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Henderson, James S. "Jim" oral history interview

Nicholas Christie

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Interview with James S. “Jim” Henderson by Nicholas Christie

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Henderson, James S. “Jim”

Interviewer

Christie, Nicholas

Date

June 18, 2001

Place

Augusta, Maine

ID Number

MOH 284

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Biographical Note

Jim Henderson was born in St. Albans, New York in 1941. He moved to Anson, Maine when he was five. His father was appointed sheriff of Somerset County by Muskie. His mother, a big Muskie supporter, shared his Polish heritage. He attended Skowhegan schools and graduated in 1960. He began college studying physics at Carnegie Mellon University, then graduated from University of Maine with a degree in Political Science. He taught at the University of Maine and Texas University. He was elected to the Bangor city counsel, then the Maine State Legislature (D), where he was on the Judiciary Committee. He was Deputy Secretary of State after his term in the legislature ended. He then became the state archivist, a position he held at the time of this interview.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Conservation Corps; Somerset County history, particularly political atmosphere and law/judicial practices; State Archives; the Penobscot River Project; Governor Longley's budgetary actions; 1976 national convention; and Muskie stories.

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Transcript

Nick Christie: This is an interview with Jim Henderson on Monday, June 18th, 2001 at his office in Augusta, Maine. Nick Christie is interviewing for the Muskie Archives. Mr. Henderson, could you state and spell your name please?

Jim Henderson: James, S as in Sam, Henderson. J-A-M-E-S, S-period, H-E-N-D-E-R-S-O-N.

NC: And where and when were you born?

JH: St. Albans, New York, June 27th, 1941.

NC: How long did you stay in St. Albans?

JH: Actually probably months or less and, just a quick capsule, lived in Queens, New York

until I was five, and lived in Maine ever since.

NC: You moved directly to Somerset County?

JH: Yes, to Anson, Maine. That's where I went to elementary school.

NC: And high school?

JH: No, and then moved to Skowhegan in 1955 I believe, and attended junior high school and high school, graduated from high school in Skowhegan in '60.

NC: What was Somerset county like when you were growing up?

JH: Oh, there's a long story. Well, Anson is, was and still is a very small town, and it's divided into North Anson and the Anson Village where I lived, so that community had less than a thousand people in it I would say at the time. And I could walk to school which was just up the road from where I happened to live, so that was easy, and, in fact, virtually all of the kids in town walked to school except for those who were coming from some outlying towns. And so, you just tell me how much you want of this, but, so it was very, you know, I enjoyed school and enjoyed the kids and everything, it was a very pleasant experience. And one of the more famous elements of this for me and for a substantial number of folks I still know and my cousins was, there's a particular street called Church Street in Anson, which had the Nazarene Church on it, and it was just lined with kids of about the same age, and so that was sort of the gathering point for a lot of mischief and good times, so to speak. And so it's, often when I meet somebody or whatever, you know, we recall those days and that's a lot of fun.

So it was, the town was basically, most of its residents worked in the mill, in Madison across the river. So Madison was sort of like 'the big town', there wasn't much in Anson except a few little variety stores where you could get your ice cream and popsicles and things like that. And so walking across the bridge from Anson to Madison and going down that main street for real shopping was always a big deal. And going to the movies, the little theater, little theater where Saturday afternoons, they got packed with kids making a big commotion and watching the serial movies that came up as well as the wild westerns and so forth. So it was nice. Could go on forever, but that's probably a capsule.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit about your family, and their names?

JH: Yes, my mother's name is Helen Dane, D-A-N as in Nancy-E, but that name was once, and this is a big Muskie link for her, Polish, and it was a long kind of convoluted name that either at Ellis Island or shortly thereafter, her immigrant parents changed the name to make it easier. So she always had high regard for Muskie as holding the Polish heritage here in Maine. And she was born in New York City.

My father, Francis, C-I-S of course, B as in Brady, Henderson, was born in Milford, Massachusetts. And his family lived there for a while and after some tough economic times basically moved to Starks, Maine, which is adjacent to Anson, and worked a farm out there for

quite a few years. And my father eventually went into the Civilian Conservation Corps, was a member of that and was stationed in Alfred. And then he went to New York City to seek his fortune, so to speak, and to work on the docks down, in New York City, which generated many interesting stories. And the movie "On the Waterfront" seemed to confirm a lot of those stories. That's where he met my mother, and then I was born in New York City, in St. Albans, New York area, and then they moved back to Maine in '4-, well, I guess it should have been '46-ish, and lived in Anson since then.

When he, shortly after they got there, my father was asked by the sheriff to become a deputy sheriff, and so he was a deputy sheriff for a long time, and I'll tell you more about that in a minute. But his first entrance into politics was running for road commissioner, in a small town, where, in his first foray he lost by one vote, and my mother didn't vote. So a little lesson in democracy there. But the next year he did win and he was a road commissioner as well as eventually a deputy sheriff. So he had some skills on the political side here, so just fast forwarding in 1955, the incumbent sheriff died and my father happened to be the chief deputy at the time so the Governor Muskie appointed my father as acting sheriff, and then in 1956 he was elected as sheriff. And sheriffs were elected for two-year terms so he served for twenty-one years as the sheriff of Somerset County.

And that was interesting to me because among other things he had deputies in virtually every little town. And I used to accuse him of running a political machine to which he said, "No, these are just good people." And they were, and that's another aspect of kind of a cultural, historical aspect of Maine in the, even as late as the 1950s, was that in the rural communi-, probably every county other than maybe York and Cumberland at the time, and Androscoggin, sheriff's departments were the law enforcement in the small towns. And they were often respected community people, the deputies were, because the sheriffs needed to get elected and they needed to be effective. And they took a very, I know my father did in particular anyway, so I'll focus on that, very informal 'friends and neighbors' approach to solving problems. And I don't know how many times he had gone to a house where someone had barricaded them in the house, with a shotgun, threatening to blow himself away and anybody who comes near, and my father would say, "Hey Joe, come on," you know, "you don't really want to do this," you know, "let's sit down and talk about it," you know, that kind of an atmosphere where a lot of problems were solved.

The same thing with the overwhelming number of patrons to the jail. And by the way, we lived upstairs over the jail in Skowhegan, so, you know, we knew a lot about what was happening. Overwhelmingly, as now, they're young people, usually got into some kind of stupid mischief. In that case it was usually knocking over some small store for beer and cigarettes. I mean, it was just overwhelming, this kind of stuff. And often, given that kind of community connection they could find out who did it. Because you just go to the town, you say, hey, you know, Joe's store was, you know, busted into, what do you think, who do you think, who are the rowdies and so forth, and they usually knew who they were and they could just talk them into saying, yeah, you're right, we did it, you know. Quite a difference from the more formal police approach of modern times, shall we say.

And interestingly, though, but that's a radical flashback to what has been promoted as

community policing these days. That was the perfect model of community policing. A community who did understand what's going on, you know. Anyway so my father was sheriff for those twenty-one years and then retired and was with the Skowhegan police department, as a crossing guard and other, in serving of civil process for some time. But he died about a year ago.

NC: Going back, before your father lived in New York, you said he worked for the CCC, the Conservation Corps?

JH: Yes.

NC: Did he tell you much about how that experience went for him?

JH: Yeah, he did have a few stories there. As I said, they were in Alfred, and in fact I have some photographs of the camp that he was in. And it was, probably a typical experience that I've heard others relate, that they were in a pretty rude cabin-like situation. Kind of big log cabins with a lot of bunks, and good food, you know, that was the big thing, and they were just working their butts off every day logging, or building roads into the woods for both fire control and pest control. And, I'm trying to remember whether they were actually involved in any bridge building, but it was that very severe manual labor, mainly to keep these young guys off the street during the Depression. And one of the deals was that they had to send a certain amount of money back to their families. So they didn't have much cash, but they, you know, I think they, it was probably a good quasi-military experience for them.

NC: Was your family highly political in the family setting?

JH: No, I would say mostly my father was the highly political one, and I was, I have a sister as well, so there were four of us in the family. Victoria Henderson is my sister. And so it was mostly my father, and I became interested I think in politics because of that connection, too. And because every two years he ran for office and there'd be some sudden strategy sessions, or he would have people over. And because he was so well known in Somerset county and popular and had connections throughout the communities, when the candidates such as Muskie, or after him Curtis and others, or Muskie running for Senate or whatever, he would take them around, as other sheriffs would do in other counties and so forth. So they would go to the fairs, the little fairs, not only the county fair but also a lot of the little town fairs throughout the state. In Athens and North New Portland and Harmony and all these little places that would have this one day thing, and bring candidates in. So that, that, so he did a, his political activity was involved in that. And being probably a member of the State Democratic Committee from time to time, a member of the 500 Club, which is a contribution club to the state Democratic Party. If you, I think in those days it was maybe fifty dollars or something, supposedly five hundred people giving fifty dollars would come up with a certain amount of money. And he might even have been a member of the Muskie Club in later years, a little bit, I'm not sure. So he was always pretty much a supporter of the party and active in his own way.

NC: So prior to being appointed sheriff by Muskie, he had a connection with Muskie in some sense?

JH: No, not at all, not that I know of anyway. I mean, it's possible but I doubt it.

NC: Somerset County, politically how did it break down?

JH: It was a fairly Republican county, and, though the previous sheriff happened to have been a Democrat. So for a lot of the legislative and statewide votes, it would go Republican pretty much. The county commissioners, of which there are three, are all, were all Republicans at the time, as were I think maybe even the treasurer and other county officers. So with this Democratic sheriff there was a lot of conflict because he wanted to do things, and they didn't want him to do things partly, in his interpretation, because of political reasons they hoped he wouldn't do well. And he had a fairly strong test in his first election with a very popular local police chief in Skowhegan, who was a Republican. But once he got over that hurdle and essentially institutionalized himself as the sheriff, he was very supportive of other candidates, and Somerset, of Democratic candidates. And Somerset county is a relatively poor county, along with Washington county and maybe Piscataquis as relatively unprosperous. So over the years, although this has happened all across the state so I wouldn't credit him particularly, you know, it has changed to be more of a Democratic and/or competitive kind of event than it was then.

One of the little typical conflicts with the county commissioners was that he wanted to get two-way radios in the cars, which they didn't have at the time. And so he had a long battle with them and he finally kind of went out and got them anyway and sort of stuffed it in their face and said, "Well I've got these, what are you going to do?" and they finally supported it. So some of that was, oh, another, I guess, part of his character that relates to this a little bit is, he was also an amateur boxer, as were two of his brothers, farm boys, and he was the welter weight champion of the state as an amateur boxer in 1937, or thereabouts. But anyway, that and his experience on the docks in New York, and the farm, you know, he was kind of a tough guy. A soft spoken person, but he wasn't afraid to get into the battle if he needed to. So I think that kind of spilled over a little bit into this Republican commissioners - Democratic sheriff business.

NC: Now when did you begin developing your political -?

JH: Consciousness.

NC: Consciousness, good word.

JH: I was probably, well interestingly, I was sort of fascinated by the process probably later in high school and maybe a bit in college. But interestingly when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do in college, and this was 1960, so this was a few years after Sputnik and during the great race to the moon, the race for space and all this jazz, and there was a lot of focus on science. Which I was somewhat interested in but, you know, one time I said to him, "I think I might like to major in history or something like that." "Why are you going to major in history, there's nothing you can do with that," you know, sort of somewhat political oriented. And that was enough for me just at the time to say, "Okay, you're right."

So I attempted to major in physics at what's now Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Didn't do that well, but I actually turned out, I was reading more history and other things on the

side and so partly I wasn't prepared for it, partly I really didn't have the interest. And then as the, kind of the Kennedy glow was afoot at that point, I kind of decided that getting involved in politics would be interesting, so I transferred back to the University of Maine, majored in political science and doubled my grade point average. But also decided that's what I wanted to do, so after graduate school, and teaching a year outside the state I made it a point to move back to Maine and got a job at the University of Maine teaching.

But my objective was to run for some political office at that point. Which I ran for the city council in Bangor, really too soon and just barely lost, and then ran again and won so I was on the city council for six years. And in the last two years of that, last year of that six years I was elected to the state legislature where I served for four years. So anyway, that was kind of, but that was a way of getting into it I guess was probably having some background on the techniques that he had used and kind of the approach that he used to people and, my father, and so forth, and so that gave me some notion about how it could be done anyway.

NC: From a young age you were decidedly leaning towards the Democratic Party.

JH: Oh yes, the Democratic Party was the good guys, and the other guys were the bad guys. And my mother, now, see, we haven't talked much about her. But her role, she came from a community of all those immigrants who ended up in New York City who were Franklin Delano Roosevelt worshipers at the time. So she was always very partisan in her discussions, you know, about Hoover caused the Depression and Roosevelt solved the Depression, and you know, and the whole big business versus ordinary people thing. She was very, very much sold on that particular interpretation. So, that certainly had a lot of influence, I'm sure, as, you know, even though it wasn't an active political role that she ever had.

Yeah, I think, and of course later on you learn in political science that the way people have acquired their party identification and stuff are usually from their families overwhelmingly, that's an inherited trait practically, or had been maybe until recently. So that was just part of that process.

NC: So you were living in Maine as the Democratic Party state wide began to really organize itself.

JH: Yes, although I would say in the, you know, with Muskie's win as governor I probably didn't even notice it, you know, I was probably in junior high school or something and, other than that my parents were probably thrilled. And I would say I didn't really catch the drift of this change personally in the fifties. Probably, I went to a, the first state convention I went to was probably in 1964. So that was probably the first time I really started getting, becoming aware of the process. So, but I wasn't really conscious of the political change at the time, I would say.

NC: So your earliest mature view of Muskie was as a national senator.

JH: Yeah, I would say so, that's right. And, to give a connection there is when I was a student at the University of Maine, having come back from Pittsburgh to the University of Maine, and

doing all this history and political science and thinking I knew a thing or two, I wrote a letter to Senator Muskie, well, he must know, about subsidizes for agriculture and what a lousy idea that was. And that, you know, I gave all kinds of reasons about not being competitive and whatever. Anyway, he wrote a letter back, and I think in those days he must have had a lot more involvement in these letters maybe because it appeared to me that either he or, you know, maybe Don Nicolls [*sic* Nicoll] were. But it was, you know, a pretty strong, which is, of course, a Muskie personality type, as well as well-argued reason why I was wrong about all this, you know. I'd written this long letter, and I got back a long letter. So that's kind of, it was nice to get that connection to him. But that was basically it as far as my vision of Muskie, because then I was out of state at graduate school and so forth, and teaching at Texas Tech University for the first, in 1968 and '9, and then came back to Maine the next year.

But then the following connection with Muskie was that when I was back at the University of Maine teaching now in 1970, fall of 1970, fall of 1969 I guess it was, whatever, I soon got involved with some research projects which, with the environmental study center at University of Maine, and they were doing a major, well what they called the Penobscot River Project. And what they, we, were all doing was trying to get a full kind of social, as well as scientific view of the Penobscot River from Bangor to Penobscot Bay, down the estuary. And in terms of water quality and environmental impact and public opinion, which is where I came in, designed a survey to assess public opinion of residents in the communities along the river, as to what they felt was the quality in the river and what they would like to have as a water quality, and what they'd be willing to pay, and whether they'd be willing to pay more taxes, and so forth and so on.

So anyway, so this study ambled along and one of the next options for treatment of the water in the river was tertiary treatment, they already had secondary treatment. And Muskie was involved with that committee in the U.S. Senate. And it was our collective opinion that the amount of money you'd spend on tertiary treatment would, already pollutants had been reduced by something like ninety-eight percent, or some huge percentage, and that the next step would only take another very small percentage out at a huge cost. So, I was convinced that that was not a good idea. Well, Muskie did not like that at all because his thing was cleaning up the water, and all these people who don't think they should go the next step, you know, were wrong because that was him. I think we even had a meeting with him at one point in Maine. I can't quite remember now the context, but he was adamant that he was going to pursue, you know, the best feasible treatment of the water in the rivers anywhere, including here.

So, I mean that was yet another view of his being strong willed, and maybe not even, my interpretation, listening to some kind of a scientific and objective information that interfered with what he'd been doing for a long time, and had his mind set on and, you know, maybe he was right but at least we didn't think so.

NC: The cleaning up of the rivers was an issue with how they classify on some sort of scale each specific section of rivers. Do you know anything about that?

JH: Vaguely, that they were letter classifications: A, B, and C. And I think they were all the way from, I think the highest quality was sort of a drinkable quality which was probably A, and

then the other one was sort of fishable, and then another one was swimmable, I think they had these kind of analogues for what the quality of the river was.

One of the things about the river was that there was a lot of sawdust, as there is probably in a lot of other rivers in Maine, because of all the sawmills that had been there for a hundred years. And disturbances of that bottom, river bottom, what happened was it sucked the oxygen out of the river from time to time, because as you took sawdust off the floor, it started to mix with the water and started to decay and all of a sudden, bang, no oxygen and fish killed, bang. So there was, recently there's been an issue about dredging, also dredging I think in the Penobscot, for mercury contamination because of a facility that has since gone out of business. And they're trying to weigh whether dredging makes sense or whether it will cause more problems or not. Anyway, that was just a side issue about the quality there.

NC: Did Freddy Vahlsing up in Aroostook County, did that issue come up while you were -?

JH: Yeah, that one lasted quite, that reverberated for quite a long time so, yeah, that was interesting because I did hear quite a bit about that. And in '74, I was elected to the state legislature in '74 (*unintelligible word*), and even then that issue was bubbling around about. You know, Democrats bailing out this guy up in Aroostook and was this a good idea or not. Although at that time I think Ken Curtis was getting most of the heat for that rather than Muskie, having been a little bit out of the picture. So, I don't remember that tagging Muskie particularly. I think Muskie had the generalized reputation that was, could handle that kind of a stress I would say. So that wasn't a big black eye from my point of view on him anyway. But, I mean, I don't think others thought that was the case.

NC: When you had the opportunities to speak personally with Senator Muskie, what sort of speaker on a personal level would you take him to be, how did he react?

JH: Well, I probably had two occasions when I really had a chance to talk with him. One was, I think it was shortly after I'd come back to Maine and was at the University of Maine.

(Pause in taping.)

JH: So, on two occasions I had a chance to speak with him a little bit more than otherwise. And one of which was after I'd come to Maine I was looking for some sort of political job, and while I was at the University of Maine at the time, he was looking for a field director or some person to work in his office. And so I went, I think I either got my father to ask him to talk to me or whatever it was, but anyway, so I went to his office in Waterville. And so he, I mean he was a pretty imposing character, so, and intimidating I would say, to me, and so he, asked a few questions and asked me if I had any interests politically myself and I said, yeah, some day, you know, I would like to run for something. So, now I don't know what he was looking for, or whether they had another candidate or not, but nevertheless he was, shortly thereafter it was pretty obvious that he wasn't interested in me for this particular position, you know. And I will never forget, I'm standing up and he was shaking my hand and he, so he shook my hand and also pushed it toward the door at the same time in a very firm way like, yup, we'll see you later, you know. Not impolite, but certainly like this is over with, you know. So that stuck in my mind

pretty carefully.

And the other time it was once down at his house there was a various, there was a small group of, maybe it was a state committee or something down at Kennebunkport or Kennebunk, I forget, whatever, and so there was just an informal gathering around his, in his living room and it was just nice to talk to him. At that time, I don't know if he was still in the Senate or not. I mean, he always comes across as very knowledgeable and very firm in his convictions. That's my recollection of him.

NC: So you served in the state legislature from '74 until '78?

JH: Right, yes.

NC: How did your decision to run, in '74, how did that come about?

JH: Well actually, having been on the city council I had a degree of name recognition and notoriety in Bangor, and in Bangor the city council is elected at large, the top three vote getters in each of three years would get elected. And at the time the state legislature, the legislative seats in Bangor, there were five, and it was the same system, the top five would win, they were not single member districts at the time. So I figured I had a pretty good chance for one thing, and that's what I wanted to do. And so it was like the next logical step, so I just went ahead and did it. And I was the top vote getter, as a matter of fact, even beating out Jack McKernan who later became governor even though that, in quotation marks, "evil," *Bangor Daily News* listed him as the top vote getter. I'm sure they thought it was true because they expected it, and but actually it turned out not to be the case.

Nevertheless, so that was, the timing was as soon as possible, I was, you know, going to become president in a few years so I might as well get started. But anyway, so I served for two terms, during a time when Governor Longley, of whose papers the archives has, was governor so that was a very interesting time when the, it was a Democratic house and a Republican senate, independent governor, a lot of wheeling and dealing and interesting stuff. I was on the judiciary committee wherein, at the time we were redrafting the Maine Criminal Code so that was fascinating to me, although I'm not an attorney, but it was very interesting.

The next election cycle, single member districts were introduced into all the cities in Maine, including Bangor, and I was, my district was sort of gerrymandered in a very interesting way that put me with a popular Republican legislator. And it's funny because the line went right down a particular street, jogged around a particular house and then continued, and that house was where this fellow lived. And yet his potential opponent was on the other side of the line, so they basically made a deal in redoing the districts. Anyway, that was going to be a tough slog for me because that district was pretty Republican, he was a pretty popular young man with all the young folks out there bumper-stickering for him, so that was going to be tough. And at the same time a fellow who was running, going to run for congress was the current secretary of state, Mark Gartley, who was perceived as a fairly conservative Democrat. He was a former P.O.W., so therefore well known.

So I decided if I'm going to go out, I'll go out in a big flame so I ran for congress in the primary as a clearly more liberal progressive candidate. And I got whipped pretty badly because, I mean, for one name recognition was an issue, for another I did very well in the Bangor area and Hancock County where I was, but Lewiston-Auburn just totally went like seven to one for Mark Gartley. And that's a big Democratic stronghold and it, and in those days I think part of the political culture was there was an awful lot of ability for the community to get the word, somewhat informally, of who the candidate should be. And in a sense, this person was a P.O.W., secretary of state, you know, of course he would be the natural candidate, and who's this other guy, you never heard of him, he's at the other end of the state in Bangor.

NC: So it was more name recognition than the fact that he was more conservative, a conservative Democrat.

JH: I tend to think so just because Democrats in primaries are usually fairly progressive. And I, you know, I wasn't able, I didn't have the resources to communicate as well as I would like, and maybe it wouldn't have made any difference anyway, but I mean, so I don't think the message was particularly it. Also I just had just as a side thing is I had a couple of commercials in the can so to speak, one of which worked real fine, and then the second one was going to show me in the legislative halls and all kinds of important stuff, and somehow it got screwed up. The guy who produced it couldn't make it work on television, for some reason it wouldn't happen. So I had to run the same old ad which would drive people crazy after a while so, the first one that I had. But that didn't contribute to it, I'm sure I probably would have lost almost no matter what. Then he, Mark Gartley, proceeded to lose to Olympia Snowe, that was the Republican candidate, and that launched her.

So, you know, for whatever this is worth, so after my humiliating defeat, you know, I was really looking for work and didn't know what the heck what I was going to do. And Bill Hathaway was also running for reelection for the senate, so I did get a job on his campaign for that duration, which he lost of course to Bill Cohen of Bangor. And I'd served with Cohen on the city council in Bangor previously and knew him quite well as a matter of fact.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit about him?

JH: He was, in Bangor, a nominally and maybe to some degree truly a moderate Republican. He's a Republican of course. And he was on the city council, and he was a local lawyer and he had formerly been, I think, an assistant district attorney. And he was also a member of the Unitarian church where I was as well, so I got to know him and his family. We'd go over once in a while, our family would go have lunch with them or brunch with them or whatever. And, so, the thing that frustrated me mostly, but I guess that's why he become U.S. Senator and I didn't, or whatever, was that he would not follow through on things that we both would have talked about as being the right thing to do. But he always seemed to me to want to not rock the boat of the then conservative business, kind of downtown establishment for, as far as the city council was concerned. And overwhelmingly, when there were options of doing something progressive, as far as housing or something, in the city context, he would always, and I noticed this in his whole career as a senator, a congressman and a senator, he would always agree in principle but this is not the time, this is not the bill, this is not the particular one. But I

absolutely agree with you, on whatever it was, which is a perfect political position to take. And he had, had and has still a very good personality and so forth so then people like him a lot, so I think that was part of his success.

But that was just part of my own personal frustration with, not really, you know, either not following through on what you believed, or maybe he didn't really believe it that much, or maybe he decided that's the way you've got to do to get some marginal advantages anyway. You know, you've got to not overdo it. Anyway, so I mean that's sort of an experience with him.

Although when he first was running for congress, and while we were both on the city council, I remember in one meeting that we had of the council he discovered, even though it wasn't a secret, that I was working for his opponent and doing some research, you know, he's says, he was really, it was surprising to me, really upset, you haven't got anything on me on, I think it was housing or whatever, you know. Now relax, this is politics, you know, you're going to find out what you find out. But he was very uptight about that as a personal thing I guess. It's just another thing that I recall.

NC: When you were on the state legislature, you mentioned before, what was the name of the committee that you spent a lot of time on?

JH: The judiciary committee.

NC: Was that where you spent the primary amount of your time working?

JH: Yeah, although I also happened to be, I was also chair of the, what was called the committee on local and county government, but that was not as hefty a committee. But those are the two that split the time. But the most important work was being done in the judiciary committee I would say.

NC: About the local and state committee, was that dealing with district lines and?

JH: No, no, local and county government committee, and that mostly dealt with county government issues primarily; county budget passing and not too exciting stuff, and any bills that might affect local government per se, their reorganization, would go to that committee.

NC: What other issues did you deal with on the judiciary committee?

JH: Well, let's see, one, we had the, we have the perennial death penalty question, which we have no death penalty and there were a couple interesting characters that would come and advocate for us instituting it. But that committee happened to have one or two older members who were the senate and house chair, but a lot of younger members in their twenties and thirties, like people in law school or in graduate school or recently graduated lawyers. And so there's like this young, progressive outfit that were on this committee, so that made it a lot of fun just from a colleague point of view.

This was also a time when, as part of this revision, the idea of parole was eliminated so that

people were given a fixed amount of time, a predictable amount of time in prison and then they're out. Whereas previously there was oftentimes a sliding scale of time that you might be in prison depending on good behavior, and then you'd get out and then you'd be under parole supervision for x number of years. But at the time, people felt that that wasn't being administered properly because there was not enough resources, so just the way probation and parole issues are now, you've got a huge client list and very few people doing anything. So they thought it was both humiliating to the person getting out, not being very productive, and it wasted money. So that was one of the issues that we dealt with and that was enacted.

I can remember, because I wasn't an attorney at the time I could ask more questions that a trained lawyer might have already dismissed. But one of those was an issue of personal responsibility, if someone is near death, and whether one ought to be able to do something about it, and if you could do something about it, such as someone falls over into the water, you could easily pull them out but you don't. And the strict legal interpretation was you have no liability there because, hey, you didn't do anything and if they drown they drown, it's too bad, you know. And so I thought that wasn't right, so to speak, but it didn't get passed. But it seems like more recently I recall some other legislation, well then I think shortly thereafter or maybe at the same time the so-called Good Samaritan laws were passed which basically exempted people from some liability if they did attempt to -

NC: Not in Maine, though.

JH: I thought there was, but maybe not. Maybe not. I thought there had been. Then even more recently I thought there was something even more sweeping which really said if you had the ability to save a life in a situation and just didn't do it, you were somehow liable, which was quite a change over that period of time. Anyway, I don't know if that was true, but that was one of those.

And another issue that we dealt with somewhat was the jury system, and some of the attorneys and others were really more in favor of restricting the role of the juries because they couldn't handle them and they weren't doing the right thing and whatever, whatever. And again kind of the outsider, non-lawyer was saying, among others, that, well then, fix it, you know, educate the juries, get them to understand better, present the information better. But for some reason I felt, you know, it was important to keep the jury participation at the forefront, which it ultimately was, because most members of the legislature aren't lawyers, and they thought it was a reasonably good choice.

NC: I'm going to flip this tape over.

End of Side A
Side B

NC: We're going to resume the interview now on side B, tape one. Now, I have a note here, it simply says 'national committeeman Mo Udall, '78'. I was wondering what you could tell me -?

JH: Actually I was a delegate to the national convention in, well it wouldn't have been '78

would it because that's not a national convention year; must have been 1976. And so during that particular period, Mo Udall, being the most, you know, a progressive candidate, was where I was headed so that was, and I think that was in, that was a New York City convention, I can't remember. I've been to two national conventions, one in New York City and one in San Francisco, which might have been '80 or '84, I can't remember now. Anyway, and in one of those, and it might have been the Mo Udall case, I can't remember, I was the absolute beneficiary of what I think is a totally outdated party rule, of the equal number by sex of delegates to the national convention. There was an affirmative action like decision made somewhat earlier in which, you know, there had to be a balance of males and females and so forth. Well, you know, the problem was the females had already captured what they needed and there were relatively few places left for this Udall slot. And I was also reasonably well-known, having just been involved, I think that might have been after I was, had run for congress. I can't remember, but nevertheless, I got to go as a delegate and I have ever since then, to my woman friends who are active in the party, I say you're shooting yourself in the foot. Might have been good a while ago, but now get rid of it, it's only limiting the ceiling. Well, hey that's the way it goes.

So anyway, that was fun. I think, you know, Mo Udall of course lasted for a certain amount of time and then whoever the final nominee was I certainly moved toward and I quite frankly, it was back in '7-, it wasn't Jimmy Carter's year was it?

NC: Seventy-eight, was it?

JH: Well, '76 would have been a presidential election year. So, how quickly we forget. I think that's right, that might have been Jimmy Carter then, yeah, so that, and if Udall was at that time (*unintelligible phrase*) Carter. I happened to have gone to graduate school in Atlanta, and so I knew of Jimmy Carter when he had, I think he had just been governor at the time that I came to Atlanta. So I'd heard of him and, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*).

NC: So did you have more contact with Muskie when you were in the legislature, or was he, was his presence not really felt?

JH: No, not really felt, no, he was off doing his thing and Maine was doing its thing, so, I mean. I think he might have addressed the legislature a couple of times but that's about it.

NC: So, since you were, mid and late seventies were on the state legislature, how have you seen since that time the Democratic Party in Maine develop? It's a broad question.

JH: Yeah, well, it's kind of tricky for me because, to finish a little thread that we discussed earlier about having run for congress, working for Hathaway, Hathaway losing the election in '78, when there I was looking for a job. And my former seatmate in the legislature, Rodney Quinn became secretary of state. And he needed, among other things a deputy secretary of state, which then, went into the bureaucracy, basically in 1979, as the deputy secretary of state for elections and corporations and stayed there for about ten years, and then I became state archivist. But the thing is, during that period, I'm looking at the party as a bureaucrat rather than as an active political person. So that, so whether it's that change or not I'm not sure. But I, from time

to time, am not sure about whether the party is as, well I don't know, maybe that's too far from it, kind of as still in touch with kind of popular ideals that they might have been earlier. And a lot of money is passing through, especially with the 'soft money' so to speak coming to the state parties to run call centers and get out the votes and so forth. So I often wonder when I'm asked to give money whether it's really worth anything, you know, I mean it's a small drop in a big bucket.

But I must admit I certainly, the leadership of the legislature is reasonably progressive and certainly is in the right place. And they've managed to maintain a good hold on the state legislature for so long that it's been, there's gotta be a lot of good things going there. And so, I don't know, I guess maybe I haven't been close enough to the party. It probably hasn't changed all that much. The more I think about it the more I think that probably internally the people who are active in any party, but in ours it's always the most active progressive people who are often involved with the state committee I'd say, but the donors are more conservative, larger gift givers and so they moderate the whole process to some degree.

One thing that has probably weakened both parties recently has been term limits and therefore the lack of an even moderate term leadership in the legislature on either side. So you don't get people you can love to hate or love to love as John Martin or Joe (*name*) who was the Republican president of the senate when I was there and kind of an icon, people you could identify with who had leadership qualities. Now it's, probably the governor is the highest profile person, maybe an attorney general. After that it sort of is not clear in the public eye who's in charge, and that may, I think tends to weaken the party structures themselves.

I guess I don't really have a good, clear view of how the party has changed, and maybe I'm thinking it hasn't changed all that much.

NC: How did you first get involved with the state archives, in the state archives?

JH: Another interesting political story. When I was deputy secretary of state, which included elections, two of the people who were in big time power in those days was John Martin and Charlie Pray, who was the president of the senate during that period. But at the time those two were kind of, they owned the leadership of the Democratic Party and, I mean of the legislature, well, as people get. So I was in charge of among other things scheduling recounts of elections and making sure things worked out. So there was a substantial number of recounts, probably in the election of, what, probably '86 I would guess. And John Martin once called me up and he said, you know, he wanted me to schedule some Republican primary recount I guess, or whatever it was, a recount the Republicans were interested in in some other town, whatever it was. And I just told him he doesn't schedule the recounts, I schedule the recounts. Well, he thought he scheduled the recounts, because after all, you know, after all, what did I put you over there for anyway. I don't know, too bad.

So I obviously wasn't a team player on that one. And shortly thereafter, you know, there are other stories around this but nevertheless, shortly thereafter a bill appeared in the legislature to abolish the position of deputy secretary of state, totally abolish it. That was pretty, well, I didn't know I was that important. And it's co-sponsored by Martin and Pray, president of the senate,

speaker of the house, oh, that's pretty good. So, the secretary of state was caught between a rock and a hard place. He's elected by the legislature, the secretary of state, as all Constitutional offices are. And so he tried to, you know, talk them out of it, whatever. And at first they were pretty strong, so I said, well, you tell those guys, just a little bit of a bluff but not completely, you know, that I could really embarrass the hell out of them if they want to go down fighting, we'll go down fighting and it probably isn't going to be too smart.

So, so the deal was I'd be exiled to the archives, sort of (*unintelligible phrase*). I thought, hmm, for what?

But actually it was a great, great decision for me and probably for the whole deal because that was my training after all, political science, archives, history, that kind of stuff. And I'd had this experience at the local government level, at the professional level of research and so forth at the university, at the county both in my father's background and that committee, and in the state bureaucracy, and in the secretary of state's office, you know, where all kinds of records are all across the state system. So actually that was probably one of the better qualifications you could ever have for this particular job, which does involve, just parenthetically, the control of all records in the state system; that is for how long they live and where they live. So many years in an agency, so many years in a record center maybe, and then either destroyed or they come to the archives. So there's a lot of decision-making about which things are more important, and what are the implications of the Searsport hearing records, let's say, versus something else. So that helped, I think that really did help me understand how to make this particular side of the process work well.

So in 1987 is when I first came over here, and during that process, shockingly enough, there was a political battle about the state archivist. Now remember they never heard of a state archivist before, ever, or again probably. But there was a question about whether this political hack, Henderson, should be imposed on the state archives when they really needed professional help and so forth and so on. Well, and so it became a partisan issue. And the previous state archivist, was from a very well known Republican family, the Silsbys, Sam Silsby was his name. But his training as an archivist was nought, that is, he was a lawyer by training. And so it was hard to argue, although people did, that they needed a professional archivist. But interestingly in the 1980s there were virtually no graduate schools or other programs that were turning out professional archivists. And probably not something you'd want anyway, as head of an agency you'd want them in your system (*unintelligible word*). And so the nomination process is, as with several others, you vote for a hearing, have a committee, party line vote for me versus against. Even people I knew in the legislature a few years before, you know, they voted against me, well they had to do it, well okay. And then the same thing in the senate, which is where you're confirmed, where they didn't overturn the recommendation of the committee. So that was interesting, there was a lot of press about it, you know, I mean comparatively, not a huge amounts but enough that people really understood what was going on. But it actually, raised the visibility of the archives and turned out that we didn't burn all the records after all and things are still pretty safe.

NC: Would you say the responsibilities the job entails have remained pretty steady and constant throughout your career at the archives?

JH: Pretty much. I think what has changed primarily is the introduction of computer records, which were zilch at the time and now they... Not to mention there was one cranky old computer in the archives and so when, since I was also, harkening way back to my scientific interests, had been interested in techie things and so forth as well. So one of my goals was to, you know, get these systems up and running here. But of course people were doing that throughout the bureaucracy at the same time. But our problem is in preserving records created on computers. 'Cause we have three hundred and sixty year old pieces of paper that are perfectly readable and you don't need any technology to read them, and we've got, you know, ten year old stuff that you can't read because it was in some obscure word processing system on some obscure size disk and (*unintelligible phrase*).

So that's been a real challenge, so that's been a major interest of mine and we, among other things, applied for and got a grant to do a digital records preservation plan. Yes, and we know, sort of what we ought to be doing, but year after year the legislature has not appropriated any money to do anything because it's always next year, it's not that important, they don't understand it and clearly haven't communicated enough. And that's another problem of the way the system works to some degree. That is, the archives is part of the secretary of state's office, so first they communicate with the secretary of state's office, they put us in the budget. But they have a lot of things going so they don't want to upset the appropriations committee and press too hard for any particular thing. So that has muted this argument on, my interpretation, (*unintelligible phrase*).

NC: It's hard for you to bring the archive to a priority level.

JH: Yeah, and say I'd like to speak out personally on this one issue and really get, oh yes, but what about these other things, you know, and maybe if they focus too much on it. I mean, it's a perfect budgetary game I'd, in a way I'd like to maybe get back into this political side again before too long. But if you have a low enough profile and a non-controversial budget, you'll get through with a modest amount and you're okay. If you make waves, you might, you know, sort of, it's a risk kind of thing, you either make it big or you get; well what are you really doing, let's look at this. And then something can happen.

So, I guess the things that have changed since I've been here would be the focus on electronic records and trying to raise people's consciousness and trying to know what to do about it. And also, we've gotten this huge amount of grant money for the state from a commission associated with the National Archives called the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. But that commission is sort of like the NEH, which give humanities grants, so all these guys are giving grants for historical records preservation. And so we've been able to provide a lot of grants to the little towns and the Historical Society as well as some, I don't think, yeah, Bates, I guess not. Bowdoin College got a major grant and Maine Historical Society and several others in the tens of thousands of dollars that we have promoted through the system.

So anyway, so that, those grants and the computer records focus are probably two of the major differences from the usual here in the old, good old days.

NC: I want to go way back to, you mentioned Ken Curtis earlier in the discussion we were talking about Freddie Vahlsing and how he was taking the heat. Separate from that issue, what can, what do you remember of Ken Curtis as a political leader?

JH: Well, I remember him promoting and sticking up for the Maine income tax. The kind of thing that other people would never have done, but he really did it and he did it just as a regular guy. I mean, he comes across as a regular guy, and that was a very significant thing to do. I think he wasn't, it was kind of in a time when it wasn't obvious where his political career would go particularly. And, but yet he pushed that and Democrats supported the push and it got through. So I remember that part of him, that aspect because he, you know, he certainly didn't seem to be that taken with himself as a variety of other people are. I mean he just seemed to be very approachable. And his family, of course, was a very picturesque family at the Blaine House; had a couple of little kids and then one had, Susan Curtis had the, I don't know what the disease was but there's a Camp Susan Curtis now that relates to her disability. So there was a lot of sympathy as well as admiration I think for them. And they were kind of Kennedy-likes in a way.

But I just happened, Saturday, to be at Castine where he was once also actually the president of the Maine Maritime Academy down there and, in which they have some, a hall named after him and so forth. But interestingly, after getting out of the governor's chair and I think doing some other pretty high powered legal work in Portland, was willing to go to Castine, Maine, across the Penobscot bay, and work with that Maritime Academy. I think he had graduated from there now that I think about it. But, you know, he's put a fair amount of energy into an institution, away from the busy Portland upscale scene, and yet it was something that he was personally committed to and wanted to improve it. So, that's the kind of, you know, it seems like whenever he had something that he really felt needed to be done, he would do it.

Of course one of the down sides was he did appoint James Longley to be head of the cost management survey review. Which I think in a sense was a very good idea, to assess how efficient state government was. What happened was unfortunately it got out of hand, a lot of people think, and that it really didn't provide meaningful evaluation. It's so hard to do that of any bureaucracy, and it's been attempted again in the last several years at the state level. But I think, you know, I don't know how people can do it otherwise, but because people don't get to the level of some bureaucrat like me to really get involved and say, "We don't need to do this stuff, wasting money on paper clips," or something, you know. It's more these global, we'll just cut X percent out and so forth.

So that, that's a diversion, but, and that's where Longley was coming from. I think he had a, I think indepen-, just to generalize this a little bit, I think he and King both have a very naive view of how government works. They don't understand it, they've not been in politics, they've not really lived it. And so they come from the outside thinking they can get things done because it's the right things in their judgment business wise and so forth, and they often fell flat and just cost the state an awful lot of money. There's my Longley divergence, I guess.

NC: Now, from the time, is it '87 that you came to the archives?

JH: Yeah.

NC: It's been right here next to the capitol?

JH: Right, yes. We now have, that building is about thirty years old and the facility is degrading in various ways because it is that old. It's very hard to get computer, the conduits big enough to get the computer cables in to really rewire the place, and it had a lot of water and other facility problems. So several years ago the three tenants of that building, which is the archives, the museum and the library directors, started plugging for a total renovation and maybe expansion of this building because of the problems that we'd been having. And we're now in the process of having plans drafted, somewhere around here, and generalized plans for expansion of that building that might double its size. And if, depending on the economy and the winds of whoever, maybe in three or four years we'll have this major expansion and renovation of the building.

But, one of the aspects in the archives in particular, we were frequently having water damage because of either the roof leaks or the pipes leak and da-da-da-da. Now the reason we're here is for that same reason, right in the midst of this planning process which in one sense is fortuitous by saying, see, we told you so. But some plumbing broke, flooded the place, all of our office level was really flooded and there was asbestos in the tiles, one of these asbestos problems, asbestos in the floor tiles, and above the hung ceilings where the air was blowing over and asbestos was attached above that as a flame retardant, it had been degrading, too. So they said "Okay we're going to take the ceilings out, the floors out, the whole routine," and so we've been over here for, what, three months so far and it'll probably be another -

NC: That was a little bit of a disaster.

JH: A little bit of a disaster, yeah, so -

NC: Especially for an archive archivist.

JH: Yeah, so luckily the materials themselves were not that badly damaged, and most of them just got wet and had to be reboxed or dried out and put back in again and so forth. So, but we haven't been able to serve our customer base, because we usually get a lot of individual researchers coming in. We've duplicated our, we put our microfilm in the library and so the people can access the microfilm which is what a lot of them do anyway. But hopefully within a month or so we'll be back and rolling again.

NC: Those individual researchers you just mentioned, are they more from the education side, or -?

JH: No, well the largest portion of them are either genealogists or, professionally researching other people's family histories, or individuals who are researching their own families, so that's a big chunk. Another chunk, though, is the legislative staff getting access to previous bills and programs and policies and so forth. Attorneys sometimes and surveyors researching land titles because we happen to have things beyond what's in the registry of deeds - town boundaries, old

court records and so forth. Some, a fair amount of academics who are writing the five hundredth book on the Civil War, you know, or are researching, you know, the film 'Gettysburg' and some of the A&E type videos on the Civil War have drawn a lot on what we have because we happen to have a very good record from our adjutant general's office, which was the bureaucracy running the Civil War people, had good records, they had good letter writing back and forth, photographs of all the officers and details of where everybody went and what they were carrying for musket balls and so if you want to reenact or something, you know where to go. So there's a lot of that stuff. There are even a few business people; one fellow was researching plane crashes in Maine so could cannibalize the material and sell them or whatever, and he came here to look at the records, the civil aviation records, to find out where these crashes were.

But, it's hard to say, there could be a variety of things that people use those records for.

NC: Anyone doing a biography of Muskie we should know about?

JH: Hah, well, if they were I couldn't tell you. But I could let them know that somebody was interested in talking about it. This may not be the best, well, I suppose there's some degree of, you know, certainly a lot of the legislative records which (*unintelligible word*) have copies of, but all the legislation and all the copies of governors' inaugurations and so forth.

We have also, just by the way, some film, I've mentioned this to Chris Beam a few times, where Muskie appears in some of the official footage that was taken by some of the promotional people here. Including Jane Muskie, as well, at some sort of event. In fact, I think there's even some of the Muskies at home with their children, some little clips like that.

NC: This was for a state -?

JH: It was for some state functions at the time, you know. And then we got, because official state records which we deal with include any mediums, so it certainly would include the motion pictures then and videos now, and audiotapes as well as, and photographs and so forth. So we have quite a few things other than the paper work.

NC: Do you find that the local media makes use of the archive at all, or not?

JH: No, not very much, no. We probably don't have enough that would be interesting because we don't have that much personality type pictures, but we have some. We have a database of our records. And I've mentioned this from time to time to some of the regulars here, but they're usually so busy with having to face deadline and get somebody to take a current pictures. That, probably that core isn't the one so much as maybe the feature writer might have more interest in what we've got.

Fairly frequently, now that they know, or that, you know, they've had a long relationship, magazines like *Downeast* or *Yankee* magazine will run a little, you know, lobstering in the old days kind of thing and they, or use one of our photos.

NC: Before I wrap up, is there anything in particular that you'd want to add, about the state,

about yourself, the archives?

JH: No, I guess just in passing is I had more knowledge and communication with George Mitchell than with Muskie. And so as a follow on, you know, he was executive director for a while here, but then as he was, even as U.S. Senator, when he was running for that and up to being appointed by Brennan, I was more, at that time, happened to be more active in the party. And so, so I got to know him well enough so that, you know, he doesn't have to think, who is this guy coming at him, you know. So that, so I've enjoyed just, you know, having some relationship with him, which has usually been not on any policy issues so much as just general social, personal things.

I remember one time at one of these fund raising events, I forget where it was, he said, he was pointing out all the VIPs and he says, and we even have the state archivist. Which was pretty hilarious because they were like, "Who is this?" Anyway, so, but all right, so I just mention that in passing, that he's somebody who I, you know, I really have communicated with and know well and his, one of his field workers, Clyde MacDonald from Hamden, was active in the Democratic party when I was up in Penobscot county near Bangor, so we kept connected to some degree too. But other than that, I can't think of anything else at the moment.

NC: Okay, well thank you very much, we really, the Archive appreciates it.

End of Interview
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