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Harding, Floyd L. oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with Floyd L. Harding by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Harding, Floyd L.

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

October 9, 1998

Place

Presque Isle, Maine

ID Number

MOH 049

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Biographical Note

Floyd Harding was born August, 26, 1923 in Albion, Maine into a family of 12 children: ten boys and two girls. His father was a rural mail carrier and his family lived and ran a small family farm. He was educated at Bessey High School in Albion and then Colby College in Waterville, Maine. He served in the US Army for three years, wherein he was taken prisoner. He later received his law degree at Boston University in 1949. He then moved to Presque Isle and has practiced law there ever since. He worked for the Maine Potato Growers as the assistant general counselor from '50-'54, and established his own practice in '54. He served three terms on the Maine State Senate (his wife ran one of his campaigns). He is married and raised nine children.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Harding's family background and education; his service in the US Army; WWII and Harding's experience as a POW; his years at Colby College; his involvement in Presque Isle politics; Muskie's gubernatorial campaign; Muskie's dealings with OPS; Paul Fullam; Harding's '64 election; Maine's 102nd legislature ('64); a comparison of Ken Curtis and Ed Muskie; John F. Kennedy; the sugar beet industry; and Muskie's contributions to Maine.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Friday, the 9th of October, 1998. We're in Floyd Harding's law offices at 429 Main Street in Presque Isle, Maine, and this is Don Nicoll interviewing Floyd Harding. Floyd, would you state your full name and your place and date of birth?

Floyd Harding: First of all, Don, I'm pleased you're here. And I'm, be pleased to talk about the subject matter, our beloved Ed Muskie. I was born in Albion, Maine on August 26, 1923, and I graduated from Bessey High School in Albion, from Colby College in Waterville, and I served with the United States Army for three years. And I graduated from Boston University in 1949. And I came to Presque Isle, and I've practiced law here ever since.

While I've been here I've, this has been a magnificent community. And I've, you know, I've just felt so good that I was so lucky to be able to be here. And I was asked by Clifford T. McIntire, who was later to become a congressman, to come up here for an interview for a job with the Maine Potato Growers as their assistant general counselor. And I was fortunate to get the job and so I worked with Maine Potato Growers from 1950 to 1954. And in 1954 I established my own law practice in this very spot where we now sit, and so I've occupied this desk ever since that date. And while in Presque Isle, people have been so kind to me. I mean, I've had the opportunity to serve as president of the Chamber of Commerce, and president of the Kiwanis Club, and president of the local hospital. In fact, it was my privilege to be on the board of directors when we built the new hospital at its present location.

And in 1964, it seems so improbable now, but people were fearful that Senator Muskie would not be reelected because the Republicans were going to turn all, their full effort against him. And so all over Maine and certainly here in Aroostook County, we decided to have someone to fill every single slot on the Democratic ticket as a tribute to Senator Muskie, because we were so pleased and so honored to have him serve us. And we couldn't imagine life as a Democrat without Senator Muskie. And so I tried to do my part. Elmer Violette and Glen Manuel did theirs; we made up a slate of three state senators to run from the county. And we ran "at large"

at that time. And nobody expected we would win, and when I started out I certainly didn't either because none had been elected, no Democratic state senator had been elected here in this century, since 1900. So we felt fairly safe that we could run and not be elected, which a lot of people said. But we were surprised. Barry Goldwater ran that year, and we were surprised to find that we were all in the state Senate. And I was so fortunate as to be elected majority leader, which was unusual because, you know, you generally serve a little time before you get to be in the leadership. But I was fortunate to be in that position. So I served three terms in the state Senate and it was certainly a very, very rewarding thing for me to do. I call it the power and the glory. I mean, you could do so much in the state Senate compared to what you could do as a community leader.

And while I was there, I mean, I had the privilege of seeing the Northern Maine Technical Institute, which is here in town, expanded. And the University of Maine, we made that, it was a state teachers' college at the time, we expanded that to make that a branch of the University of Maine. We also had in town established for the mentally retarded an opportunity training center, and it was a very rewarding thing.

So I've, I had, my family had nine kids and I simply could not maintain politics, my law practice, and my family. I gave one up, and so I gave up politics. And I've been able, so I've, it's possible to live without politics. But anyway, that's a good lead and take it from there.

DN: Okay, you grew up in Albion, in central Maine?

FH: Yes I did, yes, it's true, yeah.

DN: Tell me about your family.

FH: Yes, there were twelve in my family. There were nine, there were ten boys and two girls. My father was a mail carrier, rural mail carrier, and he was about the only Democrat in town, and, that dared say so anyway. And while I was in high school, the principal asked us to, he said, "All the Democrats stand." And I was the only one who stood up. I thought I should be there for, it was fifty in the school, and I was the only one that stood up. But then three others joined me. And then he said, "Now," he says, the other party, of course, is a more responsible and more respectful party, the Republican, "how many here now join, belong to the Republican?" And forty-six stood up. It was forty-six to four, fifty. So we had an election, and I thought I could convert those Republicans to Democrats. And we had election and, Don, what happened is, I lost one of the Democrats. It turned out that the election was forty-seven to three. So anyway, so my first electoral experience wasn't all that good.

We were on a dairy farm and we used to work out, I worked out summers for other farmers. And it was a very healthy environment and I learned much from serving in Albion and I also developed a very valuable experience. I didn't think milking cows would ever get you anywhere. But, in fact, milking cows helped me very much because I worked my way through Colby and I worked on a dairy farm with Clyde Russell.

DN: Your father was both a rural mail carrier, I take it, and a dairy farmer.

FH: Well, we farmed dairies, we grew potatoes, we grew corn, we grew, you know, I mean, we

DN: Small family farm.

FH: And we took everything from the soil, really. You know, if we had to burn wood, we went to the woods and cut the wood. If we had to build a shed, we went to the woods and cut the lumber and had it sawed. And the only thing my mother had to buy at the store was the condiments and the sugar and tea and coffee and flour. The rest of it came from the farm.

DN: That, let's see, you graduated from high school in what year?

FH: In 1941.

DN: So you went through the Depression on the farm.

FH: Yes, we did. And it was a, I've got some very vivid memories from the Depression. People talk about poverty now, but they don't really understand poverty. We had some kids that their clothes were made out of grain bags. I mean, it sounds worse than it really is because they did have prints on them, but they were very thin. And in the winter time, those kids, I mean, they didn't have any underwear, they didn't have any stockings. I mean, I don't know how they could help from freezing. And, I mean, they were hungry, and at school they brought their lunches, as we all did. And they hunched over their dinner bucket because they were ashamed for us to see what they were eating. I mean, they were eating what they called poor man's bread, and when they'd take a bite out of it, it would all crumble in little pieces.

And in school you know, kids wrestled and played and so on, and it was my turn to wrestle, or challenge Eddie Peacock, his name was. And he was two years older than I and I'll never get over the shock that I had when we wrestled. He was taller and two years older, but he was just as light as a feather and I mean, he was weak. And I could handle him with such ease and I wasn't that rugged and I wasn't that . . . But I just felt so bad for him and I guess we all did. But at that time Roosevelt came through with a program for school lunches, as it were. But you know, we got fruits and we got some canned soup and canned stuff like that. Those kids, I believe it was the only meal they had for the day.

DN: Were these children who didn't live on farms?

FH: No, their father worked, no, their father and mother were separated or dead or whatever. I don't know that, but they lived with their grandparents, and their grandparents worked for other farmers.

DN: So they were totally dependent on wages.

FH: Yes, absolutely dependent on wages. And in the winter time there wasn't much to do. And they were so pathetically poor and at the time I learned something that has made me kind of

ashamed to look back on it. It was so easy to pick on those kids, because there was no repercussions. And so everybody liked to pick on them. And so, since then, I've seen how easy it is to pick on the welfare people, because they can't come back and sass you or anything. I mean, they're helpless. And everybody can tell about the, you know, the queen just makes all this money and she lives a, has all these lobsters and drives a Cadillac and all this absolute nonsense. But it's easy to do because you know, they can't come back at you. And they don't vote, and so there's no retribution. So things haven't changed as much as I had hoped it would from back in those days when you could pick on those poor kids and there was no retribution for having done so.

DN: Did you talk much about this at home?

FH: Oh, yeah. I mean, my father was a Democrat as I told you, but my mother was a Republican, and they had some good debates. And I don't think either one ever changed their mind about anything, certainly not politics. So my father would start off the discussion, how well I remember. He said, well, my mother's name was Grace and she was Republican, he said, "Now Grace, a Republican is one of two things, he's either very rich or very foolish. Now, have you got any money on you?" So then they, the discussion would start, see. So I've heard a good lot of background about politics and

This is before I was born, but my mother was on the Republican city, yeah, the Republican town committee, it wasn't the city. And so someone was, had the chance to take the train to go to Portland to meet President Harding. And so my mother was delegated and she went to Portland to meet the President who came to visit there, and of course this is before I was born. But, you know, it's a kind of legendary thing they talked about in the family. And so she came back. She said, "Judson," she said, "you were wrong about that President Harding. He is the most charming, handsome man that I ever met in my life," she said, "and he came and he shook hands with me, he held my hand and he talked to me just like I was an important person. No," she said, "I would always vote for him." My father said, "He's a damn crook, and times will show that he is. And," he said, "I'm ashamed that you went there and I'm ashamed that you talked to him."

Well, time went by and the next kid that was born was the boy older than I, and my father was away a lot, and the kid was born. And so my father came back and he says, "Oh Grace, what happened?" She said, "Well, we got another boy." "Oh, great, that's good," and he said, "that'll make us nine boys with a baseball team, that's great." He said, "What'd you name him?" She said, "I named him Warren G. Harding." He said, "You named him what?" So my father would never call him by his name all of his life; he'd call him Chunky or something else.

And so, you know, roll the video tape ahead and somebody called me and said, "Do you have a brother Warren Harding?" I said, "Yeah." And this was during the Nixon times. And they said, "He just called in on a radio show, a fellow name of Warren Harding." He said, "He said that he was named for, after the most disgraced President in U.S. history, Warren G. Harding. And he was grateful for Richard Nixon because when, Richard Nixon now, he said, has made Warren G. Harding look like a saint." And he said, "He's lifted this awful burden from my back." So I did have some bias towards the Democrats from my bringing up and the things we did.

DN: Now, there were twelve of you. You were the youngest son, I take it?

FH: No, I was not the youngest son. There were two, there's one younger than me. Conrad was younger than me.

DN: Of the twelve Harding children, how many turned out to be Democrats and how many Republicans?

FH: I guess I couldn't tell you that for sure because, you know, once they grew up, I mean, they went their ways. But I believe that I was a Democrat and my, Conrad and my youngest sister Arlene, and Warren, of course, was Democrat. But the rest of them, they were either Anothingarians or Republicans, because they found it easier to get a job if they were Republicans. They were out trying to find work, and it's just like when I came up here. I mean, they told us, you know, "If you want to succeed you've got to be a Republican." So most of them, except those I mentioned, I believed were either apolitical or were Republicans.

DN: Now you graduated from high school you said in '41?

FH: Correct.

DN: And you went to Colby?

FH: Correct.

DN: Were you the only one in your family to go to college, or did others also go to college?

FH: My oldest sister went to Farmington State Teachers' College, and at that time you could go in the summer, do a summer course, and then you could teach right out of high school. And she did that, and she used to go back to the summer school. And my older sister was a teacher. And it gave me an unfair advantage because I used to look at her materials that she had for the kids (*telephone interruption*).

DN: Floyd, you were talking about your sister and her studies and the advantage it gave you.

FH: Yes, it did because she had all those materials there and the flash cards, and the, you know, how to count and different things like that. And so when I went to school, most of the things that they were teaching in the first grade, I already knew. And so the teacher wrongfully felt that I was very smart and those other poor kids, I mean, she gave them a real tough time. She says, "Well, Floyd knows this. How come you," you know, "what are you doing?" So I felt bad about that, but it did give me a head start. Of course, where I went to school it was eight grades, in a rural school, and you couldn't learn much in your own grade. But you heard the second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade all recite, and you heard that for eight years. So just by repetition you began to, that stuff began to sink in. So we thought that we was getting a very bad education but it wasn't that bad. And we did well on the, I did well on the exams that you took statewide, you know? And our high school, again, I thought our high school was, we were disadvantaged. But, you know, in the Army and at Colby

I did very well on the entrance exams and the SAT course or what. So it was a basic education but looking back I think it was a very good one.

DN: You went to Colby in September of '41. The war started for us in December. How long were you at Colby before you went in the service?

FH: Well, I was getting old enough to go in in 19-, that following year, and I enlisted in 1942. I believe it was like in December '42, I believe.

DN: And how long were you in the Army?

FH: Well, I was on inactive duty. I mean, as part of what I was doing, I had to go to Colby for, and it worked out nicely because I finished that year. But I was in the Army Reserve, so to speak. And I got out of, discharged from the United States Army in November of 1945, and I served in the United States infantry in the European theater and I had the misfortune to be caught in the Battle of the Bulge. And I was with the 423rd Regiment, 106th Division, and the Germans broke through there, you know, about two hundred thousand Germans broke through the sector that our division, the 106th Division, was holding. And so we were surrounded, and we were without medicine, without food and without ammunition. And so our colonel ordered our surrender on December 19th, 1945. So I became a prisoner of war and it was probably one of the most humiliating and devastating experiences of my life. I mean, people like talking about the victories, they hate talking about a humiliating defeat.

But you know, in the Bible, you tell about people that were in jail. But being in prison, it made me appreciate liberty like I could never have appreciated it before, and how important it was for us to protect our liberties and participate in government. Because the German people were decent people, and, you know, some of the best people were in prison. And so I, after the war while we were being redeployed I asked this German, he was a professor at one of the universities, I said, "How did this ever happen to your people?" He said, "Well," he said, "everybody attacked the politicians, they were bad, and nobody wanted to participate, and so all the thieves and the crooks took over." And, he said, "The good people were ground under. And," he said, "this is what happened."

And this had a tremendous impact on me, and I felt that I had a duty because I had been so fortunate as to survive. I mean, I was in Dresden when it burned and there were a hundred thousand people in that city that were incinerated. And I escaped with my life, for which I've always been grateful. But, it was sort of like, it was within me that you have a duty to appreciate your freedom, and to make sure that what happened to the Germans doesn't happen to you; that everybody participates in the process. So anyway, it's always been a motivation of mine, you know, way down deep. I haven't, you know, I don't wear it on my sleeve or anything like that, you know, but it's something which I've certainly thought about.

DN: Had anything in your education up to that point prepared you for the experience in Germany? In the war and being captured and in prison?

FH: Nothing prepares you for combat, nothing can. I mean, you know, you either have it in

your soul to be able to endure it or you don't. And you have to reach back for strength that you didn't think you had. And your faith, you know, I mean, there was no one in my outfit that was an atheist. I mean, everybody was deeply religious. And, you know, they, this phrase that you've heard in the Bible, you know, for, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son," and "whosoever shall believe in me shall have everlasting life and shall not perish." And so people felt that even though they hadn't gotten through the, formally been accepted, the pastor, or the chaplains talking to us, you know, it gave us faith that we could somehow endure it. And so there's nothing that can prepare you for it, absolutely nothing. You either make it or you don't, and of course a lot of people don't, didn't. And so I've tried to be mindful of those that didn't make it, to try, as I say, to participate and do my part to see that our country never lapses into that horrendous situation that Germany did.

DN: When you came out of the service having gone through that experience, you went back to Colby?

FH: Yes, I did. I went back to Colby for a semester. And I had done some studies in the Army while I was there which gave me some credits, so at that time I only lacked, only was short one semester from graduating from Colby. But Dick Dubord of Waterville was a good friend, and he pointed out to me that at Boston University, if you had served in the Army and you lacked just a little bit from having your BA degree, that they, Boston University would accept you. So I said, "Well, why go for Boston University?" So I wrote letters of application to Harvard, to Yale and to Boston University and to Boston College, you know, with my resumé. And I didn't have it typed up, I wrote it up. Miracle of miracles, every one of them accepted me. But then it was a question of choice. And Boston University, because I did want to practice in a small town, it had been the dream of my life to have a law office in a small town, and

DN: This was a dream as?

FH: As a kid.

DN: as a kid.

FH: In fact, I was in the fourth grade when my father asked me, he said, "Floyd, what do you want to do when you grow up?" And I said, "I want to be a lawyer." He said, "You want to be what?" I said, "I want to be a lawyer." He said, "You should do all right because there are a lot of damn fools in that business." I hope he was kidding, you know. But the truth of it is, Don, as the years have gone by, I've seen the wisdom of his remarks.

DN: You were telling me before we started the formal part of the interview about a comment your father had made about his family, about his kids.

FH: Yes, yeah. He said, was it the one about he sired twelve kids? "And there wasn't a damn fool among them, and not a single one of them was in jail tonight." And at the time it seemed that he wasn't bragging very much about, didn't have much to talk about. But really now it's, you know, if you raise that many kids and you kept them all out of jail, you'd be doing a pretty good job now, really.

DN: Now, you mentioned Dick Dubord. How did you get to know Dick at that point?

FH: Well, I knew Dick because I knew his father. Harold Dubord, of course, campaigned. And my father was not, was supposed to be nonpolitical. But all the people that ran for office used to come to see him because, I mean, he was the only contact with the outside world that so many on his route had. And so they would talk to him, and they said, "Judd, who do you think I should vote for?" And my father said, "Well, look, I can't be political, you know that." "We know that, Judd, but just give us some ideas." "Well," he says, "I'll tell you, I would support that Pete but he's so damn crooked that I could never vote for him." So he'd just give little ideas like that, so the people running for office came to see my father.

And this is where I met Harold Dubord, because he came to visit my father, to get my father's support when he was running for a statewide office. So, having known Harold, I mean, you know, we knew the family too. And Harold Dubord, I mean they, that Dubord family means so much to me. When I completed law school I was down in the Kennebec Superior Court and Harold Dubord was there. And he was the kind of a guy, I mean, he'd met me on the farm, my father had helped him as best he could, and he remembered me. And that was one of the parts of him that made him such a delightful person. He said, "Floyd, well, I hear you made it." And I said, "Yes." "Well," he said, "when are you going to be sworn in?" This is in October, and I said, "Well I guess I've got to wait until the next session of the Supreme Judicial Court, which will be in October." "Oh," he says, "you don't have to do that." He says, "Those guys don't have much to do now," he says, "I'll get together a special session to swear you in." I said, "Really?" "Yes," he said, "I'll call them up," he says, "they're sitting at home hating themselves. They're probably glad to get down here to swear you in." So, he arranged for a special session of the Supreme Judicial Court for me, to have me sworn in. And he did that. And so, I mean, you know, the Dubords are, I felt deeply grateful to him and so, and we became close.

DN: I'd like to drop back a bit. You mentioned Clyde Russell and working on a dairy farm with him when you were in college?

FH: Correct, yeah. Well, I grew up on a dairy farm and that summer I was at, before I went to work for, went to Colby, I worked on a dairy farm. And I put in an application for a job and he had this opening where he was, you could work two hours in the morning, two hours at night, and all day Saturday. And you earned your board and room and five dollars a week, which doesn't seem like much but it seemed like a lot to me at the time because your board and room was a big item. And I had gotten a two hundred and fifty dollar scholarship from Colby, which at that time, believe it or not, paid your tuition. So I worked for Clyde Russell and, on the farm which was operated by his nephew, I think it's Walter Russell. And they were splendid people. And I was so fortunate to be able to be with them and it was a critical time in my life. I mean, my mother, who had been ill for a few years, I mean, she died in November of 1941, you know, my first year in college. And it was so devastating and they were there and they were good friends. And, you know, they were there to comfort me during this awful time that I was experiencing. So I have deep affection for the Russells.

DN: Now, is this the same Clyde Russell who was later executive secretary of the Teachers Association?

FH: Yes, he was, yeah. And he was, at that time he was a professor at Colby College. Yeah, that's right. And coincidentally he was a Democrat, too. And his son Ted, who I got acquainted with on the farm there, Ted used to come over and help with the chores once in a while, and we got acquainted.

DN: Now, you went to Boston University Law School, graduated and passed the Bar, and were sworn in in a special session of the Supreme Judicial Court. And did you come directly to Aroostook?

FH: No, no, I didn't. I practiced law from the front seat of a 1939 Ford from October, October, November, December. But in the meantime I was kind of searching out for jobs and I'd put in this application for up here in Presque Isle. But I had never been to Aroostook. And, but I did quite a chore, I was surprised at how much, because I was known, my father was known, and I could make a living right from my front seat of my Ford automobile. You know, I had a few drunken driving cases I remember, I had a divorce case, and I had an assault case. I mean, you know, things that at the time you could do it so much easier. Now you have to have all the books and all the process. I mean, you could never do such a thing. But I made my living those three months practicing law in that manner.

And so I came up for the interview and Clifford McIntire was in charge of securing someone to be, at that time it was dual role, credit manager and assistant general counsel. George Blanchard was the general counsel and I was to assist him. And Harold Bryant was the general manager and Frank Hussey was the president. And I was, you know, what privilege to be associated with, I mean, they were legends in their time. And so Frank was, you know, I learned so much.

And if I may digress just a minute, this is the kind of thing I learned from Frank Hussey. He came in the office and talked to me, he liked to talk to everybody. And he says, "You know, there's a fellow working on the potato rack out there and," this kid, and he looked familiar, and he says, "I know I should know him." And he says, "Would you find out who he is and you call me?" And I remember my reaction. I had just started work there, maybe I'd worked there a month. I said, "Well, he's got a lot to do hasn't he? President of this outfit asking me to find out the name of some kid down there working on the potato rack." So I, you know, he was the president, he was my boss, and so I found out the information, got the whole details and I called him up. "Oh," he said, "I knew it." He said, "You know something? I went to school with that boy's father and I should have recognized the boy." So then Frank came back and, you know, said "hello" to the boy and said how much he'd enjoyed being with his father and so on. So Frank, you know, this is the kind of lessons that I learned there and there are some valuable lessons. And Frank and I, of course, became great friends and, you know, over the years. And truly he was a legend in his time.

DN: Cliff McIntire at that time had what position?

FH: He was assistant general manager, and I believe that Frank Fellows as I remember was the

representative. And I think he died. But anyway, there was a vacancy and there was a special election, and Clifford McIntire ran against Woodcock, I believe, from Bangor, in the special election. And McIntire won and he became a congressman and he served as Republican congressman. And he served, let's see, until he ran against Ed Muskie in 1964.

DN: Their paths crossed again on a number of occasions.

FH: What, me and McIntire? Oh, yeah, Cliff McIntire, I disagreed with him philosophically, but Cliff McIntire was a magnificent person. I mean, he knew everybody. He was considerate of your feelings or your needs, and I mean, he was just a kind of a diplomat that, I mean, you were bound to love him even though you disagreed with him politically. And I, it was tough for me in a way to work against Cliff when he was running for office, but he seemed to forgive me. I mean, afterwards we were still friends. But it was tough to work against him. But I just, he was for all those things I was against, you know, politically, and so it was tough. It was tough.

DN: When you came to the county, when did you first get involved in politics?

FH: Well, quite soon. I think it was like in '51, '50 or somewhere in there. They had a Republican meeting and I went to this Republican meeting. And I remember old Herb Kitchett. He was a retired state senator and he was presiding. And they were talking about what they were going to do and I had some suggestions about what they should do which were not in keeping with the Republican suggestions. And they said, "Well, you know, we won up here for the, over fifty years, so we must be doing something right. I mean, we don't go for this radical stuff like you're talking about, and that's why we've won." And so, I remember old Herb Kitchett said, "Now who is that anyway?" And they said, "He's new." "New?" He said, "Do you spell that with a K or a G?" So, there were some Gnews, who, with the name, up here. So the thought occurred to me at that time that nobody is going to change the Republican Party from within. The only way that you would change them is to threaten them with defeat from outside. Then they would have to move or to do some things that were more progressive. And so right then it sort of cast the die of what I felt that my position was.

DN: Who were some of the Democrats who were active in Presque Isle?

FH: Well, we didn't have very many. Very few. There was, Orrin J. Bishop was the postmaster, and his son James Bishop who, he didn't say much about his politics because he was kind of embarrassed to be a Democrat. And there was Ken Colbath who ran for Congress, and Joe Freeman who ran for a lot of offices and wasn't successful in making them, and myself. And that was just about the core of the Democrats, and of course their respective spouses. And, well, that was just about it.

DN: Now when you, you worked for the potato growers and then in '54 you said you started practice. Did you get any advice on what you'd have to do to succeed in private practice here?

FH: Didn't I tell you?

DN: Before we started.

FH: Oh, I see, okay, yes, I did. Yes, very kind of you to refresh my recollection. I told you that George Blanchard, who was a, my mentor, I mean, I looked to George for advice and guidance and, you know, do the things that you do in practice and the strategic moves that you make. And so, and he was very good to me and he was also very kind. So, I asked him what I should do and he said, "There's three things you must do if you want to succeed. If you want to set up your own office and succeed, there's three things you've got to do." "Well, tell me what they are." He said, "You've got to join the Congregational Church, the Rotary Club, and the Republican Party." And I says, "Suppose I don't do those three things, what will happen?" And of course time has shown how wise he was. He said, "If you don't do those things, life will always be very difficult for you in Presque Isle and you'll always be very poor."

DN: But you've had quite a substantial role in the community in spite of those failings.

FH: Yes, that's true, I had those handicaps, you know. It reminds me of the kids, we would, you criticize the kids for growing the long hair, you know. And so, they wanted to be themselves and they wanted to succeed in spite of these so-called handicaps. And so it made it all the more joyful for me to be a Democrat and to be able to do these things in spite of the fact, you know, that I was a Democrat. But I didn't wear it on my sleeve. I mean, I didn't offend people, saying, "You know, I'm a Democrat." You know, I tried to work with the community leaders and get along.

DN: Now in 1954 you opened your practice in October?

FH: Correct.

DN: That was a month after Ed Muskie was elected governor. Had you been active in his campaign?

FH: Yeah, I tried to help a little on the, secretly you know. I mean, I was with a Republican organization. Frank Hussey then was a Republican, although he was a closet Democrat really, I found out. But you had to be careful. But I tried to be helpful and, in small ways. And there were some people I remember that wanted to meet with Senator Muskie and then, he wasn't, he was lawyer Muskie then. They wanted to meet with him. And one of them was Harley Welch, who was a director of Maine Potato Growers, and he had been on the governor's council on the, he served in Augusta also as a state senator. And he and Burton Cross did not get along. And Harley Welch hated Burton Cross, who was Gov. Muskie's opponent. So he and several of his friends wanted to meet with Muskie, but they did not want to have, to meet publicly with Ed. And so Harley asked if I had any connections and if I could arrange for, they had a hotel room, if I could arrange for Muskie to meet them there in the hotel room where nobody would see them. And I was awfully offended by it. But Muskie said, "No," he says, "that doesn't bother me a bit," he said. "If I have to meet them in the bathroom, that's fine, that's where I'll meet them." So it didn't trouble him a bit. He met with them and he gained their support.

DN: You had an opportunity in the 1954 campaign to observe Republicans in this community and their reactions to the gubernatorial campaign; also to the House and Senate campaigns. Do

you recall any other events of that season, or people who got involved one way or the other?

FH: Well, I mean, Muskie was the fellow we talked about, Ed was so colorful. He and Dick McMahon were campaigning up here and they, you know, they just had the car they came up in. And they tell about this, and they told it on Muskie, somebody who was at the Catholic church when he went to mass. And they passed the collection box, and McMahon had a dollar he was going to put in. And Muskie was broke and so he took the dollar away from Dick and he put it in. And McMahon said, "Look, you took my dollar. What did you do that for?" And Muskie says, "I'm the candidate, you're not." So, that was some of the kind of little things that were told and it gave people a smile, you know.

And he was, this is not a plus I suppose in building up Muskie, but Burt Cross was a very hated person. I mean, he went out of his way to irritate people. Like, we had a sanitarium here for the TB. And he came and says, "Look, it's a waste of money." And he said, "I have to tell you frankly, if I'm governor I'm going to close it." I mean, this is the way he handled things, so he managed to antagonize people. And it was the same way with roads or what have you. I mean, and so he was very much disliked. And so a lot of people felt at the time that it wasn't a vote so much for Muskie as it was a vote against the hated Burt Cross. But they felt comfortable. They didn't think Muskie would betray them or anything. They felt very comfortable because he was a man of integrity and he'd do a good job.

DN: Where did they get their impressions of him?

FH: Oh, he campaigned up here. You know, he went, his itinerary; he went to church, met people on the street, and of course he would know where people would gather. I remember it was up in the big church that's up in the North Caribou Road. And he could, seemed to managed to have his campaign be there just so that when the church let out. I mean, he would just happen to be there and he would meet the people. And that's the way that he, he was a very adept campaigner. So most everybody felt that either they had met him or that they had, or one of their friends.

But something happened at this time that changed the whole thrust of campaigning in Maine, as far as so many people thought that they knew Muskie is, were TV. I mean, Muskie would be interviewed on TV and he came across very well. I mean, he was very telegenic and people that hadn't even met him, they thought they had met him because they saw him on TV. And so he, this was the beginning of the revolution as far as campaigning was concerned of using TV. And he used it sparingly because he didn't have any money. But he knew how to get interviewed, you know, he knew how to make the news. And of course they were glad to have some news, and so. I mean, he was just a super campaigner and he put everything together in a superb manner, and he won.

DN: Had you met him at all during the time when he was with the OPS?

FH: Yes, I did. Yes, I did meet Senator Muskie when he was with the OPS. He was, we met him down in Portland and we had problems with imposing price controls on potatoes. I mean, we'd just had a decent year and we'd gone through (*unintelligible word*) and prices went up.

And what happens? Truman puts on price controls. And so Senator Muskie was, you know, he was the OPS director I believe in charge of the state of Maine. And so I went down with them and tried to, you know, remonstrate with him. And he says, "Well, you know, it's a matter of the war. And you know when you create a war, we've all got to do our part." And I said, "Well, Mr. Muskie, there's price controls that you've imposed on potatoes that are fresh fruit and vegetables." And he says, "That's right." "But on seed potatoes, Muskie, Senator Muskie, Mr. Muskie, on seed potatoes there are no price controls, right?" He says, "No, no, that's not a necessity." I said, "Isn't it going to be difficult to tell whether these potatoes are sold as seed or as table stock?" He said, "You see an opening there, don't you?" So, for some reason from then on we had the largest export of potatoes I believe in Aroostook County for seed that we'd ever had in any other year.

DN: Did the potato industry have its dealings with him primarily through the Portland office, or did he come up to the county?

FH: Oh, he came to the county, and he'd face the farmers right down. I remember him being, it was a very hostile crowd and I spoke on behalf of the potato farmers, of what they had endured and how unfairly they were being victimized now at this time. And, you know, I whooped up quite a rally. But I still remember of what finesse, you know, he handled it. I mean, in the later days he would have gotten mad, but he didn't at that time. I mean, he spoke so caring and compassionate. And he says, "This is hard for me to be here." He says, "I know the pains that you people have been through and your difficulties, but remember, we're in a war, and," he says, "we have some of our young men who are paying the ultimate price. And so some of us are being asked to make a relatively small sacrifice. And so," he said, "I hope that you'll be understanding of it." Well, I mean, he won the crowd over. He won them over and they came and shook hands with him and they understood. But we still sold

End of Side One

Side Two

DN: the second side of the first tape with Floyd Harding on the 10th, the 9th rather, of October, 1998. Floyd, we were talking while we turned the tape about your experience at Colby particularly in January semester of '46. And you mentioned two professors, Wilkinson and Paul Fullam.

FH: Well, to get there within the right order, Professor Wilkinson was my professor when I was a freshman, that was before I went in the Army. And Professor Fullam was my professor during that time when, that I had come back to Colby. And so Professor Fullam gave a course in, like administrative law. And it seemed like it was the most disjointed thing you could ever imagine. I mean, you study the Congressional Records here, you look this up, you study Machiavelli, you know, and all this stuff. And, but it all kind of pulled together, you made sense of it at the end, of what he was talking about. And so it was just an absolutely magnificent experience to study with him.

And, God rest his soul, I, he gave an exam and it just happened I was lucky because I had studied the things that he asked the questions about. And I hit it right on the nose. And you

know, you could tell when you hit an exam good. And he said, "Floyd, I have something to apologize to you." I said, "What's that, professor?" He said, "I lost your, the results of your test." I said, "You did what?" He said, "You'll have to take the test again." And I said, "I will not take that test again, professor." I said, "I gambled and I won, I took that once, now you're going to ask me some other questions that I would, you know, struggle through." And I says, "I took the gamble and I won." He said, "How did you think you did on that test?" He says, "I'll tell you what I'll do with you, I'll give you a B+ because I know you worked hard and you deserve it." I said, "No, you won't give me a B+," I said, "you'll give me an A+ because I hit that right on the nose." He said, "I don't give anybody an A+, but I'll give you an A." So, anyway, I spoke, I wouldn't have said that to him if I hadn't been in the Army and so on. But anyway he did the right thing. And, but did you want me to recite that thing about Professor Wilkinson again?

DN: Oh yes, I think that's

FH: Well, Professor Wilkinson was a magnificent professor and he made you feel that you were participating in history. And some people, some figures in history didn't measure up to the historical standards and others exceeded them, but he was so contemptuous of those who had failed. And this one particular day, the professor had to have a little bit of brandy to take the palpitations off his heart. And, so he wouldn't remember whether he'd taken one shot or two shots or three shots.

But on that particular day I think he'd taken about three shots because he really was in good shape for that lecture. And I can remember the way he used to speak, because they didn't have Poli-Grip and the false teeth, you know, you had to kind of hold your teeth. And so he was there, (*mimics voice*) "And what was Buchanan doing while he was waiting for Lincoln to be inaugurated?" he says. "I'll tell you what Buchanan was doing, he was just settin' on his goddamned ass at the White House." He said, "Now boys and girls, don't you write that down, but you can always remember that's what he was doing." So this is the kind of a professor, though, the way he taught, he made everything so memorable and so important. And his tests, I mean, this is a test I still remember. The test he gave us for the finals was this one question, an essay question: compare and contrast the Elizabethan era with the New Deal era. That was the question.

DN: And this was when you were first a student at Colby?

FH: That's right, that's correct, yeah.

DN: Do you think you answered it then as you might have in 1946?

FH: Probably not. But I got an A so, you know, it was good enough; it was good enough then. Incidentally, you know, going to Colby, we did a lot of essays and I don't know if they do that any more or not, but you had to write them out. Now you type them out of course but, but I kept all of the papers that I had submitted in for essays. And then when I went back after the war, I took those back. And I had this little deal and I said, "Look, I've got these papers here and I'll, this is the program you can have. If this paper you submitted, and of course you would revise,

I'm sure, you would not submit the same paper I did, you'd do some revisions, but if you submit it and you get an A you owe me five bucks. If you get a B you owe me three bucks; if you get a C, a dollar. If it's less than that you don't owe me anything." It was amazing. Some of the papers that I got a C on, when they took them, they'd get an A on. And some of my A's that they would submit, turned out to be C's. And I, you know, it just, how it hit a particular professor.

And I know one, for example, I was, I submitted this one about getting up on the farm. And, you know, how the cows would switch their tail and with the urine on the tail hit you on the face and so on, and it was quite a challenge. And this guy was a city boy, and I remember I got a C- on that. He said, "I thought it was very flippant and you were not being grateful for what you had in life. You were being very ungrateful, so it was very flippant." But a kid submitted that and his professor had grown up on a farm; he got an A+. So, you know, it's the perception of who sees what you do and it makes such a difference. It does in the law now and it does in life and political campaigns and everything else.

DN: You took a course in administrative law from Professor Fullam in spring of '46, and then eight years later he was on the campaign trail. Did he remember you when he came campaigning in Presque Isle?

FH: You know, I don't remember. I don't remember meeting him in Presque Isle. I, it just didn't work out that way. I saw him, you know, many times after I got out of school, but I don't remember, I can't tie him in to the campaign. I can remember how Margaret Smith, you know, he was campaigning and was criticizing her and she came back on him and just devastated him. She said, "Well, I couldn't have been too bad because you signed my nomination papers." Poor Paul, he was such an honest, decent guy, you know. But she was a, she could be ruthless and she didn't resist the opportunity. But I don't remember of meeting him. And I'm sorry, I've seen him on several other occasions but on the campaign I don't remember.

DN: And what was it like from your perspective for Ken Colbath to campaign in '54?

FH: Oh, gee, Ken, you know Ken Colbath's most effective campaigning was by radio. He had a very good radio voice and he had a very good message that he delivered, and he was very effective in his radio appeal. Campaigning one-to-one, Ken didn't, people didn't take him serious enough. Of course, I just saw him campaigning in Presque Isle and of course everybody knew him. But on radio, I mean, he came across like a million bucks.

DN: You've mentioned radio and television as important in that campaign.

FH: Right.

DN: Did people pay attention to it in different ways from today?

FH: Oh, yeah. I mean, it was simple back then. You know, you got on and you stated your position and you didn't slash your opponent, you said what you were for. I don't think Muskie, I don't ever remember him criticizing anybody else, you know, in what he said. I mean, he said

what he thought some of the problems were and how he talked with people and some of their concerns. You know, you're talking about something that happened fifty years ago, you know. But I don't ever remember of him in that early campaign of ever even mentioning his opponents, saying nothing about, you know, slashing them up.

DN: Now, between 1954 when Ed Muskie was elected governor and 1964 when you ran for the state Senate, what was happening to the Democratic Party in Presque Isle and what role did you play?

FH: Well, we had a registration drive. And when I got into politics we were outnumbered here in Presque Isle about three to one. And we did a lot of registration of people and going into the '64 campaign we reduced the odds. I think we were outnumbered something like two to one. But it was still a Republican town, but I was running county wide and I noticed the returns, the county wide returns. And we had a fellow by the name of Lamerons (?) that ran and he came close, because we had the valley. That turned out tremendous Democratic vote. And Caribou and Presque Isle were still basically Republican, but he came close and I observed that. And I said, "You know, if we could just cut down the margin some here in Presque Isle and Caribou, we can win those senate seats." You wouldn't have to make that much difference, because he didn't do hardly anything. It was just, you know, the trend.

So we did have registration drives and we I remember we had, Kennedy had become President and he was assassinated, and it was like a legend. And we ran, I mentioned, you know, I talked like Kennedy talked about, you know, the faith in our country and of course Martin Luther King, you know, "I have a dream." But it was a very idealistic, we were very idealistic at that time. And we never put our opponents down, really and truly, we never did that. And so in Presque Isle in '64, in that, even with that landslide, I'm not sure I carried Presque Isle. But I came so close with that huge margin that we had in the valley that if you could just draw even, so, I mean, the margin here in Aroostook was We had plurality here. See, Elmer Violette and I had won by about five thousand votes county wide. So we did, and when we served, Don, this is the thing, people were worried about what the Democrats would do and Senator Muskie was worried about what we'd do. I mean, he used to have gatherings down there and try and tell us about what, you know, be careful with this and do this or that.

DN: What sort of advice did he give you? Do you remember some of the?

FH: Yes, I do remember. He said, "You know, what you ought to do," he said, "is pass John Reed's budget and go home." He said, "You know, don't get into a lot of these things that are going to get you in trouble." Because he didn't have confidence that, we were new and he thought we'd make some terrible blunder. And so, and he (gathered force ??--*unintelligible word*). And I thought that it was demeaning because the press was there. And so I told him, we thanked him for his assistance. "But," I said, "you know, Senator, we, some of us have labored in the vineyards a lifetime, and here we are and we have an opportunity to do some of those things we'd like to do." And I said, "If I try to stop these people, they're idealistic, they want to do these things." And say

For example, we didn't have vocational education in Maine at that time, you know. We didn't

have the vocational schools and we didn't have, you know, on the high school level, and a lot of us wanted to start that going. And there was these, the mentally retarded, I mean they were, and the people that had mental illnesses. I mean, they were incarcerated, they were in horrible conditions. And we wanted to address those things because we had the chance to do it. And Senator Muskie was not pleased with "Well," I said, you know, "have confidence in us, have faith in us, the people have sent us here and really we won't make any terrible mistakes, but we want to address those missions that we've had."

And so it came out very well. The 102nd legislature was very well regarded and I remember they came down to celebrate what had happened and so on. And Senator Muskie was there and so I said, to him, I said, "Senator, I know you've had, were very concerned about this but," I said, "all of us want to thank you for your help and advice." And he could take the, you know, the jibe. He was good-humored about it and it worked out very well. But he was very afraid of what we would do. But he was very pleased with what we did do.

DN: Do you think his fear was related to what he regarded as the inexperience of the Democrats who were in the majority, or was it something out of his experience in negotiating with the Republicans?

FH: Well, when Senator Muskie, when he was elected to the legislature in Waterville, and there weren't very many Democrats in the legislature, just a handful. And he was probably the one legislator of stature that was there at that time, on the Democratic Party. And the other Democrats were from areas that were overwhelmingly Democratic and they didn't always get the best person to, out to represent them. And so that he was fearful when he served of their stature and so he sort of carried the ball for everybody almost. And so he, I think, did not appreciate that there was a different set of, different people that were there in 1964 than were there when he was there in the early '50s.

DN: In 1965 you were the majority leader in the Senate.

FH: Yes, I was.

DN: And who was the president of the Senate?

FH: [Carleton] Bud Reed from Woolich. Splendid guy, and it was one of the privileges of my lifetime to have someone like that to work with. Remember, I had no legislative experience and I was in there as the majority leader. And without Bud to guide me, I was hopeless, and got into a catastrophe. But we worked it day by day and the legislature really isn't that complicated. I mean, you know, it's, you know, we've all belonged to clubs, we've had the president and we've had the secretary and got used to recognizing people and so. But it was a magnificent experience and I always cherish it, and I call that the power and the glory.

You know, you, people want to get your opinion. They try to interview you on TV and all this fame, and you forget your priorities. Like, my priorities, I mean, I had a wife and I had nine kids and that's what I should have been concerned about. But being in the legislature with all these opportunities to do all these things, I mean, I really lost sight of what was really important. But

for a little while I had fun.

DN: You were there three terms.

FH: Correct.

DN: And the second term, second and third terms you were there with a Democratic governor.

FH: Correct.

DN: What was the difference between, or what were the differences between Ken Curtis and Ed Muskie as governors?

FH: Well, you see, I wasn't there under, when Muskie was governor. See, I wasn't in the legislature, so I don't know.

DN: But you observed it from here.

FH: Yeah, right. But Ed Muskie was hands-on, I mean, he used to go right down, you know, to the Appropriations Committee. I mean, they tell of, he'd go right down where the Appropriations Committee was meeting, put his feet right up on the desk and talk to them about, you know, what the needs were and what they could do and how they could do it. And, you know, he was right there. I mean, Ken Curtis and no governor before or since Ed Muskie had ever dared to do that. But he had a feel for it because he had served in the legislature, he was one of them. So he knew enough of them there, he would go down and talk with them. So he was very effective. I think Muskie got done most everything that he wanted done with a Republican legislature because he was so effective in dealing with them.

Ken Curtis, of course he had a Republican legislature and they didn't, you know, they felt that he was, you know, not deserving. I mean, he didn't have the experience and he hadn't been a legislator, and so he had a rough go of it when he was governor. And his recommendations were not seriously considered sometimes, particularly when he proposed an income tax. I mean, there was almost a revolution. But Ken was persistent. And I remember we had the battle with him, and we couldn't agree on a budget and the question of, "where do we go from here?" And Ken was going to call them together and blast them. And I said, "Oh, don't do that, no, no, no. I mean, these people, they may be disagreeable, but they're all sincere. They all feel that what they're doing is the right thing. So, Governor, please, thank them all. Say, 'we haven't been able to agree, but there'll be another day and another time, we'll go back and we'll try it again.'" And so I think it was about sixty days or ninety days after that, they called them back in special session with a proposed budget. And they bought it, and we went home in no time.

So, it was trial and error, but Ken got to be good about it, I mean, you know, after, the last two years that he was governor. I think that he got most things done that he wanted done. In fact, the last two years of his being, his first term, he got done what I never imagined any governor could ever get done, he got passed an income tax. And never in history had a governor ever been reelected who had imposed a new tax. And it was a close call, but Ken Curtis was

reelected governor after he had proposed and got passed an income tax. So you'd have to say overall that Ken Curtis got to be very effective as a governor, and he got some major programs passed.

But, you see, when Muskie was governor, though, he tried for very little things. He didn't try for these big major things like Ken Curtis did, like, you know, rebuilding the university, for example, and dealing with our institutions, our mental institutions and so on, the road programs. I mean, these were major undertakings and Ken was very, very successful in it. But this is not to diminish what Senator Muskie had, I say, Governor Muskie did in his time, because what he did was very much of an accomplishment at that time.

DN: When the income tax was passed, you were also running for reelection.

FH: When the income tax was passed, I'm sorry.

DN: Sixty-, didn't you run in '68?

FH: I did, but on that one I was defeated, I didn't win that time. And then I ran again in 1970 and I was elected, right, yeah, correct.

DN: Was the income tax a factor in your defeat?

FH: I wouldn't blame anybody, I mean, I didn't handle it right. I mean, you know, I can look back and I didn't put enough time in it and it was, things were not going our way very well in '68. You know, we had the Vietnam War, and it wasn't a Democratic tide exactly.

DN: During the period when you were in the legislature and thereafter when Ed Muskie was senator from Maine, there were a number of issues that affected this community; federal programs and questions like the closing of the Presque Isle Air Force Base. Were you involved in those from the community's point of view?

FH: I was. And overall I must say that Senator Muskie was absolutely magnificent. I mean, you may or you may not recall that we had a rally for Jack Kennedy at the Presque Isle Air Force Base in September of 1960, and it was one of the biggest political rallies in the history of Aroostook County. We had fifteen thousand people that turned out for that rally. And I had a chance to meet him and shake hands with him. And I'll never forget it but, I mean, you know, his brothers, you've met Ted and you met Bobby, and they were light-skinned like we are.

But Jack, he had this skin that was tinted like an Indian, it was dark. And I think it was the medication that he was taking for his illness that made his, but the result of it was that he, it was a striking figure. I mean, with his little, his hair was a little grey in it, you know, flecks, and the wind blowing through it and it was still a kind of a reddish, and his blue eyes. And I mean he just was a striking person to meet and to talk to. I mean, you, he just captivated that crowd. And he appealed to, you know, the better side. And so many of us got into politics because of John Kennedy and what he stood for, and of course being a martyr and you know, from the grave, I mean.

So, but to continue, not digress here, one of the first things that President Kennedy did when he got elected is, he closed this Air Force Base, this missile base. So Muskie, of course Jack and Ed were friends, and Muskie said, "You know, they made quite a rally for you there, Mr. President, there in Presque Isle. One of the first things you do is to close the base." He said, "What are we going to do?" And the president said, "Senator Muskie, we will do anything it's possible legally to do to help those people." He said, "You are my spokesman and whatever you tell me is appropriate, that is what we will do."

And so, I mean, we wanted the base turned over to, and we hired Jim Keefe to be the one that would be the promoter of this. We wanted the base turned over, given to the city of Presque Isle, and we'd operate it and so forth. And so it was a question of price. Well, you know, it was a multi-million dollar base. But the issue was, and we said to Senator Muskie, I said, "You know, we could never pay this, but the government has an option: if they let us have it, they'll get income tax and they'll get tax revenue from this base. If it sets there, they'll get nothing and it'll just grow up to bushes and so on and nobody will get anything. So most urgent for us is to get that base in hand so it will be utilized." So, we worked it out, and we got that base for sixty-five thousand dollars, for transfer. And there was a generator on it that the government, I don't know whether they knew about it or not, but, whether they did or not, we sold that to Maine Public Service, that generator, for about the price it cost us to buy the base. And then we tried to make use of the facilities.

Of course the airport we made the Northern Maine Regional Airport. But there were some buildings there where the troops, the Air Force had stayed, and we wanted to establish there the Northern Maine Technical Institute. So we worked on that and lo and behold, we got the state to authorize the Northern Maine Technical Institute. And now about, approximately eight thousand kids have graduated from that Northern Maine Technical Institute. And they have, instead of getting the minimum wage, they're getting wages like ten to fifteen dollars an hour because they have become professionals. So it turned out, and we had some industries up there, and it turned out to be a very, very productive thing. And Presque Isle was named one of the all-American cities later on for the efforts which we accomplished there in transforming that old air base to a productive facility.

And everything that we asked of Senator Muskie, he worked with us hand-in-hand. And all I can say about Senator Muskie and the endeavor with that Presque Isle Air Force Base, he was truly magnificent, truly so. And he won the people up here. I mean, Muskie, whenever he ran, it was a Republican city but he always carried Presque Isle because he was above politics. And people here, the old Republicans like Dr. Boone, he told me, he said, "I didn't vote for you but I voted for Ed Muskie." And people always say, you know, they voted for Ed Muskie instead of with the Republicans. So, I mean, he was a beloved person, for good reason, to the people of Presque Isle.

DN: There were several leading Republicans in Presque Isle who became open supporters, as I recall. I think of Harry Umphrey, Wendell Philips, Frank Hussey who of course became a Democrat, or I should say revealed his Democratic affiliation.

FH: Frank Hussey, God love him, he invited me over to this Republican group over there. And I enjoyed being with him and so on. Of course they gave me a hard time because I was the only Democrat that he invited that day. So he asked me to stay after everyone had left. He said, "There's something I want to show you." This was in the '50s and he was a Republican, one of the leading Republicans. So we went upstairs and he opened this closet door and on the inside of that closet door was a picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt. So I was kidding Frank about coming out of the closet, you know, so yeah.

DN: What was it that appealed to people like Harry Umphrey and Wendell Philips?

FH: Well, even though they liked to, they were capitalists. And Muskie, you know, doing what he did for that air base, I mean, that was for private enterprise. And people here, industries prospered by virtue of what he had done to establish that base for us. And so he was working for things which they could understand. And Muskie was never, you know, in his public life, he was never controversial. And so, I mean, he would say something and because he said it, it seemed so right and so true and so decent and so even-handed. I mean, he could read from the Sears Roebuck catalogue and he could make it sound profound. True. I mean, he was a gifted speaker and he could put things in a, no, he was beloved here in the community and he helped us so much he should have been. But lots of times you may do things that you deserve a lot for, but you still don't get the credit for it. But he did a lot for us, and he got the credit for it, and well deserved.

DN: A less happy enterprise was the sugar beet venture.

FH: Yes, yeah, that was, I mean, he did try that. We all tried, but it just was not to be. And the people that were trying to grow the sugar beets and being in charge, I mean, they didn't understand the industry. And, you know, they were learning it and they didn't understand about the weather up here and how you've got to grow the beets. And it just didn't click, that's all. And Fred Vahlsing was in charge of it, he was a brilliant man, but Fred Vahlsing had the ability to offend even those who were working with him. And so it, you know, it just was one of those things that, some things are just not to be. And the sugar beet industry, well, you know, was a failure here. And probably even the most geniously gifted person in the world could never make it come to pass because we had the weather problem, so many other problems.

DN: You've talked about the legislature and some of the people that you worked with, and you also have talked about the, getting in the votes from the valley in contrast to the Republican domination of central Aroostook. What kind of a relationship did you have over the years with the politicians from the valley; Elmer Violette, notably, and John Martin?

FH: Well, they were my friends. I mean, we worked together and we campaigned together. And Elmer, you know, we walked side by side through the valley campaigning. And I'll never forget --- we were campaigning up there for some election, forgive me, I don't remember which one it was. But the sisters came out and they said, "Oh, Elmer, we're so glad that you're running." And of course he introduced me to them, and they said, "Oh yes, we're glad you're running, too, Mr. Harding. But Elmer, we're so grateful," and they said, "we're all going to pray for you, Elmer." And Elmer said, "Thank you very much sisters but I do hope you'll remember

to vote for me also.” So we always campaigned in the valley. My wife was a very good campaigner, one of the best campaigners I’ve ever campaigned with.

And so, John Martin, you know, he was twenty-one when he was elected to the legislature, and that was when I was majority leader. At that time, it’s hard to believe, but John listened more than he talked. And he just seemed to be soaking up everything you said. Emilien Levesque was a majority leader in the Maine House and he roomed with John Martin. And of course Emilien was very helpful in Madawaska, you know, to get out the vote because he was the majority leader. And so we did, we worked very closely with the people in the valley because we owed our election of course to their votes. I mean, that, if it hadn’t been for them, we’d never have made it. And we were mindful of that.

And I’ll never forget, John used to ride back and forth sometimes with us. And my wife and I were down and John rode back with us, and we went into this restaurant. And, John always called my wife “Mum”. And so the waitress said to me, she said, “Is this your son?” I said, “Oh yes, of course he’s our son, absolutely.” She said, “Well it’s lucky for him, isn’t it, that he took his looks from his mother and not from his father.” So, but John was, I mean, he was a worker and so sincere and so idealistic. And, I mean, what a privilege it was to have somebody like that helping you in his bailiwick.

So we did very well in the elections where we ran as a, county wide, but then it got to be we got reapportioned and we had to run in districts. And so the time I got defeated I ran in the district of Fort Fairfield, Caribou and Presque Isle, which at that time would have been a Republican district. So I was defeated, but I didn’t want to retire defeated. And so we started a little registration program and I ran again. And I think I psyched my opponent out.

My opponent was George Barnes and he’d see me at the post office and he says, “How are you doing?” “Oh, George,” I says, “I can’t believe it, these people that want to be a Democrat.” I says, “Republicans re-enrolling and,” I says, “we just take in these re-enrollments every week,” and I said, “this is going to be good. I mean, you know, before, you Republicans outnumbered us but we’re doing very, very well, George. And you’re going to be so proud of how many Democrats will be turning out to vote.” And I would, every time I’d see him I’d tell him how well we were doing. And he went to his doctor, he was having problems. And his doctor told him that this stress is too much and you should withdraw. So George withdrew as a candidate opposing me. And Sam Albert of Caribou, was a good vote-getter too, he took George’s place. And this time I won. So I wanted to retire as a winner, not as a loser, and that I did.

DN: You retired as a winner and since then you’ve been an observer of politics in the county. How have politics changed since, let’s take two earlier dates, ‘54 and ‘64, and today?

FH: Well, when we ran in these, when I was running, I mean, this business about the attack ads and so on, I mean, that, we didn’t do that. I mean, we had our own program. And when I ran for reelection, I just told on TV ads what I’d done, things I’d worked on. And the Republicans always thought that that was, you know, I was claiming too much credit. But I didn’t claim credit. I said, ‘While I was in the legislature, these are some of the things that happened.’ And so they would attack me that I was taking too much credit. But that worked out good for me

because I got the double spin on it, you see, so, but we didn't do that. I mean, it wasn't the attack thing when I ran. It wasn't ever in my campaigns. But it got to be, after I got out of office.

I did some absentee ballots and they were fearful that I'd be running again for it. And so I was invited over to this Republican house, residence, to take an absentee ballot. So we always canvassed them, you know, before you go pick up a Republican vote or canvas it, see, "Well, is there some people there that are going to look kindly on some Democrats at least?" And this woman says, "Oh yes, we're going to vote straight Democratic ticket." "Oh good, I'll be over." So I went over and there were a lot of people there as observers. And I says, "Well, can we go in another room, you know, so you can vote in private?" And she said, "No, I want to vote here and I want you to tell me how to vote." So I picked up, I could sense a trap right there, so I picked up the ballot and I said, "I think you had better call the Republican committee to come here, to give help." She says, "Well, you have no right to leave," she says, "you came to take my ballot." I says, "Well, you have somebody else come, I choose not to take your ballot." See, this was a set-up. And I mean, they would have sworn out a complaint against me, that I had tried to influence her voting. You know, I could sense it. I mean, it was a poorly set trap. But that was the kind of thing that was strange, that, you know, we would oppose each other but we wouldn't try to put each other in jail.

But now, with the attack ads and so on, what they try to do is get your opponent in jail, which is, you know, it's just a horrendous change for the worst. Because, like I said about Germany, I mean, we want people to run for office, that's how we protect our freedoms. But now in public life you take such horrendous abuse that it's bound to be discouraging to decent people. You know, for their wives, their children and so on, to be subjected to what you're subjected to is just unmerciful.

DN: As you look back, Floyd, what strikes you as the major set of contributions Ed Muskie made to Maine?

FH: Well, one thing, he made it a two-party state and you can't argue with that. And because it's a two-party state, you've got the competition. That's what I always argue with people. I mean, you've got no competition for anything in the political world if they take it for granted, and they have never been able to take Maine for granted. And like, for example, they get Bath Iron Works, you know, to get the commitment to that, these government programs. And here in Presque Isle, I mean, we have the ACAP program which is a major source of income here for people and the good that it brings. So it's the competition between the parties has brought us benefits which we would never have had without it. Like Senator Snowe and Senator Collins are still interested in trying to get things for the area, which back when I first got in, the Republicans never tried to get anything to the area. You know, I mean, you just, they'd just say, "Well we tried but we couldn't do it," and that was all that was expected. But now people expect results and they expect, and of course Senator Muskie set the standard. I mean, he was able to produce.

And when George Mitchell was majority leader, they expected George Mitchell would be able to save the Loring Air Force Base because, in the tradition of Ed Muskie. And so they were

terribly let down that George wasn't able to preserve Loring Air Force Base. And they said, if Ed Muskie had been there we'd have kept Loring. Of course they forget that Carter kept it for another eight years for them when Ford was going to close it. But that's back then, not now. And, of course, Carter didn't get any credit for it. I mean, he lost Aroostook County in Maine even after he had, you know, had done that. So there wasn't much benefit, a lot of people thought, in the Democrats doing things for the county. But of course it was, and we were disappointed at that. But that has been, competition is good, and the political parties, it's one of . . . We preached at the time why we thought it was so important to have two parties, is because then you had standards and there was competition; what did they do and what did we do. And people could judge who had served them the best. And Senator Muskie was the person that was most responsible for that change.

DN: Very good. Thank you very much.

End of Interview

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