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Interview with Roland Landry by Mike Richard

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Landry, Roland

Interviewer

Richard, Mike

Date

July 27, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 118

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Biographical Note

Roland Landry was born in Lewiston, Maine on April 30, 1928. He was the ninth of 16 children. He went to St. Dominic's Regional High School, where he played hockey, and then attended St. Francis College in Biddeford. After college he began his own printing shop. He was appointed to the parking authority in 1959. During 1961 and 1962 he served for two terms as Alderman for Ward 3. He was appointed to a five-year term on the Lewiston Fire Commission. In 1964 he defeated Nelson Peters for a seat on the County Commission and he served on the committee for 16 years. He headed the inauguration planning group in 1964 and was named its chairman in 1965. He was elected the Secretary of Treasury for the Maine County Commissioner Association in 1969. He was the program director for the state administration of Emergency Employment Act in 1971. He served on the Board of Directors at the National Association of Counties for two terms. He was named to the planning board in Lewiston in 1979. He has served as the Coordinator of Maine-Canadian Affairs since 1980.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Maine Legislature 1946-1949; 1955-1956 gubernatorial term; 1957-1958 gubernatorial term; 1958 U.S. Senate campaign; 1968 vice presidential campaign; 1969-72 presidential campaign; 1970 U.S. Senate campaign; Roosevelt-Campobello

International Park Committee (RCIPC); Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) (CETA Program); Emergency Employment Act of 1971; Democratic Party in Maine; Lewiston community history; Lewiston during the Great Depression; Roland's brother being killed in World War II; vigilantes organization; delegate to 1968 Democratic National Convention; Louis Philippe Gagne's political career; and insight into Franco-American culture in Lewiston.

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Transcript

Mike Richard: The date is July 27, 1999, we're here with Roland D. Landry in the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston, and interviewing is Mike Richard. And Mr. Landry, could you please state your full name and spell it?

Roland Landry: Roland D. Landry, date of birth April 30th, 1928. I was born in Lewiston, Maine.

MR: Okay, and could you tell me a little bit about your family life? You've had fifteen siblings, I guess.

RL: Yes, I have fifteen siblings, also a half sister, Pauline, from my father's second marriage. We were eight boys and eight girls, of which I am the ninth. While growing up we were all involved in sharing chore and duties. The boys all started working at a very early age helping our father and his business which was a painting contractor. We started by cleaning brushes, stirring paint, then scraping woodwork and first we started painting porches, and went on from there. My father was Adelard Landry, my mother Alice Bergeron Landry. She was kept very busy at home caring for the many children. Everyone was well instructed on all the various homemaking jobs from cooking to cleaning, helping with the study and caring for the other children. My parents were Democrat, Catholic, and very active in the church and family. My oldest brother, Armand, became a priest and always served the church and the state of Maine. We had a brother by the name of Larry who was killed at war, WWII, at the age of eighteen.

At home the social life was active and revolved around the family. Relatives came often and played cards, and there always was classical music from the record player or the radio. We all especially liked the opera, my father played a (*unintelligible word*) quite often. My background has been a big influence on my life. My mother couldn't speak any English, therefore French was always spoken at home. They were very strict disciplinarians, which was also strongly taught us to be likewise. The family always spoke about Canada more than the United States, this is where they all grew from. Tradition were always strong also; I automatically had developed an interest in maintaining them. Maybe this account a lot I am still (*unintelligible word*) about remembering everyone's birthday, anniversary, etcetera, including those of my nieces and nephews and in-laws. My current concern for helping others and making sure to never do a thing to spoil the family's name was imbedded in me deeply.

MR: Now, you mentioned that your parents were Democrats. Did you, did you discuss the politics much when you were, as a family when you were younger, like at the dinner table, would you talk about it?

RL: Yes, yes, it was one of the main subjects, especially the election time. So, my dad and mom were Democrat, and the family, all the family turned out to be Democrat and they're still Democratic, whoever's living, they're still.

MR: Would you say that your parents were more loyal to the party or to, were they kind of, did they kind of pick and choose candidates as they saw fit into their values or to their political attitudes?

RL: Well, my dad was a Democrat, and a very strong Democrat. I don't think there was too many times that he switch on the other side because he was too conservative. And that's why that he took the Democratic Party coming from Canada, they both came from Canada. He came from St. (*name*), and, that's the fir-, when he did come down over here he was only nineteen, eighteen or nineteen, and he registered as a Democrat and it stays that way for the family.

MR: And your mother had also come from a family of Democrats?

RL: Yeah, but they're coming, she was coming from Canada also, another place, (*name*), and naturally she went along with Dad because in those days were... It was more open and the party was doing more. The Democratic Party was doing more for the people in favor than the other one.

MR: Now, were you, compared to your other brothers and sisters, were you more interested in politics when you were younger, as you went off to do (*unintelligible word*) your political career?

RL: I was in high school when quite a few elected officials used to come to school to visit, just to say hi and getting us introduced to them and, at high school, yeah. See the others, the girls, they're all registered Democrat but they never took too much. It's someone who really liked politics to have done what I did. Because I've got a lot of good friends that I thought could join but they didn't want any, no part of it, they want to go vote and that's it. But myself, I enjoyed campaigning with the parties involved.

MR: And just one other little thing, could you spell your parents' names, just to have on the tape?

RL: Adelard, A-D-E-L-A-R-D, Landry, L-A-N-D-R-Y, mother's name was Alice, A-L-I-C-E, Bergeron, B-E-R-G-E-R-O-N, Landry, L-A-N-D-R-Y.

MR: Okay, and I guess one last thing, sorry to interrupt but what was the family financial situation like in general, I mean especially with fifteen, sixteen children, was it tough to raise a family like that for your parents?

RL: I remember seeing my father and my mother crying because it was quite a job to maintain the home with sixteen, and make sure that they had the, can feed the kids, had good meals and so on and so forth. My mother being a good cook, that's what they were taught in Canada, we had a very good teenage life.

MR: Okay. Now I guess if you want you can continue with where you were, sorry I interrupted you. I think we were about, let's talk about some influences on your childhood from outside of your family, any people . . .?

RL: Traditions were always strong also. I automatically have developed an interest in maintaining them. Maybe this accounts for why I am still teased about remembering everyone's birthday, anniversary, et cetera. My very concern for helping others and making sure to never do

a thing to spoil the family name was embedded in me deeply. During my teens, my parents became more lenient. We were allowed to make friends outside the family and immediate neighbors. I played hockey in grammar school and all of the high school years. Prior to that we didn't go anywhere, any place that was unsupervised by one parent.

I was a St. Dom's hockey team member, and we were to be playing a New England hockey tournament in 1948, to Boston. We played six overtime periods and the last year was honored and inducted into the Maine Sport Hall of Fame, which was quite an honor, and for which I take great pride in. Hockey was the door opener for me to looking outside the school recreation and interest. There is where I learned most about camaraderie, helping others and try to make circumstances better.

I grew up during the Depression, but one year all when the big crash came in Lewiston, like every other city in the country was greatly affected. Everyone was poor, but actually we didn't realize it since we were all in the same situation. And so we all (*unintelligible word*) ourselves together and all from hard work and determination. Socially we were restricted to school functions and the church. Very few people had cars and they were for work and not pleasure, so traveling was (*unintelligible word*) prohibitive, therefore family gatherings were the main event for the most of the people.

In 1939 when England, which meant Canada, of course, declared war, we were all influenced. My family and friends all felt involved from then on. That was the main topic of conversation in every household. As soon as the United States entered war, WWII, three of my brothers went into the service, one brother, my brother Larry, Laurier in French, L-A-U-R-I-E-R, was one of the first men in Lewiston to be killed in a battle in France at the age of eighteen. I was also strongly influenced by the brothers at Sacred Heart who were my teachers from the fifth grade through high school. Father Drouin, pastor of St. Paul's Parish, and founder of St. Dominic High School, which I started became a close friend of mine. He even sent me to be at his bedside when he passed away. He was a great influence on me. I was a member of the church choir and an altar boy until I was a senior at St. Dominic's Regional High School.

MR: Before we go into your time in school, you've been talking about how the Roman Catholic church was an important social institution, especially for your family. Were there other important denominations or religious groups in the area that you remember?

RL: We had some friends, once we hit high school, we had more friends and they were more mixed up, but the majority was all French and Catholic.

MR: So that was pretty much the norm for the whole town, the whole area. Were there ever any tensions between a French majority and other minorities, was there any . . . ?

RL: No: there were various (*unintelligible word*), had some little street battles, a bunch of young Franco-American and the Irishman they called him, they had a little battle in the Summer Street corner and that was just the starting of it. Because where we lived in Lewiston, where I was brought up, Shawmut Street, it was a nice place, and it was very quiet. Except some nights they were aiming at (*unintelligible phrase*) either one side would start or the next time the other

one would start, the other side. It was about half an hour just trying to find out who was the best fighter between the French, or the Franco-Americans and the Irish.

MR: So was this tension more of kind of like a childhood rivalry type thing, so it wasn't really seriously in the adult community, that wasn't. . . .?

RL: No, that was just to challenge each other, see. But once they got police come in, they got reprimanded and plus their parents had a complete report, and they took care of their kids, (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Okay, well I guess if we could talk about your education and where you attended elementary and secondary school and what those times were like?

RL: Okay, when I was in first grade, our church had a fund raising drive to complete the second floor of the church of St. Peter and St. Paul. There were several groups doing various things to help.

I was a member of the acrobat team. We held several exhibitions, we formed a pyramid of students and I was the small one elected to be on the top of the pyramid. That I thought was quite an honor and experience. Having attended most of my school years at a boys only school, I remember mostly the sport activities of which my school excelled in hockey in high school and grammar school. I was able to go to places outside the city and family affair. Then I could go to dances, parties and dating.

I chose to go to St. Francis College because they had to offer what I was interested in. I aspired to become a dentist or even a priest. Of course also my father approved of the school and it was near my home. No one had cars so our activities were very limited. (*Unintelligible phrase*) prohibited much outside activities also. I only attended two years. There was no one there in particular who was a great influence on me. My foundation had already been established.

Lewiston has changed along with the state and the country. Politically, it's still largely a Democrat community. Most of the Franco-American (*unintelligible word*) have been of this party and it's subsequent generation as well. Having been one of the recipients of the prejudices toward the Franco-American, most of us believe in equality. The city has merit socially also. We have had an African-American mayor, elected twice; we had two women as mayor. The textile mills which first was attractive to the French people to this region has since moved away. Those people sacrificed all they could do to give their descendants excellent education and a sense of accomplishments through hard work. Today we have become a high tech city. Employment is good, the quality of life has improved dramatically, and hopefully it will continue.

As far as for the French speaking and ethnic areas, interest in reviving the French language, but not very strong. My generation was all bilingual. Our children were all taught French. You practiced it. The next generation have very few who do speak French. I doubt that the following generation will. They want to learn it but don't practice and the same is seen through all over the state.

After leaving college I started my own print shop. During that time I developed friendship outside my usual crowd. I became interested in any political affair, and became very friendly with former mayor Romeo Boisvert and former mayor Georges Rancourt¹ and former mayor Roland Marcotte, George Alton Lessard, who all later became mayors of Lewiston. I agreed with their view and worked on the behalf of the elections and got my political bug. First I was appointed to the parking authority, I was then persuaded to run for alderman of ward three. I was then appointed to the fire commission. Mayor Lillian Caron appointed me to the planning board. I then was persuaded to run for the (*unintelligible word*) commissioner primarily through these influence from such people. Their help resulted in successful election.

I met my wife while playing hockey with the St. Dom hockey team, and later with the (*unintelligible word*) team. She liked attending games. Subsequently we met and later dated. She never was closely involved in politics, she was at home person taking care of the children.

The Vigilant organization is formed primarily of a group of Franco Americans around Lewiston and Auburn to help needy children go to the ethnic college. My first obligation was to supervise the fund, raising money projects specifically for this purpose. We were very successful and helped many children by making it possible for them to attend these colleges.

MR: Now, Don had mentioned to me that also the Vigilant, he wasn't sure about this, but also maybe the Vigilante's organization was interested in the politics of the area more generally, and, in addition to getting students into certain schools. Could you. . . ?

RL: Yeah, the Vigilante was an organization of men, but started to take the members at their high school. By the way they had about between eighteen to twenty, and it was to keep up the work, learn what they're doing, as soon as they come out of high school. And they had a good group of people that belonged in there such as the bankers, we had bankers from all over the twin cities that belonged in there, and there was just a certain amount of people belonging to. And they had to take, couldn't go over that amount that was in the by-law. So as one would die, we had a list of names to pick up a new member, and it was limited to a hundred, a hundred fifty. The last president of the association was and still is Robert L. Couturier, my friend, a lawyer. He, we had to run a meeting, which was a very serious meeting, and during a meeting it was nothing but the meeting. It was very nice. Well, a lot of the people were in their fifties and up so we had, I mean, the young ones had to learn the right way to act.

I was a president of the association, I became it, you know, and I stayed for four years and gave a chance someone else to take it. But I was the youngest, at that time, president that they had ever had. We're all people in their fifty, fifty five and prior, so I enjoyed my turns up there and we did the best we could to follow up and so, it was an honor to serve the people of Lewiston and Auburn.

MR: You said that was, you were president of that in the early fifties for four years?

¹ Lewiston Mayor 1958-9

RL: Yes, I was president of the Vigilante, I think it was in '58 or '59 I started to be president. About ten years after. . . .

MR: Okay. Well, I guess we could talk about, at this point was Louis Philippe Gagne involved in the Vigilante organization at any time?

RL: Yeah, Louis Philippe Gagne died while in office. Louis Philippe Gagne died while in office as county commissioner. The governor appointed Nelson Peters for the remaining two years to finish Mr. Gagne's term. This is when I started to run for that office. I had six opponents from the Democratic Party. I came in first taking fifty percent of all the vote at the Democratic primary election. I like to bring you a few things about Ernest Malenfant, which has been an alderman and mayor, promising to cut expenses. He ran against George Alton Lessard and won. He did cut expenses, but they were unnecessary expenditure such as public works, school department, but not purchasing necessary equipment. I had, on the parking authority, I have been on the parking authority, and being around the city hall I witnessed the loss of important services. As for relationship between us, we always knew each other, we were neither friend nor enemies. Our meeting was stormy at times, he was stubborn and no one could explain anything to him. He wanted things his way only, and could not or would not accept anyone else's point of view.

A bill was sponsored in Washington, D.C. by Senator Muskie. As chairman of the finance committee, I was then serving as chairman of the county commissioner's office. The bill was to become the CETA Program. Three different groups applied for the money, the town, the cities, and the county. Seventy county commissioners of Maine were named by the finance committee in Washington to administer the program, of which I became the executive secretary. County in this country all carry more weight than cities. We produced three thousand jobs and only had a budget averaging about twelve million dollars a year. I was named by Ed Muskie as director of the National Association of Counties. I was attending a conference in Colorado when I received a call from Senator Muskie's office asking me to stop in Washington to meet with him at his office. He then advised me of more money being available for the CETA Program. I was dealing with Senator Muskie and Don Nicoll, who was his administrative assistant.

Major issue during the tenure as a county commissioner were many, most of which I have already included in the number eleven question. Emergency Employment Act in 1973, the Comprehensive Employment pact called for funding which all came about through, due to Senator Ed Muskie.

MR: Now the, you mentioned the National County Commissioners Association, was that it, what was the purpose of that body, what types of things did the body do, did that group oversee?

RL: Well, the head office was in Washington and the, all the county commissioners from different counties all over the United States had some representative in Washington as a board member for the association nationally. So I was elected, I was sent to Washington to be on the national board of directors where I represented Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont. And we met once every two months in Washington, and we met with the, that's when we had our chance to meet politicians at the national level, because we had one or two guests every time to come and

Speak to us. But we were active, the board of directors were very active, and I followed all the places we had to go for conference. But that's the purpose of the county commissioners, National, of which I was a director also. So it was another job, every time that we saw something.

MR: Now as director you must have come into contact with several national political figures and other county commissioners?

RL: Yeah.

MR: Who were some of the more important or more influential?

RL: Well, Hubert Humphrey was Senator Muskie's running mate as vice president. We had contact with all the senators and congressmen, that was open session and we were asked to go and assist at the meeting. They wanted to talk about different things and what you would need in counties and different states, so that's when they would make the decision what to, to start something every year. But I met people from Maryland, people from New Jersey, senators and so on and so forth. I had a good, I was emotionally touched because of the way that they treat us as directors of the National Association and they were very, very wide open with us. And, but all in all, we had Senator Muskie working in the back helping us out to meet other people. This is where

MR: So Senator Muskie was kind of the senator that was most involved out of all of them with the county commissioners association?

RL: Yes, he was a believer when he was in a state senate in Augusta, very nice, open and he was good. And that's when we started to add those programs in the seventies, there was hardly any money running around. That's when the federal started a CETA Program, to have, start a lot of people, like I said, we had three thousand jobs that we put up here, right here in Maine; different city, county, and town. And that was paid by the federal. And the, it was part of it, it was part of it was that (*loses track of thought*) . . .

MR: You're saying much of the money was put up by the federal government.

RL: The federal government.

MR: And a good part of it was. . . .

RL: Yes, and another thing was that the cities, towns and county had to keep so much percent of the job going after two years. And it's how we created this big movement toward people going back to work and sure of a job for a couple of years, and if the opening it was (*unintelligible phrase*), it was for the city, the town and the county. So everybody put their application for so many, and we didn't have anything to, started hiring, we were accepting a list and they were getting on the payroll. So it was a big job to just maintain that, make sure that we had enough money to hire all of them. Otherwise all the federal branch.

MR: And also what, do you remember which years exactly you were down in Washington for this? You mentioned you were there, you must have been there around '68 if you met Humphrey.

RL: I was named for the National Convention in 1968 in Chicago, and that's where I had a chance to come across Mr. Humphrey because Senator Muskie brought him into our caucus room and we talked and that's the time I met him, Senator Hubert Humphrey. Very nice man.

MR: Oh, so you were actually present at the Chicago National Convention in '68?

RL: Sixty-eight, and I was a delegate.

MR: What was that like over there? I mean there was, it was pretty. . . .

RL: It was kind of rough for us. We came in there without knowing too, too much what was going on. We knew there was something, but we landed at the airport and they took us to the, at the luggage, where, inside the airport. They came in with a bus and into the bus, put everything in there, and everybody was checked before. And they put our luggage in the bus and we went straight to the hotel, (*unintelligible phrase*), and at the hotel we were told not to go out. If you had to go out for something special, you made sure that you would be with someone else. There were (*unintelligible phrase*). So we stayed inside the hotel while we were not at the convention. So they changed a few things around so we won't spend every morning until one o'clock to go to the meeting. They started the meeting in the morning around ten o'clock, and we stayed all afternoon. And at night we did the same thing, go back in the hotel, surrounded by police, state police cars with their siren and the lights on to bring us to the hotel. And the next morning we would do the same thing. They had thousands of people on the side of the streets. Yup. It was nice that I at least I had the experience of it, I went through it. They didn't have anything like it since. My trip in Chicago was well remembered.

MR: Okay, I'm just going to flip the tape right now.

End of Side A
Side B

MR: This is the second side of the tape of the interview with Roland D. Landry on July 27th, 1999. And on the other side of the tape we were just talking about your experiences in the Chicago Democratic National Convention in '68. Who were some of, you mentioned you met Vice President Humphrey, and who were some of the other figures that you dealt with, I'm sure people in the Maine delegation and maybe. . . .

RL: Yeah. We had some people in the delegation that knew some of the senators and so on and so forth, but we were in caucus every morning starting at ten o'clock until twelve noon. And then we had to be at the convention for two p.m., so there was a few times where we did meet with some of the people of different group, they wanted to come in and talk to us. And there every time that we met there was senat-, the United States senator from that state always attended. And we, then we met with Senator Muskie the eve of the caucus, and he had told us

then that if Humphrey would have the vote, he would be named a member, or he would be named as wise appointee, which was vice president. So we had this figured out and finally we, our group won and this is when Senator Muskie was appointed at the meeting of Thursday to decide who would be his vice president, candidate.

MR: Actually, I think it was the other way around, that Muskie in '68 was Humphrey's running mate, and Humphrey was going to run for president.

RL: That's right, yeah, yeah, Humphrey was a candidate and he chose Senator Muskie, they'd been very close friends, the two of them. But, yeah, he was, and there was no question about it, he was accepted by our Maine group and the majority by the national group, so, which candidate that they had up there.

MR: Did you have many dealings with some of the other factions, such as the Eugene McCarthy or the Robert Kennedy groups?

RL: I had, I knew who was Senator McCarthy, the Kennedy's well, which I met all of them at one function and another, but actually we were. . . . There it's so busy that they eliminated themselves, so we had to understand that we're not going to get in right on the spot on top of them, you know. But the whole place was, you couldn't (*unintelligible phrase*) directly in the convention because they went around, they were the ones running around, the convention people, but they were very nice. That's something I'll never forget.

MR: And also, now you mentioned you were in Washington in connection with the National County Commissioner Association.

RL: Yeah.

MR: Do you remember, for how long did you stay in Washington for that, was that several years (*unintelligible phrase*)?

RL: I think I was in five years, on the National Board of Directors.

MR: So you must have been in Washington from around '68 to early '70s, something like that?

RL: Yup, yeah, that's when I was on the National Board of County Commissioners and, which I represented three states. I didn't have any in the other state.

MR: And were you present in Washington for the '72, Muskie's '72 nomination race for the presidency?

RL: No, that's the only one I went to.

MR: The '68 convention?

RL: The '68 convention.

MR: And one other thing, how did you first get to know Senator Muskie originally, back in Maine?

RL: Well, I knew him in Augusta as a state rep-, representative, and then from there I remember working for his governorship, and then on later to the, and that's when I started to know, what's his name, the guy what's his name?

MR: Don Nicoll?

RL: Don Nicoll, yeah, I remember him very, very much and we used to keep contact.

MR: Okay, well I guess we'll go on to talk about your period in the '80s, or since 1980 when you became the coordinator of Maine-Canadian Affairs?

RL: In 1980, I believe I had the most enjoyable time. All my working career I met with people, great people. I had a top rated and efficient staff. It was an honor and a privilege to hold the position of coordinator of Maine-Canadian Affairs, and deem it an honor to be referred to as though ambassador to Quebec. I still correspond and visit with people I dealt with back then, both here in Maine and Quebec, and the other five provinces. I have a vast amount of pleasant memory, and developed very strong ties with them all. I believe I did a good job of promoting Maine in Canada. Everyone told me they were impressed at all of the good will I helped establish between our countries. I helped organize various groups almost as a Maine ambassador especially for the purpose of attending a joint winter carnival. We had a twelve bus load and numerous cars filled with Maine people, and all participated in spreading goodwill. So many of these people mention the good time and wish it were still going on as strong. On a Saturday at a carnival, we put on a Maine chicken barbecue, souvenir and favors were distributed to the Canadians and holiday festivities were a huge success. I can't come up with more than the CETA Program, I toured each county of Maine once while administrating this program, and then the Maine-Canadian Affairs program. Paul Couture was head of WCOU radio station in Lewiston, and the *Le Messenger* newspaper where I worked for a while right after high school graduation.

Georges Rancourt was mayor and county commissioner, and Mssr. Drapeau was (*unintelligible word*), Robert Malenfant was the sheriff. All were present to work with and helpful towards my political career.

I first came in contact with Senator Muskie at the state capitol when he was a member of the legislature. And then I worked for him a lot when he was governor and was a candidate for the United States Senate. We became very friendly while he was a representative, but it was easier when he was governor. When he was a candidate for the U.S. Senate, I got very involved with his campaign, especially working hard for him around Androscoggin County. . . . He was always ready to help. We had lunch often at the senate restaurant at the capitol. I used to bring him lobsters, which he likes so well. In 1976 I suffered a cardiac arrest and he came special to visit me at the hospital. We remained friends to the end. There was a time during Ed Muskie's career of service to his country when new faces came into politics, and they tried to follow his

footsteps. He was a wonderful role model when hard to represent political belief or to conduct oneself, and he elevated the office he was elected to, and now to a higher caliber people to represent Maine. In all he was a great man, in all he was a great. . . .

MR: Now you mentioned that you knew him well, you knew him back when he was in the state legislature, and you talk a little bit about that, and also when he was governor. How, what was the nature of your contact with him when he was governor, would you frequently deal with him at that time?

RL: I was in politics in Lewiston as an alderman, and the reason why I met him on different occasions was some members of our local delegation, and, introduced him in the time that I had anything, problems or something, I was always calling him. And if I wanted an appointment I would have it, I'd be, they'd set me up some time during the day.

MR: And when he was senator you mentioned also you worked on his campaigns for him. What, which, first of all which campaigns was it, I assume the '68 was one of them?

RL: Sixty-eight.

MR: Also was the '70 Senate reelection campaign, is that one? And then did you work on the '72 presidential, or actually you mentioned you didn't work on that one.

RL: Seventy-two?

MR: That was for the presidential nomination, that was a brief, brief campaign.

RL: Yeah, I had a job, my job was to put up posters, signs different corners in Androscoggin County.

MR: So, and, but for the '68 and '70 were you in Washington for those two campaigns, the '68 vice presidential and the '70 Senate?

RL: In '72 no.

MR: Or the '70, the 1970 Senate reelection campaign?

RL: Yeah, that was in, then he was, they won, that one is the one that he was a candidate himself.

MR: Right.

RL: We helped right here in Maine, and bottom line you always do-, have some signs, put on different lawns, so on and so forth, and I used to make the sign myself on a stencil to post around the county, which was a very, very good county for Senator Muskie. But he was very strong in Maine.

MR: Do you remember some of the times back in the early, this is the mid to early '50s, when the Democratic Party in Maine was starting to make a comeback. Do you remember some of the TV campaigns that they had, the earliest TV appearances that they made, things like that?

RL: Yeah, but, I remember that it was (*unintelligible phrase*), that's too far. I kept notes of different things when it was happening, and I didn't have anything about that because it's come from all my notes that I had at home. And my political period and following the Ed Muskie campaigns through.

MR: Did you get to know Frank Coffin at all?

RL: Very much.

MR: What was he like? Or what did he seem like, I guess?

RL: He was a very nice man. He was very soft spoken but a good politician. A man that would do anything for his people, the people. I knew him very, very well, yeah.

MR: And did you, you mentioned that you maintained a friendship with Senator Muskie through the end, so did you, even in the '80s and '90s when he was living in Kennebunk, did you maintain close ties with him, like social visits and. . . ?

RL: The, I don't know if I told you when I had my heart attack that he, he made a visit to my, to the hospital in my room to see me. And that's how close we were.

MR: Did you get to know, did you get to know his family at all, Jane Muskie or the. . . ?

RL: Jane, I know her very, very well, she a very nice lady. And was a good mother. And I remember some of their kids, but now I couldn't even name them, I forget their name. But it's been a long time, they were very young.

MR: So when, what times would you come into contact with his family? Would this be during campaign trips maybe, or just. . . ?

RL: Yeah, with the Coffins (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Or actually, yeah, with the Coffins, too, and also the Muskie family?

RL: It was during the campaign.

MR: It was during the campaign. Did you ever have the opportunity to drive Ed or Jane around during one of the campaigns?

RL: No, no, no. I remember walking with him on Lisbon Street and going different places, at the, some of the Franco American clubs and so on and so forth, which was very strong then. And going with him on the call that he was doing, who fixed him up in a schedule for the day.

And at night, at supper, we always had a get-together at one place, one restaurant here, and another restaurant, moving around.

MR: What was your experience during the time, I believe it was in the mid '70s when there was a call for Ed to, or for Senator Muskie to get more in touch with the people of Maine, there was fears that he was becoming more of a distant politician. Do you recall any experiences with that movement to get him more involved?

RL: No.

MR: Um, and one other thing, we were talking about your position as coordinator of Maine-Canadian affairs, how did you first get that position? Was it appointed or elected?

RL: It was appointed by the Maine Board of Directors of the county commissioners. County commissioners had their organizations and they had a director from the state, I mean from the different county, and that was the first time they appointed someone as a full time executive secretary, and they approached me because I was fairly young then? If I would take the job and I took it. And my job was to travel the state of Maine and later came after that the CETA Program and I left them in 1980 when I accepted the job from the governor for the Canadian Affair coordinator.

MR: Okay, so that was Governor Longley [James Sr.] was it then?

RL: Longley came way after that.

MR: After that.

RL: He came after that, I think it was. . . .

MR: Governor Brennan [Joseph] or Reed [John]? Oh no, Reed was before. . . .

RL: Because Brennan is the one I worked for as the Canadian-Franco coordinator, Joe Brennan.

MR: What was he like to work for?

RL: Very nice man, and he was not getting excited for anything, but just on the level and acting very good. He was a very good man.

MR: Now, in this position as the Maine-Canadian Affairs position, did you deal with the Campobello International Park, the Roosevelt-Campobello International Park?

RL: Yes, I had to go to a couple of meeting.

MR: And Senator Muskie was pretty involved in that. Do you remember some of what. . . ?

RL: Well, he was involved, he wanted to keep this thing going and somebody had to push for it,

seeing that a former president of the United States was thought of as living up there. It was interesting to keep it up, keep the thing going.

MR: Okay, another thing about Louis Philippe Gagne, do you recall his editorial, I think it might have been a radio program called The Eye, or *l'Œil*?

RL: *l'Œil Je Vous Parle.*

MR: What was, can you talk about the significance of that, or how it influenced you or some other people in the community?

RL: Influenced who?

MR: Just how it influenced you, maybe did you listen to it or keep up with that editorial?

RL: Yeah, I was following it, yeah. But he was not always A-1.

MR: Really?

RL: Some of his, but in general still the Franco American was listening and, that's another one, he had very good close, he was very close with Senator Muskie because Mr. Gagne was mayor of the city. And he was very close, and Mr. Gagne always kept himself on the top of it, everything that was going on. He was a very good man, he was mayor in 1948 I think, the year I graduated from high school. Because the daughter was in my class, I knew the daughter.

MR: And do you think that his, The Eye was very influential in the French Canadian community? You mentioned that a lot of people listened but would they. . . .?

RL: Oh yeah, every Sunday at I think it was twelve o'clock or one o'clock, and he had a half an hour program and everybody was waiting for that thing going on. Franco American, that's all, a lot, most of them, they could just, that's all they could understand. You know, in the '50s, like I said before, the Franco Americans in Lewiston were just starting to have the young people speak French, but it wouldn't last. You know, I'm one of the lucky one, I just kept on going speaking French, and I'm still a French Frog.

(Pause)

MR: Now you mentioned that some of the things that Louis Philippe Gagne said you didn't quite agree with. What were some of these issues that you took disagreement with on him?

RL: Well, the thing was that he had some project like anybody else and he had a few of them that were not, he was ahead of our time, which was not proper to be, to work on. And then when he started to back something up, well he knew he had a backing because of his radio audience, which I, I mean that was his way of doing his work. And when he became a county commissioner, he was very good, very active, and that did not happen. That was done while he was the mayor. But the county commissioner you don't run the same thing, it's, they're

completely, complete government from the city. So he had some idea, different thing, and he said it different. But, I say, that's in the '40s. When he passed away he still had two years to go, and the governor appointed a Republican to replace him as a county commissioner and we had to work hard afterward because it was another, a Republican, I don't remember who. There was a, one time there was two Democrats in the county com-, oh there was Louis Philippe Gagne and Georges Rancourt became a county commissioner. But in general it was good, and the city was getting a lot of activities, I mean, that's when they built quite a few schools. So actually I think he made a very good job as a mayor, and also the county commissioner. Nevertheless, we did not agree all the time for the candidates, so on and so forth, but apparently people cared for him because they elected him mayor and county commissioner.

MR: Also, one other thing getting back to the Vigilante organization, who were some of the people that were most influential in that? I think you mentioned maybe one or two, but was there anyone else who was really active in that group?

RL: From the old school on, I'm trying to think back. Who did I replace? Let's see, the, part of this Vigilante that people would like to belong to it was limited to many member and they have to make sure that the meeting was strictly French. Whatever you wanted to know, questions and so on and so forth was French. So it was, it was hard for a few people, a lot of people would like to be in there but they couldn't question in French and so on and so forth. They would like to put it in English and that was a no-no.

But we had a lot of businessmen belonged in there, Franco American businessmen, yeah. They're all dead now. But, because I belong in there myself since I think it's 1956, '57, and it was all business. I mean, I remember businesses from on Lisbon Street and that, businessmen, we were all members back then, some had to wait a couple of years before they, one of them died before they could replace it. There's no way, they didn't, they did it this way so this way they had a better chance to choose what they wanted. But it was one of the best organizations for the Franco American in Lewiston and Auburn, this Vigilante. They were working constantly on some project, especially they were working for school, for St. Dominiq High School because it was a French school.

MR: Okay. There's just a couple of other names I'd like to ask you about. Do you, did you have many dealings with Louis Jalbert, he was mostly in the State House I think? It looks like you had a lot of (*unintelligible phrase*), what was he like?

RL: He was, he was all right, but he was tough. I mean, working with him, you had to be ready and be sharp to do what he wanted to do. He was a pressure man, pressure and pressure and pressure, and he wasn't a nice man. He had his faults like we all do, but in general he did very good for the state of Maine and for the Androscoggin County, again Lewiston and Auburn and so on and so forth. He was very good to the people, but he was well respected in Augusta by some people in the legislature. Either they care or not, they agreed with him quite often, and he was a guy that when he signed something, he was not about (*unintelligible phrase*). He wanted something, he would work for it and work hard.

MR: Did you have any direct dealings with him or confrontations with him yourself?

RL: No, he was very good and friendly with me and the entire family, and so, so we, we were the same thing with his family. A sister was the, working in the city hall and she was on the registration board for the voters, she worked up there many years, and everyone knew her and liked, like they did with Jalbert. But he was a, he was a good man, he was a (*unintelligible phrase*) has to be very, to try to control different meetings and so on and so forth. But all in all the people had their own mind made up.

MR: And what about Faust's brother Paul Couture, did you know him well?

RL: Faust Couture?

MR: Or actually, Faust's brother Paul, Paul Couture, did you know him?

RL: (*Unintelligible phrase*), I knew him very, very well when I worked at *le Messenger*. He was a member of the board of *le Messenger*, in turn myself I was elected, I was named on the board of *le Messenger*. At one time they were selling stock shares which I bought some, and then eventually I became a director, later on, because they needed to get people (*unintelligible phrase*) in there, so in other words, as you come out of high school you were, someone (*unintelligible phrase*) and then you could go to St. Pete, St. Dominique High School.

MR: For which years were you involved in the board of *le Messenger*, was this soon after high school you mentioned?

RL: Yeah, right after high school I went to work up there as a Linotype operator, and then I kept on going and I was on the hand setting of the heading and so on and so forth on the Linotype (*unintelligible phrase*). So it was people who were working up there, had been up there probably average fifteen, twenty years at least, and they were retiring from *le Messenger*, so they took a pension, so that's how (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Did you get to know anyone who was working there pretty closely, or was it kind of just a brief job and you didn't. . . .?

RL: No, it was a job that, I went up there when, when I got married I was working up there, in '50, '51. But there were steady people, and there were people at that time between sixty and seventy. I was about the only young person there to learn the trade. And that's when I became a director of the corporation.

MR: And how about Laurier Raymond, Sr., did you get to know him?

RL: Very well, very well, he was the, not the manager but, manager, the called him what? They had special title. But I knew him very, very well, and his son the same thing. Larry Jr., Larry Jr.? He was in the county level also and, because when I went into the county the district attorney was the name they gave them, was, oh, it was Larry. He was in the district attorney's office as an assistant, and then he became the county attorney which today, did they change name or what do. . . .?

MR: I don't know, I think they might have, I'm not sure (*unintelligible phrase*).

RL: The judge of probate. But I knew Mr. (*name*) from the city hall, (*name*). No, Mr. Raymond, yeah, Mr. Raymond from the city hall. He was a very good man. I was on board when he was in charge as the administrator I guess for the city.

MR: And how about John Orestis who was mayor at one time?

RL: Yeah, John Orestis, again started by surrounding himself around a group of people that didn't know him, he wanted to get known, and he was never too, too active before going for mayor. He went for mayor and it's just to show you people we're not, we're still French people, but they bought, because his family come from Franco-American people, and, his mother was a Franco-American, and he could speak French a little bit and so on and so forth. A very nice man. We don't hardly see him, I don't think he lives any more here in Lewiston.

MR: I think he might be around, well I think he's on the list of people for us to interview. I might be wrong though, but I think he might still be around.

RL: Well he was in Portland.

MR: Oh yeah, he might be living in Portland now, but okay, and also what about Bill Jacques?

RL: Bill Jacques was an alderman for many years in ward seven. And he was mayor my first year as an alderman, outgoing mayor. And when I went for county commissioner he was some committeeman, and later on he applied for the job and again a Republican was named, so his, you know, he got beat by Jack Maloney as the county commissioner. But he had a lot of experience with politics.

MR: Okay, well I think that's all my questions. I don't know if there's something that you think I've missed or something that you'd like to go over about any topic at all that would cover maybe something we haven't.

RL: Well I might have gone over some of this over here, I don't know. I don't even know where I was.

MR: I think we covered the original questions. I don't know if there are any other political offices that you might have held that are politically related positions that we didn't cover on the questions.

RL: No, there's only one, I was on the board of director for the Androscoggin County (*unintelligible word*), whatever it is.

MR: Okay, great, well, okay well thanks a lot for your time.

RL: Okay, I thank you for that, too bad I couldn't make it sooner.

End of Interview