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Abbott, Charles oral history interview

Mike Richard

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Interview with Charles Abbott by Mike Richard

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Abbott, Charles

Interviewer

Richard, Mike

Date

July 16, 1999

Place

Auburn, Maine

ID Number

MOH 124

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Biographical Note

Charles Abbott was born in Rumford, Maine on October 26, 1935. His mother, Lucille (Hicks) Abbott, taught high school and had Ed Muskie as a student. His grandfather and Muskie's father were known to discuss New Deal politics. Charles grew up on a farm, attended Rumford High School and Bowdoin College (on a Maine state scholarship). He participated in ROTC and Young Republicans, and was a Political Science major. His father was a staunch Republican, county commissioner and town assessor. Charles served with the Army counter-intelligence corps in Washington, DC from 1958 to 1960 and was in charge of interviewing leading politicians and other VIPs. He worked for nine months as a financial analyst for Dunn & Bradstreet in Baltimore, then attended Yale Law School, graduating in the class of 1963 and has been practicing law in Auburn ever since. He became a Democrat the day after Kennedy was shot. Charles served as an Assistant D. A. (then known as county attorney), 1965-1970, and has served on the Democratic city (Auburn) and county (Androscoggin) committees. In 1972 he lost the Democratic state Senate primary and in 1974 lost the state Senate race by 3 votes. Over the years he has served on Governor Longley's Executive Council, the Auburn Charter Revision Committee, Red Cross, and as a Trustee for the Portland Symphony Orchestra and Monmouth Theater. He gave significant financial support to the renovation of the Muskie Archives in the 1980s.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Lucille Hicks Abbott; 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1969-1972 Presidential campaign (present at Manchester Union Leader incident); 1976 Senate campaign; the years 1973 to 1974 when Muskie and Abbott campaigned together in Auburn for Abbott's bid for State Senate; Muskie anecdotes; budget; environmental protection; Bates College honoring ceremony; Rumford, Maine: river mill town, did not exist until 1895 when Hugh J. Chisholm sees opportunity to harness water power; Rumford Center, Rumford Corner, East Rumford, Rumford Falls; Oxford Paper Company dominant industry; unions; Lyndon B. Johnson: majority leader and anecdote; the Senate as a Gentleman's Club; George Mitchell; anecdote of case with Abdullah Gashgai; John F. Kennedy's assassination; Governor Longley; and the Executive Council.

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Transcript

Mike Richard: The date is July 16th, 1999. We're here at the law offices of Charles Abbott, interviewing him. Present also is Mike Richard. And, Mr. Abbott, could you also, could you state your full name and spell it please?

Charles Abbott: Charles H. Abbott, A-B-B-O-T-T.

MR: And where were you born?

CA: In Rumford, Maine, October 26, 1935.

MR: Have you lived in Rumford most of your life?

CA: I lived there until I was twenty-one, twenty-two. I've practiced law here in Auburn for thirty-six, thirty-seven years.

MR: And tell me about your family life and background, what were your parents' names first of all?

CA: My mother was Lucille Hicks Abbott, my father was Warren S. Abbott. My father was a farmer, successful farmer in town; my mother was a school teacher. One of the things that you may be interested in is the fact that she taught Edmund S. Muskie. She always referred to him as Edmund, when he was I believe a senior in high school. And he was very impressed with her. And on many occasions when I'd meet him in airports, he would inquire of my mother. And on many occasions during public speeches I've heard him refer to my mother when she was in the audience and what an impression she had on him as a high school student. And he sent me a copy of his biography maybe twenty years ago and had quite a reference to her in that book.

MR: And was your mother a high school teacher all her life, or for most of it?

CA: No, she was not. She taught high school after graduating from Bates in 1927 until she was married in 1934. And then she taught high school for a brief bit during the war, '42, '43 or something like that.

MR: And that's, or actually she had Ed Muskie in the early '30s? '32, '33?

CA: I would say in that area, yeah, it was before I was born. But I will say this, that he obviously made an impression upon her as she did upon him because she often told us about that particular class. There were apparently some extremely bright people in the class, and Ed Muskie stood out head and shoulders above the rest. I might also say that I knew Senator Muskie's father, the late Stephen Muskie. He was a tailor in Rumford and my grandfather owned a hardware store on Congress Street in Rumford and on rainy Saturday afternoons and snowy Saturday afternoons I would visit the store and there would always be Steve Muskie present, and they would talk about New Deal politics. I think my grandfather and Stephen Muskie were probably the only two Democrats on Congress Street operating businesses in Rumford at the time. But as an impressionable kid of eight or ten, I learned a lot from them.

MR: Okay, and did you have any brothers and sisters?

CA: Two brothers.

MR: What position were you in the family?

CA: I'm the oldest brother. A year later is my brother Walter Abbott, who has long been a professor at the University of Maine, he was football coach at Maine for several years, he was athletic director, and has been strongly associated with the University of Maine all his life. My other brother is Wilder Kimball Abbott, and he's been a very successful banker, lived abroad a good part of his life.

MR: Now we're going to get into, hopefully, into detail about your relationship with the Muskie's later. But in general, how would you rate your experiences, not rate, describe your experiences in Rumford growing up? What was Rumford the town like?

CA: Well, Rumford was a river mill town. You can't put any gloss on it other than that. My brothers and I and my parents worked extremely hard, I don't mean to lay that on, but it's a fact of life that all farm families worked very hard. It was up in the morning at 4:30 all through high school, and when I returned from college, so it was a tough existence. Rumford is an interesting town. The town of Rumford, as one knows it today, was nonexistent in the 1800s, in the nineteenth century. It came, it sort of sprung up in about 1895 as a result of the water power that was available. And a man named Chisholm, Hugh J. Chisholm¹, saw the opportunity to build mills, which would be powered by the water, and started construction. And when I was growing up there was a sharp distinction between Rumford as I knew it, mainly Rumford Center, Rumford Corner, East Rumford where I lived, and the falls which was known as Rumford Falls. But it was a town that was dominated by one industry, which was then the Oxford Paper Company. We put up with the pollution because it provided jobs in the town. We cut lumber during the winter months and the lumber was sold in part to the Oxford Paper Company, and the entire town depended upon the Oxford Paper Company.

MR: And you mentioned that you were working on the farm. Was this, when you were in elementary school you'd be involved in the farm chores, and younger?

CA: Absolutely, absolutely.

MR: And your brothers too?

CA: Yes, oh absolutely.

MR: And what, you mentioned that your grandfather was a Democrat, one of the very few in Rumford. Were there any other Democrats, prominent Democrats you can recall? You mentioned Stephen Muskie also.

CA: Well, yeah, of course there were many Democrats in town. Severin Beliveau's father was Albert Beliveau who became a judge and was a leading Democrat. Severin's grandfather was named [Matthew] McCarthy², and, oh, I take that back, it wasn't Severin's grandfather, it was another individual who ran for Congress, his name was [Peter M.] MacDonald³ and he was a leading Democrat. So there were a few Democrats in town, matter of fact Rumford was predominantly Democratic, being a mill town, union workers usually follow the Democratic Party. I would just mention the fact that it's rare to find businesspersons back in the 1940s being

1 Hugh J. Chisholm, born May 2, 1842, Chippewa, Ontario. Supposedly shared a childhood job with Thomas A. Edison. Somerset Fibre Company, Fairfield, ME, 1870. Portland & Rumford Falls Railroad; Rumford Falls Paper Comp. Founder & President, International Paper, 1898-1907. 1899-Continental Bag Comp, Rumford; Oxford Paper Comp. 1901- Oxford manufactures all postcards used by US Postal Service. (www.paperhall.org). 1882-1990 Chisholm, George N. Fletcher, Detroit and Charles D. Brown of Boston by lend in Rumford and plan in town.

2 Matthew McCarthy, Rumford Democrat. Alternate to Democratic National Convention 1916 (politicalgraveyard.com)

3 Peter M. MacDonald, Rumford, Candidate for U.S. Reps., 1st district, 1940. Democratic National Convention, 1944. Maine Democratic State Chair, 1945. Candidate, US Senate, 1946 (politicalgraveyard.com)

Democrats, but my grandfather and Stephen Muskie were the exception.

MR: So most of the business people in Rumford were Republicans (*unintelligible phrase*)?

CA: That's the impression that I had, yeah.

MR: Were they still, were Stephen Muskie and your grandfather still accepted in the community as Democrats, as far as you could tell, within the business community?

CA: They were both successful at their trades, businesses.

MR: Okay, well, you mentioned, no, actually let's talk about your experiences in school now. What was Rumford High School like at the time that you went?

CA: Well, it wasn't too large. I suspect that there were a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty in my graduating class in high school. We had some good teachers, we had some bad teachers. I think the good teachers probably outweighed the others. There was a heavy emphasis, at least in the college course, on the basics. We all took Latin for four years, expected to take French for a couple of years, take mathematics for the four years. There really weren't any elective courses as we have today in the various high schools and colleges, so it was a pretty determined route that you went through college.

In my situation, I was very fortunate, despite the fact that I was a farm boy. In my senior year in high school the guidance counselor came to the door of the trigonometry class and sort of beckoned his fingers and the seven other fellows in the class got up and left. There were only nine in the class, eight boys and one girl. And the teacher, whose name was Ross, asked him what's the problem here, and they said well, these fellows are, have been selected to compete for a scholarship at Bowdoin, which was a competitive examination. And Ross said, "What about Abbott?" And they said, "Well, we didn't know, we just didn't have Abbott down." And to make a long story short, Ross insisted that I went in. And I won the thing and was able to go to Bowdoin on a State of Maine scholarship. I don't know if that answers your question, but that's.

...

MR: Oh yeah. And actually one thing I didn't cover. What was the ethnic make up of the student body in the town of Rumford, in general?

CA: Oh, the bulk were of French Canadian descent. I would dare say sixty five percent French Canadian, twenty percent old Yankee farm stock, and the balance maybe less than five percent Jewish and that's about it. There was a Jewish community in town, highly respected citizens of the town, business people. But I think the French Canadians were the overwhelming background of people.

MR: Were there any ethnic tensions that you noticed at the time between maybe the French Canadian mill workers or the Yankee businessmen if that's the way it was?

CA: I never noticed it in that town, honestly I didn't, I wasn't aware of any. When I came to Lewiston-Auburn thirty five-years ago there were still remnants of that old tension. But I never perceived it in Rumford.

MR: How large was the French Canadian population in Auburn thirty-five years ago?

CA: Auburn? I have no idea. Lewiston has always been the predominantly French Canadian town. Auburn, maybe twenty percent, Lewiston I would put at more seventy percent. Very rough, I don't know.

MR: And now your parents' political affiliations and attitudes, were they also of Democratic or liberal leanings such as your grandfather?

CA: No, no, my father was a strong Republican and was county commissioner and was town assessor. And my mother, as much to keep peace in the family as anything, became a Republican and always voted Republican. And I think was fairly conservative, although she died last year and toward the end told me that at heart she'd always been a Democrat, but she went along to keep peace in the family.

MR: And was politics discussed much at your home, like at a dinner table?

CA: Yes, yes, my mother was an extremely bright person, well read, the founder of what's called the Searchlight Club, which was a women's literary organization in town, was always writing papers on current events and would discuss them with her children.

MR: Did your father discuss politics much?

CA: Well he was involved in politics to the extent that he was a county commissioner for twelve or eighteen years. While I can't say that he discussed national politics or even statewide politics, people running for governor would always stop by the farm. We had a large prominent farm in town and my father carried some weight so people would stop to chat. But my father was a very humorous man and I think people stopped for his humor as much as anything else.

MR: And did you and your brothers ever talk about politics amongst yourselves, maybe by the time you were in high school or college?

CA: Not my brothers. I would with my classmates, but now with my brothers.

MR: When did your political interest start?

CA: Well, it started early. I, as soon as I could vote I did, I went out and drummed up votes for my father, voted absentee votes for him, and so I've always had an interest in politics, no question about it.

MR: So this started even before your high school days? You're seeing your father be involved in politics was a big influence?

CA: Probably that's a fair statement, yeah.

MR: And what were your parents' religious beliefs or attitudes?

CA: I think my father was probably an agnostic, never discussed it. He did not wear his religion on his sleeve. My mother was raised in the Baptist church but was not regular in her attendance.

MR: And, now moving on to your time in Bowdoin, what was that like? What extracurricular activities were you involved in?

CA: I went to Bowdoin in 1953 upon graduating from high school, and like most young men of that era, was involved in the Reserve Officer Training Corps, ROTC. I at that time belonged to the Young Republican party, the young, I guess it was the Young Republican Group, whatever it was, and that's where I first met Ed Muskie as a matter of fact, about 1955. I was, you know, president of my fraternity and active in a variety of affairs, but I can't recall them right now.

MR: So how exactly did you come into contact with Ed Muskie?

CA: Well, I was a political science major, I think about my sophomore year, subject to check, Muskie was running for governor of Maine, he was coming to Bowdoin, I was asked to introduce him on a panel where people could fire questions at the gubernatorial candidates. But it was a very brief encounter and I don't recall much more than that.

MR: Do you have, do you recall any quick first impressions of him, like, did he really impress you when he spoke?

CA: Well yeah, he's a, he had an impressive physical stature, he had a warmth about him, and of course my mother had talked about him incessantly for fifteen years or so of my formative years. And so I was prepped, you might say, to be impressed and I was impressed. He was a remarkable man, for one so young at the time.

MR: Okay, and were there any faculty members or other groups that you were involved in at Bowdoin that really influenced you, or that were important to you when you were there?

CA: Yeah, there was one faculty member. And I recently gave sort of an oral history to the Maine File Bulletin and pointed out that in my opinion he was the best professor I ever had anywhere at any time. His name was Athern P. Daggett⁴; just an outstanding professor, and

4 Athern P. Daggett, Bowdoin class of 1925 Professor of Government, Acting President 1967-9

taught government, but mostly Constitutional law, international law, which I took.

MR: And did you have a concentration within the government major, was it on Constitutional or on international law, or was it kind of a broad. . . .?

CA: I think it was broad, and certainly it didn't focus on local governments. I always found that extremely boring and find it today to be boring. Namely, should a town have three selectmen or five selectmen, or should it be aldermen or city councilmen. Those things don't attract me at all and I, so I perhaps took one course in local government, man named Bose, B-O-S-E. And matter of fact it was Professor Bose who corralled me into interviewing, introducing Senator Muskie, then gubernatorial hopeful Muskie back in '55 or so.

MR: And did you have many dealings with the Young, I assume there was a Young Democrats Club or something along those lines on campus?

CA: I had no dealings with them. I didn't become a Democrat until the day after Kennedy was shot.

MR: What was the political atmosphere in Bowdoin among the faculty and among the students, or the predominant atmosphere while you were there?

CA: I retain no impression of that. It was at the time pretty much a party school, I think that, I felt I was serious in my studies. I worked very hard because I got to Bowdoin late. I'd been picking corn and I came down with scarlet fever and was extremely ill. Didn't get there for two months after the commencement of classes and to get thrown right into classes, advance calculus and fraternity hazing and rushing and all that, it was a bit overwhelming for a farm boy. But I gradually made my feet but it took a lot of work, so I kept my nose to the grindstone and I just didn't, and to this day, don't retain any impression about political inclinations of the faculty. And maybe that's a tribute to the faculty that they didn't tip their hand.

MR: Did most of the people that you hung around with in college, were they within the fraternity, or kind of outside of the fraternity association?

CA: Not, unfortunately, and it was very unfortunate. You were expected to join a fraternity because Bowdoin simply didn't have the commons or anything to feed people. So ninety eight percent of the people, ninety eight percent of the men, it was all, it was an all male school, ninety eight percent joined one of the maybe thirteen fraternities. I think that's most unfortunate. It leant itself to insularity and you didn't get to know your classmates as well as you would have had you been fed in a common central dining room. I didn't particularly like the experience.

MR: Yeah, my uncle went there about the same time that you did actually, he really had a tough time with the. . . .

CA: I did, I can honestly say that that was distasteful. I did pledge one of the fraternities and was accepted, became president of the thing, but I had no interest in it. I, and to my shock and horror, when I realized at about junior year, the thing had an all-white clause in the constitution. So we immediately went out and pledged three Orientals and someone else, just to tweak their noses, and they kicked us out of the national. But I, I had no idea of that, no, I had no idea of that. When I was pledging no one ever told me, and a very decent group that I was with, and they backed me a hundred percent in pulling it out of the national.

MR: And now, about the Young Republicans Group, were there many members of that, was it a very active group?

CA: I don't think it was active, and I have no recollection of all this. I know, looking back, because I'm well identified with Democratic circles in Maine and people would be surprised to learn that I was a member of the Young Republicans at Bowdoin. But I can't recall any meeting that I ever went to, and I certainly recall no canvassing or political activities that I engaged in as a member of the Young Republicans.

MR: Now moving into your career as an attorney in Auburn, did you move to Auburn very soon after you graduated Bowdoin?

CA: No, no, at Bowdoin I was sought out by the U.S. Army, they sent some investigators around, sort of tipped their hand, and I was asked, invited, to join the counter-intelligence corps within the Army, which I knew nothing about but apparently it was an elite group. And it turned out that several of my classmates knew about it and actively tried to pull strings to get into it. But for some reason I was selected so I had an excellent tour of duty in the Army for a couple of years commencing January of 1998 [*sic*]. And then I worked for the next nine months as a financial analyst for Dunn & Bradstreet, and then went to Yale Law School.

MR: And what were some, were there any specific factors influencing your decision to go to Yale, or was it, it's certainly a very prestigious school.

CA: Well, yeah, I stopped by Harvard one time in the summer and I got what can best be described as a cool welcome from a woman named Wolfe who was the bursar, or the director of admissions. She just didn't seem too interested at all and I was put off by her attitude. I applied to two other schools, which were leading schools at the time, Michigan and Yale, got into both. Michigan offered a good scholarship, Yale offered no scholarship but the promises that once you got in there they wouldn't let go of you. And so because of geographical proximity and reputation, I went to Yale.

MR: And, but you must have done very well in Bowdoin then, academically, you were a, your performance was quite good there.

CA: Yeah, it was good. I think I missed by Phi Bet by one position. And that was, it turned out

that it was only because I had had, the only C in my life came from ROTC, which I wasn't particularly enamored with. But I, I wasn't trying for it, I didn't, that stuff means nothing to me, and, but I did well. I got top prize for my senior thesis under Professor Daggett.

MR: And what was your time in law school like, any faculty members or groups again that were influential?

CA: No, I was not a joiner, never have been. I was married at the time and pick up odd jobs here and there and I didn't, I can't say that I worked. I did not work going through law school, I worked hard during the summers, but I really treated it as a job. I'd get there at eight in the morning and I'd leave at five thirty or six at night and that was it, I didn't work at night. I didn't find it particularly hard, but I had a, I think a good approach toward the studying. Some of these guys wouldn't start studying until ten at night, and then they'd work until three in the morning. That just wasn't my way of doing things. As I say, I'd get there at eight in the morning and I'd go to class, and when I wasn't in class I'd go across the street to the big library and read and prepare my case reviews or whatever it was and, I didn't find it particularly difficult. Leading professors, Grant Gilmore, who taught contracts, was a leading figure in the contract field and designer of the uniform commercial code, was in my opinion the preeminent professor that I came into contact with. And there were many others, I mean, these are all names that you read about still, despite the fact that thirty five years have elapsed. All these professors rose to great fame. But Gilmore stood head and shoulders above them.

MR: Now did you live in New Haven while you were going to school, or on campus?

CA: Yes, I lived in New Haven in an apartment on Waylie Avenue, 366 Waylie Avenue.

MR: How was that, this obviously must have been quite different from your past experiences, living in rural Maine and then the Bowdoin campus?

CA: Well, of course I had lived in Washington for three years. I was on active duty in the military in the counter intelligence corps and lived there for all that time. I put in six months in Baltimore and then the rest of the time in Washington. And then I worked for Dunn & Bradstreet in Washington, so I felt very comfortable in the city, no problems.

MR: So now, what area or field of law were you most interested in, what was your concentration?

CA: At that time it was taxation, and I assumed that I would never do trial work at all. I took no course in criminal law, no course in I think even evidence, and I've, within three weeks of starting practice here I was thrown into a trial and I've been trying cases ever since. That proves that you can't really predict what you're going to become.

MR: Now, so what was your time in Washington in that law office like, how did you first hear about or get the job?

CA: Washington?

MR: After your six months in the Army?

CA: No, I spent two years on active duty in the counter intelligence corps, and then I worked for maybe nine months as a financial analyst for Dunn & Bradstreet, which was the giant credit reporting firm. I don't know if you're acquainted with Dunn & Bradstreet, but they rate businesses and interview them and promulgate dossiers on them, and I was responsible for some of the larger companies and analyzing them from a financial point of view. When I was in Washington I took a few courses leading toward a master's degree in I think political affairs at George Washington, and also took some accounting courses at Georgetown. But I stopped short of a master's degree, and then went on to law school.

MR: Now, and how did you first secure the job? Did you just hear about it through. . . .?

CA: The job at Dunn & Bradstreet?

MR: Yeah.

CA: Yeah, oh, my active duty was up January 15th of 1960, in the Army, and a few weeks before that I started looking for jobs. All I knew at that time was investigative work because I'd been doing only that for the last couple of years, and maybe someone told me, maybe I read in the paper, anyway I interviewed at several places and, one of which was Dunn & Bradstreet. And I was hired. And I worked for Dunn & Bradstreet between my first and second years of law school.

MR: And now living in Washington at the time, did you have any opportunity, you were probably very busy with your job, but did you have any opportunity to get more perspective on national politics, or to be involved in, some way?

CA: Yeah, much more so. I was very fortunate, there may have been a hundred, a hundred fifty special agents in counter-intelligence in Washington, and I was the one person out of the hundred and fifty that had the responsibility for interviewing anyone in the U.S. Congress, anyone in the Senate, anyone in the Cabinet, anyone above two star general rank, the leaders of the churches, that type of things. In other words, any VIP request that came in from all over the world came to my desk, and so I saw the bulk of the leading United States senators at the time, members of Congress, members of the Cabinet, the president's scientific advisor [James R. Killan, Jr.], and so I was up on Capitol Hill every day. And at the time, the McClellan hearings were going on with Senator Robert Kennedy as the counsel. And since I had plenty of time on my hands, I would spend hours and hours in there, and in the Senate gallery, and I knew personally at that point the congressmen and the senators from Maine and was welcome in their offices. So I got around, yeah.

MR: So this was, it must have been '62, '63?

CA: No, this would have been '58, '59, early '60.

MR: Okay. And so, you had contact with Muskie when he first became a senator in '59?

CA: Yes.

MR: Down in Washington.

CA: Yes.

MR: What was that like, his first moving down to Washington (*unintelligible phrase*)?

CA: Well, he had a, there was a good looking girl on his staff from Rumford named Jeanie Watson, and I guess I'd stop by to see Jeanie more than I would the senator, but I can't say that I had much contact with him at that time, at that early time. I met him back at Bowdoin, he knew me through my family, but that was about it.

MR: Jeanie Watson, was she to become your wife?

CA: No, no.

MR: What did, when and how did you become married?

CA: I was married, this was my first marriage, I was divorced ten years ago. My first marriage was, I met a girl who was the director of admissions at George Washington University Law School, and we were December 9th, 1959 in Roanoke, Virginia.

MR: And has she been involved with your legal or political work? What has her career been?

CA: Well, she was of course married to me when I went through law school, and we had a home in Auburn for twenty-seven years. And as I say, we were divorced 1989. Had three fine children who are still alive. My ex-wife is still alive, lives in Northeast Harbor, Maine.

MR: And where [*sic*] have your children done?

CA: My oldest boy had graduated from Curry College in the Boston area, he's a computer information systems specialist working for Raytheon. Second son, Edward, graduated from Gilford College, North Carolina, and has a master's in business administration from American. Works for Freddie Mac, the giant mortgage company. Good position. My daughter Ann, sort of a free spirit, lives in San Francisco at the moment.

MR: Now, getting back to your time in Washington. Who were some of, you said you were

close to the Maine senators especially, who were some of the other senators that really stick out in your mind that you came into contact with?

CA: Well, you just name any prominent senator for the time and my path crossed with him, because I was in their offices on a regular basis interviewing them. So the leading senators of the time that come to mind would have been Everett Dirksen, Karl Mundt, Lyndon Johnson, then Senator Kennedy. I met him on just one occasion, but, almost every senator I came in contact with, put it that way.

MR: What was Lyndon Johnson like in his time as a senator, do you remember?

CA: Yeah, he was a powerful, strong, resourceful guy. He was majority leader at the time I was there. I'll never forget, I've told this anecdote before. I happened to be in the Senate gallery the day after, or within a week after the two parties had held their nominating conventions, which probably would have been in about 1960 maybe. I'd have to go back in time, and he had a very interesting thing because it was a tie vote and therefore Nixon was called to take the seat to break the tie, Nixon being the vice president under Eisenhower. And then there was a stir in the back, and in came Kennedy who was not usually in the Senate chamber, but this was the first time back after the nominating convention so all of the clutch of Democratic senators, Scoop [Henry M.] Jackson and Hubert Humphrey and [James William] Fulbright and those gathered around him. And seated up at the front right was Johnson, who had been selected to be the running mate of Kennedy, and Johnson's still the most powerful man in the room. And everyone was focused on Johnson who had a large fingernail clipper. He was clipping his fingernails, and you could literally hear that click, click all over the chamber despite all the goings on with Nixon. Nervous because he had to break the tie, seated on the bench, and Kennedy who had a very back bench seat at the very back of the wall, seated over there and then Johnson right front and center clipping his fingernails. It was an interesting tableau.

MR: And what about Kennedy, what was he like?

CA: Well when I saw him he was quizzical, why he was there. He was on the phone with a fellow named Mike DiSalle who was apparently a, I think he'd been mayor of Detroit or something like that, or Toledo I think, but was a recognized political figure. I just recognized the name because he was using it on the telephone. And my conversation was maybe five minutes at the most with him about some individual that I was investigating. Johnson, I ran into him at a social event one night, and Dirksen, certainly let their hair down.

MR: And what would you say in general what the atmosphere was like in the Senate and the House at that time, maybe the partisan atmosphere toward issues?

CA: Well, from an impressionable young man, I had the impression that the Senate was very much a gentleman's club. It was very protocol conscious, seniority still held complete sway, very deferential one to the other. I didn't get the sense of the somewhat more bitter partisan debate that we've run into in later years. Again, TV, news and CNN wasn't there constantly

looking over their shoulders and maybe I only saw the surface, but it was very polite and deferential one to the other.

MR: That's interesting. I've heard that a lot, how politics, at least in the Senate and the House has kind of deteriorated in the past decades.

CA: Well that's the impression that I have. There were some very, very powerful people, you know. Harry Byrd was still in the Senate, Theodore Green was ninety three years of age, from Rhode Island, and he was still there and people, the old guy could barely totter into the Senate chambers and had a hearing aid, and yet people were deferential and gave him full deference. Now of course you've got (*unintelligible word*) Strom Thurmond who is, what, ninety-seven, ninety eight and still going strong. But Green was very feeble at ninety-three and yet it didn't seem to affect the way that people regarded him.

MR: And what was the Maine delegation like to work with or to be in contact with?

CA: Well, again, I, my principal contacts were with Jim Oliver who was the congressman from the first district. He happened to be the father-in-law of my commanding officer, and so I was, and he was a wealthy man. I take that back. He was, he lived at the same apartment as the father-in-law of my commanding officer, and was best friends with that chap. That fellow was a very wealthy man and threw large parties, and it was at those parties that I met a lot of these senators on an informal basis, a social basis.

MR: What were some of, maybe Jim Oliver, for instance, or Ed Muskie, what were they like at those parties, kind of when they got a chance to. . . . ?

CA: I never saw Muskie in a social setting like that, at that time. Oliver was a jovial, decent guy; just a wonderful man.

MR: Now, what was Senator, as far as you could tell, I might have, we might have touched upon this, but what was Senator Muskie's time in the Senate like as a junior member? Was he having, did it seem like he was having a tough time?

CA: Well again, I did not have that much contact with him at the time. I honest-, I couldn't respond to that. You have to talk with someone like George Mitchell who, perhaps later than that, but from '64 on I think was his administrative assistant and worked very closely with him. But, so I, you know, I was just a guy in the Army and run into him occasionally and he knew me and knew my family and that was it.

MR: Okay, so after your time in law school, you went back to Maine. And that's the time you moved to Auburn?

CA: Yes.

MR: That was in, must have been '65, '6-?

CA: No, it was '63. I worked here between my second and third years of law school, and I graduated in June of '63, so took the bar exam around August 17th and been here ever since.

MR: And you mentioned you started getting involved in trial work once you moved up here?

CA: Yeah, almost immediately.

MR: Do you have any stories or any recollections of other trial work that you've done over the years that really stand out?

CA: Yeah, but you don't have time enough for that. I mean, I love to tell stories about some of these trials and some are fascinating, but. . . .

MR: Maybe one or two that kind of reveal something about the political situation in the area, or just something that really struck you as being. . . .

CA: Yeah, there have been, I've probably tried two or three hundred jury trials. I've tried hundreds of cases to the court, and each one lends itself to stories and anecdotes. One that comes back to mind is a case I had for a man named Gashgai (*sounds like*), Abdullah Gashgai. He was the prince of an area that had been part of Persia, now Iran. His family, the Gashgai tribe controlled the whole southwestern sector, or section, or Iran, modern day Iran. They were roused out of there by the Shah of Iran when he consolidated his foothold in Iran, and he and his family allegedly had ties with the CIA and the CIA kept them here in the United States. Make a long story short, he was a brilliant doctor, a surgeon, and moved to Augusta, Maine. And the other surgeons in Augusta ganged up on him and tried to pull his license, and there were three separate trials that I conducted against the Board of Registration of Medicine, and against the Maine Medical Association. My co-counsel on one of those was the wife of William O. Douglas, the Supreme Court judge, whose name was Cathy Douglas. And the justice and Gashgai were very close friends, they used to go hawking together in Iran, and the old justice took a very strong interest in the case and on one occasion when I was arguing one aspect of the case in front of a state supreme judicial court, somewhat to my shock Justice Douglas called the chief justice to inquire about the case and the fact that his wife would be a little late. And you just don't do that in Maine, you don't call the court on any basis. But the press was waiting for her outside and we couldn't wait any longer, I had to commence my argument, and I got maybe five minutes into my argument and the doors banged open and about six cameramen backed into the supreme court chambers which are usually very still and August, and in walked Cathy Douglas with Gashgai and of course it just stopped everything for about ten minutes. So it was an interesting case. As I say, there were dozens of cases of great interest.

MR: Okay, I'm going to just flip the tape here.

End of Side A

Side B

MR: This is the second side of the first tape of the interview with Charles Abbott on July 16th, 1999. And we were talking some about your experiences in Auburn as an attorney. How did you, who was around town, or maybe in your family or around the area, that encouraged you or supported you in your early time as a lawyer?

CA: Well, I guess perhaps the thrust of the question would be why am I at this firm?

MR: Sure

CA: At the time, our largest firm in the state was Pierce Atwood which perhaps had only eight attorneys. Now it's a hundred and twenty five, a hundred and fifty lawyers. So there were very few positions open in Portland, and those positions that were open required you to be a family member or know someone who could really strongly recommend you to the partners in the firm. I had no contacts, I was the first person in my family to have been a lawyer, and I knew one of the Skelton boys who had been a couple years ahead of me at Yale, so I interviewed here for a position between my second and third years, got it, and naturally applied here because I wanted to come back to Maine, and so have been working here ever since.

MR: And who have you worked with over the years? Obviously the partners in this firm, but who have you worked with and who has influenced you over the years in your maybe development as a lawyer or political attitudes?

CA: Development as a lawyer, I think it's great to be a trial lawyer. You get around, you know other competent lawyers around the state and very competent judges. Frank Linnell, who was an attorney in town, was a preeminent trial lawyer. I learned a lot by watching him, trying cases against him. John Platz another one, from Lewiston, a superb lawyer. There were powerful lawyers in Portland and I tried cases against them, and after they beat you around the head a while you pick up a few things. Judge Edward T. Gignoux of the federal court was the finest judge I've ever encountered, and a great presence in the court room; a wonderful voice, magnificent man. And as a consequence you were prepared, you were on your toes and you were ready for anything when you appeared before him. And the state court judges I thought were very high caliber, still do, and I always got a fair shake from them.

Now politically, I don't know what to say about that. I'd only been practicing for three months when John Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. My first son was born two weeks before that, so I was pretty heavily engaged with a new child and an old farmhouse, and yet maybe because I'd met Muskie in the past, maybe because I felt that he held out a lot of hope for the country. It affected me deeply, as it did I'm sure many Americans of my generation. And the very next day, as I recall it, I enrolled in the Democratic Party. And there was a fellow by the name of Hathaway who was a lawyer here in town, Bill Hathaway, was running for Congress. And I remember going up to him and said, "All right Bill, you've got a new recruit." And he became a congressman and later senator from Maine. So, that's, I guess that, from there

on I, once I took things on, I'm going to be active in it. And I was active in the Democratic Party for years at the local basis, local level, on the county committee and the city committee, and you know, doing what one does to advance the cause. In 1973-74, I ran for state senate at the same time Senator Muskie, to get back to your point, was running for reelection to the U.S. Senate. Or, I'm sure it was reelection. And we campaigned together around Auburn and environs, so I came in contact with him again at that point.

MR: Now, was the, were the events of the Kennedy administration, and especially Kennedy's assassination, was that kind of a real radical, result in a real radical change in your political outlook, or was it kind of the last thing that tipped you over to become a Democrat and to change. . . .?

CA: I think it was the last thing. I think that I'd always probably been a closet Democrat. My, just because my father was strong and powerful man, and I respected him and loved him, I became a Democrat almost by default, I became a Republican almost by default. And my first vote was for Eisenhower when I turned twenty-one. We couldn't vote until twenty-one in those days. But I think this was sort of the last straw and I felt that the Democratic party was more in tune with the average working person and I embraced it and have been a Democrat ever since.

MR: How did your parents react to your switch of party?

CA: Oh, they wouldn't care at all. They just, as long as I was committed to something it was fine with them. They were not doctrinaire at all in their approach.

MR: Now you mentioned that you had an opportunity to campaign alongside Muskie in '74?

CA: Well, it must have been '7-, between '72 and '74, but I don't know when.

MR: Yeah, '72 and '76 [sic] I think were two of his reelections.

CA: Well that was '72.

MR: Okay. So actually, do you have any insights into his presidential campaign of '72? Did you, were you following his career at that point?

CA: Oh yeah, definitely. I was on a bus, I was there when the tears allegedly flowed in Manchester. A bus full of supporters from Maine went down to that event, and there was something at a hotel and then adjourned out into the street as I recall it. Ken Curtis I believe was governor at the time, he headed up the delegation going down. I remember getting on the bus here on the turnpike and going down to that event. I was active in the Democratic Party at the time, and as I said before, at both the city and the county and even the state level.

MR: Now, in the '60s after you moved back to Auburn, what, what exactly types of positions did you hold in the city and state level politically?

CA: Well, yeah, in the city I was on the charter revision committee for the city of Auburn. I think I was active in the Democratic organization. I think I was in the Red Cross, I was a trustee of the Portland Symphony Orchestra. I was a trustee of the theater at Monmouth, other things. I ran for the state senate in some year, and I've forgotten, it was, must have been '72, and I was licked in the primaries in that one. And then I came back and ran again in '74, won the primary, lost by three votes in the general election. And then some of the local people in the state legislature approached me, namely Robert Clifford who's now our Supreme Court, he was the principal one, and asked me to become a member of the governor's executive council. Because Maine had elected an independent governor, James B. Longley, and it was important that people of some caliber be on the executive council, at least that's the way it was put to me. So I agreed and was elected by the legislature. And I served on Maine's last governor's council.

MR: Actually this morning I had an opportunity to interview Charlie Jacobs.

CA: Yes.

MR: And he was also on the council at that time?

CA: Charlie was on the council with me, yeah.

MR: He said that he was often the subject, maybe not often, but he was sometimes the subject of Longley's wrath over certain issues and nominations.

CA: Well that's true, we were. Of course we were partisan in the sense that we were all Democrats, because the Democrats controlled both houses of the legislature. Longley was a unique individual to say the least, and was a master politician, and a master schemer for that matter. On more than one occasion he would call us down to the cabinet room and he would ream us out in no uncertain terms. And not allow us any paper, there was no paper in front of, I was writing notes on my shirt cuff so that I could rebut him. And he'd keep an eye on the cameras and as soon as the cameras ran out of film, or videotape, and started packing up, then he'd say all right, do you have anything to say. And so you'd have to kind of look at the, what you'd written on the cuff of your shirt and try to rebut him and you'd lose the benefit of the cameras. So he was, he was a contentious, difficult guy. And yet, toward the end, he softened a great deal, thanked us for turning down some of his appointments, which were, he later said would have been devastating to some of the people. But it was a contentious time, very contentious.

MR: And for how long were you on the executive council?

CA: It was only two years. Our first vote, as a new committee, as a new council, was to recommend that it be abolished constitutionally, and it was eventually.

MR: And what did you do after that, did you just return to the full time position as attorney

here?

CA: Yeah, that was only a part time position on the executive council and my job, I, you know, was working seventy, eighty, a hundred hours a week literally, so I'd be working weekends and nights to practice law and to free up my time to be at the legislature when it was in session.

MR: So you no longer, did you hold, I mean did you hold any more political offices after the executive council?

CA: No, no. In the, from '65 to '70 I was the first assistant district attorney, they called them county attorney in those days, prosecuting cases. But again, that was a part time job.

MR: And what made you decide to run for state senate in, you said '72?

CA: I think that's always been in my family, going back generations, there's been a sense of civic responsibility and, to give back to the community. And I perhaps naively thought that I had something to offer, despite the fact that I was green and wasn't really known around the area. And I wouldn't accept campaign contributions, I was lily white, and I remember painting my own signs and appearing at places to speak. And I did a credible, I made a credible showing despite all my shortcomings and lack of organization or planning.

MR: Who else worked with you on your campaign?

CA: No one. I did it myself. Every night I would go out, I had a fist full of flyers, and I'd crawl up tenements and knock on the door. I was received hospitably, I took more out of the race than I ever put in. People would thank me for making the effort to come out, despite the fact they may not be intending to vote for me. But all in all, it was a good experience. Took a lot of time, a lot of effort, but I'm glad I did it.

MR: Now, what was it like campaigning alongside Muskie at the time?

CA: Well, I have one very strong recollection, we went to the Pioneer Plastics plant out in Auburn. And these people working hard on the assembly line and whatnot. And some little gentleman raised a question, or some inference about some international event, and the senator just blew, just reamed him out in no uncertain terms. So I got a hint of his wrath at that time, but other than that he was charming. I remember another time we met at a restaurant in Lewiston, I think Bill Cohen was in Congress and there was a lot of talk that he might oppose Muskie in about that time for the Senate. And he'd gotten together local people to discuss the fact, and I mentioned the fact I thought Bill was a very attractive and honorable candidate and that he would give Muskie a tough time, and he blew at that one, so. But he, it blew over shortly and, you know, there's nothing that he would keep any anger in his system about, but those are the two times that I saw him really blow his top.

MR: Were there any other occasions that you witnessed him, witnessed his temper, maybe

against you or someone else?

CA: No, those are the only two that come to mind.

MR: I've heard some people say that he used his temper, and that sometimes it was kind of almost a show. What do you think about that?

CA: I had the sense that time that he reamed me out in that conference room, there were maybe fifteen of us sitting around a big square table, and I sensed that he was using it at that time, that he really didn't mean what he saying, but. Because after all, you know, I thought I was doing him a favor, I was saying, I was pointing out Bill Cohen's very obvious strengths, and I still think he's a force to be reckoned with to this day. I'm a strong admirer of him. It cuts across party lines. But he didn't want to hear it, and I think what he did, he was very forceful in telling me what his positive traits were and what he had done for the country and for the state.

MR: Now, do you remember, I guess, during that period, especially during I think the '76 reelection campaign that Muskie was running, there was a current of thought that Muskie was becoming out of touch with the Maine constituents, that he was becoming more of a national politician instead of a home politician. Do you remember anything about that, did you ever have an opportunity to talk with him about that?

CA: Let me ask you this, when did McGovern run?

MR: I can't say.

CA: I think it's about that time. And I think there was a lot of unease and dissatisfaction among the rank and file Democrats because of the silly rules that the national committee foisted upon us. You know, that every single constituent group had to be represented, so that if there were, in a group of twenty people, if three were Roman Catholic, then there had to be one third, what I'm saying, that there had to be a ratable apportionment of all of these constituent groups. I mean, you know, I, you can name fifty that might be involved. So it became impossible. And I think some of that rubbed off against Muskie and other leaders of the party. I honestly, as I sit here and recall, I. Other than a few grumbles from some of the old pols in the area who would stop by in Washington occasionally to see the senator, and would expect to be wined and dined and would be put off, and then see him later on the Senate floor, well I think he was doing his business, you see, but they were grumpy that he hadn't taken them out to eat or taken them to the Senate cafeteria or something like that and spent his time with them. But other than a few carping statements like that from the entrenched politicians, I didn't sense that the average man on the street had many reservations about him.

MR: And now did you have much contact with Muskie in the '80s and '90s after his political involvement, or after his time as secretary of state at least?

CA: I would take my mother, who was then aged, to certain events. I think an invitation may

have come to her from Muskie or Muskie's staff. For example, he was honored at Bates College, from which he graduated and had been a trustee, he was honored there and I remember going to that. And someone who I think became secretary of state later on was there at the time, the fellow from Pillsbury and Madison in San Francisco, I can't, the name doesn't come back to me [Warren Christopher]. But, and you'd meet him at things like that. Or I'd meet him in the airport. And when my dad died he sent a big thing of flowers and a very nice note, just intimate in context. I will say this also, that every year he hosted a lobster feed at his home in Kennebunk for party contributors and I always made a point of going to that just because it was a fun thing and you'd see old friends that you hadn't seen for the rest of the year, and be able to chat about politics.

MR: So did you, you didn't see him terribly frequently, maybe once or twice a year at this point?

CA: I think that's a fair statement, yeah.

MR: Now, getting back to, obviously your mother, you said, had a lot of stories about Muskie since she taught him in high school. What were some of the stories you remember she told you when you were younger and even later on?

CA: Just about this group of extremely bright people, maybe four of them that would stay behind after class and would talk politics, would talk history and whatnot. My mother was used in the Muskie film clip, which may be in the archives, and, for one of his reelections, and she's the white haired lady sitting in front of some flowers on the front lawn of our family farm, and you could probably get more from that clip than I could recall.

MR: And now, what was you family's relationship with the Muskie family in general, or Ed Muskie in particular? Did you see Jane much?

CA: No, I knew Jane but only as his wife and I did not know her before I became an attorney and active in state politics. So I'd see her at fundraisers or conferences and that type of thing, but I never was a close social friend.

MR: So there were no periods during which you had close social contacts with either Ed or (*unintelligible word*)?

CA: I think that's fair, that's a fair statement. Just through the politics, that's all.

MR: And actually, moving on to the situation of the Auburn community, how would you say it's, how would you say it was politically when you first got here, and how would you say it's developed over time, in the past thirty years?

CA: Well, again, it's difficult to recall because Auburn and Lewiston were really considered in the same area, it was of course in the same district, and the state wide offices, people considered

the two cities to be the same. My impression was that Auburn was predominantly Republican but very close, you know, fifty-five/forty-five, Republican/Democrat, whereas Lewiston was overwhelmingly Democratic, maybe seventy/thirty.

MR: And do you think that situation has changed as far as you can tell over the years, both in Auburn and Lewiston?

CA: I doubt it, but I don't know. To tell you the truth, I haven't lived in the city for ten years and, I've lived in Yarmouth or Falmouth and so I'm out of touch with what's going on locally.

MR: And, what would you say overall was the contribution of Muskie, of Senator Muskie, to state and national politics?

CA: I think both the state and the nation regarded him as a man of great integrity. Just his face bespoke integrity. I think he had the trust of the average person, I think they felt that he was a wise counselor and a wise lawmaker. So I guess the strongest contribution was one of trust. And then of course people such as George Mitchell could speak more to the topic. And I'm talking about his work on the budget, he was recognized as an expert on the budget, and of course all he's done for the environment. I guess those are his strong suits.

MR: And is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to go over, any other stories about Muskie or about your political involvement or anything?

CA: No, as I, I've been in many meetings with him and many social settings, mostly on a political basis, various homes such as Shepard Lee, you'll probably talk with Shep who was a very close friend of both Jane and Ed Muskie and would have a much deeper insight than I on the topic. I was privileged to be probably the most significant donor to the Muskie institute that you're associated with. I did it anonymously at the time, but I think mine was the largest contribution over there, toward that.

MR: Okay, great, thanks for your time.

CA: Okay, you're welcome.

End of Interview