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Allen, Frederick oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with Frederick Allen by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Allen, Frederick

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

June 27, 2001

Place

Gorham, Maine

ID Number

MOH 282

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Biographical Note

Frederick N. Allen was born August 10, 1914 in Portland, Maine to Margaret Stevens Allen and Neil W. Allen, who served as the mayor of Portland, Maine. He had three brothers: Charles, Neil, Jr., and Franklin, and two sisters, Louise and Barbara. He is the uncle of Tom Allen (son of Charles), current U.S. Congressman from Maine. He grew up in Portland, attending public schools there and went to college at Boston University. After college, he worked briefly for the family business before embarking on a career in politics. He spent two terms in the Maine House of Representatives, from 1945 to 1947, and in 1949, he began two terms in the Maine Senate. There, he became nationally active in the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) and eventually served as national president of that organization. He was a supporter of Burton Cross, Margaret Chase Smith, and Edmund Muskie.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Allen's family background; Allen's political career; Ed Muskie; Public Utilities Commission in the 1950s; gubernatorial race between Ed Muskie and Burton Cross; changes in the Republican Party in Maine; National Association of Regulatory Commissioners (NARUC); and Ronald Reagan.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is the 27th of June, the year 2001. We are at Gorham House in Gorham, Maine, and Don Nicoll is interviewing Fred Allen. Fred, would you state your full name and date and place of birth, and the names of your parents.

Frederick Allen: Thank you Don. My name is Frederick N. Allen, I was born August 10th, 1914 in Portland, Maine. And my dad was Neil W. Allen and my mother was Margaret Stevens Allen.

DN: And those two names conjure up a very distinguished Portland history (*unintelligible word*).

FA: Well, my grandfather [John Calvin Stevens] was a very well known, nationally known architect. And I was born and educated in the public schools of Portland, and took graduate work at, after Portland, at Boston University. I returned to the family business which, with one

of my brothers, but then decided to seek a career in politics after serving in local clubs and organizations. I ran for the Maine house of representatives and spent two terms in the Maine house, '45, '47.

In '49 moved to the senate, served two terms in the state senate. While I was in the senate, I became nationally active in the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners in NARUC, and served as national president of NARUC, which is the organization of federal and state commissioners. At that time I had an opportunity to visit with the then president, Lyndon Johnson, on at least four more occasions, and I enjoyed a very exciting career.

I really can say, and I try to tell young people, if you don't have a job which you don't like, by all means quit and look around. There's nothing more discouraging to me than to see young people stuck in the same job for a life time when there is so much opportunity. That's the message which I have tried to give and still try to give to young people that I meet. Don't ever stay in a job, whether it's well paying or not well paying, if you're young, get an education and then go at it.

DN: Did your parents encourage that kind of an approach?

FA: My parents, I talked to my dad and I talked to my brother Charles, a lawyer. I said, "Dad, I think public relations is good, I've enjoyed working here, but I'd like to run for the legislature." "Go ahead."

DN: Your father had been mayor of Portland. Had he served at that time already?

FA: That's correct. He was active, we were all brought up with the idea of being active in clubs in school, and athletics associations. We all were told: participate. I wasn't the athlete that my brothers were, but I participated in school sports, activities, drama.

DN: Now, you had two brothers, or more?

FA: I have, there were four boys and two girls. And Charles, Fred, Neal, Jr., Franklin, and -

DN: Charles was a lawyer.

FA: Charles [father of Congressman Tom Allen] was a lawyer, and Neal was, ended up as very distinguished professor at, ended up his career at Union College in Schenectady. Franklin stayed with the family business and took over. He was the only in the family that did, and until we sold the firm some years ago. Barbara was a singer and actually sang with the traveling contingents of the Metropolitan until she, her voice was ruined by a poor prescription.

DN: Oh, dear.

FA: But, Louise, my sister Louise, went to the west coast and worked for a very large worldwide organization involved in, [I'm] looking for the words, she also is professional and very successful.

DN: Now when you went to the legislature, you were elected in 194-?

FA: Five.

DN: Elected in '45 or elected in '44?

FA: Well I was, I served '45 and '46 in the House, and the next two terms in the senate.

DN: So you were already in your second term when Ed Muskie first came to the legislature.

FA: That's exactly right. I was in, I was in my first term in the senate when Ed came to (*unintelligible word*); first term in the senate. He came into the house when I was, again, my first term in the senate.

DN: And was that the first time you met him?

FA: All I know is that we kidded, we used to kid him and say, you know, "Some day, Ed, you might be governor." I always thought he was, I don't say this publicly, but I always thought he was one of the good Democrats. Bear in mind I come from a Democratic family. My mother and father, sister and I, the only Republicans in it. Now we're the only Republicans in the universe. But, no, I always thought Ed was very good. And -

DN: In addition to serving in the house and the senate, you were active in Republican politics in the state.

FA: Evidently I was more active than I remember. I was chairman of the town committee, I was chairman of the county committee. And I didn't serve on the state committee, but I was looking through that book, I found out I ran right up through all of that.

DN: And you managed Governor [Burton] Cross' first campaign for governor as I recall.

FA: That's correct. I, yes I did. I had forgotten that until I looked at my, saw my papers. There's some criticism of the fact that I was in the legislature. And you can borrow this book for any

DN: Oh, thank you.

FA: But most people didn't think it was that much of a problem.

DN: Did you, did you manage his campaign during the primary of '52, or was it for the general election? We can look that up. You had also, had you been involved in Senator [Margaret Chase] Smith's campaigns?

FA: Yes, I was an early supporter of Senator Smith.

DN: And after the 1952 campaign, was it then that you went on the Public Utilities Commission?

FA: Yeah. I went on the Public Utilities Commission. I was appointed by Cross.

DN: And were you appointed early on as the chair of the commission, or?

FA: No, Fred Payne was governor and the council said, in effect, we'll let you appoint so-and-so to a commission, and we'll let you name Fred Allen as chairman. It was a political deal. I think it was either Dave Marshall or Dick McMahon. Dave Marshall, by the way was, I thought was one of our outstanding commissioners. He's a (*unintelligible word*), but it was a political, it was a polit-, I got the chairmanship as a result of a political decision.

DN: What were the kinds of issues you had to deal with in those days on the commission?

FA: Strangely enough, Don, not as far from today as usual, you know what I mean? But politics was ever present, no doubt about that.

DN: Before we started taping, you were telling me about a natural gas issue that arose and the possibility, back then, of getting the gas line from Burlington through New Hampshire to Maine.

FA: That was interesting. The chairman of the Burlington commission, Vermont commission, and I were solidly in favor of bringing natural gas into Maine from Burlington. And everything was fine, excepting, everything was fine excepting that if they had to go through Vermont. And the chairman of the New Hampshire commission kaboshed the thing, because he couldn't get, at that time we had to go through him, and the New Hampshire commission said, refused to help them.

DN: What was the objection in New Hampshire?

FA: I don't know, but I was amazed that he was able to block it. There was an appointment to the federal park commission also involved. And anyway, we couldn't get authority, we couldn't get his approval. And there was a, so that fell through.

DN: Now you were on the commission in 1954 when Ed Muskie ran for governor the first time.

FA: Correct.

DN: And what was your view of that campaign?

FA: I'm trying to, I'm trying to, who was running?

DN: It was Burt Cross and Ed Muskie.

FA: Oh yeah. I thought it was unfortunate because I had always, I didn't think the Republicans looked very smart. And I don't remember that I, I don't remember that I was, I

certainly couldn't, I wasn't active, I know that, and I liked, had a loyalty to Cross, but on the other hand I had always, had always regarded Ed Muskie to be very outstanding. I don't say that for, looking for a quarter. I don't, as a matter of fact I came across a recent clipping, "Allen endorses Muskie" and I don't know when it was, it was for something. Third term in the United States Senate, did he run for-?

DN: Yeah, he ran for a third term.

FA: Did he run for a third term?

DN: Yes, he did.

FA: Yeah, and I supported him. Another person I'm supporting for office this year is Chellie Pingree. I've told all my Republican friends, I said, "I'm voting for Chellie Pingree."

DN: Now why is, why is that?

FA: I worked with her, of course I'm not a (*unintelligible phrase*), but I worked with Chellie on several matters. And I've sent a little bit of money, I don't know, recently I told her I can't. And I got to know her after, in recent years, and always admired her.

DN: What was it about Ed Muskie that you particularly admired? And you had to deal with him as chairman of the commission when he was governor.

FA: That's correct. We won't mention the name, but you know where he stood. I always, I have always, all my life, admired people who said what they thought, admitted when they made errors, and my record shows I made some errors, too. Everybody does, political and otherwise. But I, if he believed something he said it. He made some mistakes, we all make mistakes, I made some mistakes, whether you're in business or in politics. But number one, he admitted when he was wrong.

DN: As you observed the politics of Maine change from the forties through the end of the, well into the sixties, how did it strike you? What did you think was happening in the state as it went from essentially a Republican state to a competitive state?

FA: Two things: number one, the party became much more conservative than I am. I was a middle of the road, almost a liberal Republican, and I felt left out. In other words, it was becoming more and more conservative than I am personally. And whether it was Wendell Willkie or whether it was Rockefeller, the fact remained that the Maine party, Republican Party, became more conservative, along with the national party. And Trent, I had no criticism of him, (*Unintelligible phrase*), but I thought that they were, like my son said not long ago, "You were left without a party." In other words, -

DN: You regard yourself as an independent these days?

FA: No, nothing that far, I'm still loyal to the party to a degree. But, now Trent Lott and that

group, it's too conservative for me.

DN: Tell us a bit about your experience at the national level. You were active in the National Association of Regulatory -

FA: I was on their executive committee for several years, and then at the last meeting convention I was elected national party member, and that was pretty exciting. But I knew these fellows, I'd been on their executive committee for six or eight years. I'll give you an example of something that always impressed me. Well, when I was president of NARUC, I invited the New England commissioner to Poland Springs for a meeting, and of course I invited President Reagan, who was then president. So when he came, I had met him of course in California and several other places, because he ran.

But I said, "Mr. President, I'd like you to meet my wife, Noreen." He turned right to her, didn't say anything to me, he knew me already of course, he said, "Mrs. Allen, I'm so glad to meet you." He didn't say, "Fred, how are you?" He introduced himself to my wife first, and then he said, then he said, "How are you, Mr. Chairman?" That impressed me. Most people say, oh hello, as an afterthought, but he didn't say hello to me at all. The first thing he said was, Mrs. Allen.

DN: He had the instinct. As you look back on your career, what were the highlights in terms of your public service?

FA: I think the highlights were to be able to participate in all levels of government, local, state and national, to be able to participate in all the levels of the government. And still, hopefully, see that ninety percent of the people who are working, federal, state or local government, are honest, trying to do a job, and a benefit to the people. That's why our country is as strong as it is. Also that we have been able to ferret out, for the most part, the good from the bad.

I just got reading this week's copy of *Reader's Digest*, the story of the bomber, blew up a building of a city, how tragic that was. But how it came about, it came about because somewhere along the line somebody failed him, and somebody, several people, could have saved that child from becoming what he had, what he did. And so many times that happens. But with (*unintelligible phrase*) where there is, the Al Capone gang in Kansas City or some other, the fact remains that basically our government for the most part has been able to ferret out the weak, the corrupt, and that's why we, whether the president is corrupt or whether the local sheriff is corrupt, basically speaking, I think that's wonderful. I don't know whether the policy we adopt nationally is good or bad, but we are strong. And I don't think strength is everything.

DN: Are there some other topics that you would like to talk about this morning, Fred?

FA: No, but I might think of some.

DN: Well, maybe we can continue the conversation on another day.

FA: Well I do, it's wonderful, Don, wonderful of you to take the time.

DN: Well, great to see you again.

FA: It's great to see you. And now of course I'm, most of the people that I have worked with, in Maine or otherwise, most of the people are trying to do a real good job. But I was amazed to go through that clipping book, the clippings.

DN: Well, I'd like to take you up on your offer to borrow it and use it, and we'll get it back to you.

FA: Oh sure, definitely.

DN: On the occasion of the second conversation.

FA: I want to tell you, by the way, that I got a son that likes you.

DN: Oh, Fred? We enjoy Fred.

FA: Well, he's had a lot of problems, but he's happy down there and he's, you people are good, the best thing in the world for him.

DN: He involves himself and he works very hard at being a part of the community.

FA: Well I think it's wonderful, Don, I do really. He said, "You're going to see Mr. Nicoll?" "Yes I am." Okay.

DN: Thank you very much.

End of Interview
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