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Hobart, Larry oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with Larry Hobart by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Hobart, Larry

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

September 27, 2000

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 233

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Biographical Note

Larry Hobart was born in Silverton, Oregon in 1931. He won a competition to be an intern to U.S. Senator Richard L. Neuberger from Oregon and went to Washington, D.C. After interning for a year, he earned his master's degree in public administration at the University of Michigan and then returned to Washington, D.C. to work as Senator Neuberger's legislative assistant, which he did until the Senator died in 1960. From there, he worked for the American Public Power Association.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Hobart's early career in Washington, D.C.; Hobart's encounters with Ed Muskie; Muskie's dedication to the environment; American Public Power Association; Muskie as he compared to other politicians; and Muskie's presidential campaign and the possible reasons for its failure.

Indexed Names

Billings, Leon

Hobart, Larry
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Neuberger, Richard Lewis

Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview on September 27th, the year 2000 at the Muskie Archives in Lewiston, Maine at approximately ten minutes to eleven. If you could start by saying and spelling your full name?

Larry Hobart: My name is Larry Hobart, Hobart's spelled H-O-B-as in boy-A-R-T.

AL: And where and when were you born?

LH: I was born in 1931 in Silverton, Oregon.

AL: And you later went to Washington, D.C.?

LH: Correct.

AL: And what was your job in Washington, D.C.?

LH: I originally went to Washington after winning a competition to be an intern to a U.S. senator from Oregon, Richard L. Neuberger, and I served in that capacity for a year, and then left to get a master's in public administration at the University of Michigan. But after that year returned to Washington where I took a job as the senator's legislative assistant and I worked at that job until his death in 1960.

AL: And what year was it that you first met Ed Muskie and had contact with him?

LH: I met Ed Muskie in the mid-fifties as a result of my work with Senator Neuberger, because Senator Muskie and Senator Neuberger were frequent supporters of similar kinds of legislative proposals, and so I met him through that capacity.

AL: Now which legislative proposals were they?

LH: Both of them were in support of environmental measures that were rising to the forefront in the late fifties and into the sixties. And they had common positions on many of those questions that were just beginning to arise at that time. Subsequently, after the death of Senator Neuberger, I took a position with the American Public Power Association, which represents municipally owned electric utilities around the United States, including several here in Maine. And during my tenure there among other people that I hired was Leon Billings, who subsequently became a chief aide to Senator Muskie with particular concentration on environmental issues. But during my time with the American Public Power Association, dealing with issues of the generation and transmission and distribution of electricity, there frequently

arose federal questions which had to be resolved by the congress. And so occasionally I again had contact with Senator Muskie and his staff to represent the positions that we held, with respect to those kinds of questions.

AL: So did you feel over those years he saw eye-to-eye on you, on those particular issues and was supportive?

LH: I think in the beginning that was true because his position was most frequently in support of consumer positions as related to energy issues, and the organizations that I represented were consumer owned. And their sole motive was in providing service at the lowest possible cost, with local control of the citizens who were actually using the service. And Senator Muskie was, definitely thought that that was a good approach where a local community decided to exercise it, and he was normally supportive of those kinds of things.

However, during that period of time it became clear that some of the solutions proposed for the creation of electricity had environmental impacts that were not always acceptable to people in a particular area or even in the country. And one of those issues was the proposed development of the Allagash River, with the suggestion that hydroelectric facilities be established on that river. And there Senator Muskie was not supportive of the position that was taken by the American Public Power Association and some other organizations, because he wanted to preserve that part of the state in its pristine condition for recreational purposes. And I remember one of the times that I met with him to talk about this. And I asked him whether he actually had used the Allagash River for his own recreation, and he said, "No." And I said, "Well you seem to be very firm in your view that it should be protected, and what motivates you to take that stand?" And his answer was, "Well, I may not use it, but I want to know that it's there."

AL: So you had points in which you agreed and disagreed on those issues.

LH: Correct.

AL: Over the times that you met him, what were your impressions of him? Because you were in Washington and saw a lot of different congressmen in their element, what was your impression of, how did he fit in to the picture in Washington?

LH: Well, he, he was an interesting person because he had characteristics which were not always present in Washington politicians. For one thing, he was very much a gentleman, almost courtly in a certain sense in his mannerisms. He was a person who would listen when you made your arguments, he didn't try and override you or interrupt or in some way attempt to cut you off, even if he didn't agree with your position. I always remember him as being very tall, because when I spoke to him and we were standing together I always had to look up at him to say what I had to say. And he would sort of lean over, and in an atmosphere that led you to believe that he was seriously paying attention to what you were saying. He was, struck me as being very good humored. I'm sure that he could have a temper at times, but I never saw that displayed. And he was always very polite in his dealings with people. When you spoke to him in a committee hearing, for instance, he was always very ready to receive your review. He obviously listened carefully, and even if he rejected it he said, gave the impression that he valued

what you had to say.

AL: Do you have any other thoughts, recollections or impressions that you'd like to share regarding your times in contact with him that I haven't asked you about?

LH: I thought that it was a wonderful idea that he decided to run for the presidency because I think he would have been an excellent president, because of the characteristics that I've already spoken about. And I think he had a rather judicious temperament, so that he was a person who would weigh carefully options that were available to him. On the other hand I wasn't surprised that he didn't make the cut. Because I, my impression was that he didn't have enough personal ambition and steel to be as tough as might be required to run a presidential campaign. The well-documented tears at one point when his wife was attacked, and things of that kind, are not the customary reaction of American national politicians, and suggest that he was of a different stripe than some of them. So I think of him as a man who had a great civic spirit, a kind of ability that came in part from his time in Maine as governor. And his understanding of how to deal with the broad political base, and particularly in the state of Maine a base which is not always full of affluent constituents. People that need help, need services, need an opportunity to get a leg up and be better off economically. And he had a good understanding of people like that.

AL: Great, thank you so much for your time.

LH: Sure.

End of Interview