

Bates College

SCARAB

Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection

Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library

10-29-1999

Jonitis, Peter oral history interview

Meredith Gethin-Jones

Follow this and additional works at: https://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh

Recommended Citation

Gethin-Jones, Meredith, "Jonitis, Peter oral history interview" (1999). *Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection*. 187.

https://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh/187

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

Interview with Peter Jonitis by Meredith Gethin-Jones

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Jonitis, Peter

Interviewer

Gethin-Jones, Meredith

Date

October 29, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 158

Use Restrictions

© Bates College. This transcript is provided for individual **Research Purposes Only**; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, 70 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, Maine 04240-6018.

Biographical Note

Peter Jonitis was born in West Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1913. He was the son of Lithuanian immigrants, John and Alice Jonitis. His father came to the U.S. in 1910 and his mother in 1911. His father worked in the paper mills on Nashua River, specifically operating the boilers burning coal. His mother worked at a woolen mill as a metal picker and cleaner. He attended Ashburnham Street School and Commerce High in Worcester. In high school he ran cross country. He attended Clark University and while there worked at the National Youth Authority. He was in the Boys' Club in Worcester and was wrestling champ citywide. He attended graduate school at Columbia University and while at Columbia, worked nights as an oxygen therapist. During World War II he was head of the Army orientation program. He became an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania while he worked towards his Ph.D. and was chairman of the Sociology Department at Washington College in Chestertown, MD. In 1952 he was a post-doctoral guest scholar in Russian research at Harvard University. He did research for the State Department under the sponsorship of the Rand Corporation. He came to Lewiston in 1953 and while at Bates he was involved in the Democratic Party, the NAACP, and the PTA. He was at Bates from 1953-1967. He worked with John Donovan and Edmund Muskie in the 1950s. He introduced the Anthropology Department to Bates. He received a Fulbright scholarship to study in Taiwan from 1964-1965. After Bates he had a fellowship at Haverford College where he wrote extensively on Early American Quaker Penology. He then went to Florida Southern College in Lakeland, FL for seven years. He moved back to Lewiston in 1980 and served as

Corrections Advisor for the Androscoggin County jail in the Sheriff's office. His wife is Elizabeth Jonitis, who also was interviewed for this project (MOH 159).

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: environmental protection; interaction with Muskie while running American Friends Service Committee building; Democratic platform policy on Native Americans; paper mills in Fitchburg, MA on Nashua River; Clark University; Army orientation program; Quaker church in Durham, Maine; Bates College helping to improve Catholic/Protestant relationships; economic development; youth crime/violence; Bates College under president Donald Harward; Frye Street Union; Lewiston Quakers Church; and the state prison in Warren, Maine: 800-person addition to super max prison.

Indexed Names

Carignan, Jim
Davis, Kingsley
Donovan, John C.
Harward, Donald
Jonitis, Alice
Jonitis, John
Jonitis, Karen
Jonitis, Paul
Jonitis, Peter
Merton, Robert K.
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Myhrman, Andy
Phillips, Charles Franklin, 1910-
Rotundo, Peggy
Rowe, Harry
Sampson, Jean Byers
Scolnik, Louis

Transcript

Meredith Gethin-Jones: The date is October 29th, 1999. We are at the Muskie Archives. Interviewing is Meredith Gethin-Jones on Peter Jonitis, and it is 1:00 P.M. Could you please state your full name and spell it for me, please?

Peter Jonitis: Peter Paul Jonitis, J-O-N-I-T-I-S.

MJ: Sorry, I mispronounced your name again.

PJ: That's all right.

MJ: Where and when were you born?

PJ: West Fitchburg, Massachusetts, 1913.

MJ: And what were your parents' names, please?

PJ: My parents' names were John and Alice Jonitis. They came from Lithuania.

MJ: Interesting. Do you have any siblings?

PJ: I had a son and a daughter, Paul and Karen, and Karen just got her Ph.D. and father is so proud beyond description.

MJ: What did she get her Ph.D. in?

PJ: I think in psychology and education.

MJ: Interesting. And, could you tell me a little bit about your family life and background?

PJ: Family life and background. Well, I was born and raised in West Fitchburg which is a, not rural but small town situation. My father worked in the paper mills. There were four or five paper mills on the I think it was called the Nashua River in Fitchburg. And my, this was an immigrant family, we were not, we were, well I wouldn't say we were dirt poor but we certainly were not rich, we were not affluent. And mother and father worked. And I think, as I look back on it, it was difficult to get the rent paid, to buy the food, and especially I remember that if you had any medical problems they were not taken care of properly. For example, dental work, eye work, whatever, we didn't have that kind of money, being, living in an immigrant family. So as I look back on it, it was a difficult situation, really.

MJ: When did your parents immigrate to America?

PJ: They came, my father came in 1910, and my mother came a year later. They said he couldn't afford to bring both of them over at the same time, even though in those days I think the fee was very minute compared to what it is today.

MJ: And did they go straight to your hometown, or did they start out somewhere else?

PJ: I think they went to New York and then went to Fitchburg because they had relatives in Fitchburg. See, one thing about immigrants is they very often go to a town where relatives or friends are already living, you know, to help them get assimilated and to get started, especially to find work.

MJ: And what was your mother's occupation?

PJ: My mother worked many years in the, called Beoli, B-E-O-L-I, Woolen Mills in West Fitchburg. She had a metal picker, she picked, what would you call it, things in the woolen cloth. That was her job, picker, cleaner, did that for years. And my father worked as a foreman, what do you call, second class I guess engineer they called it. He ran the boiler works in the paper mill, that's what he did. And very often I helped him to clean the boilers and take out the cinders from the boilers and dump them in the yard, and I'd take that home for coal. And one of the embarrassing things for me as I remember, I had a wooden push cart, you know, two wheels, which I pushed and I'd fill that full of big pieces of coke and I would be embarrassed to have my friends see me lugging coke down the main drag of West Fitchburg to my house. But that's the way a lot of poor people survived through the winter, by burning coal from the local mill.

MJ: Did you find that there was tension between immigrant families and traditional American, or immigrants who had been there longer?

PJ: Well, that's an interesting story and of course I could talk a long time about, this of course involves the assimilation process. In fact my first book is on assimilation of Lithuanians and I have a lot of background information on it. But I think it's a pretty well established sociological fact that immigrants usually live by themselves and do not socialize very much with outsiders. They seek their own kind, either in the Catholic Church or in the social clubs, things of that sort. There's not much what you call interaction going on between immigrants and non-immigrants, between immigrants and, say, the well-established citizens of a community. No, there's not that, there's not much interaction really, very, very little.

MJ: Because there was segregation, were your parents not active in community involvement, such as politics for instance?

PJ: No, they were not active in politics or any kind of community activity except the local church. No, they didn't have time, you know. In those days when both parents worked, you know, to pay the rent and pay the bills they didn't have time for anything like that. And besides, there's a lot of housework to do, and chores and cooking and preparing, you know, foods and cleaning the house and that sort of things. There was no, there was not, practically no work on the outside community that I can remember.

MJ: And this was mostly in the 1920s?

PJ: Well, yes, 19-, just after WWI and on up to WWII, you know.

MJ: What were your parents' religious belief? You said that they were involved in the church.

PJ: Well, of course my parents were Roman Catholics from Lithuania. They did not attend the local Catholic Church with any degree of frequency that I can remember. In fact I don't, I was not even baptized into, it was St. John's Catholic Church. I went to different Sunday schools, Methodist Sunday schools, Baptist Sunday schools in my local community where I had friends from the local grammar school, but I was not really a churchgoer. But later in life I joined the Society of Friends, these are Quakers.

MJ: And why did you choose to change your, change, how did your views change?

PJ: Well, that's a long, long story, I couldn't say it in five minutes why I changed from no religion to Quakerism. I think the main thing is that I met a girl, a woman, who was a Quaker and she took me to Quaker meetings and I liked what I saw and what I heard and in due course I joined the Friends. That's why I changed religion, and today I'm very happy to be a member of the Quaker community. In fact I'm a (*unintelligible word*) minister among the Quakers.

MJ: Really? Wonderful. Now, you said that there was distinct segregation between the immigrants and the sort of well-established citizens. Could you tell me what your parents' social views, or reactions were to this, if it affected them or if they were just so overworked that it didn't really play a role, or?

PJ: Well, the only thing I can remember, there was never any discussion about the (*unintelligible word*) effects of segregation. There was an anti-Semitic view that Lithuanians held against the Jews. That I remember. I remember going many places, to various farms and buying vegetables and there were these wise cracks made against Jews, which always bothered me. But we never discussed the segregation or discrimination or any anti-immigrant feelings, no.

MJ: What were some of your parents' attitudes and beliefs coming to America?

PJ: That's a very interesting question. Well, I know from what my parents have said, they were peasants in Lithuania, they owned no land, so this tells you right away that there's an economic motivation for them to leave Lithuania and come to the United States for economic betterment because they were poor, landless peasants in Lithuania. Of course they had practically no education. My mother never even spoke English, even when she died in 1985 or whatever it was. My father read English newspapers but not too well, he never became fully assimilated. But we never discussed much the reasons for immigration, but I think, I know having written a book on Lithuanians that migration was stimulated by the fact that there was poverty in Lithuania. A lot of these people were landless peasants, so therefore there was a lot of motivation. You know, friends in the United States would write to them back and forth, and they'd say, you know, the streets are paved with gold, you know, and El Dorado, you must come to the United States, and a lot of people did.

MJ: Is that how your parents came?

PJ: That's, my father came in 1910 on a ship, and of course the steerage conditions were very poor. It didn't cost very much, I forget what it cost, but the fee was very, very small compared to what it would be today. And then my mother came a year later, you know.

MJ: Did, how did your parents' beliefs affect you and your attitudes and beliefs, and growing up in a lower class immigrant family?

PJ: Well, that's again a, a very, very important question and I need to think very carefully how I answer this. You see, being born and raised in an immigrant family, there's no emphasis on

education or books or learning. It was never discussed. Nothing, they didn't read books, they hardly read the newspapers, but I went through grammar school and I went through high school, and of course I thought I would never get to college, but I did. But even though my father had no education, he spoke three languages, he played the accordion and when he went to Lowell, Massachusetts to take his exam to become a second class engineer to run the boilers, furnaces in the paper mill, he passed because Peter helped him. Peter was then thirteen years old. I remember very vividly when the inspector came out of the building and he came to the car, he said, "Peter, because you helped your father so much he passed the examination and he got his license to be a second class engineer and to run boilers in the paper mill in Fitchburg, Massachusetts." But he had no education beyond the fourth grade, so he must have had a pretty good I.Q., you know? I would conclude.

MJ: Where did you attend elementary school and middle school and high school?

PJ: I went to the grammar school, Ashburn Ham (?) Street School in West Fitchburg, Mass. Then we moved to Worcester, Mass. and I went to Commerce High, it was called, and from there I went to Clark University, which in those days was considered the poor man's college.

MJ: Really.

PJ: Tuition was a hundred dollars a semester, note that, compared to what Bates is today. And I had to work my way through college. I did all kinds of typing and clerical work and cleaning windows and shining professors' cars to work my way through Clark. I walked from home to Clark, two miles, every day and carried my bag lunch. And frankly, I thought I would never get through four years of Clark University, but I did. And of course the story continues into graduate school. In graduate school, what did it when I was young I had lousy counseling at the high school, so my family physician said, "Peter, you should go to nursing school. . . ." So as a young man, before I went to Clark University, I went to Mills Training School of the Bellevue Hospital in New York City and took their course, made the honor role, and graduated in three years, and now I have my R.N. from New York and from Massachusetts (*unintelligible word*) by reciprocity. But that got me through graduate school at Columbia University working nights as an oxygen therapist in Bellevue Hospital.

MJ: Now this was before Clark?

PJ: This was before Clark, the R.N., yes. But after Clark I went to Columbia, I went to this school in New York and then went to Columbia. And at Columbia I had some of the nation's outstanding sociologists like Robert K. Merton, etcetera, to whom I am tremendously indebted for inspiration.

MJ: Yes, what were some of your influences outside of your immediate family, or who rather?

PJ: Well, I would say up to high school, nothing. I think people impacted my life after I got to Clark University. Of course there I met outstanding professors and I try to pattern my life after them as models. And one in particular, Kingsley Davis, who was my professor at Clark in sociology, I liked him an awful lot and I think he liked me, he gave me extra work to earn a little

money and I worked what they call the NYA, National Youth Authority. I think I got forty cents an hour.

MJ: Wow. Big difference today.

PJ: Oh yeah, yeah right. But it was the Clark professors who stimulated me to want, you know, to go on with education and get a higher degree. But I thought I'd never make it because I had no money.

MJ: Were there any groups or activities in that community that had a strong impact on you as well?

PJ: Any what kind of activities?

MJ: Groups or activities that you did besides your professors?

PJ: The only thing I can remember is joining what they called the Boy's Club in Worcester, Mass. and I was wrestling champ of the city of Worcester, would you believe that?

MJ: That's great.

PJ: Yeah, that had a very nice wholesome effect on me because that was athletics, and I did go in for wrestling, that's about all I ever did. Oh, I ran cross-country in high school but never did very well, I wasn't a good runner.

MJ: So, sorry to keep jumping back and forth, but after you attended graduate school at Columbia, where did you go from there?

PJ: Well, from Columbia the Army got me for WWII, that's December 7th as you know, Pearl Harbor. So I served in the Army. I was head of what they call Army orientation program. I had three guys working with me, for me, and Army orientation consisted of keeping the military personnel up to date on what was going on in the world, especially in Europe. For example, I'll never forget, one day the general asked me to give a lecture on world events or current events to six hundred black WACS. You know what WACS are?

MJ: No.

PJ: They're, well they're female soldiers.

MJ: Okay.

PJ: And I'll never forget that because I'm looking at a sea of six hundred black faces, which I never faced before in my life, you know, and I had to give a talk on current events. And lining up on the side benches here were the generals and the colonels and the captains listening to me, you know. And I guess I did a good job, as far as I know, but that was tough, that was not easy.

MJ: What were some of the main focal points of that speech?

PJ: Well, talking about current events in Europe, particularly, you know, the war, from 1941 on, you know. When Hitler got going in Europe I tried to explain the current events, what was going on in Europe to these soldiers, both male and female, that was my job. That's why it was called Army orientation, I headed that up, you know.

MJ: Interesting. And when did you come to Lewiston?

PJ: We moved to Lewiston in 1953, and the year before I was a postdoctoral guest scholar at the Russian research at Harvard University and I did special research there for the State Department under the sponsorship of the Rand Corporation.

MJ: And why did you choose to move to Lewiston?

PJ: Well, when I was at Harvard in Cambridge I wanted to get a job teaching, so I applied for a job at Bates College and the dean, Harry Rowe, came down from Lewiston to Boston. Took us out for lunch to the, I think it was called the Parker Hotel, and interviewed me and said, "You must come to Lewiston to be interviewed by the president," which I did. And I'll never forget it, because the day I came to Lewiston from Harvard it was snowing like mad and I said to my wife, "I ain't going there, no how." Who wants to have snow on May 1st, you know? So anyhow, I had the interview and I guess they liked me and I liked them and so I stayed there for many years, at Bates.

MJ: Did you apply to work at other universities or colleges?

PJ: Oh yes, yes, I had a short stay at a place called Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, I was chairman there of the department. I taught at the University of Pennsylvania as an instructor working for my degree, my Ph.D. I taught at Haverford College, which I enjoyed tremendously because, and I don't say this with any discrimination, they were all boys, there were no girls at Haverford then, but now they have girls. But I never had such a bright class in all my life as I had at Haverford College, which I enjoyed tremendously. So, and then I came to Bates, and then when I retired from Bates, I've been teaching for, I don't know, three or four years, at University of Maine in Auburn and now in Lewiston, and I'm teaching today at Husson College, which has a branch in the Bates Mill complex, but of course the home campus is in Bangor, I think as you know.

MJ: And so you went from Columbia graduate school, to University of Pennsylvania -

PJ: After the Army.

MJ: Right, to get, okay, so you went to Columbia, then the Army, then University of Pennsylvania, then Washington College?

PJ: Yes, for two years. You see, what happened was, when I was at Columbia, Dr. Thorston Celine was the chairman at the University of Pennsylvania, and he used to come to Columbia

once a week to give a course in criminology. So he came every Friday from Philadelphia to New York. He'd always meet me and we'd go out to a dinner and we'd talk, and I took his course at Columbia, and then that led to my first teaching job at the University of Pennsylvania. He says, "Pete, you gotta come teach with us in Philadelphia." You can imagine my happiness and surprise at that offer, which of course I accepted wholeheartedly to get my first teaching job as an instructor. For eighteen hundred dollars a year.

MJ: Well, it's always a start.

PJ: Yeah, right.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit, you moved to Lewiston in 1953 -

PJ: Fifty-three.

MJ: - correct? Can you tell me a little bit about what you thought of it socially and economically and politically, ethnically, compared to all the other places that you've been? You've obviously been in a number of places throughout the east.

PJ: Well, I still remember quite vividly entering Lewiston for the first time and looking across the bridge at this drab industrial town of Lewiston. I thought to myself, "This looked like a drab, uninteresting town," you know, heavily industrialized and so forth and a lot of run down houses and that sort of thing. I was not impressed much with Lewiston's, you know, physical appearance. Politically, I knew next to nothing about it really at that time, although later on I got involved with the Democratic Party, once I came to Bates, and that gets me of course into contact with Governor Muskie and all the rest of it. But ethnically, the thing that bothered me so much was the very real hiatus, that's not the right word, the gap between the French Catholics and the Protestants of Lewiston and Auburn. They did not get along very well together. And I think that was exacerbated on the Bates campus. So far as I know, today there's a very good working relationship, a very friendly one, between the Catholics and the Protestants in Lewiston and Auburn. I think I'm correct about that. But in my day there was a real wide hiatus between the two religious groups, and I don't think the campus did very much to stimulate that in my day.

MJ: How did you find this community socially?

PJ: Socially, well, as I remember it, fifty-three on, we joined the Church of Friends; our church is in Durham which is sixteen miles away. I was very active in the Quaker church, my wife was too. We joined the NAACP and we joined the local, what do you call it, at school, what they call it, teacher-parent association, PTA? Yeah, well, we took our part in various local organizations, yeah. But I was not as active as I perhaps could have been because I had a full-time job at Bates and being a new young instructor I wanted to make sure I knew more than my students did when I went to class.

MJ: Absolutely.

PJ: I never had, I always, my wife said, "You spend so much time reading, reading, reading." I

said, "Well, you have to stay abreast in your field, and that's a full-time job," really, if you're going to be, you know, well informed.

MJ: Absolutely.

PJ: Yeah.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit about how Lewiston compares to other places that you've lived? For instance, is Lewiston similar to your hometown in terms of the mill and the economic status of the majority of the community?

PJ: That's a difficult question to answer because how do you measure similarity or dissimilarity, you know, that's very difficult. I think fundamentally being industrialized, you know, centers with large factories; it creates a certain kind of atmosphere I think in living in the culture. I think you can see it in the so-called mill workers. There's a lot of mill workers, and of course as you know seventy-five percent I think of the mill workers in Lewiston were Roman Catholics and a lot of them worked in the Bates Mill, you know, once it was built in 1852 or whatever it was. And I think that's very similar in West Fitchburg. There's a kind of a, these people work in the mills, they come home, they do their family chores, they go to church, they serve in a couple of organizations, and like to go out Sunday, you know, for a ride or for a picnic or something, and that's about it. There's not much time in educational, you know, pursuits. They don't have the time or the interest, they don't have that kind of motivation. And I like that. In fact, my mother, I hate to tell you this, it should be off the record, she used to burn my books in my house. That used to really get me very upset. She had no interest, no knowledge of what these books were for.

MJ: How did you become so motivated to learn then?

PJ: Huh, that's a good question. All I can attribute it to is genes, what else can I say. I'm fortunate, you know, allah be praised, that I have a good I.Q., you know, but then of course once I got into college I was very, what's the word, impressed by what other men and women knew, and therefore, at Columbia for example when I took Robert K. Merton's courses, I thought, if I could be half as smart as that guy that would be something, you know. But it's people like him, and Robert (*name*) at Columbia who stimulated me to get As in my courses. And I've had six graduate fellowships offered to me, when I was at the graduate school level.

MJ: That's very interesting.

PJ: Yeah.

MJ: Going back to Lewiston and this community, you've been here since 1953, have you been here consistently since 1953?

PJ: Well I had a seven-year break. I taught in Florida for seven years, I was chairman of the department at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida, that seven year break. But when that ended, when I retired, we came back to Maine because I had a son here and I have, we have

a camp on Allen Pond in Greene, and of course I wanted to be next to Bates College, so that's why we came back to Lewiston.

MJ: Because of Bates College?

PJ: Yes, absolutely. I wanted to be next to a library. I couldn't see my life living any, you know, big distance from a library, a good library, and Bates does have a very good library as you well know.

MJ: What attracted you to Bates?

PJ: Huh?

MJ: What attracted you to Bates over other colleges?

PJ: Well, I liked the president, that was Charles F. Phillips. I liked the dean, Harry Rowe, he treated me very nicely, and the chairman of the department, Dr. Anders Myhrman and his wife -

MJ: I'm sorry, what was his name?

PJ: Dr. Anders Myhrman, M-Y-H, M-H-Y-R-M-A-N [*sic*] [M-Y-H-R-M-A-N], Myhrman. He was head of sociology, he took care of our kids when we came to Maine, and that was very nice. But I think the genuine friendship that was shown us by the president, the dean, and this chairman of sociology had a lot to do with our accepting the offer that Bates made me at that time, from Harvard, yeah. It makes a big difference I think how you get treated, especially during an interview, yeah, it's very important.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit about your professorship at Bates College?

PJ: What exactly would you like to know, I'm not quite clear what you want to know?

MJ: How your students were compared to different places and their views. I mean, sociology is a very interesting field and I expect that Bates students probably interpret things differently from many other places.

PJ: That's a very interesting question. If I look back on it, I think some were, during the middle of my career at Bates I remember we had what we call the silent generation. I remember that my students, I used to have, in fact I had some of the largest classes of any professor at Bates. I used to have a hundred and fifty-three students in one course.

MJ: Really?

PJ: Yes. Not in one time, but in three sections, but they're all of course one course. But the thing that impressed me was, or that bothered me was why don't they talk up and say something. They were the silent generation, they didn't ask me burning, difficult questions. They just kept quiet, let me do all the talking, and I didn't like that. See, my philosophy is, there's got to be

interaction between me and the student, it's give and take. I don't have all the answers, but I want the students to participate, interact, ask meaningful questions, challenge me, disagree, agree, but there should be, you know, a two-way street and it wasn't when I was teaching at Bates. And that bothered me.

MJ: Now, when was this?

PJ: I think that's changed, though. I think now, at least in the last few years from what I see, of course, I'm not sure I'm right about this, but the students are very critical of professors and if you don't know your stuff, you're in trouble. They're very critical, especially on the evaluations they make of professors, you know, once a year.

MJ: When was this silent generation you said that you taught?

PJ: In the '50s and '60s when I was here.

MJ: When were you here exactly, what years did you teach at Bates?

PJ: Fifty-three to 67.

MJ: Fifty-three to 67.

PJ: Yeah, then I went to Florida for seven years, and then moved back to Lewiston in '53, no, no, in, yeah, we came to Lewiston in '53.

MJ: And then you returned to Lewiston in?

PJ: In 1980.

MJ: Nineteen-eighty. And did you teach in -

PJ: Oh, I also had a fellowship, what they call (*unintelligible word*) Brown Fellowship at Haverford College, and we went there for a year. I had a very handsome fellowship, not that I'm bragging, but wrote this nine hundred page study, which I'm trying to get published. It's concerned with the evolution, the Quaker contribution to early American penology, nine hundred pages and I'm trying to get that published right now. That must be my wife.

MJ: All right, let me just pause the tape for one moment.

(Pause in interview.)

MJ: you found Lewiston to have changed between the time you left in 1967 and the time you returned in 1980? Were there any significant changes that you noticed?

PJ: I got to think about that.

MJ: Hello.

PJ: Well I think one thing I've noticed, I think there's been an improvement in Catholic-Protestant relationships, and I think Bates College had a lot to do with that, to stimulate it and to advance it. I think also the economic development impressed me, of the city. But I was always bothered by the crime rate, the local crime, and of course particularly youth crime, youth violence, and of course that still is a major problem as you well know, particularly in the schools if you looked at the TV in the last couple days.

I am very much concerned about the diminution of the number of priests and nuns who run the Catholic schools and churches. That is a very, very serious problem because of the population, the French population moving to the suburbs or moving out. And I'm also bothered by the fact that a lot of youth don't stay in Maine, once they get their college degrees they go down south to get better jobs. I don't know what you will do once you get your degree, you may decide to go to someplace else, but don't stay in Maine. And I don't know, I don't know if it's all that bad or not. How do you see it as a young person?

MJ: Myself? Well, I haven't lived in Maine for very long, I've only been here since Bates College, but I think that, I'd actually prefer to live overseas, but -

PJ: I don't blame you, I would too if I were in your shoes. Yeah, okay, go ahead.

MJ: I really wanted to ask you how you felt about the Bates community and its interaction with the Lewiston community. I heard from a number of sources that there was tension between the college and the community in terms of socio-economic aspects.

PJ: Yeah, well, this is a very important question and I must be very careful how I answer it because as a Quaker we're not allowed to make character assassination statements. Therefore anything I say about Dr. Phillips, the president in my day, versus Don Harward, you know, is a very difficult thing. But I think during Phillips' day, I don't think, so far as I knew, there was too much concern about improving relations between Bates College and the local community. But I think under Don Harward, see, this is where I'm getting into invidious distinctions which I don't like, I think there's been a distinct improvement in town-gown relations, and that's of course very commendable. But again, I want to avoid, you know, making this personal, I don't like to make these ambiguous comparisons.

MJ: In my notes I have that you know Louis Scolnik?

PJ: Yes, he's a lawyer and a Supreme Court justice, yeah.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit about how you know him and your relations with him?

PJ: Well, we have served on different committees. I've known him mostly through committees, and also through the Democratic Party contacts.

MJ: What sort of committees?

PJ: Well, platform committees, trying to improve relations in Lewiston, we would serve on various committees. That's where I met Lou, yeah. And of course also when he became a judge I'd go and ask him for advice, not personal, but on criminological questions, I'd go and talk with him about it, and he's a very, very approachable guy. Of course I haven't seen him for a few years. I think he's retired now or has been for quite some time, yeah.

MJ: Did you, or do you know other prominent or politically active people in the Lewiston community?

PJ: Well, I know Jim Carignan, your dean. He's very active on the council. And what's-her-name, Peggy Rotundo is chairman of the education committee, or the school committee, I know her. Again, through my church in Lewiston. See, Lewiston at Frye Street in the Women's Union is the Quaker church of Lewiston. It's located there and I go there when it snows, I don't go to Durham.

MJ: Are there other people who you know of who were particularly politically active or influential who you think are worth mentioning?

PJ: Well, I'm Corrections Advisor for the Androscoggin County jail and the sheriff's office. I've been there now eight or nine years and I go over there quite frequently and talk with the sheriff and (*unintelligible word*) administrator, you know, about corrections problems. That I do as an advisor, and I enjoy doing that in my retirement. I'm also on the board of visitor (?) appointed by the governor, this is my sixteenth year that I've been on the board of (*unintelligible word*) appointed by various governors, and we go and have meetings at state prisons and we talk about prison problems, and I enjoy that very much.

MJ: How did you become interested and involved in prison issues?

PJ: Well, as I told you, when I was at Columbia, Dr. Celine, who was a criminologist at the U of Pennsylvania, came to Columbia once a week and talked criminology and I took his course. And that's what stimulated me to get into criminology. And I visited Dr. Celine in Gilmanton, New Hampshire in his retirement and my retirement, I visited him for years and he died just two, three years ago in Gilmanton, New Hampshire. And I've had a long contact with Dr. Celine. He was my mentor and of course and a very good life-long friend.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit about your work? I know you told me what it was in the prison, but what exactly did it entail?

PJ: Well, at the county jail I talk with the sheriff and his administrator and talk about problems that they have, and I bring not necessarily all the answers but we sit down and talk about them and I bring them research, Xerox stuff, give it to them. I help them write their speeches, we discuss whatever problems they have in running a jail. And the same is true of the state prison. Right now, for example, we are building at Warren an eight hundred addition prison to the super max at Warren, which is going to cost several million dollars for expanding the state prison system in Maine. I've been involved with that as I told you now for sixteen years on the board,

and I consider that, you know, one of my pet interests is to serve on this because I like to do this kind of work because while there are no easy answers, there are some tremendous challenges, especially with youth, youth violence and youth crime.

MJ: How do you think the youth crime rate and so forth affects Lewiston as a community? I mean, obviously it's detrimental, but in what ways do you think, have there been political efforts to make changes and so forth?

PJ: Well, there's a lot of concern on the part of the police department. They're doing a lot to work on this. I know because I've had contacts with the chief and the, Mrs. Levesque who is a specialist in youth crime at the police department, I talk with her. I know that there's a lot of concern about school crime on the part of a lot of people, there's a lot of concern at the sheriff's department about youth crime, especially to stop the use of drugs and booze. There's a lot of concern about that at all the schools and the high schools. There's a lot of concern on the part of a lot of people about youth crime, and it has a tremendous impact upon families. I think one of the most important causative agents of this is family disruption. I think as you know, we have a lot of family disruption in the United States, including Maine. One in five families, for example, has no father.

MJ: In Maine or nationally?

PJ: In the United States. We have a lot of woman-headed families. I have nothing against women, don't get me wrong, but this creates a lot of problems. We have an increase in poverty in this country, in the world, including Hong Kong by the way, and there is a lot of separation. There's a lot of wife beating which is going on, of great concern to many committees throughout the cities in the last two or three years. And I can go on and on, you know, there's, the rate of change, and the culture has a lot to do with this, too. The technological, the information technology has a lot to do with kids, you know, getting properly educated in the schools on the computer and the Internet to stay abreast of technology so they can be hired and work in the local factories and offices. This is a tremendous challenge and concern on the part of a lot of people, especially educators.

MJ: Do you find that Lewiston statistically is in a, is worse off than the majority of the nation?

PJ: No, I don't think so, no. I would say that, well of course God only knows, there are what, five percent of bad kids in any population. I don't think we are, certainly not like California or Texas, which by the way have the highest number of incarcerated individuals in the country. Well, of course they have a lot of, what do you call it, mixed populations, you know, in California and in Texas, which we do not have. That makes a big difference, you know, this diversity, culture conflict and so on has a lot to do with crime and conflict. We don't have that in Lewiston.

MJ: Now, is that how, how did you become involved in the NAACP?

PJ: Well, I became, -

MJ: In terms of cultural differences, right, right, we're talking about culture.

PJ: I remember some years ago, when I was teaching at Bates, the president, I think it was Jean Sampson, asked me if I would give the keynote address to a new branch starting in Bangor. So I went up there on a snow driven day to Bangor and gave the keynote address, and I guess they all liked it, and that was my contact with the NAACP. And I think they gave me fifteen bucks or something, I forget what it was, but she's the one you need to talk with about the NAACP, she was very much more involved with it than I was.

MJ: Now, at Bates you were involved also in the Democratic Party, correct? How did you become involved in that?

PJ: Well, Governor Muskie, who was governor at the time, and John Donovan, who was the political scientist at Bates, they asked me if I would come, since I was a registered Democrat, would I help them write Democratic platform positions. And they got me to write up the one on the Indian policy, which I did because, you see, as a Quaker I used to go from Cambridge, where I was at Harvard, up to Indian territory, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot and so forth, and set up summer projects for you college, excuse me, I didn't mean to bang your knee, setting up summer projects, that's what I did. So I wrote the Democratic platform policy for the party on Indian policy. And of course Governor Muskie liked that because he wanted me to do it because I knew more about it than perhaps anybody else, I hate to say this, in the party, you know, which I did.

MJ: Let me just stop the tape and turn it over.

End of Side A
Side B

MJ: This is side two of the interview with Peter Jonitis. Now, could you, you were telling me about your involvement as a Democrat and your knowledge with the Indian population and your involvement with Senator Muskie. Can you tell me a little bit more about that, and particularly your connections with Muskie?

PJ: Well, I remember two experiences I had with him. One was when I wrote the Democratic Party platform for the party, I took it to Muskie in the governor's office and discussed it with him. And I remember he was very much for assimilation, that was his position on the Indians, "Let them assimilate," I think were his exact words.

MJ: Was, I'm sorry, was this your first encounter with Muskie, personal encounter?

PJ: Not really. I would meet Muskie in different places and wherever he spoke I would go. In many places. Now, what was the other question you asked?

MJ: Was it your first personal encounter with him, one on one?

PJ: Yes, yes, first personal one to one. Then also I remember once when I was, I worked in Washington running an American Friends service committee building, hotel, in Washington, and

when I did that I went to the Senate one day to meet him to ask him about a certain bill, you know, what I should say, what I should not say. He took me off to lunch, to the Senate dining room, which I appreciated and enjoyed, so that was my contact with Senator Muskie in Washington, D.C.

MJ: What were your impressions of him?

PJ: Very, very favorable. I thought he was a bright, able, very conscientious person with all the right values, and I admire him. Yeah, exactly.

MJ: What do you find he did for the state of Maine in his various positions?

PJ: What do I what?

MJ: What do you feel he did for the state of Maine? I know that's a very broad question, but as governor and as senator and as secretary of state?

PJ: Well, I think all the programs that he worked for, especially environmental improvement, is an outstanding contribution that he made as a senator. So far as I know, as a governor, a lot of people liked him. He did a good job as far as we all know, and looked up to him as a very good governor. I don't know too much about him as Secretary of State, that's kind of a little bit vague. Of course he was there a very short time, as you know. But on the whole, I think I would join a lot of other people who have nothing but the highest praise for his work and his stands that he took as a Senator and as Secretary of State. I'm sure he would have made a very good secretary of state. A very bright, able guy.

MJ: Now, do you feel that the general public's feelings are similar to yours, very supportive?

PJ: I think so, yes, I see that there shouldn't be any difference there, no, oh no. Muskie has a very high standing among people, so far as I know. And every place you go you'll hear that, yeah.

MJ: And, can you tell me just briefly before we wrap things up, you mentioned to me off the tape that you introduced the anthropology department at Bates College. Can you tell me about that and how that all started? You came to Bates in 1953. When did the anthropology department begin and so forth?

PJ: You see, when I was teaching here as a sociologist, I always felt that Bates College emphasized western culture. You've been to Hong Kong, you know something about eastern culture, or, I'm sure you do. But they emphasized western culture. In fact we gave a course, I think we still do, on, what's it called, culture, you must take as a student? Maybe that's not required. But in my day it was required, everybody had to take this one course and it was on western culture. And I thought, well gee, you know, after all, this is what, 1960s whatever, it's high time that Bates began to teach something about other cultures, especially eastern cultures because I felt that China and Japan and the Soviet Union were playing extremely important roles, you know, in world civilization. So I applied for my Fulbright and I got it and I went to Taiwan

and we studied Chinese civilization. Well, when I came back to Bates, I taught that, introduced it into my courses. So, in order to make myself more proficient, especially in physical anthropology which is very loaded with genetics as you well know, I went to Michigan which had some of the best departments in the country, took these courses, then came back to Bates, and I introduced cultural and physical anthropology I think it was 1964 or 1965. And I thought it was high time that Bates taught something a little bit different, you know, from what we had been teaching before that time. And I was very, very glad to introduce eastern culture, especially Chinese culture, into the Bates curriculum. I think, as you know, they've got six guys teaching it now.

MJ: Yes, yes, certainly. Is there anything else that I haven't asked about that you feel is important in terms of particularly the Lewiston community or Muskie, or anything else?

PJ: I don't think so, no, we pretty well covered it.

MJ: Great, well thank you very much for your time.

PJ: I think you did a good job.

MJ: Thank you very much.

PJ: And you seem to enjoy your work.

End of Interview