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McQuade, J. Harold oral history interview

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Interview with J. Harold McQuade by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

McQuade, J. Harold

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

October 30, 2000

Place

Rumford, Maine

ID Number

MOH 234

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Biographical Note

J. Harold McQuade was born in Mexico, Maine in 1919 to Cecilia (Edmunds) and Edwin Daniel McQuade. He grew up in the Rumford-Mexico area, and attended the public schools and was captain of the ski team. After high school, McQuade worked for the Oxford Paper Mill. He graduated from Boston University, and returned to Rumford to own and operate an insurance firm. He eventually got out of the insurance field and opened a travel agency, handling accounts including the Oxford Paper Mill. He is a lifelong Republican, but supported and contributed to Ed Muskie's campaigns. He had minimal personal contact with Muskie, but did have connections to him through the Rumford community and his family's political background. Mr. McQuade was part of the effort to raise money for and construct the Muskie Memorial in Rumford, which was dedicated in August of 2000.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Mexico and Rumford community history; family background; Oxford Paper Company; family politics; personal encounters with Muskie; the Muskie family in Rumford; Republican politics; insurance and travel industries; Muskie Memorial; Waterville Office; and Muskie's legacy.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Mr. J. Harold McQuade on October the 30th, the year 2000, at his home at 651 Somerset Street in Rumford, Maine. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Mr. McQuade, if I could start just by having you tell me your full name and spelling it for me.

J. Harold McQuade: My full name is James Harold McQuade, that's M-C-Q-U-A-D-E, Senior.

AL: Senior.

JM: Right.

AL: And where and when were you born?

JM: Oh, I was born in Mexico a hundred years ago, period.

AL: That's the most you'll give me?

JM: 1919.

AL: Okay, now you were born in Mexico?

JM: Yes.

AL: Where did you grow up, Mexico or Rumford?

JM: I grew up in Mexico as far as junior high school, and from there I, my folks moved over to Rumford, because my dad was associated with Oxford Paper Company. And at that time they owned Strathglass Park, and the people who I guess were good people and good workers got an opportunity to have a single home at a very reasonable rent.

AL: So that was the reason for the move. So your father -

JM: And then I spent four years at Stephen's High School. And then from there I opened up, there was not, you want to hear the whole -?

AL: Sure, go ahead.

JM: Oh, God. While in high school I played sports. I was the captain of the state of Maine championship ski team, I played track, and baseball. I got my letter, which at that time was the greatest honor to get a red sweater with a big R in it, and you had to win a state championship. And I have one, I still have it. When I got through school I didn't care to go to college. I was a member of the National Honor Society, but I wanted to work. So I opened up a bike shop, and then, while I was also in school, I had the concession of washing all the windows and polishing the brass on Congress Street, of which I had three students working for me. And I owned an automobile, a Model A Ford. I was quite a guy driving around at that time. Then, as I said, when I got through school I went to work laying out ski trails for the Chisolm Ski Club, and then from there I worked down to the Oxford Paper Company. And my brother, who was manager of the Strand Theater, got killed in a hunting accident. And I took his job for a few years and I decided I'd better go to college. So I sent down, entered Boston University -

AL: And what year was this?

JM: Beats the hell out of me, a long time ago. Anyway, I guess it was 1940 I think, something like that. Anyway, I got accepted at BU, and during the summers I came back to Rumford. The Oxford Paper Company gave me a job, first on the coal pile and then the woodpile. Then I got promoted to, during the summer I worked on the paper machines. Then the following summer school vacation from BU I worked in the mill as a painter. And with me was Father Goudreau, who now lives in Rumford, he was pastor of the church over in Waterville, and Judge Shelton Noyes, and the three of us painted the inside of Oxford Paper Company. So the fourth year we, after the fourth year we couldn't have the job because the union decided that this type of work should go to the married people who needed jobs at that time.

But I had graduated, and when I graduated I was interviewed by Charlie Ferguson, who was the mill manager and vice president. And I was coming back to Rumford to be a trainee, and I was going to be the only local boy that this had ever happened to. But when I got here the job was great, I liked it, I thought I would accept their position. So I asked them, what was the pay? "Well," they said, "as a trainee with a terrific future, we're going to start you in at twenty-five dollars a week." And I says, "Hell, in college I was making a hundred dollars a week." So I decided to come back and work with, well, matter of fact, I didn't decide. My father got hurt in

the mill and I was the youngest. And my two, my brother and two sisters said, "You go back to Rumford, help mother and dad out."

So I got married, and Jeannie graduated from Boston University also. So we moved back to Rumford, and I got a job with Jordan's Insurance and Real Estate Agency. And of course we had four children, put them all through college. But anyway, while working for Jordan's Insurance Agency he was making all the money and I was not making any, much. But I decided to open up an agency on my own. And during all those years I opened up an insurance and travel and real estate, and I had eight, seven offices in Maine, and owned eight pieces of property. And I guess that, I served in the Ar-, I went into the service with the advanced ROTC out of BU, and I went back to BU and got my degree. And here I am quitting November the first, I'm retiring.

AL: You are?

JM: Yes, so, that's about my whole life story.

AL: Well, I have a couple questions.

JM: Shoot.

AL: Just for the historical record, could you give me both your father's and your mother's names?

JM: My father's name was Edwin Daniel McQuade, and my mother was Cecilia Edmunds McQuade. And I would like to add a little something about her. She was a schoolteacher, she had three sisters who were nuns, and all three of them had their Ph.D. in English and math. And they were the mother superior of St. Rose Convent in Rochester, New York, and as I was told that you could only become mother superior twice. But they, all of them, were three times but they had to get their permission from the bishop. So they were great people. And I think what really destroyed both of their lives was the death of my brother Elmer. And he was the type that always took them for a ride anytime, anything they wanted he did, while I was spending my time at the poolroom or mucking around. And that's it.

AL: So you got to know your aunts growing up?

JM: I only knew them once. We had a cottage up in Roxbury Pond, and I had a kayak, and they would come up. And they were fully clad, not like today, they had the habits on all the time. And it, all the kids at that time, you know, we used to hang around, would always come to see the nuns. Because they would get in the kayak which was just a little round hole and they would squeeze in and we would paddle up and down the lake near the shore.

AL: Now you were growing up in this community during the Depression, you must have been about ten in 1929 until -?

JM: No, no, 1936 I think, wasn't that the, well yeah, twen-, yeah, but I don't remember very

much of that, '29. But we were poor, damn poor.

AL: Do you have any recollections about that time period?

JM: No, not much, I mean not enough to comment on.

AL: In your household did you talk about politics at all?

JM: Well, my sister Bernadette married Representative Lee. He was a Democrat, the whole family was a Democrat, and I was a Republican. And the reason I was a Republican, when I came back to Maine and opened up my business, due to, at that time there was only one party in the state of Maine and that was the Republican Party. And of course due to Ed Muskie, he was the guy that brought in the two party system, and today what do we have, three, four parties. But due to Ed Muskie, he brought in the Democrats. But I never changed because for the simple reason is this, in order to get any county or state insurance they made damn sure that you had, that you were a Republican. And attorney Dow from Norway, who was on the governor's council, came into my office when I opened it up, and said, "Are you a Republican?" Of course I knew about this before, and I says, "Yes sir, I'm a registered Republican." "Well," he says, "I'm going to recommend you to get some county and state insurance," and I sure as hell did from then on, yeah. But I vote for the candidate as much as possible.

AL: So on paper, in city hall, you have to be listed?

JM: I'm listed as a Republican, and I've never changed it. But I voted probably just as much Democratic as I did Republican. But I always voted for Ed Muskie because my sister and mother were so very close to that man, it was unbelievable. And Ed used to say when, or a couple of times I went down to a meeting, and my mother and sister was there. And he'd come over and put his arms around my mother and sister, and he would say to Bernadette and my mother, "What is the matter with Harold, why is he a Republican?" And mother would say, "Well, he's just registered as a Republican." She was a pretty good diplomat.

AL: In what capacity did they know him, just from him growing -?

JM: Oh well, here in Rumford?

AL: Yeah?

JM: Yeah, I guess, I know mother used to take clothing down, down to Mr. Muskie's tailor shop, and I would go in there and pick it up. And all I can remember was his father was a big, was pretty tall man, was a very dignified, stern person. And you know, you went in very meekly, and then after a while I'd go in and Ed would be there and, you know, we would talk and what not. But my brother Elmer knew Ed very well because they used to ski together a lot, and with Johnny Bartash, and a few other people who knew Ed.

AL: Now, you at some point went from insurance to travel.

JM: All in the same, well, the reason I got in the travel end of it was Oxford Paper Company was sending, at that time started to send men all around the United States on the paper industry, salesmen and so forth. And they used to have to go to the airlines at that time, do their own booking and so forth. Well, they came to me, matter of fact they came to Jeannie first, no, they came to me and said, "Would you handle our travel?" I says, "Holy hell, I don't know anything about travel." So I came home and spoke to Jeannie about it, she says yes, so anyway she got involved in it. And this, the district manager for Delta Airlines came to Rumford and told us what we had to do and what not, and the mill paid for all the expenses, I think, for six months or so. Then we got our office going and we handled all the mill insurance right up until, I guess, a couple years ago. And then it got, it got, you know, it wasn't that profitable because everybody wanted a percentage back, and so forth, and I felt that be goddamned if I'm going to give anybody my money.

But then came in American Express, and these other companies, which thought they could do a better job, but they didn't. But we also handled the travel for Bates College, we also handled it for Colby, and Donald Harward. I can't say enough about that guy because he's a great, great individual. And I used to send some grapefruit from my trees in Florida, and he was an excellent person to talk to. And then of course they got into this other agents. Like American Express came in and offered, like, "You give us so much business, we give you a percentage," and I just didn't do that.

AL: Now tell me, what was it like growing up in the Mexico and Rumford community at the time you were growing up?

JM: Okay, Mexico was a great place to grow up. We, it was a small community, the people were wonderful, I enjoyed it. But I always had jobs. I used to pass newspapers for the *Lewiston Sun* and the *Lewiston Journal, Evening Journal*, and then the Sunday newspaper, the *Portland Press Herald*. So we were always working. And then, when we moved over to Rumford, I was doing the same damn thing, working and enjoyed life. I like Rumford, I don't think I'll ever leave it. I have a nice home in Florida but stay from November until April 15th, and that's all I want of it, you know.

AL: Well tell me, what were the different make-ups of the people in town, in other words Italians and Polish?

JM: They were all excellent. My mother taught us to get along with everybody, of which she did. And one thing about her, I guess it's still in me, the house was always open, the house was always open. She always had cookies, she baked bread, and lemonade, and drinks, soft drinks, it was wonderful. It's not like that today. We had done the same thing here, but it's different, more sincerity to back when their folks were growing up. They were very, very religious people, very religious people. My mother used to go to church practically every day up to St. Anthony's. As a matter of fact, the neighbors used to say that Mrs. McQuade wore down the hill from her house up to St. Anthony's. She was a very, matter of fact she died at ninety-six, and she was sick four days, so there must be something to it. But I'm not that religious, not practicing but inwardly yes.

AL: Now, I'm sure you knew who Ed Muskie was, growing up, there was only a few years in age between you.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but my brother Elmer knew him more than I did.

AL: He was closer in age?

JM: Yeah.

AL: Now, but my question is, when did you really start to hear about him and know him from the aspect of politics?

JM: Okay, all right. I became very active in the Republican Party. I was county chairman, I was state committee man from Oxford County and what not, I was very active, I mean, with all of them. But every so often I would bump into Ed, and he'd always ask how the folks were and what not. And when I had a few bucks when he ran I would send him some money. I liked what he believed in, and I just automatically kept supporting him.

Now, you probably want to know why I started this Muskie memorial was, he's probably gonna laugh at me, but this is the gospel truth. I woke up three mornings in a row, three o'clock in the morning, I dreamt of Ed Muskie; never in my life. So anyway, I told Jeannie about it. I says, "You know, dammit, I've dreamt three nights of Ed Muskie," and I said, and she said, "That's odd." So I said, "I wonder why?" And then I read in the paper something about a memorial. It wasn't his but, I says, "You know, Rumford needs something like this." So I told Jeannie about it, and I told my sister I'm sure, they said, "Go for it." So, I didn't know what the heck I was doing, I didn't know anything about a memorial or anything. So Jeannie says, "Let's do it." So I called, I don't know, I guess about tw-, I don't know how many people, they said, "Impossible." They said, "He's got an auditorium named after him, this housing named after him," they says, "it wouldn't go." So, the more they said, "Didn't think so," the more I wanted it.

So I picked up ten key people, and they were the best. Anyway, we started it, and we've had meetings since I guess 1996. And holy God there was nothing but confusion, until I one day decided I'm going to set down some steps, and this is what we're going to follow, period. Then it started to click. Prior to that I went one year to Florida, and I appointed Fred Kannard as temporary chairman. Fred called me, he says, "Hal, you gotta come back, I'm losing it." So I just said, "Don't have any more meetings." I came back and I said, I set it out and we went to work. And the first thing we did, I said we're going to go to the town, get twenty thousand bucks, which we didn't think we'd even get five. Town meeting, twenty just like that. So I says, "What the hell, let's go to the state," and they says they won't give you anything, absolutely not. They said, they don't care about Ed Muskie, I says, "This is a Rumford project." And then of course I started getting criticism from the people, what the hell are you doing it for, you're a Republican. That's a, a Muskie person, and this was from a couple of the representatives here in town, he says, "Hey, this is politics, we're going to, we should do it, we should be in charge." And I says, "Did you think about it," and they said, "No," I says, "I'm in charge, I'm in charge." And I started getting criticism, then it came back, well he was never born in Rumford and so, I

mean never lived in Rumford, he always had Waterville as his home town. Well, I says, "Look, he couldn't make a living in Rumford as a lawyer because it just wasn't big enough, so he married a girl from Waterville and that's it, he's living there, nothing wrong with that." But, and I also mention that I guess a few years before he died, I was in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal and Ed Muskie was there. Well, I had breakfast and dinner with him, and he knew more people and asked for more people than I knew. He knew this person and that person, and he was fantastic, just to get to know him, the guy was (*unintelligible word*) all over. I mean, he never criticized, he was a, I think in my opinion the finest that we've ever had, and I don't think anyone can touch him over all.

But anyway, I went to the state and I, the commission will ask for the twenty thousand or so. I said, "No, I want fifty thousand." They says, "You're crazy." So I got a hold of Norm Ferguson, Senator Norm Ferguson, I said, "Let's sit down, what's the process?" So he told me. I says, "Put in a bill for fifty thousand dollars for the Muskie Memorial." The damn thing went through without even a comment. And then the rest of the money we raised, and any money left over we're going to apply toward a Muskie scholarship fund. I don't know how much we're going to have because the town was supposed to do a lot for us, and they didn't, we had a couple of pain in the butts on the board. Matter of fact the *Lewiston Sun* ran an ad, ran a picture of this selectman [Eugene] Boivin holding up a sign. It says 'no Muskie Memorial here,' and he was involved with the president of the chamber of commerce, but that hurt us a lot. And the town was supposed to take care of the landscaping and what not. And I think we had to put an additional twenty thousand dollars, of which we were hoping to have about close to that for the scholarship fund because I had already spoken to the University of Maine in Portland, what is it, Portland branch, not Westbrook, but -

AL: Gorham?

JM: Gorham, Portland-Gorham branch was the Muskie School of Public Affairs. And we were going to provide a nice scholarship for anyone who attended any college in Maine, and for their master's or Ph.D. they had to go to the Muskie School of Public Affairs. And, God, they thought that, we got some beautiful write ups on it, but I don't think now we're going to have enough money to go with it. But we did try, and we did a very good job.

AL: Now to go back to 1954, when Ed Muskie was running for governor the first time, were you part of the Republicans for Muskie group?

FM: No, no, no, and I'll tell you why. At that time Maine was pretty much Democratic, I mean Republican, and you didn't stick your nose out business wise too far because people resented it. And I was doing business with a lot of the, I guess we insured the majority of the town of Rumford, and the surrounding area and so forth, so, you know, you play a low profile. But I did send him some money. But then, and a matter of fact, to go one step further, today, in my Waterville office, I have Muskie's original desk that he had, I owned, where the Subway, is now occupied by Subway. But upstairs was a renter, and he had rented that building, and when he became governor he naturally moved to Augusta, but he left the desk there. And anyway, I wrote to Ed Muskie and told him that Al Perry, who was, took over renting it, when he left said this desk was Ed Muskie's. I said, "Ed, the next time you come to Rumford, I mean come to

Waterville, would you please come in and verify this was his desk, this was your desk.” So he said he would, and he came to Waterville, went in, looked at the desk. And he started pulling the drawers out and looking into it, and one of the girls said, “Senator, you needn’t bother to look in it, Mr. McQuade turned it upside down and what not to see if there was any campaign money in there.” But he says it was his desk.

Now, I’ve put a little plaque on it, “This is the desk that Senator Muskie, former secretary of state,” and what not. And when he died I wrote an article to the *Sun*, to the *Waterville Sentinel*, the *Rumford Falls Times*, and they featured it in Muskie’s items. We had people, when he died, after that article, we had people coming into that office, sitting at it on his chair, rubbing the desk, looking at it, and going out some of them who had tears in their eyes. And, matter of fact, we had more people in the office in two days than we ever had in all the years we were in business, but they didn’t buy anything. But it was very impressive. Now I’m going to plan to take it over to Rumford, but I was offered a very good price for the desk, but I think I’m going to give it to the Rumford Historical Society. But it’s a beautiful, big, heavy desk, it really is.

AL: Great, that’s a neat story, I like -

JM: Yeah, well it, people would come in you know and they couldn’t help in seeing the plaque. As a matter of fact one of the girls says, “Mr. McQuade, I’m going to put the back of a chair over that little sign because,” she says, “we can’t get anything done.” They ask about the desk, and they ask, and they get, you know, we get off the tract for what we’re trying to sell something to them on travel. But it has created quite a controversy, and I’m going to bring it over and put it in Rumford for a while and let people see it. Because you know, this man, I’m telling you, he has a tremendous, tremendous amount of support as a good congenial person. We had up there at the memorial, the people coming down, and going down, and looking at the memorial. Touching it, rubbing it, we’ve had people who take their handkerchiefs out, we’ve seen them, with tears. We’ve had parents come with their children, and they would go right from the top down of his accomplishments. You know, I, people will come I think from everywhere when they find out about this memorial. We haven’t done any publicizing it or anything. But the tour companies used to come from Portland or what have you, and they go right through Rumford and stop at Bethel, or somewhere else, but we’ve been told now you have something in Rumford that we want to stop and tell the people about. And while we were, it was being erected, the bus companies, a couple of them would stop and the people would get out.

And one day I was up there, and there was a bus load and they were brought in from France and England, and they were going up through the mountains and what not. And they all knew, not all, but most of them knew about Secretary of State Muskie. And they think this is a great thing, to have something like this going. And days when they came, it was so beautiful, that (*unintelligible phrase*) was so smooth, it was marvelous.

AL: Now I understand most of Muskie’s family, his sisters -

JM: His what?

AL: His sisters and his mother lived in Rumford for years after he started going on.

JM: Yes, right, and they all were customers of mine.

AL: All of them.

JM: They were lovely. As a matter of fact one of them, Fern Chouinard, worked for me for years. He married one of Ed's sisters.

AL: What was his first name?

JM: Fern Chouinard, and he worked with me for a number of years. And the other sisters were in Rumford: lovely, nice, quiet, conscientious good citizens, good citizens. And one brother, I think he left Rumford early, and I think he went to California or someplace. I knew him but, you know, I never associated much with him, but I knew him well.

AL: Did you know Lucille Abbott?

JM: Yes, sure.

AL: Could you tell me a little bit about her, I never got a chance to interview her.

JM: Oh, geez, I'm not the one, her husband was very active in politic. And she was a very, in my opinion, stern woman that would give you a definite answer. And I think if you disagreed with her you'd better be sure of what you were doing. That's about all I knew about Lucille. But she was very active in town affairs, very active. And I think, yeah, she and her husband were very active in town.

AL: So you never had her as a schoolteacher?

JM: No, no, no, that was before my time I think, I think.

AL: Are there other members on your committee who we should interview for this project? I have the name Burton DeFrees?

JM: Yeah, yeah, you interviewed him?

AL: No, I haven't, don't have his address.

JM: No, well, he's not well, no. I mean, I think the only one that you would have on there that knew him well was Ed Clossy and he's dece-, he died on us. And this Doherty girl that was a volunteer knew him, and the rest I think, they knew him general, they knew him in general, and that was it. Just like myself, I knew him, used to talk to him and, you know, but never. Because at that time we all were struggling and what not to get a living, and everybody was working and you didn't play, you worked. And today I guess everybody plays first and works after.

AL: I think there's a gentleman whose last name is Breault who was possibly married to one

of Ed's sisters, and is still living. Does that name ring, Ben Breault?

JM: The name sounds familiar. There's a lot of Breaults in Rumford, but I don't, I don't know, I don't know.

AL: Right, it's not someone you know.

JM: I don't know. Possibly I could research him, you know, I used to keep pretty good records, but I don't know where the hell they are now. But -

AL: Well here's a question. What do you think it is that Ed Muskie gave to the state that will be so everlasting?

JM: I think the most important that man gave the state of Maine, he gave them a great deal. One of them was a two-party system, which we never had. And I know we never had, because when I got through college I came back here to the state of Maine with a one party system, period. He also started to give us clean air and clean water. Now I can remember years ago, was kids over in Mexico, we used to go down the river and fish just to catch what they called at that time suckers. And nobody would eat them because they were polluted beyond, unbelievable. But he did clean it, help to clean up, and he did write and pass the Clean Act and clean air. Of which today the Androscoggin River, the Swift River, we can swim in it, we can boat in it, and so forth. And our air, I can remember my father buying a, I think it was a (*unintelligible word*), an old car that was a, I don't know who made it. But we used to go out, and that was one of our jobs to clean the soot off of it from the mill. It used to be that thick, and we'd have to get out with a broom and sweep it. Then we finally had to stop because the acidity in it, from the smoke and the debris, would eat into the paint.

And so, but anyway, today you got emissions that are coming out of the stack that are clean, you know. With so many of the brushes and all the environments (*unintelligible phrase*) requirements, federal government, that's what he has done. And the odor, we get that once in a while, but that's being cleaned up. In other words, he was called Mr. Clean because he did clean things up, he really did. And if it was left to industry I don't think they would have ever done a dang thing. So the man, I'm telling you, it was, should go down in history as the best we've had. I mean, we've had Margaret Chase Smith and Senator Mitchell, but this guy accomplished something. He did something, and he did it well.

And, you know, the response that people are going up there and learning so much about Ed Muskie. Matter of fact, I was told about a week ago that a teacher had a group at the high s-, grade school children up there, and this was the first time that that has ever happened. And, no, no, I'm very proud that I got involved in it. Why, I don't know, really. It was three hellish years and you better believe it, it wasn't easy. The people, well you were there at the dedication. Now that was a beautiful job, wasn't it. Everything was done professionally and well. And we had more people than we expected; we didn't expect fifty people. We thought Muskie would bring her group, and that was just about it, but people in Rumford would come and see it when they wanted to. But we had, I guess, way over three hundred people, which was terrific. And the coverage that we received was unbelievable, unbelievable. But the only thing (*excerpted*

segment) that's between the two of us.

AL: Now, I don't have any real specific questions left, but I wanted to give the opportunity to you. If there's something I haven't asked that you feel is important, or final comments that you'd like to make, go ahead.

JM: Well, I can make this comment. My wife Jeannie had got so involved at the end of this, her enthusiasm was terrific. I said to her one day, "Why don't you be the chairman if you're telling me what to do and I'll do it." She says, "I'm beginning to see that this is the greatest thing that has happened in Rumford for a long, long time," and it is. I don't think they will ever have anything comparable to it. And what else? I don't know, I guess that's just about it.

AL: Great, thank you so much for your time.

JM: Okay, if I think of anything I will send it to you.

AL: Okay, thank you.

End of Interview