Superior Court nomination in 1979; court cases; the evolution of Maine courts; Louis Jalbert; “As Maine goes, so goes the nation”; the 1936 presidential elections; impression of Frank Coffin; Kennedy being defeated in Maine in 1960; James G. Blaine and anti-Catholic legislation; Maine Democratic strongholds pre-Muskie; Thomas Delahanty’s career; Muskie/Hathaway tension; Democratic splits in Lewiston/Auburn; 1968 Maine caucus; Bates tensions; 1966 mayoral elections; Jalbert vs. Rocheleau; political personalities rather than ideology; Lewiston’s political reputation; Maine anti-Franco prejudice, Muskie as long-winded and Lincolnesque; Mitchell as Senator; and Cyrus Vances’s resignation from Secretary of State.

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Transcript

Marisa Burnham-Bestor: It is the 29th of March, 1999. We are in Auburn at the Auburn County Courthouse. Present are Justice Robert W. Clifford and Marisa Burnham-Bestor. Could you state your name and spell it for the record?

Robert Clifford: Robert W. Clifford, R-O-B-E-R-T, C-L-I-F-F-O-R-D.

MB: Thanks. Where and when were you born?

RC: I was born in Lewiston in May of, May 2nd, 1937. And my father's name was William H. Clifford, and my mother's name was Alice Sughrue Clifford, S-U-G-H-R-U-E. And I had six

brothers and one sister. My oldest brother was Jere, J-E-R-E, William, my second was Constance, who is now deceased, William H., Junior, Peter Clifford, Paul Clifford, who is now deceased, Richard, myself, and my youngest brother is David Clifford. And we all had to work when we were young and had responsibilities of cleaning the house and doing the dishes and all that kind of thing. My father was a great dishwasher and my mother, of course, had a lot of children so we all pitched in and helped out.

My father was an attorney; he was very involved in the community and he had a practice, a law practice. But he was also very active in the Rotary, hospital board, and in the United Way, or the predecessor to the United Way, and he was also actively involved in his church, which was one of the Catholic parishes in Lewiston, St. Joseph parish. And his brother John Clifford, who was his partner, became a, was active, more active than my father actually in politics and Democratic politics, and became a United States attorney upon the election of Franklin Roosevelt. And then in 1946 or '47 became a United States District Court judge, the only United States district court judge at that time in Maine. And he died in the mid-fifties.

My father continued to practice and two of his, three of his sons, Jere and William, Jr. and myself practiced with him along with a cousin of ours, John Clifford, the third. And we were, we were Irish-Catholic and we were Democrats and the community we lived in is very heavily Franco-American, but Catholic. And the, I think that the Franco-American people, the values that they value are hard work and I think that it was a good community to be raised in.

MB: What do you feel that, how do you feel that your family and their beliefs, how do you feel that they've impacted you as you've grown?

RC: Well the religious faith was a very strong influence on me and the role of family was very important. I also had a very large extended family. My mother came from a family of ten or eleven children and so I have a lot of first cousins who I remain fairly close to. They're mostly from Massachusetts or away, but nevertheless, family and religious faith were very important to me. And my father's emphasis on community, on giving something back to the community as well.

MB: Tell me a bit again about how your family came to the United States and settled here in Lewiston.

RC: My family was Irish immigrants. My great-grandfather came at the time of potato famine either in the late 1840's or around 1850 and settled here after a short time, I think, in the Midwest. And he was a farmer and he had several children, the only one of which, of whom married was my grandfather. And my grandfather became quite a successful contractor: built the Lewiston City Hall, the Bangor City Hall, and retired in his fifties I believe. And he lived in Lewiston. And the other siblings in that family, some of them were also quite successful: two of them were dentists, two of the women. The sisters were telephone operators in Massachusetts and retired in Maine. And one was a, uncle, my uncle, great uncle Jeremiah was a, he was a miner and I guess became quite successful and settled in Butte, Montana and he died in the '30s. But the last one of those, my grandfather died in 1941 and those two great aunts died I think in the '50s. So there's only, they tended to marry late and live long so that there's not, there's only

four generations.

MB: Throughout the years that your family has been in Lewiston, they've been very prominent in the field of law. Who was the first person in your family to become a lawyer?

RC: That was my uncle John; the one who became a judge. He and my father became lawyers I think within a year of each other and practiced together for a long time. And then my uncle became the United States attorney, which at that time was a part-time position, and then became a full-time judge. And my father practiced law and then the judge's son came in and practiced with him and then two of my brothers and then me.

MB: How do you think that your family first got interested, I mean your father first got, and your uncle first became interested in the law?

RC: Well, because I think they were from Irish background and they, their father had not been educated. And they attended Bowdoin College and one of them attended, my father attended Harvard Law School and my uncle Georgetown Law School. And they, their professional life was, there weren't many Irish-Americans at that time who were able to have a professional life. But because my grandfather was, had had some success he was able to give them that education. And they were very, the whole family, was very proud of the fact that they became professional people.

MB: And then how did it become a legacy in the family? What kept the interest?

RC: Well it's just the, my maternal grandfather was also an attorney in Boston. And it just, the interest was there for three of us, but there was five of us, five in my family who did not become lawyers.

MB: Who, as far as your father's political life went, who were his, who were the people he was affiliated with politically?

RC: He really wasn't that active. He was so busy raising a family and practicing law that he, his involvement was, I think, much less direct than my uncle's. One of his heroes though, was William Pettengill, who was a famous Maine politician who wrote several books. And my father used to talk about Pettengill all the time.

MB: I've heard the expression used before, the "Clifford clique."

RC: The "clique"?

MB: The "clique"?

RC: It was more fancy than fact, I think it was more of a myth than. . . . Some of the people that ran for local politics would use it in a demagogic way, I think.

MB: Oh, really?

RC: At least I think. When I was a child I remember that people would accuse our family as being behind certain politicians. And I think it was more, it really was, I think a lot of it was myth.

MB: So, but your family had that power within the community?

RC: Well I really don't, I mean I think it was, people thought there was more active involvement and power than there was. Although my father was very active in the community, but less in the political part of the community than in the community.

MB: What were some differences and similarities between your social outlook and your political involvement compared to your parents and your family?

RC: I'm not sure what. . . .

MB: Just, as far as your father's involvement and your uncle's involvement politically, did, were you similar to them in your interest in being. . . .?

RC: Well I, yeah, my brother Jere, the oldest, ran for alderman when I was in high school; he was a young lawyer. He was elected and served three or four terms I think, three or four years, in the city council. I'd majored in political science at Bowdoin College. I went to law school, and when I came back I ran for the city council in Lewiston. And then I ran for mayor, and then for the State Senate, and served on the Lewiston Charter Commission, and then I was appointed as a judge. So I was fairly active in politics. But the local politics was, at least the city politics, was non-partisan politics; it was not, there's no party affiliation. And I did run for the State Senate as a Democrat and served two terms.

MB: How did you get interested in the Senate and those political affiliations versus just being a lawyer?

RC: Well my brother had, my brother William, Jr. was in the Senate for one term before I ran. And, when I was the mayor he was in the Senate. And he enjoyed the experience and wasn't going to run again. So I, being prevented from running again for mayor by the term limits, (at that time the term limits was two one year terms, that was it, that was the max). . . . And so I ran for the Senate and served two two-year terms. And then I found it very difficult to practice law and serve in the legislature and so I did not run after two terms.

MB: Just too much of a workload?

RC: Well it was, yeah, you had to be in Augusta and it was difficult to earn a living as a lawyer when you were up there.

MB: When and where did you meet your wife?

RC: I met my wife, who is from California, in Europe. I was in the Army and she was working

for the government. And she did help me a lot in, she loved to campaign and she likes people and she really did throw herself into campaigning for me. And so she was a great person to have when you were running for office because she would not be afraid to go down and knock on doors and go to all different parts of the city and campaign for you.

MB: Was she politically involved at all?

RC: Directly, no, she really wasn't. I mean she was involved as my wife, but she didn't run for any office or anything herself.

MB: How did you end up meeting overseas, where was that at?

RC: Yeah, well I was from the Army and she was working for the government and I think we met in the officer's club.

MB: Oh really? Where were you stationed?

RC: I was stationed in Ludwigsburg in Germany, Seventh Army.

MB: Tell me a bit about your experiences growing up and your education, the schools that you attended.

RC: I went to the local public schools here in Lewiston and Lewiston High School. And then I went to Bowdoin College, which many people in my family had attended. And then I went to Boston College Law School and then the military. I, I mean I just went; I think I had a pretty normal experience as a child in school and, as well as in college. I think I was probably influenced by my family's having attended, to go to Bowdoin College. And I sometimes thought that maybe I would have been better off at another school, since I was, it wasn't kind of my own, I mean I was kind of just, I was kind of, it was easy to go to because my family had been there, etc. It wasn't a very adventurous choice.

MB: Growing up did you feel as though because your family was so in the public view that that affected your childhood at all and your experiences socially?

RC: Well I suppose that, all the people knew you, knew me more than maybe knew my friends when I'd see older people. They knew me. Not so much because they knew me personally, but because my father was a pretty prominent guy and my uncle was pretty prominent. And it kind of was embarrassing sometimes, you know, to be, that people would know you when you were probably behaving not as well as you should.

MB: How close-knit was your family as far as your uncle and your immediate family?

RC: It was a close family although I think that my, I was probably closer to cousins on my mother's side than my father's side. And the reason for that is that my father married a lot later than my uncle so that his children were a lot older than we were. Whereas on my mother's side there were members, cousins who were a lot closer in age than they were, to us.

MB: When did you become interested in going to law school?

RC: I kind of wanted to go to law school all the time through college. I majored in political science and kind of knew I was going to law school.

MB: Did you want to be a mayor and senator, or were you really just. . . .?

RC: No, I didn't, I really didn't have any i-, I just, I didn't decide to run for city council until the year I did it and I didn't decide to run for mayor until the year I did it. I did, after serving a couple years on the city, on the, as a, then I think it was called the Board of Aldermen, I thought I could do a good job as mayor and I wanted to be the mayor. But I didn't really, I didn't really have these aspirations as a child. It was only when I actually began living in the community.

MB: How did your family respond to you and your brother's wanting to become lawyers?

RC: Lawyers? Oh I think they were, I think my father encouraged us to become lawyers. It's a noble profession so I think that my family was encouraging and proud of the fact that three of us became practicing lawyers.

MB: What shaped your. . . .?

RC: Although not as proud as my mother was of one of my brothers who became a priest. That was, that was the, she was more proud of him I think than anyone.

MB: What shaped your political affiliations as far as Democrat, Republican, in that sense?

RC: Well in Lewiston there wasn't much of a choice. You, I mean, it was a very heavily Democratic city and in order to be elected to anything, at least that was partisan, you really had to be a Democrat. And the enrollment was just lopsided and that's because of the history of, Maine was such a heavily Republican state. And the only, the people in the cities, especially the Franco-Americans and the Irish-Catholics felt at home in the Democratic Party in those days, so that the registration was just, I mean it was just kind of a natural home. My parents were, my family was enrolled as Democrats and I became, and all of us became Democrats at least then. Although I'm not sure all of us remained Democrats afterwards, but certainly in those days it was.

MB: Explain to me what was partisan and what was nonpartisan in Lewiston.

RC: Well the election; they don't run under a party label. They just, if you get enough signatures you can run; you don't run as a Democrat, you don't run as a Republican so there's no primary, there's no. . . . The political party is not involved at all in city politics.

MB: And so those were for positions like mayor and alderman?

RC: Yes, yeah.

MB: But for the state politics it was?

RC: State Senate is, they have a primary, you run as a Democrat or a Republican, they have a primary, you don't. You can run as an independent, but most people are elected with a party label. And the same with positions like United States Senator and Congressman, although of course now we have an independent governor, which is the second one we've had in twenty years.

MB: Is that better, do you think, the nonpartisan?

RC: I think it is at the municipal level, oh, I think it's much better.

MB: Why?

RC: Because it, because I don't think the party philosophy has a whole lot to do with what goes on at the local level, number one. And number two, in a place like Lewiston you'd freeze our anyone who was not a Democrat and so I just don't think that's, I think it's much better to have, to have party [sic] affiliation, the two cities, that, to have no party affiliation. The two cities that do, I'm not sure that-, Waterville has party affiliation, I just don't think, I think our local politics is kind of, you know they just had a recall election of the mayor and the people in these very small caucuses select who the party candidate's going to be. I just don't, I just think it's much better to allow people to run if they want to run without any party affiliation because I don't think party means much at the local level.

MB: Were the people who were being elected in Lewiston, were they reflective of the very Democratic population; were they very liberal, or?

RC: No, because the population is, I think social issues, very conservative. And they're Democrats, but I think they were very fiscally conservative in Lewiston and generally very socially conservative. And I think Lewiston was known for being, for having conservative Democrats and I think generally the politicians from Lewiston, at least historically, have reflected that. It may have changed recently, but.

MB: Has Lewiston's politics changed significantly since you've been involved?

RC: Yeah, I don't, you know since I've been a judge I'm not sure I follow it as closely as I should. But the charter has changed. I was the chairman of the charter commission that drafted the new charter. So it's a very different form of government now; it's a city manager essentially form of government. And before it was a very Rube Goldberg-kind of unique form of government that had a, the power lay with the various boards and commissions: You had a Fire Commissioner and a fire department, a Police Commissioner ran the police department, a Public Works Commissioner that ran the public works department and the power was very diffused. And you had a Finance Board that probably had more power than everybody. But now you have a more traditional city council-mayor form of government. And the city council appoints the city administrator who really has the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the city,

which is a much more traditional, it's kind of more normal traditional form of government.

MB: What year did that go through?

RC: The charter commission was elected in 1978 and we met the whole year and it was, the new charter was drafted, we drafted a new charter. It was voted on in June of 1979 and became effective in January of 1980. So that the new mayor, the election of 1979 elected the new city council and the mayor under the new system.

MB: What were the problems with the original system that led you to changing it?

RC: It, there was no one in the system who kind of looked beyond the next few years. You didn't have anybody who was, had responsibility for the administration of the entire city who could kind of. . . . And the old charter was the result of some unfortunate incidents that happened during the 1930s where there was corruption, or allegations of corruption, and I guess some corruption did occur, job selling, etc. And so the legislature which in those days drafted charters, (there was no home rule), the legislature drafted a charter for the city which took, essentially took, the power away from the elected representatives and put in the appointed. These people were appointed by the mayor, these commission and board members, and they were required to be of certain party affiliations. They were, on a five-person board, for example, there had to be three Democrats and two Republicans and that was in the charter. So independents couldn't serve on these boards and no more than three Republicans, two Republicans could serve on the board, or no more than three Democrats could serve on the board.

MB: Despite the fact that it was a nonpartisan held office?

RC: The elected people were nonpartisan. Those board members were by party affiliation.

MB: Huh, interesting.

RC: We tried to, I tried to, before in the, when I was mayor I proposed some changes in the charter. By then we had home rule. I didn't propose a full change but I proposed some changes. We changed the election date, we changed the mayor's term of office from one to two years, those were both successful. And I proposed eliminating the requirement on the boards and that was, the city council defeated that and so that didn't go to the people. I think it would have probably been successful had it gone to the people. But, so those two changes occurred in 1971 or '2, and then the full charter changed in 1979. That was really one of the mo-, my, what I feel is one of my major accomplishments in life was having served on that charter commission, because I think Lewiston has a very fine charter.

MB: Is it still true now that you have to have three Democrats and two Republicans?

RC: No, we don't even have the, we generally don't have the boards any more. The city council has the, pretty much has the power. It was a major change.

MB: Wow. Who were some of the other people involved in that charter commission?

RC: Oh, there was a, there was a member elected from each ward and then I think there were three people that were appointed. I think it was like a ten-, there was, I know there was an elected representative from each ward and then there were three people who were appointed I think by maybe the mayor and the city council. So it was a fairly large charter commission. Don't embarrass me by asking to name them though. I can get that for you if you want but I just don't remember many of the names. I mean, Roger Phillipon and Mrs. [Rose Marie] Butler and Mrs. Mekowski. I just don't, I can get you the names, but I can't remember all of the names because I don't want to leave anybody off.

MB: So was it an ald-, part of your alderman position that got you on to the charter commission?

RC: No. I mean, I had to run for it, I had to run against, you know it was the only election that I, when I ran, in my life, where I felt that maybe I would lose and maybe I was not as qualified as my opponent because my opponent was Professor [Douglas] Hodgkin.

MB: And how did that campaign end up going?

RC: Oh I won, because I was, my name was, I had been, served as the mayor and I had served in the Senate. So I had a big advantage in the election. I didn't really campaign very hard, but I was, I mean, he really would have been an excellent charter commission member too and we both lived in the same ward. So, but that was, he was the fellow I ran against. He's a government professor who, he's still, isn't he at Bates?

MB: Tell me about how come you decided to run for alderman instead of going into private practice?

RC: Oh, I didn't; alderman was part-time. I practiced law when I was an alderman. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to do it. I mean, I had to practice law and support a family.

MB: You practiced with your father and your uncle?

RC: Yes. No, my uncle was dead then. I practiced with my father and two brothers and a cousin. [I] practiced in Lewiston and we had a kind of a general practice of law.

MB: And what was involved in the alderman position that interested you in it?

RC: It was, you know, you were a representative, a legislator representing your ward in city government. And I just ran against an incumbent and was elected and I served three one year terms, I served one year as, second year I think I was the president of the city council, and I. . . . So those were one-year terms; I had to run three times.

MB: What were some of the issues going on in town at the time that you had to deal with as alderman?

RC: Fluoridation was an issue. The location of the bridge up there that is now kind of in the news again; I voted against that location. That was one of the major issues that we had. The budget was always a big issue as to, that's always the biggest issue in a city.

MB: What was it like to work on it within the old charter, within the ratifications of the old charter?

RC: We had a couple of strikes that were, we had a strike, a Public Works strike. Judge [John] Beliveau, who was a district court judge, was the mayor during two of my years on the city council. He was my immediate predecessor as the mayor. And we had a Public Works strike; it was quite controversial. And we finally brought them to court and got an injunction and the strike ended because it was an illegal strike.

MB: What were they striking for?

RC: Wages.

MB: Was that the . . .

RC: That was in 1969 or, 1970 I think.

MB: What workers?

RC: Public Works.

MB: Oh, okay. Wow.

RC: And when I was the mayor there was a police strike, which was, you know, kind of more serious. Again it was an illegal strike and there was a sick in, I mean they called it "blue flu", and that only lasted one day. We got an injunction against them and then they came back to work.

MB: Why were they striking?

RC: Money.

MB: What were some of your political standings or beliefs that you used when you were campaigning?

RC: Well, I don't. . . . I mean these campaigns were kind of not as issue oriented as you might think. I mean, it's, you met people, you asked them to vote for you, you told them that you were going to be fiscally conservative and you were going to protect their interests and they were, you didn't. . . . The great issues usually were not preeminent in these campaigns. It's sort of, knocked on doors and went to the social clubs and shook a lot of hands.

MB: What were some of the reasons that you found that you became a Democrat since it seems as though. . . . Or what were some of the reasons that so many of the people in the area were Democrats and some of their beliefs are so conservative?

RC: Because there was, the Republicans kind of froze them out historically. I mean, they were, there was a lot of anti-Catholic, in Maine. There was a, the Klan was active in Maine in the twenties and it had nothing to do with blacks and little to do with Jews; it had mostly to do with Catholics.

MB: I didn't realize that that even existed.

RC: The Klan was, oh yeah, the Klan has a history of anti-Catholic bigotry and it was fairly prominent in Maine. And one of Maine's more prominent politicians [Ralph Owen Brewster], a man who served as governor and then I think a representative and then a senator, refused to disavow the Klan in the twenties.

MB: Really, is that still . . .?

RC: So that that part of, historically the Francos and the Irish-Catholics became Democrats because the Republicans kind of wouldn't let them in the door.

MB: Is that still true as far as Klan activity in the state?

RC: No, I don't think there's Klan activity up here any more.

MB: When, I remember reading that you were interested in getting women involved in politics; it was a newspaper article on you that spoke about that. What was your, where did that come from; where did that interest come from?

RC: Well, I mean it was probably general. There was a, when I was the mayor, a woman named Lillian Caron became, was elected to the city as an alderman and she later became the mayor. She was a pretty controversial outspoken woman. She's now dead. And I guess my view is, you know, everyone who is interested and eligible should be free to run and to hold office.

MB: What were some of the things that you did to encourage women to get involved?

RC: I just maybe encouraged individual people.

MB: Can you remember anyone who, man or woman, who you encouraged to become politically active who you thought would be. . . .?

RC: Oh a lot, you know, a lot of people you try to encourage to run for city council. And, John [E.] Kivus who's now deceased, I encouraged to run for city alderman. Charles Lanie who succeeded me I think as an alderman in Ward one. Just a lot of people that you felt would be a good, I, a lot of people I unsuccessfully, wouldn't run and I tried to select a lot of good people to

appoint to the boards and commissions. That was really the mayor, I mean you really had, that was where you really had an impact. Because, under the old charter, is that the people that ran the boards and commissions were really important because they ran the city, and selecting good people was very important. You had to make sure that the party affiliation was right and, that is, you know, that they had to fit in to the charter and that they would be good people. I think I encouraged a lot of people. I had a lot of support when I ran for mayor and I got a lot of good people involved on the various boards and commissions who had not been involved in politics before.

MB: Who were some of the people that you appointed as mayor?

RC: Oh, Louis [C.] L'Heureux and Richard Bellaire and, (I'd have to see the list), Laurier Raymond in the Finance Board, Aurele Bosse in the Finance Board. I appointed Dr. [Pauline Vachon] Beale, a woman, to the Library Committee I believe. It's I'd have to get a list of them because it's been thirty years ago. But that was one of the things that I thought I did, accomplished well was appointing a lot of good people to the boards and commissions. I had a s-, I should have brought my sc-, my secretary kept, in the mayor's office, kept a scrapbook of, I should have brought it, it would have helped, it would have been, because I could have recalled a lot more names for you.

MB: Why did you decide to run for mayor?

RC: Well, it's because I felt I could do a good job and there was no, the prior mayor, Judge John Beliveau, was prevented by term limits and I just felt I was ready. I was glad; I almost ran before I ran for the Board of Aldermen and I was glad that I did not because I think I probably was not as ready as I was after serving three years on the Board of Aldermen.

MB: And then how did you get interested in the Senate?

RC: Well it was a seat that was open and my brother had held the seat. And I couldn't run for mayor and I was interested in politics. And I felt I did a good job as mayor and I was in a position where I could have been elected, running. If you do a fairly good job as mayor, you, the mayor is fairly prominent because you're invited to a lot of social functions. They have the "snowshoe clubs" and you know in Quebec, the history is the mayor is a very elevated position so they invite the mayor to a lot of their social functions, and you get a lot of exposure. And so I was elected pretty easily to the Senate.

MB: How were your political beliefs and your brother's political beliefs different as far as what you did and how you, what you wanted to accomplish in the Senate?

RC: I think they were probably pretty much the same. And again, most of the, I sponsored a lot of bills. The city clerk in Lewiston had me sponsor a lot of the bills for the Maine Municipal Clerk's Association. So I sponsored a lot of bills; I got a lot of them enacted. And I got, in sponsoring bills that are kind of not controversial and in making a good appearance you really, you do, you get to know a lot of legislators and you become pretty effective doing that. Is this, does the tape have to be changed?

MB: No, not for another five minutes. I was just checking it. What were some of your impressions of Maine politics and the functioning of the State House when you were working there?

RC: I was, the, I was impressed with the legislature. I admire legislators who go up there and, it's a pretty complicated process. And for people to, first of all to run for office, to put themselves at risk of being rejected, that takes some courage I think and some commitment to public service. And then to go up there and spend the time up there, and to, because it's awfully slow working and slow-moving you really have to spend a lot of time up there away from your, you know, home. So a lot of people have to stay overnight; I commuted but a lot of people who live a further distance than I did. And I have great admiration for people who serve in public, serve in public service positions. And the legislature is unique. You have two houses. I sponsored a unicam-, one of my pet bills was a unicameral; I sponsored a unicameral bill to get rid of the two houses. Needless to say it did not, it was not enacted; did not pass. But, so I have a lot of admiration for. . . . I was a cosponsor of the criminal code, which is now in effect in Maine, which was a complete revision of Maine's criminal laws. I served, because I was in the legislature I got to serve on the Probate Revision Commission which recommended a revision of the, complete revision of Maine's probate laws. So you, it opens up opportunities for you to. I sponsored quite a few pieces of legislature although most of which I think probably were not kind of controversial. And I didn't enjoy the partisan part of it much, as much as I did the just working on bills and getting things done.

MB: You spoke a bit about the difference between partisan and nonpartisan. How else did city politics and state politics. . . .?

RC: Differ?

MB: Yeah.

RC: City politics is, I mean the closer to home you are the more, I think the more people represent the views of the constituents because people in city government have no trouble calling you up and telling you what they think. The further away you get, if you're in the state legislature, there's more reluctance to call you. And I think if you're a congressman you're almost like a celebrity and you don't, you know, people like to shake your hands but they're much less reluctant to tell you that, I think anyway, that you're wrong on an issue. Whereas in city government, boy, they had no qualms about it, because they felt you were kind of one of them; you worked in the community, you were a part-time legislator. And so I think that local politics more accurately reflect, I think, what people are thinking.

MB: Which did you enjoy more?

RC: I enjoyed them both, I enjoyed them both. But I, being mayor was a great job because it was, you know, first of all you're, even though it takes a lot of time to go to a lot of the social functions they re-, the people in Lewiston treated me very well. And I was the first non-Franco-American elected as mayor in I think it was like forty years. I think it was 1931 or something

and I was elected in 1970.

MB: What led you to the court appointments and your work here?

RC: When I was in the Senate I served with governor, with later Governor [Joseph] Brennan. And [I] supported him in, (I got to know him very well), supported him when he ran for governor in 1974. He lost, in the primary he lost to now Ambassador Mitchell, he lost to George Mitchell who in turn lost to Longley who was an independent. And then I supported Governor Brennan again in '78 when he was elected. And I was the first Superior Cour-. . . . I was practicing law then; I was not in the Senate and I was, although I was in the char-, I was finishing up my Charter Commission duties. And he nominated me to serve on the Superior Court, I was his first Superior Court nomination in 1979.

MB: This was Governor Brennan, and this was 1979?

RC: It was.

MB: What were some of the responsibilities of the Chief Justice?

RC: I was, I served as a Justice of the Superior Court in 1984. The new position was created of Chief Justice; they didn't have a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court before, I was the first. And I was appointed to that position by Chief Justice, Maine's Chief Justice [Vincent] McKusick. He appoin-, the Maine, the Chief Justice appoints the trial court Chief Justice and I served in that position from '84 to '86 when I went on the Supreme Court. You, you're responsible for the scheduling of the other judges on the court, and you're responsible for the, generally, the administration of the Superior Court.

*End of Side One, Tape One
Side Two, Tape One*

RC: . . . thing that, any detail that you want me, that I can't remember a name or something, I'll be glad to get it for you. I may not have these names on the tip of my tongue, but I can get what-, anything like that that you want from me, if you want to complete something.

MB: Yeah, no, what I'll probably do is have, I'll talk to Andrea [L'Hommedieu] and she'll tell me which names I needed.

RC: Okay. I'm a little embarrassed about my inability to recollect some of the people I appointed.

MB: That's okay. You talked a little bit about social functions that you attended as mayor.

RC: A lot of social functions: social clubs, "snowshoe clubs", dances. They'd invite you because you were, it, in rural Quebec the mayor was a, *Monsieur le Maire*, it was a position of high honor and they'd be honored to have you. And my wife used to love to attend those functions.

MB: Really.

RC: Yeah. And so I attended a lot of them. But it was only for two years, I mean it was, but it was a lot of weekends that you'd go. They'd have. . . . a "snowshoe" convention here and you'd go and you'd welcome the people and you'd give them a key to the city and that kind of thing.

MB: What was some of the feedback that you got, like you talked about, from the people as to the functioning of the city and what they wanted and what were some of their demands?

RC: Most people want great services and they don't want to pay a lot of money for it. But actually, when you, when I was the mayor it was a period when, you know, the economy was fairly good and we didn't have big tax increases. And so most of my attendance at these things was very, just, you know, they were love-ins. I mean it was, they didn't come up to you at those most of the time and then complain; they just, they were happy that you were there and it was a very positive feedback.

MB: So when did you get the complaints as you said?

RC: Well, I got some as an alderman. I remember one time when I was the mayor I was sitting in my mayor's office in the afternoon. And a woman called me up and she said that her, she lived across the street from the city councilman, or the alderman, and she said that the Public Works truck was backed up and repairing his lawn, you know, which didn't sound too good. And she said, "What are you going to do about it?" And of course I was embarrassed. I said I'd look into it immediately and I had to tell the Public Works director that, you know, "We don't use public works trucks to repair an alderman's lawn, especially when you've got someone across the street who's going to call up the mayor."

MB: As a, in the, as a justice in the Superior Court, what were some of the important cases that you heard that you can remember?

RC: Well the most infamous one that I can remember is, the two, one was the strike in Rumford, Boise Cascade, which was near the end of my Superior Court tenure. Big strike up there and I had to deal with the request that the strikers be enjoined from interfering with people trying to get to work. Very, very, I've never seen tension in a courtroom. And I had the hearings right here in Auburn even though it was an Oxford County case. And I've never seen and felt that tension where you had these people who, you know, their livelihood was, a lot was at stake. You had all the union people on one side of the court room and you had the management people on the other, and then they played the video tape of what was going on up there and it was pretty rough. You know, the people would try to drive through, either suppliers or people who were management people and the language. . . . and they'd, you know, scratch cars and they'd threaten them. This was back in 1986. That strike got settled. Unfortunately the strike in another paper mill, International Paper, same kind of strike a year later did not get settled. It went on for three years and most, a lot of the people lost their jobs because of it.

MB: What would be the causes of these strikes?

RC: Money and working conditions. Another case I had was a case called *State against Nancy Ferdette* who was charged with the murder of her husband. The murder occurred in Memorial weekend of 1978 and the trial, I tried, I presided at the trial three times. In December of 1979, I was quite a new judge and the trial occurred in Skowhegan. The jury, Mrs. Ferdette, Mr. Ferdette was shot in his bed at seven o'clock, around seven o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Ferdette said that an intruder had come in and shot Mr. Ferdette, that she was locked in the bathroom. Because the back door of the apartment opened, the intruder opened the door and she, in the bathroom, the door couldn't, she couldn't open the door because of the, and so she couldn't see who it was. And her gun was used to murder him. It was found in the washing machine right outside the bedroom door. It was found two or three days later but it was, there was a glove that was one of hers that had powder burns on it was found on the floor.

The day of the murder Mr. Ferdette had, there was an appointment at the bank and the bank was going to show Mr. Ferdette where his, the eight thousand dollars which was missing from his account, where it went. And it was withdrawn by Mrs. Ferdette using his signature. That was what was going to be shown to him that afternoon, and so she was tried for murder. First trial was, oh, and one month before, he woke up in the middle of the night and his bed was on fire and she said that an intruder had come in and lit the bed on fire. And anyway, the first trial was a mistrial, it was a hung jury. The second trial she was convicted. She appealed, she won her appeal and was granted a new trial. The third trial, much to the surprise of everybody, she was acquitted. And she is now, she's since died, she died of a heart attack several years ago.

But that was a very fascinating, I presided at that trial three times and it was a very, very fascinating trial, because it was. . . . a lot of murder trials, the issue is whether it's murder or manslaughter; it's not a question of whether they did or not. In this case, she said she didn't do it and so it was kind of a "Whodunit". And there was, in that trial there was a man who testified for the state. About six months prior to the murder, he testified that Mrs. Ferdette approached him, gave him thirty-five hundred dollars, (that's part of the money that was missing from the bank account), and asked him to find someone to kill her husband.

MB: Wow, that is a very interesting case.

RC: So that was a fascinating case, yeah. Someday someone ought to write a story or a book on that trial, on that whole case.

MB: How did being a justice change the way that you saw politics in Maine?

RC: Well, you have to be, you have to be, disassociate yourself from politics, which is really one of the things that, judges should be disassociated from politics. And so you don't, unlike some other states where judges have to run for office, and have to run as Democrats or Republicans. . . . It insulates you from politics so you don't, you know, you can't contribute to campaigns, you can't get involved in campaigns, and you don't have to contribute to campaigns.

MB: Did you then stop practicing law?

RC: When you become a judge it's full-time. Except for the probate judge, yes, Superior Court's full-time, I stopped practicing.

MB: Do you think that was a good choice on your part; are you. . . .?

RC: Yeah, I was happy as a judge. I was happy practicing law, but I was happy as a judge. I really enjoyed the Superior Court. I think it was the happiest of my life, the seven years on the Superior Court. I served a full term on the Superior Court and I enjoyed it and I think it, I did a pretty good job at it. And then I became, Governor Brennan also appointed me to this court just as he was leaving office. He, there was a vacancy and he appointed me, nominated me.

MB: How have the courts changed in the years that you've been on them?

RC: Well, the law has become more complex, and there's more cases. And especially there's more kind of. . . . They're more complex, the cases, the civil cases are more complex. And the biggest changes I think have come in the District Court which is not the court I sat on, which is the lower court, where there's a lot more divorces now because of the family breakdowns, and a lot more cases where children are at risk and they have to protect children, child protective cases, termination of parental rights cases, and a lot more cases where people get injunctions and allege they're being harassed or abused. So the District Court, that's probably changed more than anything else. But courts are becoming, unfortunately, a vehicle to solve some of society's problems, whereas ideally it would be just a place where you resolve disputes. But especially the District Court is becoming a place where people are going to, you know, the breakdown of the family has really affected the District Court a lot.

MB: Are they hearing more custody cases?

RC: Well, there's more divorces; there's many, many more divorces, you know one out of two marriages practically now. And there's a lot of abuse of children. Children growing up with no fathers, with a lot of people who used to be institutionalized are now out, they may have children. The children get neglected; they get abused. And the Department of Human Services steps and seeks to protect the children and it's a huge load on that District Court.

MB: Do you feel as though this is a problem unique to Maine, or is it. . . .?

RC: No, I think it's a national problem. As the social fabric unwinds, a lot of the problems end up with the courts.

MB: How has that changed your job and what you do?

RC: We see a lot more of those cases in the Appeals Court than we used to; it's a lot more of our, our caseload is made up of that kind of case.

MB: I wanted to ask you for some names of local political leaders, as many as you can think of. And I wanted to ask you about (*unintelligible phrase*).

RC: Well, you know Louis Jalbert, have you heard that name?

MB: Uh-huh.

RC: Louis was a, he was a, in Lewiston politics he was very prominent. He did not do well in local elections to the city government, but he was, he did well in being elected to the State House. Although, he did well because in those days the elections were at large. That is, Lewiston elected six representatives; I think that was the number. They weren't elected by district; they were elected at large. So if twelve people ran for the House of Representatives in the city of Lewiston, the six highest total were the ones elected and they could have all lived on the same street. And he did well because his name was known. He didn't do, when they changed that to districts, he finally was defeated. But he was an, he was, he'd call you up at seven o'clock in the morning. He was, and he had a terrible reputation for truthfulness, and he was convicted of some kind of a graft thing in the 1960s.

MB: What did you think of him? Did you know him personally at all?

RC: I did. You couldn't help but know Louis Jalbert. Well, you tried not to anger him because he was a great hater. And he, he always, he was fairly supportive of me early, or at least he appeared to be. Although one of the first acts I did up in the legislature when I was a senator, was I voted for somebody else for the delegate. The delegation elects a chairman and he was frequently elected chairman of the Androscoggin County delegation; each county would elect a chairman. And I supported somebody else and I incurred his wrath.

And then when he, he was the one that was instrumental in getting the bridge approved, that runs by Bates, runs up here. It was a referendum. That's how that bridge got approved, you know; it was a referendum that he kind of engineered. It wasn't, the legislature didn't enact it; it was a public referendum. And he wanted it named after himself, and I did not support that and he was very angry with. . . . I didn't participate in the vote, I didn't vote because, on the naming of the bridge. But they named it the Veterans Memorial Bridge. So, yeah, he was less. . . . But after I got out of the Senate he again became fairly friendly. You know, he was a guy who tried to get involved in everything. And he had some success in electing, you know, supporting people and electing people but he was awfully difficult to deal with because he was kind of a double-dealing fellow.

MB: Is there anyone else that you can think of?

RC: Well Frank Coffin, you know, was a, was a, he was before my time, but he was a Lewiston boy; went to Bates and ran for governor. And, although when he ran for governor I think he was, by that time I think he was practicing law in Portland. But he engineered [Ed] Muskie's, he revived the Democratic Party, was instrumental in electing Muskie as governor in 1954, and Muskie was elected. And [he] became very prominent because Maine's elections in 19-, up until the late 50s, Maine used to elect its senators, its congressmen and its governor and its state. . . . The state elects the legislature in September, not in November.

And so that the saying "as Maine goes, so goes the nation," that's where that came from, because

Maine would have its election in September. And so in 1936, yeah, which was the year that Roosevelt ran for the second term, Maine, Maine's election was, I don't think they voted for President on that day but they voted for the other offices, and they voted Republican. And so people thought that Maine was a bell-weather state and it meant that Roosevelt, in Maine, was going to be defeated. And the only state in 1936 that voted Republican besides Maine was Vermont, and so the expression "as Maine goes, so goes the nation," changed to "as Maine goes, so goes Vermont." Have you ever heard of this?

MB: Yeah, I've heard of the "nation" one, I've never the "Vermont" one.

RC: That's why, is because the September election. But the relevance, Muskie was elected in 1954 as governor and it was a big upset. And because the, it was in September, he got a huge amount of publicity. And he was a governor-elect, he wasn't going to take office until January. He got a huge amount of publicity which helped him a lot later and he became two-term governor, which was in those, was two-year terms, and then became a United States senator. But Coffin really kind of managed his campaign, and so he's a very prominent. And Muskie, if Muskie would have been elected, if [Hubert] Humphrey would have been elected in 1968, Muskie was his running mate, Frank Coffin probably would have been on the Supreme Court. Frank Coffin is now a circuit judge on the, he's actually retired now, he's older. . . . But he probably would have been appointed to the Supreme Court because of Muskie; he was a great friend of Muskie.

MB: Was your father or your uncle involved politically with Frank Coffin?

RC: No. They were, they were, Frank Coffin was, they were kind of a generation earlier. I'm sure my father probably contributed to his campaign and followed him. But, he was elected in 1960. Now that was the last huge; Kennedy was defeated here in Maine by a big margin, John Kennedy. And that's because the old anti-Catholic, they came out of the woodwork to vote against him. And Coffin did better than Kennedy did in Maine. Coffin came fairly close, but it was a sl-, Kennedy got slaughtered. And that was kind of the last hurrah of the old kind of bigotry that, that kind of had existed for such a long time.

And the Kl-, the reason the Klan was fairly popular in certain pockets in Maine was, James G. Blaine was famous as being a, (the one the Blaine House is named after, the governor's mansion), is, he, you know, he was a sponsor of a lot of anti-Catholic legislation to ex-, you know, put up the barriers for Catholics and that kind of thing. No money spent on education for Catholic schools and all that stuff; was a lot of that with James Blaine. There were, there are a lot of good people in Lewiston-Auburn, but Lewiston was kind of rough politics so many of the good people that didn't want to get involved in that served on the boards and commissions which were appointed and they didn't have to. . . . You know, mayor's campaigns were pretty rough. The mayor's campaign was pretty important because the mayor appointed all the boards and commissions . . .

MB: In the old charter?

RC: Yeah, in the old charter, yeah. But John Orestis was the first mayor who served more than

two years because he was, (you know, the amendment to the charter that allowed two two-year terms), he was the first mayor to do that. And then Lillian Caron succeeded him as mayor and she was the first woman mayor; we now have a woman mayor, too. She's the second. Then a guy named Paul Dionne was a mayor. I think we've had good, very good mayors. A lot of the mayors have been lawyers; at least, I was a lawyer, my two predecessors were lawyers, Orestis was a lawyer, and Paul Dionne was a lawyer. So there were quite a few lawyers who were mayors during the '70s and '80s. Paul Dionne is now, works for the Worker's Compensation Commission; I think he's the director or something of it.

MB: Were there any other people that you. . . .?

RC: Bill Hathaway, William Hathaway was from Auburn. And he was congressman and then he was the United States Sen--- he was the one that defeated Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith, and then was defeated by [Bill] Cohen in 1978 for U.S. senator. He was from this, he was, he came out of this area. I'm trying to think of, a mayor of Lewiston was Alton Lessard who, who was a state senator and then became a Superior Court judge. He was a, I think he was a pretty prominent guy that was involved in politics. Before I was elected, in the '40s, the '30s, the '40s and the '50s you pretty much, and the '60s, you pretty much had to have a French name to be elected as a mayor. Not so much alderman if you lived in certain sections, but.

MB: Who were some of the people from your father and your uncle's time?

RC: Louis Brann was, (Brann & Isaacson law firm, B-R-A-N-N, his name was Louis Brann), was elected governor in 1932 and that was, you know, that was very unusual in those days. And he was, he practiced law here; he was a city solicitor and he was, you know, the city attorney and he was involved in politics. But Lewiston-Auburn didn't elect too many people prominent in politics because it was a Democratic area and they didn't have any. . . . Frank Coffin was elected congressman from this district in 1956 maybe or '58, but he was the first in many years. And we didn't have a senator, a Democratic senator, until Muskie was elected in 1958.

MB: How was your brother, I mean your father and his brother involved with those people that you just mentioned?

RC: Well they were, they were involved in the '20s and the '30s but it was a, it was mostly a losing. . . . I mean it was, the legislature was fairly prominently, predominantly Republican. And, as was, I mean, they, I don't think we had a Democratic United States senator or Democratic congressman or, very rarely in those days. But they, you know, they would support local legislators and they would support people who ran for Congress and the United States Senate usually without much success. It was a pretty much of a one party state in those days. And the pockets of Democratic strongholds were Lewiston and Biddeford and Waterville and some up in Aroostook County. And other than that they were, Democrats had a tough time.

MB: Was, were the politics in those areas really that different or was it just like you said, about. . . .?

RC: I think they were less ideological and more about us against them. I mean, the, especially

the Franco-Amer-, the Irish and the Franco-Americans felt kind of left out and that, you know, they never got any, there was never any judges appointed that were either French or Irish. And that, I mean, there was very little of that and so that they were, it was a, it was kind of an “in-your-face.” Whereas I think that that kind of, you know, I think that that’s less strong than it used to be, that feeling that you. . . . Because the state is balanced now politically, more balanced and so I think there’s less feeling that “It’s never us, it’s always you kind of thing.”

MB: Who are some people that are still living that you know that it would be beneficial to, the oral history project to interview in the area?

RC: Judge Delahanty who sits here; he might be. And his mother, who’s my cousin, was Judge Clifford’s daughter but she was a, she was married to Tom Delahanty, Sr. who was a judge. But he was a great friend of Muskie and Coffin and all those people. He ran for Congress in 1960 and was, lost, but he, so he was a, she would be able to tell you a lot more than I would about that kind of era because a lot of those people are now [in their] ‘70s and ‘80s and dying off. She’s in her eighties but she’s very sharp. So she might be someone. She knew Muskie well and her husband was in on that, I think on the inside of that Muskie group and he’d be much more informative about that than I would be. I mean, he’s dead but she would be much more informative than I would be, and maybe her son would.

MB: Who’s her son?

RC: Judge Delahanty who’s a Superior Court judge. And his office is down the hall here.

MB: And his father was. . . .?

RC: Thomas Delahanty. His father was a lawyer in Lewiston, served one or two terms in the state legislature, ran for Congress in 1960, 19-, the year that, yeah, I think it was 1960 or maybe it was another year. But he served as the Chairman of the Public Utilities Commission; Muskie appointed him to serve as a Public Utilities Commission. And then he was appointed as a judge in the ‘60s I think.

MB: And this is Tom Delahanty?

RC: Yeah, Tom senior. And he was, he had, he occupied this seat. He didn’t have this office but the seat that I’m on the Supreme Court was, I think it was the seat he had. I think I was; I didn’t succeed him directly but I think there was one judge between us that, this is the seat that he had. He’s dead, but his son who I think has a pretty good grasp of their family history. . . . And his mother, if you could get a chance to, she knows a lot I think about that.

MB: Is there anyone else you can think of?

RC: You could talk to Bill Hathaway; he’s still alive. He’s in Washington.

MB: Oh, really.

RC: Yeah. I don't think he and Muskie, was, I think there was maybe a little tension between them but he'd give you a lot of information. Frank Coffin, you people must have, doing this they must have, you must have got a lot of input from Frank Coffin. He's still living and he's still sharp, and he was the engineer of the whole thing.

Oh Shep, Shepherd Lee also was very close to Muskie. And he's a, you know Lee, the big car dealerships, he's been a very successful guy and is still very active in his business and is still very active in politics I think. I don't know how much of the project you have, but I mean, he, these people would, I'm sure maybe they've already been interviewed, they've probably been, for the Muskie thing.

MB: Some of them, yeah. I wanted to ask you a bit about Lewiston politics and how they've evolved. Can you recall a time when there was a split in the Democratic Party here in Lewiston? I've been told about that.

RC: Well there always was, there's always tension and splits. For example, I think in 1968 I remember a lot of the Bates professors showed up at these caucus-. . . . They used to have these caucuses to elect delegates to go to the state convention. And they came because they supported Eugene McCarthy or Bobby Kennedy or something, you know. And a lot of the people who did the work on the Democratic Party would resent the people from Bates showing up ideologically-driven, whereas these people were, you know, the Democratic Party was kind of a social thing for them and they worked hard all the time. And so, yeah, that was, the tensions were, at the caucuses then were, because of the Vietnam War. . . . And a lot of people supported the war and a lot of people opposed the war. And, you know, I remember that, that's the split that, I mean, I think, I was a delegate then and I could, I knew there was, that you could sense that.

You know, it was the Muskie people were more the traditional and, because Muskie knew he was going to, have a chance to become the vice-presidential. . . . And Humphrey was a, supported the war as Johnson's vice president, wasn't he, and so that the dissonance, I remember that's split. But it was only, see the local politics didn't get involved in that because it was non-, it was kind of non-partisan, it was not. . . . So it was only every two years we had these caucuses and people would resent the people from Bates showing up to. . . . The professors would, you know, and others too, would come and, especially in '68 when the Vietnam thing was prominent. But it's '68 I remember in particular because there were a lot of McCarthy supporters and probably Bobby Kennedy supporters. And the more traditional people would, tended to support Muskie and Humphrey and the war.

MB: Do you remember any splits involving, like you said Louis Jalbert or Bill Rochelle [sic]?

RC: Who? Rocheleau?

MB: Yes, that's, sorry.

RC: Well, yeah, those were, yeah, Rocheleau ran for County Attorney and my brother Bill, who was the one that preceded in the Senate, William, Jr., he was elected County Attorney in 1966 in the Democratic primary which was a huge upset, because he was, again, the first non-Franco in a

long time to be elected to county office. Rocheleau was his opponent. Louis Jalbert supported my brother and then Rocheleau in the same year I believe, '66, was elected mayor. And he ran against a guy named Albert Cote who weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds. You heard that name?

MB: No, I haven't.

RC: Albert was kind of Louis', he was a state representative. He was always elected a state representative. He was a pretty smart guy, he was a decent guy, but he was, people just wouldn't elect him mayor. He weighed three hundred, he had crooked teeth and he weighed three hundred and fifty pounds and people thought that Louis Jalbert had too much influence over him. That was a kind of a bitter election, the mayor's election. I was, supported Cote. I was going to be Cote's, or at least I was told that if Cote won I would be his city attorney. The mayor made the city attorney appointments then. And Cote got slaughtered, I mean, Rocheleau. . . . And so Rocheleau, Rocheleau was a very decent guy and I liked Rocheleau a lot.

In those days, because of my brother's election I was on the wrong, you know, on the opposite side of the political thing in a couple of elections. I served one, my first year as an alderman. Rocheleau was the mayor; it was his second term. But, yeah, Jalbert was, that, the mayor's election in 1966 was definitely a Jalbert group versus Rocheleau group mayor's race and Rocheleau won, whereas the previous spring my brother had defeated Rocheleau as, in the Democratic primary for County Attorney. That's when the County Attorney was a part-time job and it was just for the Androscoggin County. Now the District Attorney is [made up of] three counties.

MB: So when there was a split within the party it didn't so much . . . ?

RC: It was less ideological than personality. Because they were, they were all, I mean there wasn't much difference in ideology of any of them.

MB: But that wasn't, since it was non-partisan, the election to begin with, the split . . .

RC: The mayor's one?

MB: Yeah.

RC: Yeah but it was a personality; I mean there was a definite split in the personality. Louis Jalbert was definitely aligned with Cote. Louis Jalbert had run for mayor at least once, and, he was defeated. People wouldn't elect him. And the people wouldn't elect Cote; they didn't want him to be. . . . They didn't mind electing him up there in Augusta, but they didn't want him to be their spokesman and their poster child I guess.

MB: What sort of reputation did Lewiston have in the political world?

RC: I think probably a lousy one.

MB: Why?

RC: Well, because the former government was so strange and unique. This elective representatives didn't have as much power as most cities and it was, you know, a lot of people in those days were called. . . . The reason for that was the corruption in the '30s and people couldn't be trusted kind of thing; the politicians couldn't be trusted. So you had to, you had to do two things: you had to take the power away from the dumb politicians and you had to give enough power to the Republicans to give them the veto over anything real bad. And I think in Maine, I think the most pervasive prejudice in Maine is anti-Franco prejudice.

MB: Really?

RC: Yes, I do. I don't think there's any question about it. The jokes that you hear in Maine are not Polish jokes or they're not; they're Franco jokes.

MB: I haven't heard any. Do you know any?

RC: Well, I mean, any joke that's like a Polish joke that you hear in some parts of the country would be, it wouldn't be told in the form of a Polish joke, it would be formed in the, told in the form that, the butt of the joke would be a Franco-American.

MB: Why is that?

RC: Because it's, because the, I think a lot of it has to do with first of all the old prejudice, the Catholic prejudice, I think, has carried over somewhat. And then the language difference. They speak, a lot of the older people, first of all, couldn't even speak English, and secondly they spoke with an accent, you know, with an obvious accent. And so I think people tended to make fun of them. And the income, the wages were low here and people were generally, it was a city that was shoe shops and textiles and low wages.

MB: What were some of the memorable events or circumstances from your experiences in politics?

RC: Well in the, you know, in the mayor's, in the city government was the changing of the charter and I think giving the city a charter that's really, I think, a very good charter. And the state politics would be, would be sponsoring a whole, a lot of bills that were, you know, good bills. Having participated in sponsoring the criminal code, which I work with every day. . . . And when I became a trial judge, I hadn't had a lot of criminal experience and it was very easy to, the criminal code, because it was organized and it was well written. I didn't have anything to do with the writing of it, I mean, it was recommended by a commission, it was. But to have sponsored it to get it through the legislature was. . . . So that those things, you know, you affect your, you make a state a better place to live, or a city a better place. In doing that you can have an impact if you. . . . And I think I had a, I think I was a pretty effective senator. I wasn't very partisan and I sponsored a whole lot of bills and I thought most of them were good bills. I tried to give us a unicameral legislature, but that didn't work.

MB: What were some of your involvements with Ed Muskie, directly, or indirectly?

RC: That would have, when I was the mayor probably, more than any. . . . We really did very well by him from the Dept. of Housing and Urban, whatever the department was, with Model Cities. We did a lot with the Model Cities. We built a school and got a lot of good programs and we got a lot. . . . We used the money well in Lewiston with Model Cities, on Model Cities projects. [We] built a community center and spent the money wisely, I think. And Muskie was instrumental in getting us a fairly lar-, you know, a very large grant. That was a direct involvement with him. I didn't, I really was never very, I campaigned for him locally and, I didn't, you know, go. . . . I wasn't a prominent statewide politician or anything; there were a lot of people. I remember going, in 1975 or '6 when he thought, Senator Cohen, then representative Cohen, was going to run against him. I remember campaigning with him in downtown Lewiston because I was still, I had just recently been mayor and I was a senator and brought him down to some of the social clubs.

MB: So you did know him a bit on a social level, or?

RC: Well I wouldn't call it a soc-, I mean it, social. . . . I remember when I was a boy in high school he had just been elected governor and he spoke at, he spoke at some function. And he came to my hou-, they arranged it, so he came to my, my mother, he came to my house for dinner before he spoke. And he had to go upstairs and he had to take a nap before he spoke and, after dinner. And then they woke him up and he went to speak at some, at the function. I remember he, you know, that's the first time I met him. He was a, as I say, because he was elected in September he got a lot of [publicity]. I remember he was on the cover of *Life* Magazine because of the "as Maine goes" thing. But I didn't, you know, and I, I became, when I came back here and began to practice law and get in to politics, you know, you'd see him at functions at these dinners and things; you shake his hand. I'm not sure he, I'm sure he didn't. . . . I was just one of many people that he had to deal with.

MB: What do you think his major qualities were?

RC: He was smart and he was, he, I think basically was a pretty, he wasn't a very sophisticated man I think. And I think he kind of had a vision, you know, certain things that he was interested in. And he was a very good legislator in enacting like things in the environment. And in Maine he just opened the kind of the door to the two-party system because the people saw that he was a Democrat and he was a good, you know, he was a good governor and he was a good senator and so that that helped end the kind of the one-party rule.

And I think he was a pretty, you know, I don't think he, he didn't dump his wife, you know, he maintained; I think he was a good family man. Well a lot of those people, you know, they go down there and they end up, you know, with a younger woman. And, I mean, you know, it's, look at what Mitchell and Cohen and, they, you know, their marriages both failed. He really was, maintained a simplicity about him that, that he, you know, he, that never was a problem with him. I don't think he ever chased women or. . . . He was always a pretty, guy, that rock-solid guy that was a good family man and had several children, five, four, five kids and was a good family man and paid attention. And I think he was not, I think in the '70s he was a little

afraid of Cohen because he had been, he had become so prominent nationally that he didn't come home very often, and I think he was a little worried that, in 1976, that the Maine people were going to take it out on him. But other than that I, you know, that's what I think about him, as his-

*End of Side Two, Tape One
Side One, Tape Two*

RC: That's something I know very little, about is the presidential campaign.

MB: Oh, really.

RC: Because his, Mus-, you know his. . . . I know Mark Shields was his campaign manager, wasn't he? The guy that's on, the guy that's on McNeil-Lehrer and Capitol Gang?

MB: Oh really? I'm not sure. I'm not sure. So Severin Beliveau, though. . . .?

RC: Yeah, he knows, he first, he's, he knows and remembers everything about everybody and he's very smart and he was directly involved in the Democratic Party. John Orestis would be another one. He no longer practices law but he's in the nursing home business; that's John Orestis there in that. He was the mayor after I was and he was very friendly with Severin Beliveau and probably knows more about the Muskie thing than I would (*unintelligible word*).

MB: Why would you consider the qualities that you mentioned in Muskie significant to him?

RC: Well because I think they're kind of unusual. I, he really was smart. I thought he, people thought he was, I thought he was smart and, you know, was a good speaker. Well, he spoke too long I thought sometimes, but I. . . . And I thought he was an extemporaneous, I mean, he could speak without notes and that he was; he knew what he was talking about. One of the things that he did was, when Paul Dionne was elected mayor, (jeez it must have been 1980 and Muskie was still a senator; it was not long before Muskie became Secretary of State), and he was the speaker at the inaugural banquet for Dionne. And he spoke, and he spoke about foreign policy and it was late at night, because in Lewiston they used to have the inauguration and then they had a banquet. So it was, and it was a weekday, and it was, you know, it was late. And Muskie spoke a little too long and he didn't speak a whole lot about Paul Dionne. He spoke about, you know, affairs of state and I remember a lot of people, you know, looking at their watches and wondering when he was going to end. And plus the fact that he, you know, it didn't sound like someone speaking at a, someone else's inauguration. It was, so he tended to be, you know, and he tended to, the affairs of state were important to him and I guess you can understand that. But, he had been elected I think in 1976 again and he would have been up for election I suppose in '82 so, but he became Secretary of State.

MB: Do you remember any event or circumstances that illustrated his character or abilities that you witnessed or heard about?

RC: Well I thought he spoke well most of the time, I mean he, at, you know, at conventions and

at the Jefferson dinners or whatever they called them. And I thought he did a, I thought he was a good vice presidential candidate. His, he almost won in 1968 and, [Richard] Nixon had a huge lead and I thought he helped, I thought he helped Humphrey on the ticket. You know, he was a pretty rock-solid guy from Maine and they used to call him “Lincolnesque” all the time. And I think his reputation on the laws on the environment were. . . . I mean he, he’s known for that probably more than almost anything less as far as the national scene. (*Interruption*)

MB: What contributions did he make, if any, to the justice system in Maine and the functioning of the justice system?

RC: Well in the last years of his life he became prominent in the, in support of the Maine Bar Foundation, which is an organization that raises money to pay for legal services for people who can’t afford it. He, I think, he became, he was the honorary, or the chairman of it I think. And, but that’s af-, that was post-retirement. And so he was very involved in that. Frank Coffin is also involved in that, if you speak to Frank Coffin. I’m sure these people probably have already. So he was very involved in the Maine Bar Foundation at the end of his career and I guess did a good job. And very, was just not an honorary, I mean, he actually, I guess, became very involved in it and contributed a whole lot to the, to that. And that’s a very active organization that raises a lot of money for legal services for people who can’t afford it.

MB: Do you have any vignettes about Muskie that you could share with us, stories or experiences?

RC: I, I mean I know that he was very, very nice to me. When I, during this process of, when my direct involvement with him as the mayor, on the Model Cities he was very helpful and very gracious and treated the people from the city very well. And, you know, I just think he was a decent man. I mean, I think he was a, his wife’s a very nice lady and he, you know, he maintained his religious faith and he maintained his loyalty to his family and I think those are very important qualities.

MB: Is there anything else that I’ve missed that you feel is important from your experience, that you want others to know about you or your times?

RC: Well, I think that I’ve spoken about myself more than I have, more than other people are interested in I’m sure already. But Muskie is, I just think there are people who are more familiar with him than I. And some, I’ve given you the names of some of them. John Orestis, Severin Beliveau would be some. Maybe this guy, whose name is Henry Bourgeois and he’s in Augusta. . . . And he’s the, (oh God, what’s his title?) he’s the head of the Maine, used to be, he was the librarian in Lewiston and I appointed him as the Model Cities director. He was very capable; did a great job. And now he is the, it’s the organization that’s, a kind of an organization of businesses that is a statewide organization that gets partial funding from the state I think. But he might have some stories about Muskie because he’s a, he was more directly involved with Muskie’s office, because he was the Model Cities director, than I was, I mean I, at the time I guess. And that was my direct involvement was during the. . . .

MB: Model Cities project.

RC: Yeah. Of course that was a very, that was, that was the big federal dole in those days.

MB: So Muskie was a senator at the time that you were getting this?

RC: Yes, Muskie was a senator. [He] was elected governor in 1954 and he served two two-year terms, which was the maximum. And then he was elected to the Senate in 1958, he defeated a guy named Fred Paine who was the senator, who was a Republican. And he served in the Senate until he was appointed secretary of state in 1980 I believe by Jimmy Carter. And that's how Mitchell became a senator. Mitchell, who was a judge, a federal judge in, a United States District Court judge, and Muskie had been very instrumental in getting Mitchell that judgeship. Muskie became Secretary of State because Cyrus Vance resigned because of Carter's aborted attempt of rescue of the hostages, did you know? I'm not telling you anything that's a secret here. Jimmy Carter, the hostages were in Iran then and Jimmy Carter attempted a rescue. Cyrus Vance, I guess, was involved in diplomatic things to get them out and the rescue failed. And Vance was upset that the rescue was undertaken, rescue attempt, resigned, and Muskie, who was senator, Carter appointed as Secretary of State. And then Mitch-, because of the vacancy, the governor fills the vacancy of a United States senator. And Governor Brennan appointed George Mitchell and that's how Mitchell became a senator.

MB: What did Lewiston do with the Public Cities Model. . . .

RC: Model Cities?

MB: Model Cities that led to Muskie being so appreciative of the effort?

RC: Of us being so appreciative of Muskie's effort?

MB: Well, yeah, if that's how it worked.

RC: Because Muskie got us a lot of money.

MB: And what did Lewiston do with the money?

RC: Oh, I think we built a model; a community center; we did. We took some of the money and made a lot of repairs, infrastructure repairs that were very badly needed and, you know, would have really put a crimp on the, in the old part of the city, water, sewer, and the, under, repairs under the streets. We got a new school, which was downtown. And all the new schools had been on the outskirts so that people in the downtown areas, who were the low-income people, were attending, you know, older schools that were probably somewhat inferior. We got a school and a community center downtown, and there were other things that, that. . . .

So we got a substantial amount of money and I think we spent it very well. But we were very grateful to Muskie for getting us, you know, he was very influential and got us a substantial amount of money. Nixon was the president and, but Nixon was a big Model Cities advocate. But Muskie was very instrumental in getting a generous grant to the city.

MB: Just to Lewiston-Auburn or to all the cities in Maine?

RC: Well I'm sure that other cities got grants. But my focus at the time was on Lewiston-Auburn and it was. Not Auburn, I mean Lewiston, Auburn may have gotten some too, I can't recall. I know that Lewiston got a very generous grant and that's because Bourgeois did a great job at presenting the case. And we went down, and Muskie was very gracious and was very influential in getting our grant for us.

MB: Is there anything else?

RC: No.

End of Interview