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## Carignan, Jim oral history interview

Jeremy Robitaille

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## **Interview with Jim Carignan by Jeremy Robitaille**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Carignan, Jim

### **Interviewer**

Robitaille, Jeremy

### **Date**

August 8, 2001

### **Place**

Lewiston, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 316

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### **Biographical Note**

James “Jim” Carignan was born in Conway, New Hampshire on August 31, 1939. His father, Hervy, worked in a wood turning factory and his mother, Florence, was a retail salesperson. Of Roman Catholic, French-Canadian and Irish background, they were Democrats. Carignan was president of his class, involved with New England regional debate and forensics, president of New England Senate, and a Regional Key Club Officer. He attended Bates College (class of 1961), majoring in History and was president of his senior class, and worked in the office of the Dean of Men. Jim taught Colonial American history at the University of Rochester until 1964, Kent State University until 1968 and Kenyon College until 1970. He took the position of Dean of Men at Bates College in January 1970 and later served as Dean of College until his retirement in 2003.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: World War II memories; Kent State massacre; conservative Ohio; Model Cities; Manchester Union Leader incident; Community Concepts; St. Mary’s hospital; Lewiston City Council; and the Bates College and Lewiston/Auburn relationship.

## **Indexed Names**

Albert, Dick  
Bernier, Rene  
Bilodeau, Joyce  
Griswold, Steve  
Kelly, Frank  
Lynch, Scott  
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996  
Nicoll, Don  
Rhodes, Jim  
Sampson, Paul  
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Tara, Kaileigh

## **Transcript**

**Jeremy Robitaille:** We're here at the Muskie Archives on August 8th, 2001 with a follow up interview with Dean Jim Carignan, and interviewing is Jeremy Robitaille. All right, last interview we ended with your overall impressions of Ed Muskie. We had covered that pretty thoroughly so I don't have too much more to ask about that. A couple of, I wanted to go back to a couple of things that we, well, something that we really didn't talk about in a follow up to something we had discussed earlier. First of all, and this may, it may not even apply, but first question I'd like to ask is what if any recollections do you have of how, like, the community of Laconia was affected by WWII, and again, this is really -

**Jim Carignan:** How old do you think I am?

**JR:** Yeah, no, just some, maybe like even stories from family.

**JC:** I have very little memories. My father did not serve in the armed services, and I don't remember why. He didn't volunteer and I guess his number didn't come up. But I remember as a little, little boy, when it got dark at night my mother would always go around and pull all the shades and say, we have to do that because those bad Germans are trying to get us. And I remember, I remember sort of peeking out, we would peek out to watch and see if my father was coming home and if he was all right. So it was, there was a, I mean I do remember this. Not intensely, but this sense of fear. Now, my mother was afraid of her shadow, but, so I don't think that was necessarily typical, but it was really, I mean that's one of the very few memories that I have from being a, you know, a little kid and barely walking. See, I was born in '39 and so I was six when the war ended. And, but I do remember that sense.

And my wife talks about her father, who also did not serve, being part of a neighborhood watch and they would have to go out and be sure that everybody had their curtains closed. And that, he was a part of the civil defense system, a warden for his area. And so there was this preoccupation through the war.

**JR:** All right, (*unintelligible phrase*). And jumping ahead a little, now when the Kent State massacre, you were at Bates by then, right?

**JC:** I was at Bates, I had just come, I came that January.

**JR:** Do you, did you have any, like, do you have like an insider's perspective on that incident at all? I mean -

**JC:** Yeah, I do, I do. Kent State was a, the last place that you expected that to happen. It was a university that had grown dramatically. In a decade it went from something like, you know, ten thousand, twelve thousand to twenty-some-odd thousand, enormous growth. And they were building things and faculties were expanding and students were coming in great numbers. And it drew from an area of Ohio that was industrial and textile, and so it was a very working-class university. And I met some other people who didn't think it was that, but not uncharacteristically it was a pretty conservative place, you know, particularly on issues like Vietnam. The labor movement was not at the forefront of the Vietnam protest as we know. So there was a, it was a very conservative, so on that, from that perspective, you know, it was the last thing that you would think happen.

But there was a very, how does one say it, sort of a vigilant conservatism at work. And I remember I joined, God, this is digging way, way back, I joined maybe a dozen, fifteen at the most, other faculty members and a few students for a silent vigil in front of the dining hall every Wednesday noon as I recall, or Friday, maybe it was Friday. And we'd just stand there and we'd, you know, with some signs and say nothing. And there'd be some people who would taunt us but we didn't say anything. One day we're standing there and you'd have thought we had broken into City Bank in New York. Cruisers came from all directions, police, and they got out and they started taking pictures and, you know, we thought, whoa, what have we done here, you know? And we were all very young faculty members, very insecure, and very untenured.

And so everybody came, I remember we came down to my office and I was delegated to call the president, which was a, you know, I was a, that was a big deal, I mean this was a big university and I was a very young guy. So I called the president, who had a drinking problem but he was okay. I explained what had happened and that the police, local police, had pictures of us and we were very concerned about what they were going to do with them. And he let on that he had not known about his event and he was upset about it, he was sorry that it happened, and that he would look into it. And we said, look, what we're really interested in, is being sure that nothing is done with those photographs. And so we got a call back, he said, stay by the phone, I'll see what I can do. He called back and he said, (*unintelligible word*) why don't you go down to the police department and they will talk with you about this. And so we went down to the police department, three of us, and we lobbied hard and they agreed to allegedly destroy the film in front of us. Well, we hoped it was the film, we don't know if it was the film but it was a film.

So, you know, there was this, this conservative, a very conservative community in conservative Ohio. And so, so it was that side that was vigilant and yet there wasn't much to be vigilant about except a few faculty members and a few students. But apparently, I mean, things got worse and

worse, and I think the vigilance kept sort of producing a reaction amongst those who opposed the war. And then there was this great, you know, protest which really was a great surprise to me. And I think what happened is that Jim Rhodes, who was then the governor and was running for governor and it was near the end of the gubernatorial campaign, and the numbers showed he was in a very tight race and he was in trouble. And what he did, was to move in and take over the university in effect with the National Guard, and suspended all the normal university channels of communication, the deans offices and the, I mean they were all but sort of out of the picture, off the screen. And the National Guard was there. And I think that they were incapable of resolving the issue because they didn't know the place. I mean, they didn't have, and so it was my sense from afar, and this was corroborated by some people who were there, that what could have been resolved, got short circuited by the imposition of the National Guard and by the Rhodes machine in an effort to win the election. He's going to be the tough guy in conservative Ohio who's going to contain these pintos. And so I think it escalated as a result of the fact that there were no normal mediative channels of communication. That's my impression.

**JR:** Okay, thank you. Okay, next up, we had talked a little bit about the Model Cities program in Lewiston. What specific programs were you, are you aware of that came out of that and were you, was Bates at all involved with them, whether it just be -?

**JC:** No, Bates wasn't involved in them at all, and I don't know much, I mean that was way back. In fact, that was before I was here.

**JR:** Okay, I was mixing you up -

**JC:** So Model Cities, I think some of the Lisbon Street renovation was the result of Model Cities. And there were, I mean it was, Model Cities was, you know, they'd come in and tear stuff down and build new things. And with very little sort of respect for the context and the community. And, I think that's a little bit harsh, but it feels that way when you hear people talk about it. And when we talk today around tables about doing things in the community and doing housing, well let's not make the mistakes of Model Cities, which was very top down I think. And so, and I think, you know, the whole Knox Street area was a beneficiary of Model Cities, that some money came in and Steve Griswold was able to tap into that money and do major renovations in that area. And of course it hasn't, I mean you just, you need to have other programs that go along with that stuff if you're really going to change things. So I don't have very many comments.

**JR:** Yeah, but (*unintelligible phrase*).

**JC:** Now, you know, Muskie was, and I know, talk to Don Nicoll, Muskie was very careful to, and he was very much involved in Model Cities, and he was careful to be sure that Portland and Lewiston and Bangor got their share of Model Cities money.

**JR:** Yeah, other people I've interviewed about that, that it's definitely, they say the same thing. Model Cities down in Portland thought it was a good idea but it just never panned out.

**JC:** Yeah, it didn't work out. Yeah, it was, and I think it was, this is a shorthand for a much

more complicated, I'm sure that I don't understand it, but a much more complicated situation. I think it was primarily a top down thing, and it got laid on cities and laid on communities and then they woke up and said, now what do we do with this stuff.

**JR:** Okay. There is one question in regard to Muskie and Lewiston, which I refrained from asking last time, but I thought you might have a perspective on it. It's really just kind of conjecture on my part. And it's in regards to Muskie and like the *Manchester Union Leader* incident, and given the context of that controversy, if that, if you had a sense if that in any way affected how the Franco-American community in Lewiston, and I guess throughout Maine, viewed Muskie, if like they, because it was kind of in regards to Ed Muskie.

**JC:** I think by that time Muskie was their, was their gem, and they were just angry that it happened. I think that they felt he was being treated unfairly. And so, I don't, I didn't, I never heard anything, fallout that, you know, I mean, like he's a crybaby or a wimp, anything like that. I think it was, you know, well Loeb guy is such a bastard.

**JR:** And there was no sense that, in regards to it being surrounded by his wife using like that derogatory term about Franco-Americans, nothing of that nature?

**JC:** I don't think people believed it. I mean, I think that those who knew Ed just knew he wouldn't do that. And so I don't think it ever played in any significant way that I was at least aware of here.

**JR:** Okay. Now I'd like to switch gears to your involvement in Lewiston. When did you first get involved, like in what capacity? Beyond work with the college.

**JC:** Well, wow, I don't know. I guess in the seventies I was asked to be on the board and then the chair of the board of Community Concepts, which is a CARP agency, community development agency. And, you know, then I was involved in the schools, one of my kids was there and the PTAs and PTOs and all that sort of thing. And I was appointed to a task force on education and, sort of a slow increasing engagement and a sort of fast increase in complaining about the city. They didn't ever do anything right and they weren't, you know, they were just so shortsighted, blah-blah-blah-blah. And the seat for the councilman came available, and I had gotten involved in the hospital as well. And I just said to my wife, you know, I'm going to end up being just a complainer or I can do something about it, and I'm just going to run for that seat and see if I can get it and if I can I'm going to try to do something. So I did win and went ahead and I finished three years, three difficult years, but three enjoyable years.

**JR:** And you were involved with St. Mary's?

**JC:** I am the chairman of the board at St. Mary's. And I went on that board about eight years ago.

**JR:** All right, and tell me about your years in the city council, those tough three years, like the major issues, and the many people that you've worked with, and (*unintelligible phrase*).

**JC:** Now, it's hard to go, you know, it's hard to do all that, it's so, always so very complicated and enigmatic and you end up at a certain place and you wonder how you got there. This is my take on it, okay? I joined a council mid way, so I was the new kid on the block. Frank Kelly was very supportive of me, he was the president of the council. There was a young lawyer, Scott Lynch, who was from Ward One, and I had instantaneous difficulties with Scott Lynch. Scott and Frank were very good friends. Scott had sort of created Frank into a surrogate father and it was a very close, almost blood relationship there. And for reasons that have never been clear to me, Scott had authority over people like Joyce Bilodeau, whom he treated with really profound disrespect, but they'd always go along with him. So I found myself very isolated. The mayor and I, and she welcomed me with open arms and said, oh my God, finally somebody I can talk to. And Dick Albert, who was another member of the council, very quiet but very sound and solid.

So the three of us tried to work together. And Frank, bless his soul, Frank and I would have coffee every once in a while. He'd come over and we'd talk, and we got to a trusting kind of place. And he, I remember Lynch and I, I can't remember what the issue was, Lynch and I squared off and we had a knock down drag out in the council chamber and it was a four-three vote and Frank voted with me. And Lynch said to me, that won't ever happen again, don't you worry, I will take care of that. So, I mean, it became Carignan versus Lynch, and so that was part of the dynamic.

The other part that I was very much aware of was that I was the professor from the college and what the hell does he know about real life, and he doesn't understand how it is really in Lewiston. He doesn't even own a house, he doesn't pay property taxes. So there was this, I had to overcome this sort of reverse elitism in a sense. And so that, I worked hard at that and I hope I'm not an elitist, I've tried very hard not to be an elitist. But I had to really work at being one of the fellows. And you know, I think the first time I swore they sort of, oooh, you know, what's he doing, I mean does he do that. And, but I made good progress with Frank, and Nan and I and Dick worked well together, and we were able to accomplish some things.

We were able to bring in for the first time a school budget that responded to what the school committee wanted. And I need to stop and go back, because what was the turning point for my involvement, and this the run for the council, is that two years before or one year before there was a terrible battle between the council and the school board over the school budget, and I don't know if you remember but a thousand people met over here in the -

**JR:** In the junior high.

**JC:** The junior high, and it was just, it was awful. And I, I was just terribly disturbed by that and I offered each party mediation. I said, you know, it was rather presumptuous of me, and I said well, they said well, you know, we'd like to have somebody else with you. They didn't trust me. And I said, well Bob Stone and I can do it. Bob's a, you know, he's a Republican, I'm a Democrat, we talk with each other, we get along with each other, I think we can work with each other. So they said, all right, we'll try it. So Bob Stone and I mediated a number of sessions between the city council and the school committee which were really quite, quite, I mean there was deep, deep anger, profound resentment. I mean, people would cry in these meetings. There

was real hatred.

And Lynch was the kingpin of the whole thing, and I'll never forget the meeting at which he, and this is, the professor business comes back in, he was defending his position and he said, and "I have a book here and I want to quote from the book." And so he quotes from the book. And I thought to myself, you know, come on, what's going on here, you're trying to impress me with your vast knowledge? So I said to him, "Can I see the book?" So I picked up the book and it was, it dealt with an issue that was quite different, it was a school committee seating, but it was a different issue. And so I said, "Scott, you can't do this, this isn't relevant," and I just blew my water. And so he, he had, I mean that confirmed his anger but he really had met a match, and we, and he lost some standing there. And so we worked through, and Frank came along very, very well and Frank did some real leadership. And what we did was to produce a protocol that I wrote and they approved of the way in which the city council and the school committee would interact in the future in order to avoid these things.

So it was a, I mean I really got drawn in there and that's when I thought, you know, I'm going to go on that damn council and we're going to straighten this stuff out, we're going to get better. So I got on the council, dealt with all that stuff, gradually got to be, you know, more and more listened to. And we were able in that first council to, and I'll never forget this meeting, it was in the mayor's office and it was the whole council and we were in an executive session. And what we were really facing was a sense that the city administrator was tired, unimaginative, manipulative and awful. Just a very, very, always skating the edge of lack of integrity and not providing what we thought was the kind of energetic and positive leadership that we needed. So some of us said, "It's time to bring this to an end." It was a bitter. I mean, I remember Scott said, "I will do whatever has to be done to stop that from happening." (*Name*) and Scott were very close friends. "I will expose you all; I will do whatever I have to do." And we just held firm and said, you know, "This is not about personalities, Scott. If you've got a problem with personalities you need to think about that. It's about policy, and we are not moving in ways in which the city needs to move, and we have to have a change in leadership."

And Scott started to think I think, and I remember he said to the mayor that night, because he pushed, he said why, and we gave verse and, we just went through it, and I think some of it he had not been aware of. And so at the end he said, "Well, you know, maybe I shouldn't be involved in this at all, maybe I'm biased." And the mayor said, "Yes, maybe you are." But later on it was (*unintelligible phrase*) already knew what was going on, there was all sorts of stuff going on and calls to me and, you know, I was the henchman, I was Lear. And I said, "No I'm not but I'm supportive," blah-blah-blah. So what happened is the council appointed Lynch, Carignan and Frank to be a triumvirate to have discussions with the city administrator. And I had taken the position, we can do this in such a way that everybody comes out a winner, and we just need to be magnanimous and upbeat and positive. And so we negotiated, you know, a parachute for the city administrator so that he was able to resign and come back on as a consultant for various kinds of projects that were underway for which he would be paid and for which he would continue to collect retirement and health benefits and so on for a year.

So we got through that and that was a big turning point. And then we had elections and the mayor was reelected and beat Scott Lynch, I was reelected, some new members of the council,



Gary Adams went in for a year, Mark Gouse, and Ron Sheen, four new, I mean it was a real turnaround. And so the first thing I did was decide I was going to be president of the council and I announced that I was going to do that, and Joyce Bilodeau announced. And I met with the new members of the council and one of them, Rene Bernier, looked me in the eye and said, I will never vote for you for anything, I will never support you on anything. Because she had been a friend of Scott Lynch's so a supporter of Scott Lynch's, and I had written an open letter to the community on the mayoralty race, which appeared in the newspaper the day of the election in which I declared clearly my support for Kylie Tara. And my, the implication was that Lynch was making false claims for himself. And I was citing chapter and verse of why that was so. And so they were very, I mean they were just livid, enormously angry, I mean.

Joyce rallied that anger because she had been a friend of Scott Lynch's and Paul Sampson was a friend of Scott Lynch's. And Ron (*name*) who was a representative from Ward Four, and I mean, God knows what, I'm not sure he knows where he is most of the time, I mean real problems of understanding. And he saw college, he doesn't like the college, he thinks the college is a non-tax paying drag on the community and so, and I'm the college so he, it was clear, so I didn't win the presidency of the council which was fine. In fact I think it turned out to be better because I was able to sort of operate in a different way.

And it's been a wonderful experience, we've done some things. I mean, we have reorganized and restructured the council, we've gone to a workshop format now and we have workshops, we have committees. The only one that functions is the one I chair, but that's okay, I mean they'll come along in time. In fact, Rene Bernier and I co-chair it and we've worked very hard and very well together, and we're going to accomplish some significant stuff. And she, we often laugh about that first meeting that we had. And so I've learned a lot about the community I think, and I think we have made some really important turnarounds. We were able to confirm our commitment to the Bates Mill, we held steadfast to that. And I think that twenty years from now, or fifteen years from now, people will say, boy, they really did the right thing back then. I think that will, either that or there'll be tumbleweeds, you know, blowing down Lisbon Street. I think that will be seen as a courageous act and a real investment in the future.

So it's been a very good experience for me. And I think on balance a good experience for the college to have somebody from the college involved, and eventually accepted and able to work with, you know, people from very different backgrounds. So I think it's been good. It's been fun. I'm going to miss it, I really am going to miss it.

**JR:** Are you -?

**JC:** I'm not running, no.

**JR:** Not running?

**JC:** No, well Sally and I have bought up, I'm going to retire in two years and Sally has been long patient with my being out nights, mostly in the college business but now with city business as well, and I'm going to spend some time together and I'm going to, we're spending more time in Harpswell, where this house is that we've bought. And, not fair to, I mean I, you know, I'm just

going in other places now, it's time to go.

**JR:** So while the, your, specifically your involvement has probably improved relations between Bates and Lewiston that are really, (*unintelligible phrase*) -

**JC:** Oh yes, oh yeah.

**JR:** Of Bates as being -

**JC:** Yeah, it's still there, it's still there, it's, and I have to keep reminding the president that, you know, you are continued to be perceived as a grabber of tax dollars, I mean in the sense that you, we buy houses and transform them into centers for this or offices for that and that takes them off the tax rolls and so, and we don't pay any taxes. I mean we do pay taxes for part of the president's house, my house, those kinds of things. But, you know, we're, we don't pay taxes for this. And there's a, you know, there's a profound, profound difference between what one I think rightly describes as, historically at any rate, a working class-community and a college. Those are different worlds.

And I think what we have been successful in the last ten, fifteen years in doing, is creating links that make sense both to the community on its terms and the college on its terms. We haven't tried to be something that we aren't, and we haven't asked the community to be something that it isn't. And so there's a kind of authenticity and yet increased connection. But it's going to take, you know, a generation for that to turn around. It'll take twenty years. And even then it will be a slow and incremental turning of attitudes. And there will always be I think this notion that there's just a lot of rich kids who drink too much up there. And, you know, it will always be somewhere with very rich kids who drink too much, and they're right. And so, you know, that will persist but I think substantively there have been, you know, really substantively there have been some significant inroads in the working relationship between the college and the community.

**JR:** Okay, just one last question in regards, what your impressions are of how, of how Lewiston, you know, has changed, and how I guess its relation to Maine, how you've seen it and how, in what direction you see it going politically and otherwise?

**JC:** See, I just think Lewiston, this will sound harsh. I think Lewiston has always been, and I may have mentioned this when talking about Laconia, New Hampshire, I think it has always seen itself as the poor sister or the poor daughter or the poor whatever. It's a community that has not had a lot of self-confidence, it's a community that hasn't thought it's worth much. Now it doesn't articulate it, it doesn't say that, but it feels it. I remember when I was talking about, and continue to talk about, another hotel in Lewiston and Auburn, on the Lewiston side of the river. One of the fellow councilors looked at me and said, we don't need any hotels, no one's going to Lewiston and Auburn and use a hotel. And I think, you know, that sort of sums up for me this notion that, well, we don't expect very much for ourselves, we don't think we deserve very much in some sort of way. We don't have a lot of confidence, and at some sort of subconscious and maybe even conscious level, although we don't articulate it that way, the way we articulate it is to bitch about how other people do things to us. Like Portland or whatever. But what that really

is all, I mean Portland doesn't sit there deciding to screw Lewiston. It's all about a comment, about what Lewiston thinks of itself, it thinks that it's powerless, it thinks that it doesn't have capacity, it thinks it doesn't have the self confidence, doesn't have value, so other people take advantage of us. And we just have to get beyond that, we just got to get beyond that, and that's a very hard thing to change, it's a very hard thing to change.

I think there are some signs out that that's changing. And some of us are working very hard at it, you know. We had a joint meeting with the Portland city council and, boy, you know, they were, they didn't have horns coming out their heads and they were normal and we had a good conversation about economic development. And some of the Lewiston councilors said, you know, they're nice folks. Well, what did you expect, you know? But that no---, you know, that notion. So I think that's a, that continues to be, you know, an abiding very fundamental culture problem in this community. And things like L-A Excels, those kinds of activities are, and the leadership that I think we have had in recent years, is beginning to turn that around. It's going to take a lot of work.

**JR:** Great.

**JC:** All right?

**JR:** All right.

**JC:** Are you going to let me go?

**JR:** I'm going to let you go.

**JC:** All right.

*End of Interview*