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Lemieux, Lional "Lal" oral history interview

Brian O'Doherty

Interview with Lionel "Lal" Lemieux by Brian O'Doherty

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Lemieux, Lionel "Lal"

Interviewer
O'Doherty, Brian

Date
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Place
Lewiston, Maine

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Biographical Note

Lionel A. "Lal" Lemieux was born in Augusta, Maine on January 23, 1911 to Quebecois immigrant parents. He was the tenth of twelve children, the first of two to graduate from high school, and the only one to attend college. He graduated from Cony High School in 1928 and from Bates College in 1933, majoring in history and government. He also debated under Brooks Quimby, and was a senior when Ed Muskie was a freshman. He began his career at Western Union, and worked throughout New England. In 1940, he took a position with the Lewiston Evening Journal, and covered the municipal governments of Lewiston and Auburn. From 1945 to 1956, he covered the Maine State House. In 1954, he became city editor of the Lewiston Evening Journal, and eventually became editorial editor. At the time of interview, he lived in Lewiston.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Brooks Quimby; Bates College; working with Ed Schlick in Augusta; treatment of Lemieux by Muskie's staff after writing critical articles; Burt Cross' mistakes in his reelection campaign; Le Messager (French newspaper in Lewiston); Ernest Malenfant; and Jean Charles Boucher.

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Transcript

Brian O'Doherty: Today on November 15th, 1999 Brian O'Doherty is interviewing Lionel Lemieux., Tthis is part two of maybe a two part interview. And we're going to start today by just asking some general questions, Mr. Lemieux, and then maybe go into specifics if we need to. The first question I have for you is, in the last interview you mentioned that you were mentored by Brooks Quimby. Today, the debates council is named after him. What were some of Brooks Quimby's characteristics?

Lionel Lemieux: Well, would you repeat that, what sort of what?

BO: What were Brooks Quimby's characteristics, personal characteristics?

LL: Well, he was a driver. He wanted us to work hard and he was willing to work hard himself, and he pushed us, so. And I think that's why we got good results. In 1933 we had the Eastern Intercollegiate Debating Championship, I was a member of a three man team. I was a senior and

the other two members were juniors, Frank, hmm, it's a heck of a time to lose my memory, [Theodore] Ted [I.] Seamon and Frank Murray were the two juniors.

BO: What was the debate on?

LL: I don't recall the debating subject but it was current.

BO: And who did you debate against?

LL: Oh boy, I was afraid you would ask that. We had about ten debates and we went right up and down the Atlantic seaboard. The most memorable debate was in New York City. We debated the College of the City of New York. And on the way to the debate the New York students were in an automobile accident and one of them was killed. But they decided that we'd have the debate anyway and we proposed a two man team against their two man team. And so Frank, Ted, and I drew straws, and Ted drew the short straw. So Frank and I put on our side of the argument and they, the New York students, theirs. And the audience was very nice and they, the fact that the other debater had been killed in an accident was really a dark cloud over the whole proceedings, but they voted for us anyway.

BO: Did you regard Brooks Quimby as a friend, or debate, or just a coach? Was he personable? Was he detached? I mean how would you describe him as someone who interacted with his debate students?

LL: Well, he was very demanding. I think he was more a coach than a pal. Of course, he was a lot older than we were naturally. That made a difference. And where I was of French extraction, he was very demanding on that. I had a problem with my accent when I was in high school, so. I couldn't even speak English when I was in grammar school, so he wanted everything perfect. And I'm thankful that he did, because I did succeed in losing my accent completely and I did succeed in the debating on the graduate level. And I think had it not been for that training, my newspaper career would not have been as successful as it was.

BO: And how often did you practice every week?

LL: Practice what?

BO: At debate.

LL: Oh boy, we had frequent sessions but I don't recall exactly how frequent. It was I think two or three times a week. I'm positive it was more than one.

BO: Now, I researched a little bit about your radio debates, and I'm just curious, if you could expand upon some of the debates that you had on the air with WCHS, or CSH, Channel 6 -

LL: It wasn't *with* WCSH, it was *on* WCSH. It was with Tufts University, and one of the debaters on that team became a resident of Lewiston and we were friends for years and years, and now I can't think of his name. Jack Maloney was his name. He was a South Portland boy

who had gone to Tufts and then went into debating. And we took, he and I took opposite sides on the first intercollegiate debate to be broadcast on the radio in Maine. That was in about 1931 or '32, I'm not sure of the exact date, but about that. Jack is dead now. So are most of my other friends and relatives. I'll be eighty -nine years old in January. And she's ahead of me, she's already over nine-, eighty-nine I mean.

Mrs. Lemieux: I'm eighty-nine.

LL: Eighty-nine, yeah.

BO: All right, growing up and going to college in the '20s and early '30s, it's a complete different story from the '20s and '30s, economically speaking. Did those times, those conflicting times, economically, change your political views at all?

LL: Well at that time I didn't have any political views. I was too busy making a living and if it hadn't been for the scholarship programs at Bates, I would never have been able to get my education. See, I was in a family of twelve. We were nine boys and two girls, wait a minute, ten boys, I was a boy too. And I was the first one to go to high school and the only one to go to college. And when I was in high school and I talked, I was in debating in high school too, and I talked to my parents about going to college they told me there was no way, absolutely no way that I could go to college because I had two younger brothers, and I had more education than any of the other children, and so I would have to go to work. And so I discussed it with my father and mother and I said, "Well, if I go on my own, will it mean that my two brothers, younger brothers, will not be able to go to high school?" "No, no, we'll see them through high school." "All right, I'm going on my own, I'm not asking for a dollar from you." And my mother and father both said, "Well you won't make it, you'll be broken hearted." I says, "I will make it. And if I don't make it, it will be my loss, not yours. I'll give it my best try."

Well, a Bates College graduate who was at one time mayor of Augusta, Ernest McLean, was a lawyer in Augusta. And he and my father had been very friendly when my father served on the common council. He was one of the first Franco Americans to serve in the city government in Augusta way back in the 1980s [*sic*]. So he said that if I chose Bates College, he would give me a fifty dollar check toward my tuition. Well, in those days that was half of the tuition, yeah, for the first semester. So naturally, I had been accepted at Bates and at Colby and the University of Maine. I hadn't applied to Bowdoin because I knew I couldn't possibly afford it. And so my girlfriend, I had a girlfriend, my girlfriend was going to go to the University of Maine, but I thought, well, if I go to the U of M I don't get that scholarship. And so I told her, look, you go there, I'm going to Bates.

So I came here, and I had scholarships every year for four years, and I would never have been able to make it without that aid. And I've always been thankful for it. As a matter of fact, when Bates decided on a new library they conducted a campaign, and I gave them the total of all the scholarships I had received and, even though the, but I didn't add interest because I wouldn't have been able to give it to them. I didn't have that much money. My wife, not this one, was kind of unhappy about it because we were not rich. We were doing all right but we, to give them several hundred dollars was a, she thought was too much. Well I, as I told her then, she was a

school teacher too, (this one was a school teacher, I like school teachers), if I hadn't had the Bates education, I wouldn't have had the career that I did, so I was paying it back.

BO: So, to change gears a little bit back to the political arena, the political perspective, would you have associated yourself as a Republican or a Democrat?

LL: My family was Republican. My father was a strong Republican and my, one of my uncles was a chairman of the Republican city committee in Augusta for years.

Mrs. Lemieux: I was a Democrat, my family was Democratic.

LL: Terrible, terrible.

Mrs. Lemieux: I still am.

LL: Yeah, she's still a Democrat and I'm still a Republican.

BO: What were some of the issues that drew you to the Republican Party?

LL: What was that again?

BO: What were some of the issues, why were you a Republican instead of a Democrat?

LL: Primarily because my father was a Republican.

BO: And so, we talked about your early career in the 1930s and '40s as a reporter and as a Western Union telegrapher in the last interview, and we ended up pretty much in the early 1950s when Ed Muskie was becoming more politically active. He was running for governor and we were just ending at the beginnings of his career, and I think the beginnings of your career as well. How did you first feel about Ed Muskie personally and as a reporter?

LL: I met him on the Bates campus. I thought that we had spent three years together at Bates, but I found when I did a little research that that was not so. He was a freshman when I was a senior, but we were both on the debating council, and so I had contacts with him. And for some reason I took to him. I always liked tall people, and in fact two of my classmates, and not only classmates but roommates, at Bates, at East Parker Hall, one was six-four and the other six-six, and I was five-three. And I still have in my file someplace, don't mention it, she doesn't like my files, one is standing here, the other standing there and they have their arms like this and I'm hanging on as if, like an ape, you know. They always had a big kick out of that picture. Now I think both of, they're both still alive.

One of them, Don Smith, came to see me about three or four years ago. He lives out in the Midwest. He became a gentleman farmer. His family was very well to do and had, they owned control of the Methuen Mills in Methuen, Massachusetts. And of all things, he was a Socialist while he was at Bates and he got me interested in it, and I went around making speeches with him. I wrote his speeches and wrote my own, and we went to various types of meetings in small

towns around Androscoggin County. Then I could see that, that's if I can remember the name of, there was a very prominent Socialist [Norman Thomas?], nationally, who came to Bates, and naturally Don met him and then brought me in on it. And we spent an evening with him after he spoke to a group at the college, and then he spoke to a group in Minot, which is just outside here. And he drove us back to Parker Hall. And I remember that as if it happened yesterday, and that was a long time ago, either my freshman or sophomore year. I think it was a sophomore year. And he says, "Well," he said, "this was a great evening. Now," he says, "if you want to be a flaming youth, you stick with us."

So we said goodnight and I couldn't sleep all night, a flaming youth, a flaming youth. Did I ever tell you this? Do I want to be a flaming youth? Here I'm spending four years in college to be able to have a successful career. Do I want to go up in fire? So finally I fell asleep. The next morning Don, my roommate, said, "Lal," he said, "we have a meeting tonight in Gray." I said, "Don, you have a meeting in Gray tonight, I don't." He says, "What's the matter?" And I told him, I says, "I don't want to be a flaming youth. I want to be a successful, happy family man and I'm not about to set the world on fire. I like it the way it is." "So," well he says, "are you going to write the speech for me?" I said, "No, I'm not writing any more speeches for the Socialist party, and I'm not making any more speeches for the Socialist party. I am going to go into one of the traditional parties and make my career on that basis."

So it's about that time that I, I was, I wasn't voting yet anyway, and I became enrolled as a Republican in Augusta. And I remained a Republican until 1940 when I came to Lewiston to cover Lewiston beat. And there, when you went to City Hall in Lewiston, if you didn't speak French, you might as well go home. And also, if you weren't a Democrat you might as well stay home. So I became a Democrat and I remained a Democrat. When I first went to the legislature it was to cover the Democrats, which I did. And that worked out very well. I still have many very good friends in the Democratic Party, but in Lewiston it was, it opened all the doors for me in the City Hall, and that's what I was interested in. I wasn't interested in the party particularly; I was interested in the city beat and being a good reporter.

Mrs. Lemieux: An opportunist.

LL: What?

Mrs. Lemieux: You were an opportunist.

LL: No, an opportunist. See, she put an extra syllable in there. See, she didn't go to Bates. University of Maine.

BO: I really want, I'm really interested in the Socialist topic. Being a Republican before you got to college is a huge drastic change to become a Socialist in college. Why?

LL: Well, the whole idea was to help the little people, to help the poor.

Mrs. Lemieux: That sounds like a Democrat.

LL: I never hit her, never, she'd break my arm. No, I, it wasn't any great ideological commitment or anything like that. It was a thing to do at the time, and when I was with Don I was pretty convinced that Socialism was the wave of the future until the night of the flaming youth. That, I don't know whether that man whose name I don't remember ever realized, I know Don told him, that he cut short my career in Socialism right then and there because I didn't want to be a flaming youth. I was, even in those days I was rather conservative.

BO: What were some of the speeches like?

LL: Oh boy.

BO: Do you remember any of the content?

LL: No, oh no, that's too long ago.

BO: The topics?

LL: No, I don't remember. I made a lot of speeches.

Mrs. Lemieux: Could he get that from the *Sun-Journal's* archives?

LL: While you were in the other room he told me that he did some research on, at the *Sun-Journal* and followed some of my stories.

Mrs. Lemieux: Oh, good.

LL: You know? I told him you suggested it.

BO: When you moved, when you decided to go into newspaper reporting and became a Democrat, was that a hard change?

LL: No.

BO: Or was it more of a veneer that you said you were a Democrat, but you were really a Republican at heart?

LL: Well, I was never active politically after I left Bates because in my work at Western Union I couldn't be. There were no rules against it, but I had to handle material from both sides, and that didn't bother me at all. Then when I came to Lewiston, as I said before, I soon found out that a Republican and speaking English in the City Hall was just out of his element, you might as well go home. And so I went home and became a Democrat and speaking French. Of course I spoke French from the start anyway. Incidentally, only one other member of my family went through high school, and that was the one, the next younger after me. And the baby of the family went two years in high school and then left school and joined one of my older brothers in a garage. He had a nice garage in Augusta, and my kid brother went with him, which he regretted years later, but it was one of those things.

BO: Did your parents have a problem with you becoming a Democrat, a temporary Democrat?

LL: No, no, by then my, let's see, my father died in 1950 and my mother had died in 1933. So that, my uncle had been chairman of the Republican city committee in Augusta and was, at the time that I was here [*sic* there], was the manager of the state liquor store in Augusta, he was not happy about it at all. But as I recall, he said, "What will Margaret Smith say?" I says, "I don't care what Margaret Smith says, that's my work and my job and it's what I have to do." And I did it.

BO: So, when you were reporting in 1954 up in Augusta, before Muskie became governor, you said you were covering the State House, is that correct?

LL: That's right. That was until September of 1954, because in August of 1954 the city editor had died, my friend, and I became city editor. Well then I continued going to the governor's news conferences weekly, but I couldn't do the regular coverage. And when the 1955 session began, I had my, one of my top reporters take over the city desk, and I went to Augusta with Ed Schlick. You probably have met him, or heard of him anyway. I went to Augusta with Ed Schlick and showed him the ropes, and introduced him to my best sources and best friends there. And he covered for both the *Sun* and the *Journal*. In those days the *Sun* and *Journal* were owned by the same man but they were competitive on the news side. Advertising and so forth, it was all joint, but the news was competitive, and I had only reported for the *Journal*. Ed was hired as the first one to report for both papers. I didn't, I held off on that. They kind of talked about it, and I said it was tough enough to cover for one paper, but to cover for an evening and a morning, that there'd just be no time left for a nap.

BO: You said in the earlier interview that because you wrote that article about Muskie in the 1954 election for governor, that you said he may not win the election, that Muskie gave you kind of a cold shoulder, didn't put out the welcome mat for you in the governor's Blaine House.

LL: Well, I, that isn't quite the, I didn't mean to say that because it was more Muskie's associates who didn't open the door. But I knew how to open doors and they, and Jane was always very, very nice to me, Muskie's wife. And Ed and I remained very good friends. Whenever something came up and I had to contact him, he always treated me okay. I never had any difficulty with him.

BO: Did you notice how he treated his political, not enemies, but for lack of a better word, enemies?

LL: No, I don't recall anything like that.

BO: You don't, even during his speeches, did he ever reference any of his enemies, or -?

LL: Not that I know of. Of course, I do remember this, that even though Ed was a Democrat and the legislature was controlled by the Republicans, he was able to get more cooperation from the legislature than most of the Republican governors. And that I saw with my own eyes, I was

present. And I think that was largely because of his personality and ability to get along with people.

BO: When you wrote your famous article, the famous article saying that Muskie -

LL: Yes, I know. Just a wave on, let's see a Democratic wave on the Democratic sea. No, no, on the *Republican* sea.

BO: Were you hoping for a coattail effect, were you hoping to sway people's minds?

LL: Oh no, no, I was interested only in my own career, I had no desire to be at the State House. I turned down an offer by Burt Cross to be his administrative assistant, and if I had taken it I would have been out on my ear when, but that's not why I didn't take it, because I really thought that Cross was going to be reelected. Frank Coffin, who was the Democratic chairman at the time and came out of the Democratic chairman office in Lewiston, Frank was very upset about that story. As a matter of fact, I had made a speech at the Kiwanis Club and used that material, and he was not happy about that either, so that for a while there he was kind of offish. But we became friends again as the years went by. And of course then he went to, became a judge, a federal judge in Massachusetts. And I haven't seen him for years and years and years.

BO: Did you write that article because you thought you could sway some people's minds from the Muskie camp into the Cross camp?

LL: No, I wrote that article as an evaluation of the oncoming election, to indicate how I felt it was going to come out. And I was wrong. I hit a good average, though, through the years, so I'm not complaining. I was sorry that it was taken so hard by Frank Coffin, but there again there was nothing I could do about it.

BO: What do you think was the hidden, the hidden stack of votes? Where do you think the hidden stack of votes came from for Muskie?

LL: Well probably a major factor was the vote in Washington County where Burt had made the mistake of denying them some of the things they wanted, and he figured the county was not that important. Well, the vote showed that it was. I don't recall the exact votes, but I know after the election was over he called me up, while he was still in the governor's office. He called me up one day and said he'd like me to drop in, he wanted to talk things over. I said, "Sure, I'll come in my next visit," which was in two days. And I went to his office and we had a real nice talk. And he said, "You know, Lal, if you had come with me as my administrative assistant this wouldn't have happened." I said, "Burt, I didn't swing that election in the other direction, and it wasn't because I wasn't with you." I says, "You were the one who did what you did in Washington County, and you insisted that you were right, and the election showed you were wrong, and I'm sorry, but that's the way it goes." "Well," he says," you know," he says, AI could have done a lot better with you with me." And, "Well," I says, Ayou know, when your term was over you would have had a green house to go back to, a business, but I would have had nothing. The paper wouldn't take me back, and the other Maine papers are already starved, so," I said, Anow if there had been something for me." "Well," he says, Athe last part of the, of my

term, I could have named you to one of the important state offices at my disposal, like the Public Utilities Commission. And why didn't you ask me to do that?" I says, "Why, for this reason Burt. If I had done that and you had won, every time something came up that you didn't agree with, you'd say 'well, it's your fault, you should have stayed with me, you shouldn't have gone out'." So, I says, "No," I says, Ait had to come from you and it didn't." And so I refused to leave my job. I stayed in newspaper work. And I'm glad I did now, it was the right move.

BO: What were some of the issues that the Washington county citizens had problems with?

LL: That I cannot remember at all, that's totally blank. I had nothing to do with it at the time, except that Burt was involved in it, and after the election and hashing things over, saying there's a block of votes that was lost right there, unnecessarily. It could have been done better.

BO: So, speaking of the first election, I mean he was the first one, the first Republican governor not to be reelected.

LL: Yeah, that broke his heart.

BO: He was, was he devastated for a while?

LL: Oh yes, he was, he was. He had accomplished so much and he had, his intentions were the best in the world. He didn't mean to make the mistakes he did, but he did make some mistakes. I don't remember the details now. And when he made mistakes when I was covering, I said it. I never slanted my column, my political column, which ran every week, nor my daily stories because I liked somebody or because I didn't like them. I did it to what I felt was right.

BO: Did, how did Governor Cross feel about Muskie?

LL: I think it was wholly a political feeling. Something I have never understood was why Burt was willing to let the finance commissioner rig the budget so that it would look as if Muskie's first term would have a deficit, wind up in the red. Of course, when Muskie became governor, that rig was set up. But then the finance commissioner accepted a job with Muskie, and so he reversed the thing so the rigging never happened. But I never felt right about that, and to Burt Cross' dying day I would like to have had an explanation because he never wanted to talk about it. And naturally there's only so much you can do when you say, well what about this, well I don't want to talk about it. That's it. Now he's dead.

BO: Did he ever curse at Muskie or curse in his name, or was he -?

Mrs. Lemieux: He was sending him Christmas cards even after we were married, Burt Cross and Olena [Moulton Cross].

LL: Oh yes, yeah, and we're getting them from him. Well, Senator Muskie and his wife, too. No, they, I don't recall his ever saying anything very derogatory about Muskie. He wasn't that kind of a man. He wasn't the kind of a man who went around downing people, at least not with me. Now maybe it was different with some other people, but I never had it happen.

BO: I'm very interested in this finance director, the conspiracy against Muskie which seemed to be driven by . . . .

LL: Well I don't, now I don't remember his name, but it was the finance commissioner at the last part of Governor Cross's term who became finance commissioner for Ed Muskie[1], he was the key man. Now, his name may have been Scribner, it could be Scribner. Now, I don't even know whether he's still alive, and I don't know whether he would admit it.

BO: How did Cross first come about telling you this? Telling you about the finance director and how he was going to manipulate Muskie's first term finances?

LL: He never told me. It was, Cross never told me that, it was after the things was all set up I found out about it. And then when Ed became, Ed named I think it was Scribner, I said well, everything's taken care of, there's nothing else to be done. Scribner knew what the story was, he knew how to correct whatever changes had been made, and so there was no need to do anything about it.

BO: So, did Muskie, do you think Muskie knew about the conspiracy, or knew about Burt Cross' influence over the finance director?

LL: I don't know, I really don't know. But it wouldn't surprise me if he knew, and that that could have had a, it could have had something to do with his decision. I don't know who else was in line. Because you see, we were having a major upheaval, the Republicans were going out, Democrats were coming in, and there were bound to be a lot of animosities and a lot of difficulties.

BO: Do you remember any other things that Burt Cross may have done to make Muskie's first term a little less pleasant?

LL: No, and as I told you before, I always, I never understood how he would be a party to that kind of a move, or somebody must have sold him a bill of goods, but I don't know who.

BO: And just to summarize everything so in the future when people reference this, basically what happened was Burt Cross, or someone in Burt Cross' staff approached the finance director of Maine to change the books, alter the books to make it look like Muskie had a deficit, a budget deficit in his first term. Is that basically what happened?

LL: Yes, I think that would be a, whether he did, whether Burt Cross did it I don't know. I've never known, I was never able to find out.

BO: That's very interesting. Speaking of the revolution, speaking of the Muskie revolution, do you think that Maine was predisposed to become a Democratic state, or do you feel that Ed

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[1] Raymond Mudge

Muskie's oratory skills and organizational efforts drove a new understanding of the Democratic Party?

LL: That's a hard question. I think the man was the major factor, and if the party had been the major factor, I think we would have had more Democrats coming into office.

BO: Good point. You've been a reporter from basically 1940 until your retirement in 1983.

LL: Nineteen eighty-two.

BO: Nineteen eighty-two, excuse me. It almost perfectly mirrors Ed Muskie's political career.

LL: Wait a minute.

BO: It almost perfectly reflects Muskie's political career, I mean he entered politics in the late '40s and retired from political office after he became secretary of state. Did you notice how, did you ever reflect on how Ed grew up politically?

LL: No, because after he was governor, then he was in congress, and I had practically no contacts with him then. And I was no longer reporting, I was editing then and in that position I was office bound.

BO: But even as a citizen, even as a citizen, I mean you read the newspapers I'm sure, I mean you were very active, active reader politically speaking, did you ever notice a change from his '50s style of politics to his '70s style of politics?

LL: No, I don't believe so. He was always one to seek agreement; he was always one willing to compromise, within limits.

BO: I think this is a good point to actually flip the tape, just so we don't run into the same problem we did last time we had an interview where the tape stopped in mid conversation. So we're going to stop the tape and continue the interview in just a moment.

End of Side A
Side B

BO: This is side B of the first tape of Lionel Lemieux on November 15th, 1999. We are Lionel Lemieux's home in Lewiston, Maine, and Brian O'Doherty is interviewing today. We were just talking about basically the finance campaign and Burt Cross, and a few other things regarding the 1950s and your career as a newspaper reporter. What I'm really curiously interested in now because we're limited on time, is going back to the '40s and '50s and seeing what you remember about some political figures of the time, other than Mr. Muskie. The first is Faust Couture. I'm wondering if you have any information about him. I believe he's passed on and the only way we can receive information about these people is through interviewees like yourself.

LL: Faust was the owner of the French newspaper here, *le Messager, The Messenger,* and I had

some contacts with him. He always treated me all right, and the French paper and the English speaking papers of Lewiston were never particularly friends, but I never had any trouble with either one. But of course, being of French extraction and my father having been a subscriber of the *Messager* when I was a little boy in Augusta, I always had a friendly feeling toward that organization and Faust.

BO: How about Louis-Philippe Gagne?

LL: Louis-Philippe Gagne was the principal reporter for the *Messager*, and later became mayor of Lewiston. And he was inclined to be antagonistic, but I got along all right with him. I got along with most people.

BO: And did you remember his character, his personality, how he dealt with people, how he interviewed?

LL: Well, I remember referring to him as Franco-Franco, in other words he'd have been better off to stay in Canada. But I never said, I never told him that to his face and I never thought enough about it to argue the point.

BO: How about Al Cote?

LL: Who?

BO: Al Cote.

LL: Oh yes, big Al Cote. He was a good man, probably the best goalie they ever had in hockey, he was so big it was almost impossible to get a puck by him. Very good natured, he served on the Lewiston city council and also as a representative to the legislature. I had a lot of contacts with him through the years and he was a dependable man and an honest man, he was a good man.

BO: And, this is somebody who's really important and someone who we really haven't had much information on, and it's Ernest Malenfant? And if you could give a detailed description, as best as you can, of him?

LL: The most famous thing I can remember about him I'm not going to put on tape.

BO: Oh, really?

LL: Yeah, it was not, it was, he intended it as a compliment, but I didn't feel complimented. Ernest wanted, Ernest became mayor of Lewiston. A lot of people felt that he was not fit for the office. He had served on the city council and he was very opinionated, and he didn't have much education, so you never knew which way he would go. But at one time he offered me a membership on one of the city commissions and I, at first I thought he was kidding, but he was very serious about it. And I said, "Well," I said, "I thank you very much but I have no idea of spending any time as a commissioner on a Lewiston commission." He said, "Why?" I said,

"Because I live in Auburn." He didn't realize that I had moved to Auburn several years before. And after your machine is off I'll tell you the other story, but I'm not going to put it on tape.

BO: How about Bill Rocheleau?

LL: What?

BO: Rocheleau, you have to pardon my French, if you don't mind the trite expression.

LL: Oh, Bill Rocheleau. I don't remember much about him. I knew him, he was in the city government, but I, offhand I don't remember anything outstanding.

BO: Alton Lessard?

LL: Oh yes, Alton Lessard became the youngest superior court, the youngest municipal judge in the state of Maine and he -

BO: Where, do you know where?

LL: I think it was here in Lewiston. And Alton was in the office of Brann & Isaacson, and Brann was, became governor and that's when Alton was named by Governor Brann to be municipal judge. He was just out of law school.

BO: Armand -

LL: I think that was in the 1930s, he was probably a -

BO: So he was older, he's older, he was older.

LL: Not a lot. We were contemporaries, we were in the Junior Chamber of Commerce movement together.

BO: Roland Marcotte?

LL: Roland Marcotte, yeah, Chevrolet salesman, yeah. A good friend of mine, but I don't recall anything. That was after I was off the local beat and the county beat and my contacts were more in the legislature and in state government. But I'd say favorably, he was a good man. I don't know whether he's still alive or not.

BO: Armand Souci [*sic* Sansoucy]?

LL: Souci or Dufresne? Oh, Sansoucy.

BO: Sansoucy.

LL: Yeah, Sansoucy in French. And Sansoucy, he was an accountant, and he lived right just

above here for a period of time and his brother was a, in the advertising department of the *Sun-Journal*. And I never had many contacts with him but those that I did have were always favorable. He was a good man.

BO: Are there any others that you remember back in the day that were contributors to Lewiston or Lewiston area politics? Any other names off the top of your head?

LL: Well, there was Jean Charles Boucher, who was a member of the old government, the original city government which had a strong mayor. And he was one of the councilors who came out of the, came out clean when the new charter was voted in 1939, and then several years later became mayor of Lewiston. And at that time he was serving as state senator for Androscoggin County, and at the legislature there were so few Democrats that they used to say that when he held a caucus, he would do it in a telephone booth. They used to kid him about that. I knew him very well; I used to travel back and forth with him in his car. I had a choice of his car or the public bus. I didn't have a car of my own and I traveled with him, and he never asked for any favors.

I wrote a few speeches for him and, until one day, and I had spent a good time the night before writing a well, not rehearsed, but researched speech. And the next day I got in, and he was the lone Democrat with a whole bunch of Republicans always piling onto him, and so he starts the speech and his accent got the better of him. And I was sitting at the reporters' table and I was sweating bullets, oh my God did he murder that speech. I had words that he couldn't pronounce and I didn't realize he didn't know them, and I never suffered so much in my life. And I never wrote another speech for him, either. I told him, never, no more, no more, I will not do it. And, he's dead now, too bad. But he was a good man and he did a good job as mayor of Lewiston. And he was a good legislator, even though as one Democrat he didn't have a great deal of power. But he never hesitated to go up against all these Republican members of the senate, lawyers and big businessmen and everything. He was a contractor himself but on a small scale here in Lewiston, and it didn't bother him. He'd get up there and punch away in his broken English.

BO: Are there any others that you can remember?

LL: Not offhand, no. I thought of Jean because I spent a great deal of time with him. Well, after you turn your machine off I'll tell you a brief story.

BO: Okay, well, we're, the interview is coming to a close. Are there any subjects that you'd like to talk about before, on tape, before we end the interview that we may have forgotten to touch on that you were expecting to speak about in the interview?

LL: Well, I expected you to ask me about the government which preceded the Lewiston city charter, so-called "new charter" of 1939. And that government was a strong mayor and council government, and it led to the development of, I can't think of the terms. It led to very strong mayors and corruption, selling of jobs and stuff like that, and that was why the new charter movement took place. And one of the principal people in that was Frank Hoy, Frank S. Hoy, who was then manager of the Lewiston daily *Sun-Journal* and, general manager of the *Sun-Journal*, and then later organized and operated WLAM in Lewiston. Then, wait a minute, I got

lost there. Well, the commission form of government inaugurated by the new charter was something brand new in Maine. And it was to, designed to, break down this party rule which had led to so much corruption. And the appointees from the start were successful businessmen, lawyers, people who really wanted to do something for the city, and it worked out very well that way. Even to this day the charter has worked well. Period.

BO: Any other subjects?

LL: No, I don't think of any.

BO: Topics, stories?

LL: I hope you have enough material there to keep you busy for a while.

BO: Well, I'd like to thank you for your time, and your wife's time.

LL: You turn off your machine.

BO: I will, and this concludes the interview on November 15th, 1999 with Lionel Lemieux, signing off.

End of Interview