8-12-2002

Babbidge, Chris oral history interview

Paul Brunetti

Interview with Chris Babbidge by Paul Brunetti

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Babbidge, Chris

Interviewer
Brunetti, Paul

Date
August 12, 2002

Place
Kennebunk, Maine

ID Number
MOH 357

Biographical Note

Christopher Welton Babbidge was born in Portland, Maine on March 14th, 1949. He is the son of Frank and Helene Babbidge and the grandson of Adah Burns Carnes Roberts, who was the vice chair of the Maine Democratic Party in 1954. Babbidge is a high school history and government teacher in Kennebunk, Maine. He is very active in the Maine Democratic Party, serving as a delegate to the state convention and is active in local government as well. For many years he was on the faculty of the Muskie Scholars program at Bates College.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: personal background; growing up in South Portland; political influences; relationship with Ed Muskie; electoral college; jobs after college; forming the Muskie Scholars Program; Ed Muskie's interactions at the Muskie Scholars program; becoming politically active; starting as a teacher; Muskie's tenure as Secretary of State; and Babbidge's political involvement.

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Transcript

Paul Brunetti: This is August 12, 2002, at the home of Mr. Chris Babbidge in Kennebunk, Maine; it's 9:45 AM. This is Paul Brunetti interviewing Chris Babbidge. Can you start by stating and spelling your full name?

Chris Babbidge: Sure, Paul, it's Christopher, C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H-E-R, Welton, W-E-L-T-O-N, Babbidge, B-as in boy, B-A-B-B-I-D-G-E.

PB: And when and where were you born?

CB: I was born in Portland, on March 14th, 1949.

PB: And do you have any recollections of the Portland area?

CB: Well, actually I, my folks lived in Margaret Street in Portland, in South Portland at the time, but they, that was an apartment that they had for a short time. But I do recall that they bought a home in, I recall, an apartment on Bonny Bank Terrace in South Portland, which is where I had my earliest preschool recollections. But when I was, I believe it's actually when I was six, we bought a home on Massachusetts Avenue in South Portland, which is the Sunset Park portion of Thornton Heights, and I lived there until adulthood.

PB: Great. And, let's see, what was South Portland like politically, religiously?

CB: Well, South Portland was a part of the American suburbia of the 1950s. My particular neighborhood had four streets, at the end of which, at the end of one of them, was a ball park and a community house. And so there was a, we called it Farm League at that particular time, it's wasn't officially associated with Little League but it had the, all the things that Little League does and a tremendous amount of involvement. Probably an awful lot of families who were owning their homes for the first time, I'm betting. So it was a middle class experience, a post-WWII middle class experience in South Portland.

PB: So would you say it was more Democratic than Republican at that time?

CB: You know, that's a hard call because Maine, up until the 1950s, was primarily a Republican state. But I would guess that South Portland at that time was probably fairly mixed. I will tell you though that the first indication, the first memory I have of political affiliation was the election of John Kennedy in 1960, when Kennedy ran against Vice President Nixon in the 1960 election. I was in sixth grade and, I believe it was sixth grade, right, and my class voted, and I knew nothing about politics. My family, I don't recall what they said about it, but I couldn't have heard too much because I ended up voting for John Kennedy. And my class voted sixteen to seven for Richard Nixon. And so I felt like I had done something wrong, I guess, because the quote I remember to my dad was, "Dad, I'm sorry, I voted for John Kennedy in the election." And he said, "Chris, that's fine, so didn't I." And at that time I remember, you did? Because nobody I know did, you know, and so that's terrific. So I remember feeling good about that.

So there must have been a Democratic leaning early on (*unintelligible word*), but it wasn't based on ideology or anything like that, I don't believe, at the time. But that's the first probably political memory I have.

Although I do remember on television, I guess, Dwight Eisenhower listening to John Kennedy give his inaugural address. And Kennedy had actually, from study that I've, you know, done since, been a saber rattler. In other words, he'd been a hawk in that election, talking about how,

very much like what Ronald Reagan did to Jimmy Carter in 1980, and that is that this administration has dropped the ball, and we need to be tougher, we need to be, we need to have our military with a greater degree of readiness, blah-blah-blah. And Kennedy made some quote, actually "Ask not what your country can do for you," is not what I remember. What I remember is Kennedy saying, "Those that ride the tiger often end up inside the tiger." And Eisenhower, I remember, the camera cut to Eisenhower, who was pleased with Kennedy's at least acknowledgment that impulsive use of the military could be very dangerous in a nuclear age. So that's my first political memory, probably, in television.

PB: What were your parents' names?

CB: My father, Frank W. Babbidge, Frank Welton Babbidge, was a, both of them were from the Rockland area. My mother is Helene Carnes Babbidge, that's H-E-L-E-N-E, C-A-R-N-E-S. And they both grew up really on Lake Avenue in Rockland, and that's, so that's where my roots are from.

PB: And what was your grandmother's name?

CB: My grandmother's name was Adah Evelyn Burns as a child. And then she married Carnes, so her name was Adah Carnes. But actually, her first husband died, I believe, and she remarried early in my life, if even during my life, to Christopher Roberts. Christopher Shirley Roberts who was an attorney, who originally came from Vinalhaven but who set up practice as an attorney in Rockland. So my grandmother, Adah Carnes, Adah Burns Carnes Roberts, actually I believe was an assistant librarian for most of her life, and my grandfather was an attorney. So Adah and Chris Roberts were fairly well known in the Rockland community.

PB: And were they politically active?

CB: They were. My grandmother, actually, was born in Texas. I think her dad was a minor league ballplayer in the Texas league in the Pittsburgh Pirate organization. But she spent her youth in Portland. I understand she went to Wayneflete, but she ended up on Lake Avenue in Rockland. And my grandfather, I understand, was asked by Franklin Roosevelt to take a position involving the judiciary, I believe. Maybe it was, I'm not sure about the exact appointment that was offered, but the fact was that he refused the appointment because it would have meant leaving Maine, and he wasn't politically ambitious in that way. My grandfather was somewhat of a Civil Libertarian at the time, he defended a lot of people, helped out a lot of people and was kind of a home grown, you know, home town, what would they call it, Mr. Rural Maine Attorney, and was well appreciated. My grandmother became, you know, I wasn't aware of her activism when I was young, because she was active at about the same time that I was just entering school. But she was the vice chair of the Maine Democratic Party during the resurrection of the Democratic Party in 1954. She worked with Frank Coffin a lot. As a matter of fact, when they talked about the, when my grandmother would talk about the party and what was happening in 1954, she always kind of mentioned Ed Muskie and Frank Coffin in the same breath. Because the two of them were the people she thought deserved a great deal of credit for what happened, which is really returning the two-party system to Maine.

PB: So there was a lot of political conversation in her house.

CB: There were. Well, there was a lot of conversation in her house. It wasn't always political, but Lake Avenue in Rockland, the old, it was a former farm, but that old house in Rockland was always full of lively, vital, vibrant conversation, and often political. Although my grandfather, you know, he was quite a reserved fellow, and I only wish that I had reached adulthood in time to have some conversations with him. He died, I'm not sure about the date, but just at the time when I was in high school and not really, you know, I sort of got my political legs rather late.

I mean I was interested in history very much. My passions when I was very young were astronomy and geography, but I only became, and I loved history very, very early from my dad basically. My dad was, although just a high school graduate, he graduated from Rockland in 1931, was a reader of history, and a person who could read it and live it. I mean he appreciated the trials that people went through, and personalized them in his mind, and made me appreciate them as well as being real. You know, so, and he had a lot of compassion. He would, he was not one to dismiss other people's travails as something minor, he had a lot of compassion. And I think that's where I began to care.

PB: Was he politically active? Or-

CB: He was very politically astute. He was not politically active in an organized sense, he wasn't a member of the Democratic party. As a matter of fact, you know, the way my parents, one of my parents is a registered Democrat and the other one registered Republican, and neither one of them were active in their party. They merely, I mean that, once you get in the voting booth you put that curtain behind you and, you know, everybody is an independent, if you want to call it that. But the fact of the matter is he was very politically aware, read the newspaper front to back every day and would discuss it, and that's where I got my education from.

PB: So which one was the Democrat and which was the Republican?

CB: You know, I'm not even sure because it didn't make that much difference. But I'm going to guess, I'm going to guess just because it didn't make much sense that dad is the Republican and my mother the Democrat. The reason I say that, I can remember saying that it's amazing that he's registered as a Republican because he was very liberal in his beliefs. Like I said, he voted for Kennedy in 1960, which wasn't necessarily a liberal vote at that time, but he certainly believed in the under-represented.

PB: Your grandmother Roberts was your mother's mother.

CB: Exactly, and so Mother Roberts was my mother's mother, so that's why she would be the registered Democrat.

PB: Was your grandmother political?

CB: Adah Roberts?

PB: Your mother.

CB: My mother, no, no, never. She could discuss things, but she sort of deferred to my father to a large degree, who was passionate about it. And even though she came from politically aware parents, and active parents on occasion, it was a big family and I think that, you know, I can recall her youngest sister, Christine, my Aunt Christine, telling me about . . . . She was young and, you know, she was a young married woman and she lived at home with her husband and my aunt. My aunt and uncle had a, they lived in what was an addition that had been built earlier off my grandparents' farm. So they lived at home, but I recall my aunt saying that one time Grampy called up and said, "Can you make us a lunch? I'm bringing somebody home," and so she, you know, I think she had been napping because she was in some later stage of pregnancy, and she finally got up and made a sandwich and the person she brought home was Ed Muskie, the person he brought home was Ed Muskie. And I think that perhaps was, I'm trying to think of, if she's pregnant she would have been pregnant with my cousins and looking at their age, I'm guessing that Muskie probably, this was at the time, in the vicinity of the campaign, of his 1954 campaign for governor.

PB: Did you have any contact with Ed Muskie or Frank Coffin through the years?

CB: It's interesting, with Frank Coffin I just happened to see him at a Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in Portland actually, so I introduced myself and had a nice conversation with him. But it was not arranged, it was, you know. With Ed Muskie I had the good fortune of knowing him on two fronts. I'm not sure that he knew me, if you want to- Well, that's probably untrue because he got to see me in a repetitive situation after a while. But I'm an active Democrat, I've been active myself since 1978. And in 1980 was my first state convention, I was elected as a delegate from Greenville to the Democratic State Convention in Bangor. And Ed Muskie, in 1980, had just been appointed secretary of state under Jimmy Carter. And in his earliest days as secretary of state he had gone to Belgium to, for a major NATO meeting, and then he'd gone and spoken with Andrei Gromyko who was foreign minister of the Soviet Union. And he was on his way back to report to Washington, D.C., but he stopped at the Bangor International Airport and made a special appearance at the Democratic convention on his way back. And it was like we were getting the first, you know, the first public appearance of Ed Muskie as secretary of state after having this, after having had this major international meeting, especially he and Gromyko. But he paid homage to his roots and made a speech at the Bangor Auditorium.

PB: What was that like when he was there?

CB: It was spectacular. I mean, it was a major event. I mean, not only was Ed Muskie sort of coming home to his, the area, you know, to the organization and the people who he had served and who had been responsible for helping him in his early days, but Muskie was the hero, is the, you know, is a hero of the Democratic party. But also that moment in history was particularly important. In 1980 things had chilled between the United States and the Soviet Union as a result of the Afghan invasion in December of '79, so for the senator, or secretary of state at that time to

appear before us was really, it was spectacular.

It's interesting, after his speech a lot of delegates at the convention left the floor to get a glimpse of Muskie or try to speak with him in the mezzanine before he left. And I remember there was major concern because the platform was being discussed, and with probably the more traditional Democrats leaving the floor to talk to Muskie, it left the progressives with a potential majority at that particular time. And we were talking about major issues, like abortion and things of that sort, and so I don't recall if it actually had any significance as to what was passed as part of the platform, but I recall a major concern that, oh my gosh, the real business of the convention is getting done here.

I have to say that political conventions, the evolution of political conventions in my, even in my short two decade plus exposure, has been that conventions have become less meaningful as decision making opportunities, but have become promotional programs for the candidates. Which they are meant to be, I mean we don't apologize for that. But the fact of the matter is, there was the opportunity for real confrontation and decision making on difficult issues back in those days. And there still is today, although it does seem that the organizers of the conventions, rightfully, want all Democrats to be unified when they leave the convention. But I do personally fear that the attempt to maintain unity and minimize dissent, I guess, no, they can't minimize dissent, but to minimize the opportunity for cantankerous discussion, for several reasons by the way, sometimes it's not to merely keep people unified but it's also to keep people on schedule if we do have a keynote speaker coming out, coming from, flying in who's going to be available at 8:20 to make a presentation in the evening, and our debate goes two hours long in the afternoon, then everything gets backed up and it could be a major problem for getting the, you know, major speakers to be heard by the convention. But anyway, I will say that we have to be careful a little bit, because I'm a believer in grass roots democracy.

But I will say, in returning to the subject of Secretary Muskie, that that 1980, there's two things I remember about the convention in 1980, specifically, because it was my first convention. One was that moment when the secretary came, which was golden. The other was platform debate, and speaking on abortion. I recall one person getting up who was, who said, "We really should not include abortion as part of our platform, and the reason we can't is because abortion is such an important issue it is beyond compromise. It's a philosophical issue, it's an issue that can only divide this party. Our purpose here is to win elections. By adopting abortion as a platform plank, it is only going to alienate those that disagree with the plank as adopted, whichever way we go with it, and it's going to be divisive so it shouldn't be included." And I'm nodding my head, thinking this is a rational explanation of, you know, we need to be able to succeed.

And then another fellow got up, and I don't know if it was a fisherman (*unintelligible phrase*). I mean the Democratic Party has people from all parts of Maine society, and I was impressed with the eloquence of people regardless of what part of society they represented. Fellow got up and said, "It's the Democratic party that has the conscience and the courage to take on important issues. We've never not faced an issue because it was difficult. In 1948, during the Truman administration, it was the Democratic Party that came up with Civil Rights, even though we knew that was going to cost us in the South. It was the right thing to do then, and this is the right

thing to do now." And I, you know, I was just run over by the eloquence. I said, boy, this is a real classroom. See, I'm a high school teacher, I've been in education for thirty years now. But at that time I saw political conventions as an extension of the classroom, this is where real discussion on real issues is taking place and real decisions are being made. And I was very, very impressed, and from that moment I was hooked about remaining politically active.

So the two memories I have of that 1980 convention is the secretary of state of the United States making a special appearance in this historic moment, and then secondly the level of discourse in platform debate I thought was extremely high and very educational. And I thought that's, education is one of the functions of a political party and so I've been involved since.

PB: What was the result of the platform debate?

CB: They did adopt a plank favoring women's right to choose.

PB: Did it hurt in November?

CB: It, probably not. I don't know if it, if the reason it didn't hurt was good or bad. The fact of the matter is, that in campaigns there is no litmus test, or there's no real accountability for a candidate to adhere to all the planks of a platform. And so the media that was received at that time, I don't think, everybody tip toed around the abortion issue anyway at that time. The Republican Party in the early seventies actually had come out in favor of, or at least not against, a woman's right to choose. But they, but the right wing of the party, you know, secured that early on. And the more progressive wing of the Democratic Party sort of gained a foothold during the 1970s as well.

PB: Let's backtrack a little bit. Did you do all your schooling in South Portland?

CB: All my public schooling. Actually, I, my education is such that I graduated from South Portland High School in 1967, and I guess George Mitchell, you know, because he had Falmouth roots early on, but he hailed from South Portland later on, but I didn't know that at the time. But anyway, so South Portland.

And then I went to the University of Maine in Portland for two years. It was the only school I applied to, I knew, I'd known since about the age of fifteen probably that I wanted to be a history teacher. And so I looked at the history professors that were available in Portland, I'd heard some good things about a couple of them specifically, and so I sort of knew what I wanted to do.

I paid for my own education with what I made in the summer time; I knew my folks weren't going to be able to help out too much with the finances there. So I lived at home and went to Portland for two years, after which I gained permission from both the university and the draft board, Vietnam was going on that time, for me to visit southern Africa. So I spent the next semester in southern Africa, and when I came back I had intended to go back to school; actually, what happened was I had developed a little bit of debt, I had borrowed some money from my dad to return in January, mid year, and the draft had gone to a lottery and my number was so high I

knew that wasn't going to be a factor. So that spring I worked for the United States government actually, the Department of Agriculture, as a pest control worker in southern Maine.

We were given implements of destruction and sought out the dreaded brown tail moth. So you know, like the Coast Guard would drop me off on an island and then come back after me eight hours later, and I was to map where, you know, first of all, see them. But the fact of the matter was that it would have been even better if it had been summer time, *(pause)* but it was February, March and April, and so there was three feet of snow. In the sixties we got a lot of snow. But anyway, in 1970 that actually was, '69, '70. Came home actually in January of '70 so that was the spring of 1970. Then I went back to school, spent a little bit of time with Orono, graduated University of Southern Maine, or PG as it was called then, University of Maine Portland Gorham, with a degree in history.

PB: You said since the age of fifteen you'd been interested in history and wanted to be a history teacher.

CB: I think so.

PB: What caused that?

CB: Probably my father's influence more than any other. It was only after I became politically active that I was reminded by my family that my grandmother had been very politically active. And upon talking with her, sure enough, she had been very active with Senator Muskie. And, she showed me that she had exchanged, you know, Senator Muskie was sending her Christmas cards each year. I mean, of course political figures do that often during their terms, but evidently they had been close enough that she maintained at least Christmas card correspondence with the senator. So that's how I happened to know about it. Like I say, it was probably at that time, too, my, I was the oldest of the grandchildren and so, and I did very well in school and all of that, and so there was a lot of encouragement for me to become an attorney or a judge, or maybe governor. They really thought, "You could be governor some day," that type of thing. So they would always feed my ego a little bit every time I would visit Lake Avenue in Rockland.

But it was brought to my attention that my grandfather had had the opportunity during the Roosevelt administration, that he had been an active Democrat. I only found out in some things that were sent to me that my Aunt Christine, I told you, the young woman who made lunch for Senator Muskie during the campaign, she ran for county treasurer later on and so forth. So another, my grandfather was very politically active, my grandmother had become vice chair of the party. She introduced I think Senator Humphrey at a major speech that he made at the Samoset Hotel. And Don Nicoll, actually, who's heading up this oral history project, was the host and organizer of a Democratic retreat that we had just recently, in the 1990s. And when I introduced myself, he began the retreat by saying, "And I am delighted to have in the audience the grandson of my former boss." And he was talking about my grandmother at the time; he was a young volunteer in 1954 when things were getting going.

PB: Did your grandmother have any stories to tell you about her involvement?

CB: You know, she did not sound her own trumpet very much. It was mostly the rest of the family that did that. I don't have a lot of personal stories about Senator Muskie or Frank Coffin. Merely that she thought very highly of them, enjoyed their sense of humor, they seemed to enjoy each other.

Knox County, you know, the Maine coast is heavily Republican, but Knox county Democrats for as long as I can remember in my life, and that's only the, in my political life which is only the last twenty four years, political active life, Knox county has been a very strong, has had a very strong Democratic county committee. And so I don't know how much my grandmother had to do with that.

I did mention her in 2000. I was elected at the Democratic State Convention as an elector, and the electors in Maine selected me to be president. So I had the wonderful honor of being president of the 2000 Maine Electoral College, and I made a speech to close the Electoral College program, and I've got to go over there actually, but one thing that I know pleased my Aunt Christine for instance very much, was the fact that, can you excuse me a minute? Maybe I'll just take a, why don't I take - (*pause*). I went and retrieved a copy of a speech I gave as president of the Electoral College on December 18th, 2000. And we had about an hour and fifteen minute ceremony in which the four electors did their Constitutional duty. But I think I'd like to share a part of this speech, if I could. One of the things of course that was controversial about the Electoral College, of course, is the fact that Vice President Gore did win the popular vote, but didn't win the Electoral College. So therefore the legitimacy of the Electoral College came into question, but I mention my grandmother in here so I'll share part of that speech with you.

(*Reads*) "I want to say that I'm sure that some of the framers of the Constitution did have the Hamiltonian perspective that the Electoral College was a protection from the people. But it was as late as August in 1787, at the Constitutional Convention, when the Congress and then the state legislatures were being considered to be the bodies which would choose the president. But adherence to the principles of American government, separation of powers in federalism brought about a different result. It was James Wilson of Pennsylvania who worked for the president to be selected by the people, and the Electoral College was negotiated as a compromise. And although Article II of the Constitution specifies that state legislatures will determine the method of choosing electors, that method has come to be by the popular vote of the people. One person, one vote prevails as we, the electors, are chosen by the popular vote of each state.

This Electoral College is Maine's forty-sixth since statehood in 1820. In Maine's first nine presidential elections, Maine voted Democratic eight times. But starting in 1856, over the next century, Maine's electors voted Republican in twenty-seven of the next twenty eight elections. By 1954 Maine had not voted for the successful presidential candidate in five of the previous six elections, eroding confidence in the old slogan, "As Maine goes, so goes the nation."

It's at this time that I'd like to mention the name of Adah Roberts, a Democrat from Knox County. Adah Roberts died nearly six years ago, shortly before her ninety-fifth birthday. But one of her daughters, two of her grandchildren, one of whom is standing before you at this

podium, and her great-granddaughter are in this chamber today. This energetic lady from Rockland was vice chair of the Democratic Party, and a force in the organization of the 1954 convention, the convention that launched the public careers of Ed Muskie and Frank Coffin, the convention that is credited for marking the rebirth of the two party system in Maine. In the last ten presidential elections, Maine's Electoral College has voted five times for the Republican candidate, and five times for the Democratic candidate. In a renewed commitment to the saying, "As Maine goes . . .," Maine's electorate has voted with the nation wide winner of the popular vote for six elections in a row, including this year."

I go on to talk about how I think this, you know, is, how the two party system is actually working in Maine, but I don't make any more references to my grandmother. I just barely say, we had six hundred and fifty one thousand people vote in Maine for president in the year 2000, and Vice President Gore won by thirty three thousand votes. That's, in some cases that might be considered a close election, but when Florida is decided by three hundred, thirty three thousand is fairly significant.

But, you know, Joe Mayo, Dorothy Melanson, and Bill Phillips were the other electors in 2000. My daughter was able to serve as a page, which was a treat for me. But I will say it was a heady experience, too, for us to, it was a wonderful ceremony organized by actually Becky Wyke, who's Joe Mayo's wife, and Dan Gwadosky. Because not only did we have a full legislative chamber in the house, but to my right was the governor and to my left was the chief justice, and on the other side of the governor was the speaker of the house, and also the president of the senate. And they didn't get to speak. They were there for the importance of the occasion, but certainly this 2000 election emphasized the importance of the Electoral College.

PB: Definitely exciting in 2000.

CB: Amazing. But that's, you know, I wanted to mention my grandmother because she was, I think, an ordinary citizen who stepped forward and made a big difference at an important time.

PB: It's also exciting because she was a Democrat in a heavily Republican area, and made a change there as well.

CB: Well, I know, when you asked if my mother was Republican, or was active rather, the only, I recall that my mother almost thought Franklin Roosevelt as a member of the family. And I can, and she must have been sharing maybe even some of the concern of the family, but I remember my mother saying that when Franklin Roosevelt died, it was a huge thing. I mean, Franklin Roosevelt became president when my mother was nine, and died when she was twenty-one. So as far as her memory, he had been the king for her entire you know adulthood, or at least adult memory we should say. So to have Harry Truman come on board, you know, I don't know if it made much difference that he was only a high school graduate at that time, because most people were, but to have only been vice president for a few months, and to have to step into those giant shoes. I can remember my mother's expressing that, “Oh my gosh, are we going to be okay?” I mean, I wasn't around then, but in her, in sharing the memory with me was interesting.

PB: Were there any Maine connections to Franklin Roosevelt with your grandmother, other than the nomination for -?

CB: You know, I have no knowledge. I mean, obviously Franklin Roosevelt came through Maine when he went to Campobello. But I have no knowledge of that, I don't know if they stopped by or whatever, that's something I don't have any personal knowledge of.

PB: So you graduated from college what year?

CB: Seventy-two.

PB: Seventy-two, and what did you do after that?

CB: Well in, when I first got out of school I, at that time I was working summers for the Coca-Cola Company. I was driving a truck for Coca-Cola, and worked for a guy by the name of Jim Ritchie, he was my supervisor, I liked him a lot, good guy. That fall I had applied for a job and had two excellent interviews and fully intended to get it. I always had done very well when I applied for jobs, and I think I was probably a little arrogant, I'm not sure. But anyway, I ended up not getting it. A fellow, I got a letter in the mail finally, that's how I was notified, that a fellow with a master's degree who had been teaching in Europe got the job. And I sort of got a wake up call, wow, I forgot who I'm competing against out there, there are some good candidates.

So I didn't have anything to do, so that fall I had a buddy who had gone to Arizona, and Phoenix, and so I hitchhiked for eight weeks to visit him in Phoenix, Arizona. And then the two of us, he had an old pickup and we built a framed roof on the back of his pickup and put a queen size mattress in the back, and then we drove to Vancouver, Canada and just came down the coast of California and, slowly, just as a trip, for which he could take a couple days off. Unfortunately we got into a minor traffic accident in redwood country, and we were back on foot again. But it was a great, a wonderful eight weeks. I got to get into Mexico a little bit, got to see an awful lot of the west, you know, I got to eat hot peppers under the shadow of Mt. Rainier, in the old campground outside of Rainier, and do a lot of hiking around Tucson area and so forth. So that was wonderful.

I got back, I'll tell you, I do have a political memory there. That was 1972, and I think I left in September of '72, I can remember leaving South Portland by the turnpike at two in the afternoon, and I thought I'd probably go to my aunt's home in Andover, Mass. for that evening. But I ended up getting a ride so quickly I kept on going and ended up in northern New York State. But I think twenty-five rides later I got to Phoenix and, but I spent some time in Columbus with relatives there, I went to Ohio State and so forth. But in Phoenix I recall deciding to go to the Grand Canyon, and so we left the lowland hot area of Phoenix and I got to smell those pine trees for the first time in several weeks when I was going north, terrific, as I got close to Flagstaff, where my dad had been during the Depression, by the way. Yeah, he had driven a couple of elderly, well, an elderly woman around the west, from the Rockland area actually, so he got a job

as her driver and had quite an experience at that time.

But anyway, when I went north I picked up a fellow, or no, I got picked up by a fellow who was an organizer for George McGovern. And he was, this was the day before the election in '72, and I had long before lost hope and this young man was absolutely committed and sure that McGovern was going to win it. And so I had been hoping for McGovern early on, and then I'd sort of become apolitical, I didn't think McGovern had been much of a chance; Nixon was doing a lot of things that were very presidential. I was not a fan of Richard Nixon, but I had not expected much as that campaign went on for McGovern to do well. And then this fellow rejuvenated my hopes. By the time I got out of that car I was thinking, McGovern's going to do it, this is wonderful news, you know. And of course the next day was an entire demolition of McGovern's presidential aspirations.

But that was, I wasn't involved actively back then. Later on, in 1989 when the Muskie Summer Scholar's Project was going to be initiated, with Chris Beam, the archivist, being the principal character, and a few of us being asked to join as part of the faculty back then. This year it was just Chris and I, so we've done it for, what, I think this was the fourteenth year. But because of the Muskie Project, the senator visited our program each of those summers.

PB: We'll return to that subject on the next side.

End of Side A
Side B
CB: It was a program originally designed to take advantage of the Muskie Archives, which had newly been created. I didn't actually realize how new it was when I was getting started as a faculty member there. But it's had multiple purposes since; we appeal now to a diverse bunch of young people, so we have kids from urban areas as well as, just a varied geography. And so part of the program's I think emphasis now is to not only talk about America during the years of Senator Muskie's public service, but also to give students of color and of other backgrounds the opportunity to come and see Bates College as a potential place for them to go to school.

What was nice regarding the project for me was that I not only got to use some wonderful resources at the Ladd Library and the Muskie Archives, I got to teach a more diverse student group, but I also had exposure to Senator Muskie. Senator Muskie would come and visit the program each summer until his death, or if he was at all available to do so and he usually was, he usually made himself available to come up and speak with the scholars and take questions and so forth. Which I found a tremendous opportunity, and by the time the students had learned of Senator Muskie and so forth, they came to much appreciate that as well.

The reason I bring that up at this time is because I was saying, in '72, I made a reference to George McGovern in the '72 election. Well of course Senator Muskie was the frontrunner for most of the period between 1970 and 1972. And he tried to run a national campaign and, you know, a number of things occurred, dirty tricks being one of them, the Muskie appearance in front of the *Manchester Union Leader*. A lot of things, the Muskie finances being stretched thin, and high expectations for Muskie, meaning that if he didn't do absolutely well, then the news

was interpreted as bad even though he might have made a fairly strong showing in these different places. I asked him at one of these Muskie Summer Scholars Program, not about the '72 election precisely, but about the '68 election. Because in 1968, as a sophomore in college, as a nineteen year old sophomore, as a person who was eligible to be drafted were I not going to school, but as a person who was two years away from being able to vote, I was very much against the war. And it wasn't just that, it was also that I was a little concerned that there was a lot of profiteering on the war, that the war seemed to be fought by a disproportionate number of poor whites and Black Americans, while a lot of corporate heads and so forth were making a lot of money on the war. So I had different reasons for opposing the war.

When Senator Muskie was chosen as the vice presidential nominee by Hubert Humphrey, that put me in kind of a dilemma because Senator Muskie was the favorite son of the state of Maine, and I regarded him very highly. And so I asked him at this, at one of these Scholars meetings, Senator, I want you to try to appreciate the dilemma that I was in in 1968, because I did not agree with American policy in Vietnam, and I thought I had very legitimate reasons for doing so. And yet you, as the nominee for Senator Humphrey, for vice president, Humphrey-Muskie ticket, did not in any way, that I could see, vary from President Johnson's "Stay the course policy regarding Vietnam." And my question was, "Couldn't you have given some hope to the young people of America that saw obvious problems with the war, (that he himself would acknowledge four years later, in the '72 election)?" And his response, you know, he kind of smiled, and he said, "Well, you're asking me to." I don't recall the words that he gave, but it was along the lines of, you're asking me to sort of take a shot at revisionism. In other words, now in retrospect can I take the easy road and say, you know, but then he got a little bit more serious and said, "I suppose we could have done something to show a somewhat independent course but, (you know)…" he went on to explain the needs at that time. And he was committed, it wasn't any posturing on his part, he believed in the course at that time.

So those were wonderful opportunities for us to get some firsthand information from the senator himself. And there were other moments for us to appreciate what was, you know, his excitement for instance over the procedure of being chosen as vice president and so forth, so it was nice to have that. And I remember him speaking to me particularly. I was mad at myself because I had, he said, when I introduced myself as being from Kennebunk in one of those early meetings, he said, you know, I just read, and I think it was a Dana Pearson article from the *York County Co-Star*, and I hadn't read it and I didn't have that to share, but he liked it so much that he had brought it to Washington and he got a good laugh out of it. And I can remember, there was an opportunity for he and I to share something if I'd read my own local paper that day, but I hadn't read it, so, but whatever. Yeah, the senator always struck me as a man who liked his station in life. He was a VIP, I think he enjoyed being a VIP. And his cadence in his speaking I think was purposely dramatic. He knew how to speak in such a way as to emphasize important points, as to maximize I think the impact that he would have on an audience. He got people to listen to him.

PB: What was his, how did he interact with the kids at the Muskie Scholars Program?

CB: Very well. I mean, it was in many occasions, you have to understand a lot of these students who didn't know Ed Muskie very well, maybe knew the name but didn't know much

more than that before, they would have spent two weeks on using this man's personal materials for research, they would have seen the WCSH biography on him, they'd have done a lot of reading about him. And so by the time they got to see him, here they are in a Muskie Archives building, which is a wonderful building, the portrait of Ed Muskie over the fireplace, which you're well aware of, you know, and so here is the man himself. It was very, it was sort of like a group of pilgrims seeing the Pope or something, I mean, to a certain degree. So he certainly did have this exalted status when he was with us. But he was very down to earth, willing to take questions and answers, and enjoyed hearing, usually the students had some excellent questions to give him, so he was, I think he was gratified by that.

Of course, in the biography I mentioned from WCSH, during the 1968 convention which is such a, not the convention, the campaign, which was so heated over the issue of Vietnam, he had an awful lot of young people that showed no respect to speakers of, you know, from the establishment, and Ed Muskie had trouble with that. So oftentimes he'd remain silent until heckling would quiet down and, you know, as you know perhaps, he would sometimes invite people, they complained they didn't have a voice, you know. Well, he gave them the opportunity to come to the microphone on occasion, and of course they would give their speech and usually run out of things to say after a couple of minutes, and then when he spoke he had the people's attention and it worked out very well. So I think he did have a way sometimes of diffusing a situation, you know.

PB: So you became politically active in 1978, but how, when did you become politically aware?

CB: Well, that's a great question. I'm still striving to reach that point. I would say, I would say that I had a couple of people in, I had a couple of history teachers in high school that, I'm not sure, who helped me appreciate history even to greater degree. Still my dad was by far the great influence there. But I recall Charlie Cahill, my freshman, I never called him Charlie in those days, but Mr. Cahill, when I was a freshman in high school, when John Kennedy was assassinated, he was my teacher. And I recall him mentioning that Lyndon Johnson is perhaps the best qualified vice president we'd ever had. In other words, for a person to step into that job, Lyndon Johnson was a man of stature. Something that I think, you know, now Kennedy probably needed Johnson, but I think a person who appoints a vice president who is, who has obvious competence, that president demonstrates some, some responsibility to the nation I think, and also perhaps is competent in their own ability to the point of being able to handle a vice president that also has stature. I think there have been recent vice presidents, or recent presidents I think, you know, George Bush is one who in a couple of his appointments, appointed them for political reasons that made sense, but they were not people of stature, and I don't think were appointments in the best interest of the country.

PB: So -

CB: So, as far as my political awareness, I think in high school I was reasonably aware. I had an idea of, I mean as far as me being a Democrat for instance. Wow, that's a great question. Not so aware that I was for Hubert Humphrey. In other words, I became an admirer of Hubert

Humphrey *after* the 1968 election. It's only after the 1968 election that I truly became aware of his commitment to Civil Rights and how early he had been involved, and so forth. So college, my college years were when I became more aware.

PB: And so what, well, when did you start teaching?

CB: Nineteen seventy-two. I substituted primarily at Scarborough High School for three months, and then in 1973 I signed a contract, I'm sorry, that was the spring of '73, that's right. The spring of '73 was Scarborough High School, and the fall of '73 I signed a contract to go to Greeneville, and I spent eight years there.

PB: And that's how you were the delegate to the state convention (*unintelligible phrase*).

CB: In 1978 I started, I became active for the Democratic Party. I, when I say active for the Democratic Party, I was looking at the campaign between Bill Hathaway and Bill Cohen in the 1978 Senate race. And so that was my, I remember Dave Mallett up in Dover-Foxcroft giving a couple of concerts on behalf of Bill Hathaway. I went to those, I went to a couple of political meetings. I became chair of the Greeneville Democratic committee, and that's where I got started along with Judy Terwazowicz, and Karen Murray was the other person.

PB: What made you support Hathaway over Cohen?

CB: You know, I have to search out my reasoning here. But you know early on, my activism probably was through my activism as a teacher. My second year as a teacher at Greeneville, I became president of the Teacher's Association. And I also became a member of their, of the Maine Teacher's Association's political wing. Their political wing at that, it was called PACE, Political Action I'm not sure what it was. Every teacher's organization in the state would have a PACE representative, and what that PACE representative would do would be to interview, as you're doing me, interview candidates for the Maine legislature. Republican, Democrat, anyone else who's running, make a report to a convention of Maine Teacher's Association PACE delegates, and make a recommendation as to what endorsement. You see what I'm saying? So it was an interview of the candidates on specific educational issues. The idea of, you know, the idea of this, ideally, is that we can, we're going to give somebody an education report card, and this is for the value of all of our teachers out there. Now, if they choose to vote for a person who we don't recommend an endorsement for, that's fine, that's obviously okay. The idea is for us to provide information and education. If they think their nuclear policy is more important than the educational issues, then they can make that judgment. But we are providing information for them to go on regarding educational issues.

So I got very active through the Maine Teacher's Association originally in interviewing legislative candidates and so forth. Went to these PACE meetings, at these PACE meetings I heard, congressmen and congressional candidates would come speak to the convention. See, what would happen is, we'd have one PACE meeting, share our information, there would be perhaps a preliminary endorsement based on that information. Actually not yet; we would go back to our own, after that we'd go back to our own Teacher's Associations, present the

information to them, they would vote, and then I would carry the Teacher's Association vote to the second convention, at which I'd be introduced to all the candidates who were also seeking endorsement for congressional level. That's when I started becoming interested in the next level, and that's when I sought, obviously the Democratic party was much more attentive to educational needs than the Republican party at that time, so that's when I sought to become active as a Democrat. And in 1978 was when that began. The 1980 nuclear issue was one that I actually went door-to-door on in order to shut down Maine Yankee. I was, we were going full throttle, full, you know, embracing nuclear power at a time we had no plan for its waste, and I just thought that there was -

PB: Still don't.

CB: No, we don't, that's true. And so at that time I thought we were going too fast on this issue, a lot of short term gain for long terms headaches, and so that's what got me even more involved. But, so I got elected as a delegate to the 1980 convention for Senator Kennedy, in 1980. Jimmy Carter I thought had let us down a little by not being more forceful with inflation. I was chief negotiator for the teacher's in Greenville, and we had taken it on the chin in the previous couple of negotiations and it was time for us to play a little bit of catch up. And Jimmy Carter, instead of saying, you know, that we shouldn't have, he let us, he recommended that we only get a certain amount of increase. Inflation was going on, it was twelve percent, and he recommended a seven percent increase being maximum.

I understood his politics, but meanwhile the Teamsters went ahead and got their eleven, twelve, thirteen percent increase, and we needed to play catch up and it made it more difficult for us. So I was a little disappointed in the leadership of the president with that particular issue. And then also, when Kennedy expressed some interest, he was quoted in the news magazines as saying, "I'll kick his ass." And that just gave those of us who liked Kennedy politics a little more motivation to work for him. And in that, Carter actually won I think the preliminary voting of the caucuses, enough to get twelve out of the twenty-two delegates. But a lot of Carter, some Carter delegates didn't go to the convention itself, so it ended up the meeting being split eleven-eleven between Carter and Kennedy in 1980. I don't remember Senator Muskie being up front in that. Of course he was, because he was secretary of state under Jimmy Carter, but I don't remember him having, I don't remember if he exerted, I wasn't in the Carter camp so I don't know how much influence he might have tried to exert there.

PB: I had heard a story about there being a possible Muskie run for president in 1980. Did you hear any rumors about that at the '80 convention, about nominating Muskie?

CB: No. One of the things that Muskie himself talked about, though, was the value sometimes of running as a favorite son. That you could marshal your votes and have greater, but most of the time when Muskie spoke of that, it was of an earlier period. I don't remember, I can't give you any information on Muskie's - I do know, though, I mean even by that time, well no, it's in retrospect because I learned about this after. I mean, Muskie being secretary of state was a time, you know, he had been senator for, '58, he'd been senator for twenty-two years, so he was ready for a change. And he had, but he had been very important with the Budget Committee during the

1970s, so he was a man of tremendous stature. I mean, I remember, sometimes you know secretary of state is a diplomatic, you know, career service person who the American public doesn't know. When Muskie was chosen secretary of state I remember feeling, wow, this is, this is not only great for Senator Muskie, but this is great for the State Department. Senator Muskie is a person who is, you know, who is formidable, I guess that's the way to put it, a man of status.

PB: What did you think of how Muskie handled some of his issues at the end of the Carter administration as secretary of state? You mentioned Russia already, Iran. Coming from Maine and reflecting upon that?

CB: I think that Senator Muskie exemplified Maine virtue very much. One of the things that Muskie said is that he always, probably the greatest compliment that he could have from the people was to be trusted. You know, he felt that if they trusted me then if I've earned their trust, then I've accomplished a great deal. And of course being worthy of that trust. I think I admired him a great deal for that. Also I admired him, for a man who, in sports jargon, "wanted the ball." I mean, he was a man who would have been gratified to be president. I liked when he said, when he was chosen as secretary of state, I liked his comment that when you have the opportunity to use the skills that you have developed all of your life, then, and you're challenged but you can use your skills in an effective manner, he said, there's nothing as gratifying as that. And so he was a person who believed that he had the ability, and a person that, who would take an assignment, and would be gratified by the challenge of the assignment and follow it through. There's a lot of people who you never know how they'll perform, and sometimes they step up to the plate and surprise you, and sometimes not. But Senator Muskie was a person of, I think, supreme confidence. And I think his wife was a person of ambition, and I think between the two of them, you know, that was a formidable team.

PB: What was your political involvement after 1980, how did you -?

CB: I was elected, in 1981 I moved to Kennebunk and became active in the Democratic committee here in Kennebunk. Got elected to the York County Democratic Committee as a representative from Kennebunk, later became chair of the Kennebunk Democratic Committee. Since 1980 I have been elected a delegate from my town to the state convention each year, except for 1986. In 1986 I was involved taking students on a trip, and so I think we were in Washington at that time or something, I'm not sure, was that one of my Washington trips? Anyway, I was away with students for the weekend, and had to give up the opportunity. I missed a convention when it was I think at the Ramada Inn in Lewiston. But, so that makes what, twenty, let's see, that's ten, eleven conventions that I've attended, state conventions, always as a delegate, always as a county committee representative as well. So for that amount of time, for the last twenty-four years I've been active in the Democratic Party. The, I'm trying to think of what positions, mostly as a York County person. Probably one of the most gratifying experiences I had was as town chair in 1988. This was when George Mitchell was running for reelection, and when Joe Brennan would have been running, is '88 the year? I think so. Joe Brennan would have been running for Congress for a second time during that time. But we established a headquarters, which hadn't been done, that I know of, in recent years, except, you know, an actual commercial headquarters, not one in somebody's house. We had a real -

PB: In Kennebunk?

CB: In Kennebunk. We actually had it next to the Shop 'n' Save store in town, which is Garden Street Market today but, so there was a lot of people going to the market who would see our headquarters. We had a nice big painted sign out front. And we organized a meeting at eleven o'clock in the morning, eleven thirty in the morning, and we, you know. I think they expected us to have twenty or thirty people hopefully, and we had well over a hundred, to see Senator Mitchell and Joe Brennan. And actually Joe Brennan for years later would remember that as a, the beginning of a wonderful day. I mean, we kicked it off, it was, I gave a speech introducing the two of them. Joe Brennan had been the subject of an ABC special regarding federalism, actually, because he had gone from being governor to being congressman and Peter Jennings used the difference, to show the difference between two types of government. Meanwhile, Senator Mitchell had been front and center with the Iran Contra hearings, and his lecture of Oliver North, and so I commented on that as well. And I think there was a historic moment for that reason. They both appreciated my comments greatly, and then they gave wonderful comments themselves, and then went on to other parts of York County later in the day, ending with the Jack Howells award dinner, which was a York County Democratic function. And they said it was one of the best days the campaign had.

PB: Was Senator Muskie part of that day?

CB: Not at, no, not at that time, no. Senator Muskie in 1988, hmmm, I'm not sure as to the status of his health at that time. Senator Muskie was not active in the York County Democratic Committee. I mean, as far as attending and being a part of the decision making and so forth.

PB: Was he ever part of the functions of the committee?

CB: As an invited guest, I'm sure. But at this time I think he was still spending some time in Washington, I mean that's where he was living mostly. They had the home here on Boothby Road in Kennebunk, but most of their time they were spending in Washington.

PB: So had you had any interactions between '81 and '96 with the Muskie family?

CB: Well, you know, it's funny you should say that. I went to the Muskie lobster bake just two weeks ago, and there were members of the Muskie family there, although I didn't get an opportunity to interact with them. Jane comes pretty religiously to it, and brings along members of her family, which is wonderful. I often talked, I mean when I would speak with them, initially when I spoke with Jane Muskie it was to remind she and Ed about my grandmother, and they warmed right up, they lit right up and said, and how is she doing, and so forth. It was a memory of pleasant times past, I'm sure. But no, I have to say that I haven't invaded the Muskie's privacy here in Kennebunk as an ongoing thing. My exposure to the family has primarily been those half dozen times that he's come to the Muskie Scholar's Program before his death. Of course, you know, there are people in town here that know the Muskies. You know, there are, one person was telling me of, let's see, I'm trying to think of, I don't even know where these happened,

Muskie stories

I guess one would be, actually two or three people have told me of an occasion where at one time he played tennis and had several Washington VIPs with him, I don't know if it was other senator's or not. Somebody in the party wasn't wearing all white, they must have had a multi-colored thing, and white clothing was required at this exclusive club. And one of the people who knew the senator went over and said, "Senator," and the senator said, "Yes," and he called the person by their first name, they knew each other, and he said, "Next time, do you know about the whites policy, white clothing policy only here?" "Yes, I do." "Next time, would you please make sure that that's adhered to?" And the senator said, "You know, the person's first name, there won't be a next time." So he could be pretty demonstrative on occasion.

I do remember, let's see, another friend mentioned to me one time about one of the, his sons being a little mischievous and misbehaving and he was being, so he was told that he had to sit out two days from this recreational activity. And the second day, the first day was because of this misbehavior. Then the boy said, "Do you know who my father is, do you know who you're dealing with?" And he was punished a second day for that, okay? Well, Senator Muskie brought him back on the second day, and the fellow that told me this story, his name's Dave McConnell, he said, "Senator, I'm sorry but Ned can't participate today. And I don't know if you know this, but did he tell you the story, did he tell you what he said?" And he said, "No, he didn't." He said, "Well, he said that, he brought up your name as a reason why he might not be, maybe should not be punished." And so the senator said, "Did you say that, Ned?" "Yes, I did." "Well, he wont' be attending today, the recreation." So Senator Muskie supported the discipline of his son, which was a nice thing. He could have taken the other route, you know. But, so, you know, it's kind of interesting when you hear the personal stories. I know he played at Webbhannet a lot, Webbhannet Golf down here. I don't have any stories to share with that.

I do know that Senator Muskie has a famous temper. I don't have any personal knowledge of that, I can't even discuss it. Although, as a long time witness of his public speaking, I can say that I'm not at all surprised if he would use his temper in a means of magnifying his point. You know what I'm saying? Now, how much he's in control of his temper, you know, I suppose that's some debate, I'd like to. But the fact of the matter is, you know, I do think he knows how to maximize a moment as far as public speaking is concerned. So, quite a man, quite a person.

PB: Anything else I'm forgetting that we haven't touched up yet you can think of?

CB: Let me think here. As far as my grandmother is concerned, her activism as I understand it was pretty much limited to the mid-fifties. As far as my involvement, the last three years, the last ten years, I've been on the Democratic state committee for about twelve years, and for the last decade I've been on the state rules committee, and for the last three years I've been chair of the state rules committee. And the only thing I'd mention there, that we just had a major accomplishment at this last convention, and that is we did a revision of the rules, in which we have restored to the Democratic caucuses the ability to choose the presidential nominee. What this is going to do, I think, is return to Democrats reasons to attend the caucus. Now, the only thing I would say, we've had an experimental primary here the last couple of years to go along

with the caucus. Not as many people have voted the primary as we had hoped, but in order to not take a step backwards regarding public involvement, the new rules will provide that a person can vote in a sort of absentee ballot, so that their vote can be counted at the caucus should they not be able to attend personally. But that's where my time, I would say, as far as public volunteerism has been going most recently.

I plan to step down, actually, next month as chair of the rules committee, because last spring I was elected to be a member of Kennebunk's charter commission. We haven't had a charter review in about twenty years, and so we'll be rewriting the town's charter, determining if we're going to have a town meeting form of government or whether that needs to be changed. So that's where, but I teach history and government at Kennebunk High School, and that's part of my interest obviously. I've been teaching American government since my days in Greenville in 1973, and I've brought my students to the Augusta legislature, which of course is where Ed Muskie got his beginning. For most of those years, I've taken my classes to Augusta to show them their government so that they will not be intimidated to go up there on their own when they need to, in order to serve or merely lobby on behalf of themselves. So, I'm not sure if there's anything else that I can share with you, unless there's a specific question that you have.

PB: Got everything I needed.

CB: Great, great, well I enjoyed this very much. I think having a project of this type is very valuable. And I'm not sure that I would want to listen to all four hundred testimonies, but as you know, as a historian I can tell you, the way to get at the truth is to get as many different perspectives as you possibly can. So I've enjoyed being part of it, thank you.

PB: Thank you very much.

End of Interview