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Interview with Helen Carey by Mike Richard

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Carey, Helen

Interviewer

Richard, Mike

Date

August 26, 1999

Place

Belgrade, Maine

ID Number

MOH 140

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Biographical Note

Helen Carey was born in Waterville, Maine on March 2, 1932. Her family was Republican. Her father worked for the state doing survey and road work. She attended Mount Mercy School in Waterville. After she married Richard "Spike" Carey, Helen worked as a telephone operator. She and her husband lived in Ward Seven, of which her husband was co-chairman. Helen served as vice chairwoman for Ward Seven (which was almost entirely Democrat, French, mill workers and construction workers). Helen was also City Clerk for six years.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Malcolm Fortier; Ward Seven, Waterville, Maine; and Ed Muskie's contribution to the state of Maine.

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Transcript

Mike Richard: We're here at the Belgrade town office on August 26, 1999 with Helen Carey. Interviewing is Mike Richard. And Mrs. Carey, can you please state your full name and spell it?

Helen Carey: Helen Carey, H-E-L-E-N, Carey, C-A-R-E-Y.

MR: Okay, and your date of birth, please?

HC: Three-two-thirty-two [3-2-32].

MR: And where were you born?

HC: In Waterville.

MR: Okay, and you mentioned off the tape that you lived in Waterville, but you lived in . . .

HC: I lived all my life in Waterville, until we moved to Belgrade.

MR: And you went to Mt. Mercy School, but you didn't have too much connection with the Waterville community.

HC: Had none at all.

MR: Okay, so let's talk about your connections with the Waterville community after you married your husband.

HC: Okay, I worked as a telephone operator for a long time, and then we lived in ward seven for a while and that was my first introduction to politics.

MR: Okay, and what was, actually if you don't mind my asking, what was your family's political background?

HC: Republican.

MR: And had that gone back for a couple of generations, or?

HC: Well, it's because my dad worked for the state and that was kind of given. If you worked for the state in those years, you were a Republican.

MR: And what was his occupation?

HC: He did all kinds of things. He did survey work for them, he did road work for them, he did all kinds of things.

MR: And what was his name?

HC: Dan . . .

MR: And your mother's name?

HC: (*Name*). My mother was never involved politically with the city, or any place else, except to support my husband when he ran for office.

MR: And you were city clerk for a while in Waterville, you mentioned?

HC: A long time after this, a long time after he, I was, oh, what did they call it, I don't know, vice chairman of ward seven for a long time. And that was the first time that my husband ran for office, he ran for the council while I was vice chair of ward seven. I don't remember any dates, so I can't help you with that.

MR: What are your impressions of ward seven as you . . .?

HC: Totally Democrat. About ninety-eight percent Democrat.

MR: And what about some of the ethnic communities in ward seven and outside the ward?

HC: They were mostly French and mostly laborers. They worked in mills, they worked construction.

MR: Okay, and during your time in various offices in the town government, who were some of the people that you came into contact with?

HC: I don't know what you mean by that. What kind of people? As city clerk I serviced the whole town. I did that for six years under Malcolm Fortier and two years under Richard, and, I don't know what you mean by who I came in contact with.

MR: Well, who are some of the people that you might have seen on a day to day basis who were involved in city politics in some way, maybe people, or even office staff, or people that . . .?
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HC: I worked full-time, so, you know, I don't even remember some of the names of the people that were there. That's a long time ago, you know, it was in the, I don't know, late '60s? I've worked at a lot of jobs since so I really, I don't know who you mean, you know. I mean, I knew the people on the council and the aldermen and stuff, but even some of their names I don't remember.

MR: But was there anyone that you developed a closer relationship with, or was it just kind of a working relationship during the day and you didn't see too much, or know too much about them outside of that? I mean people in the council I'm actually talking about.

HC: Oh, well, I mean we were friendly, I was friendly with all of them because I had to service them. But I mean, I don't know. You know, in eight years you go through a lot of people. Nancy Hill, I was involved with that a lot because she was chairman of the Democratic Party in Waterville, so I dealt with Nancy a lot, and her dad and, I mean her husband, not her dad. But individual councilmen, you know, there were a lot of them and I just dealt with all of them.

MR: Now what was the Democratic Party office like in Waterville? Was it a, was it that strong a force in Waterville as far as you (*unintelligible phrase*)?

HC: The people were. We never had, per se, an office location if that's what you mean. No, we just, we'd set up headquarters whenever an election was coming up. But the Democrats were strong, in those years anyway. See, I need to ask Richard about what years, like when he ran against Marden and stuff because that's when the Democrats really took off.

MR: Yeah, actually, let's see, I've got some info here if it would help. He's, he was . . .

HC: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

MR: But he was mayor from '70 to '77 and . . .

HC: But he was on the council and he was on the board of aldermen and . . .

MR: Right, he was, he said he'd been four years on the council and then four years on the board of aldermen, so that must have been about '62 to '70, those two four year periods. And then, well he was also in the house late '60s.

HC: When he was an alderman and Malcolm Fortier was mayor is when I first became city clerk.

MR: Did you get to know Malcolm Fortier very well?

HC: Yes, I knew him, yeah.

MR: What was he like, just any anecdotes, or what was he like personally?

HC: Oh, he was very pleasant and he was good to work for. He was not very, he wasn't a pushy person. I mean, if you had a question to ask him, he'd answer you but he never imposed his answers as law, so he kind of gave you your head and let you work.

MR: And actually some other people, did you get to know either Dick or Bob Dubord at all?

HC: Yes, or we knew them from forever I guess.

MR: What were they like?

HC: Bob was a dentist, so he wasn't too much involved with politics. But Dick was a very bright and strong person, it was a terrible loss when he died. He was working for Richard's election at the time, as mayor. So, yeah, they were good people.

MR: And how about the, I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing this right, the Jabars, or Jabars family?

HC: Yeah, the Jabars, yes, John was always involved politically. He was, I can't remember if he was city solicitor, I think he was when I was in the city clerk's office. He was always very involved personally with the Democrats.

MR: Okay, and someone else, Max Codere, did you get to know . . .?

HC: Max was treasurer or tax collector, yes, well we knew him like that, from, I didn't know him personally very well, I just knew him from working with him.

MR: And how about Paul Dundas?

HC: No, Paul I didn't know at all.

MR: Let's see, there was someone else I was thinking of, oh, Dick McMahon, did you get to know him?

HC: Dick McMahon I met a few times, but I didn't know him personally either. I mean, not to sit down and talk with him. The ones that we were friendly with were, the Jabars we were friendly with for a long, long time. And then, oh, well the professor, Al Mavrillac from Colby, he and his wife we were friendly with, they always worked to support Richard and so they were very active, both he and his wife.

MR: And also Paul Fullam, Professor Paul Fullam, did you get to know . . .?

HC: I didn't know him. I met him at Democratic conventions, just shake hands and stuff, but.

MR: And what did you, were these state Democratic conventions, or county . . .?

HC: Yes, state.

MR: How many . . . ?

HC: We went to all of them for years and years and years, but never actively participated any more than just a regular delegate. Sometimes we'd work the registration tables if it was in our area, but other than that we didn't do anything. Just the one year that I did housing for a state convention, that was it.

MR: And your connection to that delegation was through your husband, or through Nancy Hill, or how did (*unintelligible phrase*)?

HC: Of what delegation, to the one where I did housing?

MR: Yeah, or actually, to that one and to any of the times that you went to some of the Democratic conventions, was that through . . . ?

HC: It was just because we were always considered to be delegates, so, and we went because Spike was in office and needed to circulate. And so anything that helped him, I did.

MR: And how would you say that the Democratic Party in Waterville has changed over the past forty, fifty years while you were in Waterville?

HC: I don't know. I think that when we first got there, there just wasn't that much. Because Ed Muskie used to like to tell that they would meet in a telephone booth and that was all the Democrats there were. So, and up until ten years ago we were there and they were still fairly strong then, they had gone from almost nothing to quite a viable group. And now I don't know, I don't know anything. The last ten years we've been here, so.

MR: And how about the Republicans, I don't know if you had many dealings with them while you were in town office, or?

HC: Well, we knew a lot of the Republicans, and when Malcolm was elected mayor there was a big ballot controversy, some ballots had been lost, and so Cyril Joly was the one that had run opposite to Malcolm, and he kept coming in to the office all the time saying, you aren't going to be clerk very long because when they count those ballots I'm going to win the election for mayor. So, but they never opened the ballot, the court said no. If they weren't there the night of the election they weren't going to be counted, and they never were. So I stayed as clerk.

MR: So you were clerk for approximately, was this maybe a ten, fifteen year period?

HC: No, six years under Malcolm, and then two years under Spike.

MR: I'm sorry, before . . .

HC: The other way around, two years under Malcolm and six years under Spike, because he was mayor eight years.

MR: And before that, you told me a couple minutes ago, but before that you had served in a couple other positions?

HC: Vice chairman of ward eight, and then delegate for the county committee. It was never very active county wise because they didn't do an awful lot, I mean, they did bean suppers and, to introduce candidates and stuff, but.

MR: So that met maybe once every couple months, or?

HC: I really couldn't tell you, I don't remember. It's been too long.

MR: Do you, actually, do you have any, what would you say Ed Muskie's legacy for the state of Maine and Maine politics, and politics in general have been? What did he bring to Maine in that sense?

HC: He sure put us on the map. And then the Clean Air and Clean Water, I mean everybody has to recognize that. And he was a decent politician, and I hope everybody remembers him for that.

MR: Okay, well is there anything else you'd like to add about your time in Waterville, anything about the community or your work there?

HC: It was a neat place to live. We both of us really liked Waterville.

MR: Yeah, it seems like a nice town.

HC: Yeah, it is a nice town. Is that where you're staying?

MR: No, actually down in Lewiston, (*unintelligible phrase*), but, yeah, I've visited a few times.

HC: Okay.

MR: Great, well thanks a lot for your time.

HC: You're welcome.

End of Interview