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Dubord, Evelyn oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with Evelyn Dubord by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Dubord, Evelyn

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

April 19, 1999

Place

Waterville, Maine

ID Number

MOH 083

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Biographical Note

Evelyn Dubord was born in Oregon, Illinois on August 25, 1921 to Ethel (Morrow) and Charles Parnell. Her mother was a college-educated housewife, and her father a railroad tower operator. Her family lived primarily in Galesburg, Illinois, where Evelyn attended public schools. She completed two years of art school at the American Academy of Art, and then was hired in New York City as a commercial artist. In New York, she met an Air Force Lieutenant by the name of Richard Dubord, whom she married. She moved to his hometown of Waterville in 1945. Mr. Dubord became a successful Waterville area lawyer, a partner with Bob Marden in the firm of Marden and Dubord. He was active in Maine Democratic politics and was elected Mayor of Waterville 1954.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: the Great Depression in the Midwest; the Dubord family; Waterville from an outsider's perspective; Marden & Dubord law practice; Muskie's circle of friends; and Muskie's influence on Maine.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: . . . here with Evelyn Dubord on April 19th, 1999 at her home in Waterville, Maine. Mrs. Dubord, would you please state your full name and spell it?

Evelyn Dubord: Evelyn Parnell Dubord, E-V-E-L-Y-N, P-A-R-N-E-L-L, D-U-B-O-R-D.

AL: When and where were you born?

ED: I was born in Oregon, Illinois, August 25th, 1921.

AL: And when did you move to Waterville?

ED: In 1945. It must have been, must have been around the end of April or the first of May because I remember going out to the camp and it was cold, but the ice was out.

AL: What brought you to Maine?

ED: I married my husband, Richard.

AL: Where did you and he meet?

ED: We met in New York during the war, he was a lieutenant in the Air Force and I was working in New York at the time as a commercial artist.

AL: Now what are the names of your parents?

ED: Ethel and Charles, Ethel Morrow and Charles Parnell.

AL: And how many children did they have and what was your place in the family?

ED: Four girls and I am the youngest, and I just came back from seeing my three sisters all of which are still living.

AL: Are they all still living in Illinois?

ED: One's in Wisconsin, two are out in Illinois.

AL: What were your parents' occupations?

ED: Mama was just a homemaker as everybody was in those days, and my father was a railroader. We lived primarily in Galesburg, Illinois which was a railroad terminal sort of place, trains coming from the west going into Chicago, going out of Chicago, would switch in Galesburg, they had a big railroad yard and my father was a tower operator for the railroad.

AL: What were their religious backgrounds?

ED: We went to a church that was, I think at first it was Presbyterian and then it got to be a Congregational. My father really didn't, he, well actually couldn't, he went to work seven days a week in those days and, but we went to the, mainly the Congregational church.

AL: What were their political and social attitudes?

ED: I don't know that we ever talked about that much. Daddy pretty much just went to work and came home late and we just were never active politically at all. I think after the Depression when Roosevelt was elected, I think they probably considered themselves Democrats but I don't think were ever active at all.

AL: What were your parents' relationships with different groups in the community, was there a lot of ethnic diversity in the place you grew up?

ED: Back in those days the Black people in the community were pretty much in their own area. It wasn't strictly that they couldn't go in other areas, but they pretty much were kept, to live in their own areas. Nobody ever talked about racism as far as I'm concerned, and I think maybe my mother might have felt a little bit of, because of her background, of her upbringing, but as far as we were concerned, there were Black children in our classrooms and we were allowed to bring them home or go to visit them. She would never impose her attitudes on us.

AL: How do you feel that your family affected you as you grew up?

ED: I think probably the thing that I realized most after I grew up was that they pretty much did not force their attitudes or thinking on us. They pretty much let us think and do as we chose.

AL: What were some of the other influences on you growing up besides your parents and family?

ED: Well, one of the big ones was the Depression. We were right in the middle of it, and my father had worked for the railroad since he was a little boy so he had seniority so he had a job, but, while this was a railroad community an awful lot of people we knew didn't have jobs and you grew up sharing what you had with your neighbors. And I think that's probably one of the biggest influences. Learning that you don't have to have everything and you take what you need and share, I think that was the biggest influence.

AL: What were some of the, when the Depression hit, what were some of the things that were very noticeable changes around you?

ED: That people didn't have anything to eat. You know, we would have people over to eat with us, that lived on our street, and you just shared what you had. You had a garden, you cooked, and if somebody didn't have something to eat, you shared it.

AL: Where did you get your elementary and secondary education?

ED: In Galesburg.

AL: What were your experiences like in school?

ED: It's hard to remember that at this point.

AL: Were you a good student?

ED: Yeah, I was a good student, my sisters were all good students. My mother had been a, had gone to Knox College which is in Galesburg, which was very unusual in those days. And so she saw that we were good students. My father was not educated but my mother was.

AL: What did you do after high school, did you go to work or go to college?

ED: I went to professional art school in Chicago, the American Academy of Art, and then I didn't finish my whole term, my whole whatever you call it there, because this was during the war and all the young men were getting drafted and professional art at that time was all men, women just weren't in it at all, so when I got hired, I got hired because they decided they had to start having women, and I was the first one in our department. In fact I was the only one for a long time. So I went two years to professional art school and then I . . .

AL: And there weren't many women going to school with you? Mostly men?

ED: They were mostly men but there were some women going to school, but not really with the idea that you're ever going to get a job.

AL: How did that affect you, it being a school with, being outnumbered by men?

ED: Oh, I think I probably thought it was pretty cool at that time.

AL: Could you tell me your husband's full name?

ED: Richard Joseph Dubord.

AL: And where was his family from?

ED: From Waterville.

AL: And what were his parents' names?

ED: Blanche and Harold Dubord.

AL: And what were their occupations?

ED: Harold was an attorney and Blanche was a housewife. She was also a musician, used to play piano for the old silent movies when her husband was going to school

AL: Now how many brothers and sisters did your husband have and what were their names?

ED: Robert, his brother who was next younger after Richard, and then Betty who was several years later.

AL: Could you give me some recollections of the Dubord family? How did they interact and any, oh, vignettes that you could remember.

ED: They were very family oriented. They had a camp on North Pond and everybody, everybody went there on weekends. There was a lot of family gatherings. Betty was so much younger than the boys that she wasn't actually, like, close as far as we were concerned.

AL: What was the Dubord family's place in the community, politically and socially?

ED: He had been a mayor of the city . . .

AL: Your husband.

ED: No, his grandfather, or his father.

AL: Harold.

ED: Harold had been a mayor and Blanche had worked in city hall as, various jobs around city hall, and they were always active politically for the Democrats. And then he was, Harold was Democratic National Committee man for several, several years. And in fact when I first met

Richard, he was still Democratic National Committee man. And when they would come down to New York to see us we frequently would be going out to dinner with all these people that you read about in the paper and were politically important people.

AL: What was that like?

ED: It was quite a thrill for me. I had come from a nonpolitical family and it was very strange, like a whole new world opened up.

AL: Do you believe that Harold was a big influence on your husband?

ED: Oh, I'm sure he was. He worked in the office when, after Dick got through law school he and his father had a partnership and so they worked together. And as I said, we were always there on weekends until we finally got a camp of our own on a different lake, which almost crushed the grandparents, that we would even think of going to a different lake and not be with part of the family because this is their whole way of life. But he was I'm sure a great influence.

AL: And what about Blanche, what kind of influence do you believe she had on your husband?

ED: Probably the same as his dad. They were very active doers.

AL: What about musically?

ED: Oh, that was always a part of it. She'd play the piano and we'd all sing or have little family shows, the kids would all perform.

AL: Did Dick play any instruments?

ED: He played a saxophone and a clarinet, and I'm sure that that was the influence of his mother and his Uncle Gene which we'll mention later.

AL: You said your husband was an attorney, that's what he did by profession; do you know when the Marden Dubord law firm was formed?

ED: I was trying to figure that out and I'm not sure.

AL: It was formed with Harold, not Dick, right, originally?

ED: Yeah, it was his father and Richard. His father first was in with, Blanche's father was a lawyer, way back . . .

AL: What was their last name?

ED: Letourneau. And he was, they were together and then he died and then Harold was alone, and then Richard came in with him so that was just the Dubord and Dubord. And then the Marden and Dubord, I'm not sure. It was after grampy died and I just, I just couldn't put a date

on it. But I understand you've talked with Robert Marden and he probably has already given you that information.

AL: He may have, I didn't do the interview.

ED: Someone did, and he would know when.

AL: What was Dick's relationship like with Robert Marden, being Republican and a Democrat together?

ED: They were good friends, just very good friends, and there was no difference. He was Republican and we were Democrats, that was, that's just the way it was. Had nothing to do with how close we were, and in fact he and, Bob and his wife and Dick and I were probably, they were probably the closest friends we had socially.

AL: Tell me a little bit about your husband, his personality.

ED: Well, he was a very talented person humor wise. He was just extremely clever with imitations, jokes, telling jokes, whatever. He was always like the life of the party. He just had a tremendous sense of humor. And was a good lawyer.

AL: What were his political ambitions and what roles did he play within politics in Maine?

ED: He first ran for mayor of Waterville and I think he was probably, I think he was the youngest mayor that they'd ever had at the time. And I was trying to put a date on that and I think Susie must have been about four so it must have been like 1954, in that time period.

AL: About the time that Ed Muskie ran for governor?

ED: In that period. I think maybe, maybe a little, Susie was younger than that. She was born in '50 so it had to be '52, in that area anyway. Then he ran for governor in the primaries a little later and was beaten in the primaries by a man called Mayor Doloff.

AL: And that was later maybe around '60?

ED: Yeah, I think so.

AL: Did he hold any other . . . ?

ED: Then he was National Committee man for a long time.

AL: So he remained active.

ED: Yes.

AL: Do you remember Muskie's campaign at all, when he was running for governor? Did your

husband know Senator Muskie at that point?

ED: Oh yeah, they were neighbors. They lived, we lived on Silver Street and they lived on (*street name*) which is the next street over, and the back of the house faced the front of ours.

AL: Oh, okay. So you knew him from earlier?

ED: Yes.

AL: Could you tell me what his relationship with Ed Muskie was?

ED: Just a friend, yeah, a friend, political ally. Pretty much a close friend I think.

AL: Did they ever do things socially?

ED: To a small extent. No to any great extent.

AL: Now what was the Waterville community like when you moved here?

ED: Oh, it was just a typical small town, predominantly Catholic.

AL: Economically, what were the businesses supporting . . . ?

ED: Mostly mills, a lot of the people in the wards, particularly the French wards, were mill workers, and there wasn't really anything much besides the mills, paper mills and fabric mills, that was it.

AL: And ethnically speaking, were there Jewish, Franco Americans, what . . . ?

ED: Mostly Franco Americans, or I shouldn't say mostly, but, yeah, I guess predominantly Franco American. A few Jewish, a scattered few other people but it was pretty French. And French was spoken a lot. That was the thing that threw me when I first came up here because I couldn't read names, and I thought Dr., I found out was Dr. Guite (*pronounced Gitty*), I thought was Dr. Guite (*pronounced Gite*). I just, I had no French whatsoever and I had a hard time reading the phone book.

AL: Well what was it like besides the language coming in to a fairly small city where your husband's family was a prominent and influential part of the Franco American community?

ED: I don't know that it was any particular trauma or anything, it was just what was happening and that was it. I sort of suspected this after they had come down to see us in New York and I knew that it was going to be a whole different life. But then when I got up here it was just small town life, it wasn't like the big city life at all.

AL: In what ways has Waterville changed over the years?

ED: Well, it's gotten away from the, to an extent from being such a French, Franco American community, not in numbers but in, oh, I guess people don't speak French. At one point if you had a law office you had to speak French in order to even work there, to talk with the people, and now that's no longer true, I mean, it's not . . .

AL: So it changed in the cultural heritage in some ways, not actually the, like, you're not saying that the French people have made an exodus from this area, they've just changed.

ED: Drifted away from that, the cultural traditions (*unintelligible word*), yeah.

AL: We see that in Lewiston, too.

ED: Yeah, I'm sure you do.

AL: Can you think of others in this community who would be good sources for this project?

ED: I was talking to my sister-in-law this morning and she said Robert, Richard's brother, had gotten a letter which he returned but she said they hadn't heard from them and she said he would be glad to talk with you. So I told her I would mention it.

AL: Would you give me your perspective on Ed and Jane Muskie and their family?

ED: Well, after they moved to Augusta we didn't see them as a family so much after that. When they lived right on the next street then we often saw them but as a family after that, I didn't really see the kids growing up that much. I remember going to the Blaine House and one of the kids had drawn in the eyeballs on one of the statues in the den, and saying, well it hasn't affected them that much.

AL: How were they perceived by the Waterville community when they lived here? When . . .?

ED: I don't think anybody thought that they were much different than anybody else who was a mayor and a representative in Augusta or anything like that. At that point, I don't think anybody realized how far he was going to go.

AL: Now what year was your husband born?

ED: Nineteen twenty one. He was younger than Ed by quite a lot.

AL: So probably when Ed Muskie started his law practice in Waterville, your husband wasn't practicing.

ED: I don't think so. I don't remember when Ed started his.

AL: What was the social relationship between you and your husband, your brother-in-law Bob and his family, and the Muskies?

ED: I don't think, I could be wrong but I don't think my brother-in-law and his wife were that close to them socially. And we were closer to them because we were neighbors and because of Dick's involvement in politics I think.

AL: I'd like to hear a little . . .

ED: Socially we didn't, like we didn't really go out with them like we did with Bob and Scoop, Bob Marden and his wife. Once in a while we, you know, might go to dinner at their house or they would come to our house, but not in any really close social relationship.

AL: I'd like to hear a little bit about Dick's uncle, Gene Letourneau. That must have been his mother's brother?

ED: Yes. And he was a sportswriter for the Gannett papers, he wrote a column called "Sportsmen Say" and he also wrote for many magazines, sports magazines. He was a well recognized outdoors man, not just around here but all over the United States, and he was quite, quite the gentleman. He was, in fact he just died recently, I think he was ninety-three or something like that and up until the last year he was still going out in the woods tromping away and fishing. But he was a very prominent sports figure. And as far as his connection with Ed, I don't know other than he probably took him on fishing trips I would assume, after Ed got away from here and wanted to come back, if he wanted to go fishing, Gene was probably the one who took him.

AL: I'd like to talk about your husband's relationships with some of the other political figures of the '50s and '60s. Maybe we could start with Frank Coffin?

ED: This is where my memory gets pretty vague as far as details are concerned.

AL: It's okay.

ED: One of the strange things that comes to my mind is that they frequently had lunch meetings with these bunch of guys like Ed and Frank and probably Don, and we lived on Silver Street and we had little money and three kids and I had some stainless steel silverware from the A&P store and some dishes that I'd gotten at Joseph's Market, just, if you bought so much money you could buy a plate for so much, and I've often thought, after Ed got where he got and Frank got where he got, here I am serving them in our own little way and it was just great, they were just delightful people. Give them what I had for lunch and that was it. But I didn't have the association with them that Dick did, I mean, this was more a man's world at that point as far as, I got the lunch and they did the talking. George Mitchell, I never knew him as well as some of the others.

AL: Of course he was quite a bit younger, too.

ED: Yeah, and he came in the picture a lot later as far as we were concerned. But he was, I knew him and that was about it. I never was close with George.

AL: What about Don Nicoll?

ED: He was one of the bunch.

AL: And, I have two names here that I don't know much about . . .

ED: Erlon Nadeau was a local ward seven politician, influential in his area, and he was part of the group when Dick ran for mayor, was one of the ones that we got together a little nucleus of local people that planned the campaign and Erlon was one of them, he was always a close friend. Omer Richards was another one, and a fellow named Paul McClay whose brother was a political columnist for *The Sentinel*.

AL: Does Spike Carey ring a bell?

ED: Oh yeah, Spike's been around for a long time. He was a surveyor and he just has always held some political office or other, whether it was the legislature or, I guess mostly the legislature.

AL: Are they both, are Erlon and Spike still active in politics?

ED: Spike is. Erlon I think probably has died, I haven't heard from him in a long, long time. I couldn't be certain, but.

AL: Did you follow Senator Muskie's career over time, having been there at the beginning?

ED: Up until when Dick died, yes, very much because Dick was always part of his campaign and . . .

AL: What do you think his major qualities were?

ED: Well, I was thinking about that this morning and I, for one thing he was very intelligent, he was an excellent speaker and he was Abe Lincoln like in appearance which, all of which helped to get elected and that's what you have to do if you get anyplace in politics is get elected. And I think those were all real important things. He had the ability but he also had the appearance and the means of getting to people, getting through to them.

AL: Do you remember events or circumstances that illustrated his character or personality or abilities?

ED: Well one thing I remember is after the Humphrey-Muskie election we went to Caneel Bay with him, immediately after the election, and met them in Washington on the vice presidential plane, and we were on our way to Caneel Bay and it was a prop jet and it was slow and not the way Muskie liked to travel and he jokingly said, if I had known this was all the kind of plane that a vice president got, I wouldn't have run in the first place. So that was just one little incident.

AL: What influences do you think he had on Maine?

ED: Well for one thing he broke the Republican chain and did such a good job of it that it's never been the same since then, it's always been more or less up for grabs rather than just predominantly Republican. He was really looking to the future. Like, he started the Clean Air-Clean Water, all these sort of things that had just kind of been overlooked before because nobody had to come up with something to get elected before that. And he really did start a chain of improvements, just, infrastructure.

AL: Have we missed anything important that you'd like to add?

ED: I can't really think of anything particularly. As I say, my memory is not what it used to be and my active participation really stopped in 1970 so that's about it.

AL: Well great, thank you very much for your time.

ED: You're welcome, I enjoyed doing it.

End of Interview.