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Nicoll, Don oral history interview

Jeremy Robitaille

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Interview with Don Nicoll by Jeremy Robitaille

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Nicoll, Don

Interviewer

Robitaille, Jeremy

Date

August 1, 2001

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 314

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Biographical Note

Donald Eugene "Don" Nicoll was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on August 4, 1927, and grew up in the West Roxbury section of the city. He is the son of George and Mary Nicoll. He attended Robert Gould Shaw Junior High School and Boston English High School and graduated from Colby College in Waterville, Maine in 1949, majoring in History with a minor in Government. Don met his future wife, Hilda Farnum, also a Colby student, when they worked in the resort town of Ocean Park, Maine, in the summer of 1944. Nicoll began his graduate work at Pennsylvania State College in 1949, where he received a teaching fellowship in the Department of History. His graduate studies concentrated on American history, specifically the period from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. His M.A. (1952) thesis was on the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Starting in 1951, Nicoll and his family settled in Buckfield, Maine where he picked apples and taught part time at Stephen's High School, located in Rumford. Nicoll began working as an announcer for WLAM radio in Lewiston, Maine. He became a reporter and then news editor for WLAM and WLAM-TV. In June 1954, Nicoll left WLAM to become Executive Secretary of the Democratic State Committee at the request of Frank M. Coffin, who has just become chairman. Mr. Coffin was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Maine's Second Congressional

District in 1956 and Nicoll went to Washington, DC, as his administrative assistant, continuing in that post until December 1960, the end of Congressman Coffin's second term. Mr. Coffin ran for governor in 1960 and was defeated. After the election Senator Edmund S. Muskie asked Nicoll to join his staff as legislative assistant and news secretary. Nicoll served in that position until 1962, when he became administrative assistant. He continued in that post until 1971, when he became personal advisor to Senator Muskie. He left the senate office in mid-1972.

From 1972 until his retirement in 2005 Nicoll worked as a program and policy planner, first as a consultant (1972-73), then as chairman and chief executive officer of the New England Land Grant Universities Joint Operations Committee (1973-1975), then as coordinator of planning and vice president for planning and public affairs for the Maine Medical Center (1975-1986), then as a consultant (1986-2005). His clients were primarily in the non-profit sector and included universities, libraries, education associations, health care organizations and social service agencies. He also worked as a volunteer, heading a variety of public policy projects, including the Maine Task Force on Government Reorganization, the Maine State Compensation Commission, the Maine (Mental Health) Systems Assessment Commission, the Maine Consortium for Health Professions Education, the Southern Maine Community Television Consortium, the Maine Special Commission on Government Reorganization (co-chair), the Board of Visitors of the University of Southern Maine's Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council and the Governor's Allagash Wilderness Waterway Working Group.

From 1998-2005, Don Nicoll was the Director of the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Colby College; guest lecturers; sescription of W.E.B. DuBois & Max Lerner; educational experiences and influences at Boston English and Colby College; formation of religious and political beliefs; McCarthyism; WLAM; work experiences; role and view of TV and radio in 1951; meeting Frank Coffin; Liquor scandal hearing; representing Governor Payne; Lewiston community, politics, political figures, diversity, issues: city charter (who would have control over the financial management of the city); Lewiston delegation in Augusta; Ernest Malenfant; George Call story; Maine politics; Governor's council (history of, members, functions); state of the Republican Party in Maine in the late 1940s and early 1950s; factions within the party; description of Burt Cross; beginning of Don's own political activity; Democratic survey and formation of Democratic state platform for 1954 elections; Frank Coffin becomes Chair of the democratic state committee; Don becomes executive secretary; and recruiting candidates to run (Ken Colbath; Jim Oliver; Paul Fullam).

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Transcript

Jeremy Robitaille: We're here at the Muskie Archives on August 1st, 2001 with Don Nicoll and another installment of the series of interviews that we're conducting with him. And Don, last time we left off talking about your times at Colby and I think we wanted to pick it up with the, you wanted to discuss your recollections of the people you heard speak with the Gabrielson lecture series. So kind of give us those speakers that you remember, the content, you know, what are their, the content of their speeches and really like how they affect you and your, and just like your political perspective.

DN: Okay, the two that I remember most of all were W.E.B. DuBois, that's capital D-U-capital B-O-I-S, who was the civil rights leader, from early in the twentieth century up until the 1960s; had grown up in Massachusetts, western Massachusetts, was African-American, and was probably one of the most brilliant leaders in the African-American community. At the same time, he was a product of New England and had all of the attributes of a New England aristocrat in style. I remember him, I don't remember the specifics of what he said at Colby, I remember that he spoke to a fairly large audience and then a smaller group of us met with him for a more informal conversation. And I was struck both by his brilliance and by his incisiveness on the issue of Blacks and discrimination, segregation, and public policy. He was also, at that time, increasingly critical of the U.S. economic policies generally and moving closer to support of the Communists and the Soviet Union in particular, where he was critical of the Cold War, which was in full swing at the time.

The other person I remember was Max Lerner, who was a writer on public policy issues. He may have been a journalist at one time, but he was mostly known as a writer. Today I guess he would be referred to as a left-wing writer. He was a liberal and, he was a liberal anti-Communist, and was part of the group of liberal intellectuals who opposed, with some vigor, the Communist party in the United States and the Soviet Union. But he was constantly in the awkward position of being critical of U.S. economic policies, uh, sometimes critical of our defense and international policies, which he found too constrained by the Cold War. But at the same time he was very critical of the totalitarian and oppressive aspects of both the Soviet Union and the American Communist party. And I don't remember specifically what he had to say. I

remember there was a controversy over his coming. Some of the more conservative members of the Colby administration were very unhappy that Ira Gabrielson's money, Ira Gabrielson being a very conservative Republican, was being used to bring people like W.E.B. DuBois and Max Lerner on the campus.

JR: In your four years at Colby, how would you say that your, that through your liberal education, how would you sum up how your views changed? I think specifically, um, speaking to perhaps your religious views, because I know you went through quite a, it seems like you went through quite a metamorphosis.

DN: Well, I had been a very conventional mainstream Protestant throughout this period, and it was not a dramatic change for me. Maybe it's part of my phlegmatic personality, I don't know, but I really became more and more of an agnostic in that period. That's one of the reasons I decided that I did not want to pursue a career as a minister. And I, I became an agnostic, which I remain today.

JR: And politically, had you already, you, had you already become more liberal by the time you got to college, or did, kind of, college kind of pushed you in that direction?

DN: I think the college experience in some ways helped me articulate a political point of view that had evolved during my high school years, and probably made me therefore more explicitly a liberal Democrat. The, my experience in high school, I should note, was in a school that was located in the heart of Boston's slums. I lived in a suburban section of Boston but the high school, Boston English, was located not far from Copley Square, but in the south end in what was a decaying area. In fact, ultimately under the depredations of urban renewal, the school and the whole section of the city was torn down. And into that school came boys from all over the city, and particularly from the families of recent immigrants. There was a large population of eastern European, southern European, African-Americans, although they did not make up a very large portion of the population of the city at that time, there was much greater proportion within the school. And there were Armenian families, there were large numbers of Jewish boys, and of course large numbers of the Irish and Italian from the south Boston area and the east Boston area. And probably both the ethnic mix, which was much greater than I'd experienced as a kid, and the economic mix, because I suspect that as high as forty, forty to sixty percent of the population in that school was low income, low to lower middle income working class kids, reinforced my sense of connection with working class people.

And it was also an exposure to people from very different cultures, very different points of view from what I'd grown up with and I regard as one of the healthiest and best things that happened to me. I had the combination of first class instruction, teachers. As I mentioned in an earlier interview, I benefited from women who were discriminated against in grammar school and junior high, bright women who couldn't get a job anywhere but teaching or nursing. And from men who, because of the Depression, instead of going into promising business careers ended up teaching, and were very bright and very able. And you add to that the socio-economic and ethnic mix, and it was very liberating.

And then that was reinforced when I got to college by the influx of G.I.s. Because of childhood medical problems, I was 4F, that is physically unfit for military service, and I turned eighteen just at the end of the war and was rejected from the draft. So I went, I was able to go directly from high school to college. And in January-February of 1946 there was a tremendous influx of veterans just back from the war, and most of them were well into their twenties with very different experiences, many of them young people who had never dreamed of going to college. Their education was over when they got out of high school, and the G.I. Bill enabled them to go on to college. So they had a very different perspective on life and opportunities than those of us coming out of families with middle class aspirations, if not middle class incomes. And that, too, was for me a liberating experience.

I guess, as I look back, I think that more important than political theory and particular political perspectives or points of view, were the attitudes that were shaped both by the intellectual discipline of faculty at Colby, and secondary, elementary and secondary school, and the open view on people regardless of their backgrounds and the differences by the experience in, particularly in high school and then in college, that were important. In a curious way, as I think about it, the socialization coupled with the intellectual discipline were more important than any particular political theories.

JR: Okay. During your first few years after Colby, how politically aware were you, do you think? Like, of like national politics?

DN: I was quite aware of national politics starting at the end of Colby. In 1948 I was not happy with Harry Truman. And it's probably a reflection of my political immaturity, if you will, because, or changes as one gets older. I'm a great admirer in retrospect of Harry Truman, but at that time I was very unhappy, and even more unhappy with the Republicans. And so in 1948 I voted for Norman Thomas, the Socialist candidate for president, in my first vote for president. And I was very unhappy over the Korean War and what it was doing to young people. I had a cousin who was in the Marines and managed to get through the war without being wounded or killed, but I was very sensitive to the anguish that that war was causing for a lot of people.

And I was also seriously concerned over what was happening domestically, particularly in what emerged as the Red hunting, Red baiting period that evolved into what we call today McCarthyism. And I went, as I think I may have mentioned earlier, from graduating from Colby to being a graduate fellow at the what was then Pennsylvania State College. Before I got my degree it had been converted into a university, and it was a one year, non-renewable fellowship. My obligation as a fellow was to teach two sections of freshman American history in the first and second semesters of 1949-1950. And I completed my residence requirements, that is the course requirements, by the end of the summer of 1950. As chance had it, the sections of the freshman American history I was assigned, all four were pre-Civil War. So my focus there and my focus in the, my studies, were on early American history and my thesis was on the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. And that was a period when, very much like the post WWII period, where the Federalists were attacking the Jeffersonian Democrats for being agents of a foreign

power, in this case France and the French Revolution. So I immersed myself in the political battles of 1798-'99-1800, and the intellectual turmoil around questions of free speech and social disorder. In those days, they did not refer to political parties, they referred to the factions, and they were opposed to parties. Even, it wasn't just John Adams and his colleagues in the Federalist party, but it was Jefferson and his friends who lifted their hands in horror at the prospect of factions growing in the country. All the while they were plying their trade as politicians.

JR: How did that, all that immersion in the turn of the century American politics enhance your understanding of contemporary politics? Because there were lots of parallels between -?

DN: I thought there were lots of parallels. And I remember being struck not only by the tendency of politicians to demonize the opposition. I also was struck by the importance of perception when talking about political movements and public decisions in the campaigns. And perceptions of what was going on were just as important, if not more important, than the actual facts when it came to social and economic and political developments.

Uh, generally I was concerned about the conspiratorial views that were dominating American politics in many ways during that period, both the attitudes of people on the far right, and Democrats who were liberal on domestic issues, but exceedingly rigid in many ways on international matters. And not just with respect to the Soviet Union, but casting other countries and societies in terms of whether they were for us or 'agin' us when it came to relations with the Soviet Union. And I remember being concerned at that time, as well as later, with the lack of interest that I felt we, as a society and as a political entity as a government, were taking in African and Asian countries, the Third World as it came to be called.

But I had no interests then in getting involved in politics, and had virtually no knowledge of politics in Pennsylvania, where we were living. Focus was national politics, and that was a continuation of the pattern when I was an undergraduate at Colby. And we, Hilda became pregnant, as I said the fellowship was non-renewable. So we had to leave Penn State at the end of the summer of 1950, and headed first to New Jersey. And that fall, or winter, I got a job as a laundry truck driver and on weekends would do research in, principally in the New York Public Library and some in the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia. And then I went to Boston and did some work in Massachusetts Historical Society preparing for my thesis, which I kept puttering away at. And in September of 1951, we had an opportunity to move to Buckfield, Maine and occupy the house that my in-laws had just bought as a retirement home, to which they planned to retire in another fifteen years; fifty years ago this coming fall; long time ago.

JR: Okay, yeah, along that vein of moving to Maine -

DN: Incidentally, I still hoped to become a teacher, that was my objective, I wanted to teach in college or university. Had no prospects for doing so at that point, and I had not paid attention to the fact that since nobody could do research overseas during the late 1930s into the forties, historians were focusing on American history. So we were a dime a dozen. And at that point I

didn't have even an advanced degree, I didn't have my master's degree yet. So the prospects of teaching were very slim, and I really wasn't interested in teaching in high school. So we came to Maine and landed in Buckfield.

JR: Okay, in regards to your eventually taking the job at WLAM, how did that, like getting that job and getting exposure to the inside of a radio station, of media, how did that I guess alter your view of media. So I guess first, what was your general impression of, just like the institution of media, and then how was that, how did that change when you went in I guess?

DN: I really didn't have an image of media as an institution. In fact, in those days I don't recall any great discussions about 'the media' as we have them today. And it was simply a vehicle for entertainment and for news. Television was really in 1951, late 1951, limited pretty much to very large metropolitan areas, places like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington. It had not come into Maine and so radio was all there was, and radio was not terribly sophisticated at the local level. The, nationally of course, we had come through the war and in WWII the reporters and commentators played an enormous role, and they were almost folk heroes. And as I said, I didn't think, and I don't recall big discussions about 'the media', but the reporters, the commentators were important figures, and they were the subject of discussion. Edward R. Murrow, Lowell Thomas I have mentioned I think, who had been one of the early newscasters, very different kind of newscaster from Murrow and his colleagues. And so news casting was a fairly romantic vision at that time.

Although when I went to work for WLAM I wasn't aiming to become a newsman, I knew nothing about the station really. I came into Lewiston, Hilda and I had talked and decided that rather than delivering laundry, which paid the rent but wasn't terribly stimulating, I would look at something that was closer to my education. And the choice was between perhaps going to work for the newspaper if I could find a job, or going to work for a radio station. And I happened to, I walked up and down Lisbon Street trying to decide where I'd go and ended up going into WLAM, where they needed a part time announcer and copywriter. And since I could write reasonably well and I had had some public speaking experience and could speak reasonably well, they hired me. And it was only after being there for a while that my interest in politics and public policy, etcetera, led me into the newsroom, and ultimately to a short lived career as a radio and television news reporter and editor, in the days of primitive technology.

JR: Yeah, tell me about your time reporting. What different areas did you cover?

DN: At first I covered, well my first jobs in the newsroom essentially were taking wire copy off the teletype and editing it for announcers to read. And during the slack times of the day, early in the morning or on Saturday afternoon and evening, reading it myself. And sometimes lifting stories from the local paper, from the Associated Press accounts. Then, as I moved into the newsroom, I started covering local stories, some sports although not very much, public speeches by local figures, and Lewiston City Hall. WLAM, at that time, was owned by a man named Frank Hoy, H-O-Y, who had been the business manager at the *Lewiston Sun-Journal*, and he had very strong commitments to a radio station's obligations to the community. And he

wanted to be sure that there was substantial coverage. His son, Parker Hoy, was the news director, and Parker, a Bates graduate, had very strong interests in politics, public policy, and echoed his father's feelings and pushed them, even beyond what I suspect his father anticipated.

It was also the case, and I didn't fully appreciate it at the time, but the general manager of the station, Elden, E-L-D-E-N, Shute, S-H-U-T-E, Denny Shute, who was known principally as a very mellifluous announcer and very pleasant interviewer and very good commercial radio man, had an extraordinarily strong interest in public policy. And Denny later became a minister, an Evangelical minister. He also was a legislator for a while in his later years. But there was a kind of a culture of news emphasis at WLAM that far exceeded any other station that I'm aware of in Maine at the time, including those that were much larger and much more richly endowed with capital.

And in the news room, we had on the news staff Parker Hoy who was the director, and he also functioned as a reporter; General Ralph Skinner, a retired military man and a general in the National Guard. Ralph covered both Auburn city government and Androscoggin county government since they were located in buildings adjacent to each other, so he was the, sort of the Auburn reporter. And then I covered Lewiston City Hall and politics in general, including ultimately politics at the state level, and went to Augusta on a regular basis to cover major stories when the legislature got tied up in a big issue, and the governor's regular news conferences. And that sort of evolved over the months, and from time to time went farther afield. I remember covering a campaign swing by President Truman in 1952, when he came into New Hampshire and campaigned Portsmouth and up into the state. And I remember getting on the campaign train, they were still campaigning on trains in those days, and was on the campaign train for a short distance in '52.

But my, I had lots of work at City Hall. Lewiston was a very lively, political town at the local level. Got to know more about local politics, covered the courts, and covered speeches, and then covered the governor, the executive council, and legislative fights, particularly those dealing with people in Lewiston. There were regular battles in the legislature in those days over the Lewiston city charter, and we had to cover those.

The liquor scandal involving Governor Payne led to my first exposure to Frank Coffin, when he was representing Governor Payne in a legislative hearing. And I will never forget his words on that occasion when he opened, that this was a scandal with accusations of favoritism and money under the table and you name it, related to the sale of wine in Maine. And in those days there were a couple of wineries, so-called wineries. They really were wholesalers who bought wine from California and elsewhere in tank cars, and the tank cars rolled into the state, went to the winery, and there the wine was pumped into bottles. And that was Fairview wine run by a man named Herman Sahagian. And he accused the governor and the liquor commission of fixing the books and taking money for emphasizing other brands of wine than Fairview wine. And so Frank was appearing before the legislative committee and he stood up and said, "Mr. Chairman, when all is said and done this is a case of very sour grapes." And I knew at that point I was in the presence of an inveterate punster.

JR: Excellent. Kind of backtracking just a tad to, you mentioned that you covered Lewiston City Hall in particular. And what sense did you have, like you're talking about how it was a very vibrant political town; tell me about the main people that you remember interacting with in Lewiston City Hall, and just the political dynamics at the time.

DN: At that time the major conflicts were, I guess, three-way. One was the Franco-American community, particularly those members of that community who still had very strong ties to a discriminated against population and a feeling of being oppressed by 'them'. And the 'them' included the Yankees, the old Yankees, and the Irish who had risen faster economically, in the community, and exerted a strong influence. And to a certain extent the Jewish community which was regarded as being allied with the Yankees. And then sprinkled in the 'them', from the point of view of what we might call the hard core Franco-American political community, were a few members of the Franco-American community who had advanced economically and politically.

One of the figures that anybody involved in observing or being in politics in Lewiston in the 1950s would remember is Ernest Malenfant, who was mayor of the city on a couple of occasions, and a political figure for a number of years. Mr. Malenfant was a bachelor who lived down in Little Canada, was a gate keeper on the railroad, on the line, the siding lines that ran into the mills. His command of English was limited but vivid, and he represented hard core protect-my-people, might be regarded as a populist, but really was very conservative in many ways in terms of his political and economic views, and he used to refer regularly to the 'Clifford clique'. And the Clifford clique was a set of political alliances starting with then Judge John Clifford, who had married the daughter of a Michigan Republican congressman who was the nephew of former congressman Frank [*sic* Dan] McGillicuddy, Democrat in Maine, who in turn was a law partner, Dan McGillicuddy, excuse me, Dan McGillicuddy, who in turn was a law partner of Frank Andrew Morey, who was Frank Coffin's grandfather. Judge Clifford in turn had a brother who was a lawyer, William Clifford, and nephews who became, and son, who became lawyers, and a daughter who married Thomas Delahanty. And Tom had started work in the mills, in the Pepperill Mill as I recall, and then managed to get to college, became an FBI agent, then a lawyer, studied law, became a lawyer, came back and practiced law. He ultimately ran for congress, lost, but became a judge first on the superior court and then supreme judicial court. Clifford and then Delahanty, Tom Delahanty, and Alton Lessard were law partners and Alton Lessard was from the point of view of Ernest Malenfant part of the Clifford clique and he sort of epitomized that group.

There were other politicians who bridged the gap, people like Edward Beauchamp, former mayor of the city, and Romeo San-, not Romeo, but Armand Sansoucy. Roland Marcotte who came along later was more part of the new wave of upwardly mobile, fairly conservative economically, members of the Franco-American community moving into business. Armand, for example, was an accountant and Roland Marcotte was a car dealer and very successful. And this, this represented the social change that was going on in the community. And in the post WWII period you began to see that. Many of the members of the community, particularly the Franco-American community emerging business leaders, had in one way or another gotten their

start as a result of their military service. They, even those that didn't go on to college or to professional schools, had the advantages of the G.I. Bill and loans, veterans' loans for housing, for business. And many of them had on their merits risen to the ranks of either senior non-commissioned officers or commissioned officers during WWII, and learned that they could command attention. They were also liberated, in a sense, by the decline of the mills which offered fewer and fewer job opportunities, and so they had to move into other economic fields.

And I think looking back that many of these figures represented the change that was taking place in Lewiston at the time. And I guess the other aspect of this that's fascinating, anybody who's ever writing about Lewiston and its evolution has to note this, that although there were plenty of signs and instances of prejudice, discrimination, it was also a very tolerant community in many ways. I remember for example that when we were looking for an Ob-Gyn physician for my wife, we delivered two of our children here in Lewiston at the old Central Maine General Hospital, she was referred to Dr. Amy Cattley whose husband was Dr. Daniel, I think it was, Rock. Dr. Cattley was a native of Australia and -

End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

JR: Please continue.

DN: We were talking about Dr. Cattley and Lewiston. Dr. Cattley was a WASP, if you will, from Australia. And her husband, Dr., Rock, was Jewish, I think he came from upstate New York. He was a neurosurgeon. When they married as residents in their medical training, they decided that they would have to find a community where they, as a mixed marriage, could function well and not be pushed aside by prejudice. And so they did a fairly intensive survey and concluded that the most hospitable community to which they could move was Lewiston, Maine. They came here and both had long, distinguished careers in the community and found it indeed hospitable as they had expected.

So Lewiston is a, is not what it sometimes appears on the surface, and was not then. And I always felt, observing politics in Lewiston and politics in Auburn, and while I was amused at some of the antics of the members of the board of aldermen, as it was called in those days, and some of the peculiarities of the internecine warfare that went on, it was a much healthier political community in the sense of public policy decisions and participation than Auburn. And it was a much healthier community in terms of tolerance for differences among different groups other than might appear on the surface.

And there were uglinesses there. I remember having to deal with Louis Jalbert, who delighted in calling himself Mr. D, who had a vicious anti-Semitic streak and verbally attacked Shep Lee, who was a great supporter of Frank Coffin during the 1960 campaign. And you ran into that and you ran into people who were anti-French, but it did not, it did not, those prejudices, those attitudes did not dominate the community. And it was a fascinating study in diversity in many respects, at a time when Lewiston's economic prospects were very dim, because the mills were

cutting back constantly during this period.

JR: Expanding on, I guess, to your covering of the State House in Augusta and the Lewiston delegates, I'm particularly interested in, if you had much interaction with Jean Charles Boucher and also to, if you could address what you remember of the specific issues surrounding the Lewiston charter that were discussed.

DN: Yeah, the big, well first on Jean Charles Boucher. Senator Boucher was one of the elder statesmen at that point in the Lewiston political scene. He was a relatively quiet, very gracious person in his demeanor. He was regarded by a number of the Lewiston legislators and politicians and political leaders out of the labor movement, for example, as not tough enough. And he was sometimes criticized as not being a hard-nosed enough fighter for low income people, mill workers, etcetera. But he was, in his own quiet way, very effective and carried a fair amount of weight in Augusta. And I can't give any specifics in terms of his role, but that's, that's my recollection of Jean Charles. And he represented sort of a, in some ways he represented another era of politics. He was one of the politicians you always saw dressed up in a, in a suit. And Paul Couture who was the business agent for the hod carriers and laborer's union very seldom wore a suit, only when he had to. Albert Cote, another member of the delegation, would not dress up very much unless he absolutely had to. Jean Charles always looked as if he came out of the band box, and just very dignified. He and a few others were like that. Eddie Beauchamp. And it was so different, Eddie Beauchamp was sort of a dandy, but Jean Charles was the, sort of the epitome of bourgeoisie.

The charter fights were, were something, and they centered mostly in who would control the finances of the city. There had been in the 1930s-40s great difficulties and there were accusations of, in addition to accusations of incompetence against the mayors and the councillors or aldermen, charges of malfeasance as well as misfeasance. And as a consequence there was a reform movement that led to revisions in the charter. And the charter left the city with a weak mayor, weak council form of government, and very strong commissions or boards that ran departments in effect, or set policies for departments. And the strongest of these was the finance board which controlled the budget essentially for the city. And regularly the people, who felt dispossessed by those charter changes, went up to Augusta and tried to convert Lewiston's charter into a strong mayor-council form of government. And there wasn't, even in those days, in those days in Lewiston there wasn't a city manager. There was a controller who had an important role, there was a city clerk who had an important role, and then there were department heads: the head of the public works department, the head of the police department, etcetera. But the finance board was a very powerful agency.

Frank Hoy, whom I mentioned earlier who was the head of the WLAM, the owner of WLAM, had been one of those most active in the reform movement. And I can remember some of the figures from the finance board by sight, but I can't put names with them and they were from the ranks. There weren't many Yankees in the group, but there were Irish and there were well-to-do Franco-Americans. And I remember particularly the, an example of Ernest Malenfant. There was a hearing in Augusta on the charter. It came after the, a controller had gotten into trouble

and had been sent off to jail. And after C. Alden Woodworth, superintendent of schools, had gotten caught with his hand in the till and sent off to state prison.

And the local political activists, led by Ernest Malenfant and a couple of others, had put in, and he was in the legislature at the time, had put in bills to change the charter, restore power to the people. And I remember Malenfant standing before the committee that was chaired by a legislator from Portland who was part of the old Yankee establishment in Portland. He was, the hearing had attracted enough attention that it was held in the senate chamber. And as a reporter with a tape recorder or wire recorder at the time, I was seated to the left of the dais where the chair of the committee was seated, and so sort of behind the dais and I could see the chair of the committee and the witnesses in the audience. And Malenfant got up and made an impassioned speech in which he said, "They're gonna tell you that before the city charter they were stealing the city jobs; that's true. They're gonna tell you that before the city charter they was putting the money in their pockets; that's true. But today they go to state prison; that's farther." And it was, it was so typical of his speaking style and sort of getting to the guts of the issue which was, nobody went to the state prison in the days when we were supposedly messing up, but today you got people going to prison, something is wrong, give us back the power.

Well that, that put the chairman in a position as he listened to Malenfant of sort of trying to control himself, but not very well, he was ducking down behind the dais. And then it was thoroughly, his self control was thoroughly destroyed when George Call, a, I think, I don't know whether George was a legis-, I think he was a legislator at the time. He had been city counselor and a legislator. George was a strange kind of fellow. He was tall, very slender, had eyes that were always sort of wide open. And he was a Yankee, though he was not, he was, and a Republican. And he got up and rambled in his remarks, and it wasn't clear from what he was saying whether he was supporting the proposed changes in the charter or opposing them. And finally the committee chair interrupted him and said, "Mr. Call, I'm sorry but I'm not sure, are you for or against the legislation?" And George threw his hands out to the side and looked up at the ceiling with his eyes staring, and said, "Well really, Mr. Chairman, I don't know." At which point the chairman disappeared behind the dais and didn't emerge for a couple of minutes. But this was the nature of the fight, it was the fight over who was going to control the financial management of the city.

JR: Okay.

DN: And underneath it there was an element of social control that was more, more socio-economic than ethnic. And you hear the same fights echoing today, but in today's terms it's, there isn't a trace of the ethnic division at all.

JR: What is your general impression of, like, the strength or weakness of the Lewiston-Auburn delegation in Augusta?

DN: In those days they did not carry an enormous amount of weight because, principally because they were virtually all Democrats and there were very few Democrats in the legislature.

So they did not carry much weight. And that was true before Ed Muskie was elected governor and it was true after, until the mid-1960s when the Democrats finally achieved a majority in 1967. No, excuse me, in 1965, after the, in the '64 election. But the strength of that delegation was fragmented in part by the divisions between Lewiston and Auburn at the time, and part by the political power base, and part by factions within the delegation. And from my point of view, Louis Jalbert's penchant for making his own deals and thus nobody could, Louis would play both ends against the middle, and frequently weaken the delegation as a group. The other thing that happened as the years went on, as the Democrats gained in numbers they were gaining in the suburban and rural areas and so the power base within the Democratic Party was shifting, and that diminished the amount of clout they had.

But at the same time one has to say that on many of the issues that were of concern to their constituents, people who worked in the mills, lower income people, people with needs for social services, the growth in the Democratic Party in the state, and the liberalization of the Republican party during a good part of that period, tended to support their constituents, so they did not do badly. It was on local issues that they tended to get shortchanged.

The other thing that one has to put into the mix is the fact that in Augusta, more than one would observe here, prejudice and discrimination played its role in shortchanging some very bright people, who happened to have Franco-American names and whose English dialect was different from people from Augusta and Waterville who were Yankees by inheritance. And that had an adverse effect on it.

JR: Okay, and additionally, with your time as a reporter, tell me about, you mentioned interacting with, like the governor's office, like the executive council?

DN: The governor's council was a, an institution we inherited from Massachusetts. It was created during the colonial period as a counter balance to the royal governor, who was appointed by the king, and carried over into the United States and was particularly strong in both Massachusetts and Maine. The executive council was elected by the majority in the legislature, that is, whoever had the most votes, whichever party had the most votes in the combined house and senate, would elect all of the members of the seven members of the council. And in those days it was no contest, they were always Republicans. They tended to be former senators, former Republican leaders, or local Republican leaders who were given a fairly cushy position. And they had to act on certain budgetary matters, that is, the release of funds, and on pardons and some other ministerial functions of the governor.

As I remember the members of the council in 1952, '53, '54, they were older men and several of them were well into their seventies or even early eighties. They were business people for the most part, they were politically conservative but not very energetic when it came to political theory or public policy. They were mostly interested in maintaining the status quo, and they represented the tendency of the Republican Party in Maine at that time to maintain the status quo. We would see them, since I did not spend all of my time in Augusta but went up for special occasions, including the legislative hearings on issues of importance here in Lewiston or the

governor's press conference or some major political event, I didn't have the opportunity to listen with and chat with members of the council or others who observed them at close hand. So it was mostly an impression of personality and relationships, and then second- or third- hand stories about their patterns of behavior in their dealings.

I do remember going on the annual summer trip that the executive council and the governor took on the Kennebec River and sometimes down to Boothbay Harbor. And they either went on a sea and shore fisheries boat or on a boat owned by one of the councilors, who was a wealthy business man. And the members of the press were invited along, and the rules of the game were that you didn't report on casual conversation, but somewhere along the way there would be a news conference so that you could have a story to take back. And I remember that they were primarily trips on which the councilors, I don't remember Governor Cross drinking anything, but the councilors imbibed pretty heavily and some members of the press did. It was a social occasion and you had a chance to observe people who did not fill you with admiration and confidence. The biggest impression I carried away from that, and other exposures to the Republican elected officials, was that this was a party that was afflicted with dry rot and was ripe for the plucking if the Democrats could get their act together.

And it was reinforced by knowledge that the Republican congressman from the second district of Maine, which was then, we had three districts. The first district was the southern part of the state, Robert Hale from Portland was the representative, part of an old line family, very able in many respects, legislator, particularly knowledgeable of international relations but absolutely no sense of his constituents or interest in rank and file constituents, but with a name that would get him reelected as long as Republicans dominated. Second district was Charles Nelson, former mayor of the city of Augusta, very bright, amiable, moderate Republican but an alcoholic and getting increasingly ineffectual. And then the third district was Clifford McIntire who was a representative essentially of the potato industry, bright, very conservative, very straight, not terribly imaginative legislator probably, but at that time the strongest in terms of his political base.

And the party was just split asunder by a contest they'd had earlier, the '48 contest between Margaret Chase Smith, Ralph Owen Brewster and others; the bitter primary battles in 1952 and earlier struggles, '50 and before, over the governorship. And Burt Cross was essentially a minority governor, I mean of a fractious, infractionated Republican Party. So by 1953 you had a weak Democratic party, very narrow base, and a fractious, seemingly impregnable but internally rotten Republican party. Burt Cross was a nice enough person but probably one of the most conservative people I ever met in the broadest sense of that term, not just politically but in his behavior, his attitude, and very stodgy and very fixed in his ways, and with an incredible capacity to put his foot in his mouth.

JR: Okay, and how was the national political scene comparing in, like in 1952, like for . . . ?

DN: Well 1952 I made the tremendously perceptive prediction, brilliant political insights, that Adlai Stevenson was bound to win the presidential election and beat Dwight David Eisenhower.

And I have never made a political prediction since. And nationally Eisenhower was dominant, although in the 19-, he was elected in '52 overwhelmingly, and 1954, even with Ike's popularity, the Republicans lost a number of seats including Maine's second district. No, did not lose Maine's second district, but in '54, and '54 was when Ed Muskie won election as governor and that was taken nationally as a sign that the Republicans were in trouble, if a Democrat could win the governorship in that midterm election, in September. So after that election we went traveling, campaigning for Democrats around the country. But in '52-'53 it was Eisenhower and it was still the Korean War winding down, it was still the Cold War, it was still the terrible activities of people like J. Parnell Thomas and Joe McCarthy and company.

JR: And when was, when would Margaret Chase Smith make her famous speech?

DN: That was in 19-, I think that was 1953. I don't think it was, I don't think it was after that. I'd have to look it up, but it was in the early to mid-fifties, her statement of conscience.

JR: All right then. So when do you begin to not just be aware of politics but begin to become involved?

DN: Well my involvement started in 1953 when Frank Coffin made a speech in Westbrook at a Jefferson-Jackson dinner. And it was not widely reported but there was a story in the *Westbrook American* that Denny Shute, the station manager at WLAM, picked up. And Denny suggested to me that I interview Frank Coffin, who was a bright and coming young lawyer in Lewiston and had made some interesting comments about politics in Maine, about the Democratic party and what it could do. And by then, as I indicated, I had come to the conclusion that the Republicans were in enough trouble that they could be beaten. And I thought that some of the younger, more attractive Democrats ought to step forward and push.

So I interviewed Frank. And when the interview was over and we'd turned off the tape recorder, I said to him, "When are you going to stop making all these speeches telling people what they have to do and run yourself?" The second district is, I guess I started by saying that the Republican party was afflicted with dry rot and was, I thought, vulnerable, and in addition the second district congressman was a known alcoholic. None of us as reporters would ever write about it, but sooner or later he was going to make a misstep and Frank should take him on.

Well Frank made it clear that he had no intention of running for office, that he had a young family, he needed to build his law practice, etcetera, etcetera. And that ended the conversation that day, but I was sufficiently impressed with him and sufficiently interested and concerned that I kept calling him and badgering him over the months that followed.

And sometime along the way I met Ed Muskie and observed him in a, in what was called the reverse press conference which was organized by Louis Jalbert. Every so often Louis would come up with a brilliant idea and this was one of them. He organized a meeting at the old Augusta House Hotel on the Augusta Circle, now occupied by the Key Bank building on the circle, or it's a bank building, Key may own it. But in any event this was the place where the

lobbyists all gathered and Louis organized an evening meeting in which the Democratic leaders would come and have an opportunity to question the political reporters covering the State House and would then, and ask them questions about politics in Maine. And Ed Muskie and Frank Coffin and several others came, and I was one of the reporters along with Doc Arnold from the *Bangor Daily News*, Peter Damborg from the *Portland Press Herald*, Bob Crocker, the AP bureau chief, and Jeb Byrne was there, no, not Jeb Byrne but Floyd Nute from UPI, and I think Ed Penley from the *Lewiston Sun-Journal* and Lionel Lemieux -

(Interruption)

DN: But, I attended that and it was an interesting set of exchanges. Ed Muskie and other leaders were there; I don't remember all of the others. I think Tom Delahanty was there, Frank and Ruth Coffin were there. And through the fall and into the winter of 1953, approaching 1954, I kept calling Frank and badgering him, and he was beginning to weaken only to the extent that he would get involved in party politics. And it almost blew up when he picked up the paper one day and read that he had been appointed by the Democratic state chairman, a fellow named Jimmy Sawyer from Castine, to head the pre-convention platform committee. Now Jimmy was a chauffeur and handyman who worked for a couple of elderly wealthy ladies in Castine, and was a veteran of WWII, was a native of that area, and a very funny man in some respects. But you wondered how in the world he ever got to be chairman of the state committee. And indeed, how he functioned beyond being a handyman and a chauffeur. I think he's a good example of somebody who is, was shrewd and very intelligent but not in conventional academic terms. And Jimmy had appointed Frank, Jim Oliver who was a former Republican congressman from the first district, converted to being a Democrat by way of being a Towsenite, Townsend. Townsend was a proponent of a social security system that was even more comprehensive than what we have today, as I remember it. And the third person was a fellow named Roland Guite from Hancock County, Ellsworth

JR: Do you know how to spell that last name?

DN: G-U-I-T-E, Guite. Roland, by the way, is an uncle to Frank Murray, Buddy Murray or Robert Murray [and Cynthia Murray-Beliveau], who are from the Bangor area. Their mother was Roland Guite's sister. And the Murrays were active Democrats and Frank, who's now a Roman Catholic priest, was a school teacher, taught at John Bapst, and was elected to the legislature. And then his brother Buddy, more recently, has been a representative and a senator. And, but Roland had settled in Ellsworth and was a real estate agent. Amiable fellow, later on the state committee.

And Frank was so insulted by having been announced as the chairman of a committee that he hadn't been asked to do, that he was ready to tell Jimmy that he, under no circumstances would he serve in that fashion. As I recall, I convinced Frank that he should not worry about those niceties and take advantage of the situation, which he decided to do. And he then launched the development of a platform through a combination of questionnaires sent out to anybody and everybody including members of Governor Cross's cabinet, and public meetings culminating in

public sessions where the final version of the platform was drafted at the Democratic state convention. And this non-partisan reporter, over the next several months, was busily engaged in helping Frank both craft the questions for the questionnaire, analyze the returns, and develop the mailing list of people who should get them.

Finally he decided that he would run for the Democratic state committee, and with Ed Muskie's encouragement was willing to stand for state chairman in 1954. And Frank was faced with the fact that in Androscoggin County they had had a habit of rotating the membership on the state committee. At that time there were two members of the state committee from each county, a man and a woman. And the man's position was due to rotate to Albert Cote, a state legislator, but, and it was considered a local plum and not a position of great moment in terms of your power, but it was a feather in your cap to be known as a member of the Democratic state committee. And Albert was somebody who was constantly pushed aside. He was a very obese man, I think he probably had some kind of a disorder that led to his obesity, and people used to make fun of Albert as 'Fat Albert' and, but he was a very bright and very good guy. And it turned out that Frank and he had been classmates in high school and Albert admired and liked Frank. And so when Frank decided he wanted to run for the state committee and then be elected state chairman, I believe that people he talked to included Irving Isaacson and Eddie Beauchamp. And Eddie Beauchamp went to Albert and Albert said, "If Frank wants it, of course I'll support him." So Frank was elected, when the convention came along and he went to the caucus, he was elected state chairman.

The platform attracted enormous amount of attention in the press as a bold effort by the party, and the open process for drafting it got even better attention. A footnote on all of this, by 195-, late '53, WLAM had developed a television station, it was a UHF station, up on Applesash Hill in Lewiston as the transmitter in a little bungalow, sitting right on top of the hill. Today there are some, I think they're cellular phone transmitters or something up there. But in those days there was just a little bungalow and WLAM put up a UHF antenna and set up in the house a studio and an announce booth and a control room, and that was about it. And some storage space for sets, such as they were. And I remember when Governor Cross and his commissioner of health and welfare, Dean Fisher, Dr. Dean Fisher, came for an interview being conducted by the members of the reporting staff of WLAM, I among them. And I remember Frank, it was Parker Hoy and Ralph Skinner and I, and they came up, and it was just after Frank had sent out the questionnaires for the survey. As I said, the survey went to everybody including members of the governor's cabinet -

End of Side B, Tape One
Side A, Tape Two

DN: I was talking about the events leading up to the Democratic state convention of 1954. The pre-convention platform committee effort, Frank Coffin had sent out questionnaires to a lot of people including members of Governor Cross' cabinet. And Governor Cross and Dean Fisher, Dr. Dean Fisher, D-E-A-N, F-I-S-H-E-R, who was the commissioner of health and welfare came to WLAM TV for an interview. And as I recall Dr. Fisher coming in, sneering at the Democrats

and laughing at Frank Coffin, waving this questionnaire, 'how silly could they be, sending everybody, including Republicans, including members of the governor's cabinet these surveys for their platform'. And as one of the participants in drafting the questionnaire, I was being very open mouthed and innocent but laughing to myself at how deluded the Republicans were in my view. And they were as they went toward the period of the conventions, because the Democrats got all sorts of credit for this business of taking people's opinions seriously and then being willing to debate the provisions in the platform in open session, not create the platform behind closed doors in a smoke-filled room.

The convention ended with no candidate for governor, no candidate for U.S. Senate, no candidate for Congress in the second district, no candidate for Congress in the third district. And only Jim Oliver announced to run for Congress in the first district against his old nemesis Robert Hale. And at that point Frank, Ed Muskie and a few others started making phone calls and trying to find candidates for those other slots.

And in the midst of all of this, Frank was going to the first meeting of the Democratic state committee planning to seek election as state chairman. And I got a call one day from him, he wanted to talk. And he said to me, "You've been on my back for months and now you've gotten me into this mess, you've got to come to work for me." And he wanted me to go to work for the state committee as executive secretary. The state committee had no staff at that junction, and it had very little money, a few hundred dollars. And Frank went to the state committee and said he wanted to hire a full time executive secretary and they said, "Fine, you want to hire someone we'll authorize it, if you can get the money." So they voted to authorize the hiring, and Frank then had to seek the money. They found a business man here in Lewiston who was willing to pledge a thousand dollars for support of the office. And so with that pledge Frank said, "Okay, now I want you to go to work for me." And I said, "Okay," and went home and told my dear wife who was taking care of our two sons, that I had decided to leave my secure job with the television and radio station and, on the strength of a few hundred dollars in the bank account with the state committee and the pledge of a thousand dollars, go to work for this organization that hadn't won a statewide election in, at that point in twenty years, dating back to the thirties. And I was offered a munificent raise from seventy-five dollars a week, which is what I was paid at the station, to a hundred dollars a week.

So I did it, and in the meantime they recruited candidates, including Ed Muskie, to run for governor. Tom Delahanty very reluctantly agreed to run for Congress in the second district. And a fellow named Ken Colbath, C-O-L-B-A-T-H, agreed to run for Congress in the second [*sic* third] district. Ken was a small business man with a record store in Presque Isle. And then Professor Paul Fullam from Colby who had been my advisor and department head at Colby, agreed to run against Margaret Chase Smith. And we were off and running.

JR: Excellent. I think we'll just about wrap up for today, that's about where you wanted to go. Just one question regarding the pre-convention platform questionnaires. Do you know if any of them are still in existence and where they might be? Andrea was very interested in that.

DN: I suspect that somewhere buried in my papers there is a copy. And the Democratic state committee may have some. They have some files dating back to that period and there have been sort of intermittent conversations about saving those files. But a lot of the stuff they had is gone, unfortunately. I know that a number of years ago I was looking for some things that they didn't appear to have. There may, it's also possible that here in the archives there would be copies or a copy of that because Ed Muskie did turn over documents like that to the secretary and she was very good about keeping them. It'll be worth checking there.

JR: Okay.

DN: Oh, and Frank Coffin is the other source.

JR: Oh, Okay.

DN: Frank is writing his memoirs and I haven't talked to him about this but I think Frank may have a copy of the questionnaire. He's much more assiduous about those things than I am. More disciplined.

JR: Great, all right, well, that concludes this interview. I probably won't be doing any more of these, I'll probably -

End of Interview