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Interview with Paul Mitchell by Mike Richard

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Mitchell, Paul

Interviewer

Richard, Mike

Date

July 2, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 115

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Biographical Note

Paul Mitchell was born in Westfield, Massachusetts on January 20, 1926 to Mintaha "Mary" Hasad and George John Mitchell. His father was Irish, but adopted by a Lebanese family. His mother was Lebanese. In 1930, his family moved to Waterville to care for George Sr.'s mother. Paul's father worked for Central Maine Power in the Waterville gas operation. His mother worked at various textile mills. There are five children in Paul's family, including Senator George J. Mitchell, Jr. They grew up at first in the King's Court neighborhood of Waterville in a predominantly Lebanese community. They then moved to a home on Front Street in Waterville. Paul attended the Waterville Public Schools through high school, graduating in 1944. He was able to complete his high school education by enrolling in the Navy V-5 Program, which brought him to Bates College for three semesters after graduation. He opted out of a military career in 1946, and returned to Maine to complete his education at the University of Maine at Orono, graduating in 1949. He then got a Masters in Education at Columbia University. He began a career in the Insurance Industry, working in New York and Boston before moving back to Waterville in 1959. There he worked for Paul Julian at the J.B. Freel Insurance Agency. He served two terms as Alderman in Waterville from 1959 to 1962, and served as the Executive Director of the Waterville Urban Renewal Program from 1962 to the late 1970s. At the time of the interview, he owned the GHM Insurance Agency in Waterville, the successor firm to the J.B.

Freel Company.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: volunteering for Ed Muskie's campaigns 1959-1976; state of party politics in Maine in 1999; changes in the Democratic Party since 1959; Waterville municipal government 1959-1999; Waterville mayors in the late 1950s and early 1960s; urban renewal; Waterville Sentinel and Waterville urban renewal; Muskie's involvement in Waterville's urban renewal; Paul Julian; insurance industry; Waterville area political leaders; John Jabar; people swapping political parties for convenience rather than conviction; comparison of Waterville to similar Maine communities; Muskie's impact on the environment; and Muskie's legacy.

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Transcript

Mike Richard: This is July 2nd, 1999, and we're at the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston. This is Mike Richard interviewing Paul Mitchell, and the time is 11:00 AM. Mr.

Mitchell, in the last interview you were talking about some of the economic and ethnic situation of Waterville, and now we're going to get into the political situation. So would you like to talk a little bit about that first?

Paul Mitchell: Politically, of course, Waterville's a very active, has always been, a very active city. Strangely enough, the only election other than when Senator Muskie ran for the nomination of the presidency, the only election he ever lost in the state, was the election as mayor of the city of Waterville. And sometimes I think that's the best thing that happened to him, because he went on from there to become a representative and then obviously the governor and then U.S. Senator. And in every instance he was outstanding, wherever he was serving.

Politically, Waterville's basically a Democratic city. Just, right after the war, World War Two, probably a short period of time the Republicans had dominated the council in Waterville, but that changed very rapidly. And Waterville became and still is, primarily, a Democratic city with Democratic roots. Most of the politicians who have gone on to higher office have been the Democratic politicians from the city of Waterville.

MR: And would you say the alignment politically of the Democrats in Waterville has changed since the Democratic takeover?

PM: Well, I think what you're finding now is that you're getting more and more people who are saying, "Well, I'm not aligned to any particular party. I'm going to be an independent." And, of course, I don't understand the thinking in that regard because many times the very same people who are independents complain about the quality of the candidates. And my response to that is, "Then you should be affiliated with a party and one that reflects the views that you have of government, so that you have some say in the selection of the candidate that's going to represent that party."

I think the Democratic registration in Waterville is still significantly higher than the Republican registration. Now the independents, I'm not certain what their registration is but I would believe that they probably constitute if not the largest body in the city, it would be second to the Democratic Party. It's still, the independents for the most part are still, they lean towards the Democratic Party. And I might add, the independents in Waterville are probably of the younger generation as opposed to the older generation of the city.

MR: Would you say that the Democratic Party in Waterville or in Maine is as unified as it was, say, thirty years ago? Or are there different factions within the Democratic Party lines?

PM: Well, I don't think they're as unified as they were thirty years ago, or forty years ago, or even twenty years ago. I think there's been factions, one of the things that probably has occurred. And I think it's happened to both the Democrats and the Republicans. Well, you see what's happened right here in the state of Maine. You've had in the past twenty years, two independent governors and I think you're going to see more of that in the future. There are more parties coming on line. I'd hate to see us in a situation where we have a half a dozen political

parties. I think the country has run pretty well with two parties. As long as those parties can meet the aspirations of the majority of the people, I think they'll succeed in remaining the dominant parties. But as soon as they cease meeting the aspirations of the great majority of the people, I think that's when you're going to find more and more splinter groups coming on line.

MR: Okay, let's move on to your discussion of the Muskie and Gray families and your relationship with them. When did you first meet either, well, let's start with the Muskie family. When did you first meet them?

PM: Well, of course, the Muskie family really lived in Rumford. And I first met Senator Muskie when I returned to Waterville in 1959 after I had got out of college and worked in New York City for a number of years. And I didn't return to Waterville until 1959. So from 1944 when I graduated from high school, until 1959, a period of fifteen years, I was pretty much out of the city of Waterville as far as being a resident of the city. I was a resident while I was a college student, but I worked in New York City for almost eight years and then a couple of years in Boston, following my tour in the Navy and then my years in college.

I met, I knew Jane Muskie, who was Jane Gray, Muskie, when she was in high school. She was a year behind me at Waterville High and I knew her then. I wasn't familiar with any other members of the family at the time, the Gray family.

And I wasn't familiar with Senator Muskie, who was not a senator obviously during the '40s and early '50s, until he became governor in 1954. And I recall at the time, when I first read about it, I was working New York City. And there were a couple of us from Maine and we were all very proud of the fact that he had broken the Republican stranglehold, you might say, on at least the governor's seat in the state. And he went on, obviously, to have four great years as the governor. Which led, of course, to the years he served in the U.S. Senate where he was probably one of the na-, he was, without a doubt, one of the national leaders in the Senate.

Now, Senator Muskie I met in 1959 and, from that point on, whenever he had a campaign, would be involved in his campaign in any way I could. I was never really part of the hierarchy within the campaign, but I, in the local area, worked as diligently as possible for the senator's reelection. And I got to know him in a little different detail when I served as the executive director of the Waterville Urban Renewal Authority for a period of almost sixteen years, and got very much involved with the senator because he was very interested in what happened in Waterville.

Waterville got involved in four urban renewal programs. And I directed all four of them, and it kept me in close contact with his office throughout that period of time. In addition to the fact that his brother-in-law, Howard Gray, whom I got to meet in 1959, 1960, in that period, was the general manager of the local newspaper. And they had a significant interest in seeing what was happening in the urban renewal programs. Two of them were downtown projects, so they impacted on the entire community from a tax point of view. And from a relocation point of view, because it was significant numbers of families who resided within the area as well as

businesses that all had to be relocated under the guidelines established by the federal government.

And it was a proj-, the first, the first two projects, which were both downtown, were projects that were designed to assist in creating new business opportunities and strengthen the tax base of the city. But it, to start the project you had to acquire significant properties and tear them down. So a lot of people, obviously, were very much in opposition to that type of thing inasmuch as they felt that the project would never succeed and therefore these properties and their tax revenue would be lost to the city forever. Well, in hindsight that didn't happen. What happened is exactly what we'd hoped would happen, that the project would succeed and the tax revenues would increase.

Well, of course, while the project was being undertaken, Senator Muskie would hear repeatedly from people within the project area; some for, some against. And his brother-in-law Howard Gray would keep the senator advised. And also the newspaper would run articles continuously, some critical of what we were doing, some very complimentary of what we were doing, but always in favor of the project. Well, of course, I would hear from the senator's office and the senator himself over what's happening, "Why is this delayed? What can we do to help?" And this is the kind of contact I had with the senator at all times during that period of time, from 1962 to 1977, when this project was being undertaken, or the projects were being undertaken in the city.

He was primarily interested in the first two projects which were downtown renewal projects and, as I said, which impacted on the tax base in a rather significant way. Now there's a lot of, there were, he was, his office was really helpful in many instances, in most instances, in regards to carrying out the project. But there was a down side to that, in that we had to always be certain we were correct in the information we were giving to him.

Our problem many times was dealing with HUD. It wasn't so much dealing with the people in the project area, but it was dealing with HUD and the bureaucracy in Washington. And if we gave him information, he would ask us occasionally, "Why aren't you doing this?" And we'd say, "Well, this is what HUD tells us to do." And then his response would invariably be, "But the Congress passed it this way." But the bureaucracy makes up the rules as you go along, and oftentimes they're in a conflict with what Congress intended. That's how we were able to get tremendous assistance from the senator, who would then go straight into the bureaucracy and find out, "Why isn't this being done in a different manner, or the manner that Congress intended it to be done?"

But as I started to say, you had to be very careful when you got involved in that, because when we gave the senator information we had to be certain it was correct. Because there's nothing that he would have, would have made him unhappier than for us to be giving him information that wasn't correct when he's taking our case into the bureaucracy and finding out, well, I got wrong information from the peop--, from the local agency. So, you know, it helped tremendously because we made absolutely certain on every situation that we researched the data. We

examined it from every regard, legally, in any way possible, that, to make absolutely certain we were not giving him information that was not correct. As a result, we really had some successful projects. We probably were as successful, if not the most successful, renewal agency in the state of Maine.

MR: Now, this sounds like a pretty stressful project for at least staff members and probably for Senator Muskie too. And I've heard some stories, rumors, whatever you want to call them about his temper. Now, do you have any stories about that?

PM: Well, he never, I don't think he ever, certainly not with me, ever became, ever blew up, you might say. Now my brother worked for the senator for a number of years and he can readily attest to the fact that the senator does have a very short fuse. And it was the kind of situation, I think he had so many things going and he himself was just not an ordinary person. He grasped the question or the problem quickly, and I think he had great difficulties in trying to figure out why other people didn't grasp it as quickly as he did. He had an unusual talent for going straight to the heart of the problem.

And I've heard stories. For instance, out of his office where, when the Pentagon was going to go into a committee hearing on their budget. And he wasn't even on that committee. They asked him to interrogate the group that would be making the presentation to the committee, prior to their appearance before the committee. Because his questions were so penetrating that it was rare, indeed, if the committee members at the official hearing would be as difficult as he was in their private meeting. And so, that's the way he questioned everyone. And if you didn't have the correct answer, or if he gave you a project to undertake and you came back either unprepared or wrong, I guess he just would go ballistic.

And he, but he got a lot of things done. I mean, I think it must have worked the same way for a lot of people that, you just prepared your material from every angle to make absolutely certain what you had was correct. And I think he appreciated that, quite frankly, because it, he never hesitated, in our case at least, he never, ever hesitated to help us solve a problem with the regional office of HUD. And I attribute our success to his assistance whenever we needed it.

MR: Now you were talking earlier about some of the press coverage that the urban renewal project was getting. Were there any groups or newspapers that would consistently be either for or against the project, or critical or supportive?

PM: Well the newspaper, of course, itself. It was the only newspaper in the city at the time, at that time it was called the *Waterville Morning Sentinel* and then became *Central Maine Newspaper*. They were basically in favor of all of our projects. That's not to say they accepted them *carte blanche*. They would say, "Hey," you know, "You've got to carry it out effectively. You've got to carry it out with the least amount of disruption to businesses and families." And if things didn't go well, and they were, I think, fair in that they gave people in opposition to the project equal opportunity in the newspaper to voice their opinion as to "for" or "against". And even, it would be irritating, say, to the urban renewal board and the staff carrying out the

project, that occasionally people would really misrepresent what we had told them or what we passed to them. And the newspaper was fair in that regard. They would point out that this information was given to you in this manner and now you're misusing it in another manner. So that we basically had the newspaper at all times in our corner as far as carrying out the project, but they were very, very, they were a watchdog to make sure that we carried it out under the complete letter of the law. You didn't do something that was not there available to you to do.

MR: Ok. How about, let's go back to the '60s and your involvement in his campaigns, in Muskie's campaigns. What specifically were your jobs during some of the campaigns you worked on?

PM: Primarily, as I said, nothing very detailed. And I was not part of the group that was his inner circle giving him advice as to what to do and how to carry it out. That was a whole group of different people. My function primarily would be distributing campaign literature, contributing to his campaign. My wife was more involved in, she certainly was not involved as an inner circle either, but primarily going to meetings and getting literature distributed throughout the area, not just in the Waterville area but throughout the state of Maine. And my older children were involved in that regard. As a matter of fact, when he ran for the presidency, or for the nomination for the presidency, they worked as far away as New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Florida in the distribution of material. That kind of thing. We did not get too involved in setting policy, by any means. We had nothing to do with that.

MR: Did you ever travel, or you and your wife ever travel during the campaign?

PM: Travel?

MR: In relation to the campaign.

PM: No, not really, not really. My children did, but not my wife and I.

MR: And one other thing I'd like to pick up is your relationship with Jane Gray Muskie in high school. How well did you know her?

PM: Well I just knew who she was and, you know, "Hello" and "How are you?" She was much friendlier and knew my brother John to a greater extent than she, because he was in the same class as she was. Other than that, really not a very close relationship by any means. Just friends. But that was about the size of it at that point in time.

In my own situation, I was halfway through my senior year in high school when I would turn eighteen. And if I had not gone into a naval officers training program, I would have probably been taken right out of school and drafted into the Army. But because I was successful in passing the necessary examinations, both physical and written, with the Navy, I was able, allowed to complete high school. And, we had an awful lot of involvement, you might say, in sports activities. The whole family, my brother John and I especially, at that time in football,

basketball, baseball, and with the Navy. So you never really, socially, never got involved to any great extent, period. There were too many other things going on at the time, as well as thoughts about when I'm going to be going into the service.

So my friendship with Jane Gray, Jane Muskie, with Jane Gray Muskie was primarily just as students, you know, 'hello, how are you'. She lived around, just a short ways from our home and you'd often see her walking to school. But there was a whole group of kids living in that area as well.

MR: And you said you didn't know much about her family situation, or . . . ?

PM: No, I really didn't, no. Again, my brother John was much closer that way than I was. I got to know Howard, her older brother, later on. And I got to know him very well. Howard [Gray] and her sister Ginny [Gray Harvey] later on, but not at that point in time. They were all older than I was for one thing, see. And none of them were in school at the same time I was in school other than Jane.

MR: Okay. Well, I guess we can move on to other people in the community, in the Waterville area, that you can think of might be valuable for this project?

PM: Well, there were a whole bunch of them that worked for Muskie and, you know, some of them obviously were politicians even before the senator became a very prominent politician. In the, people that I have, I've known over the years that were very much involved with the senator, then again as I said, some were prior to the senator. Harold Dubord, for instance, had been a very successful politician in Waterville and just barely lost the senate seat in the late '20s or early '30s. I don't recall when. He became a judge, state judge, state of Maine judge later on in his career. He served as mayor in the city of Waterville and he was a very, very, I would say very, very smart, intellectual kind of person.

His son, Dick Dubord, was, served as the attorney general in the state, ran for governor in the state, did not get the nomination, but was a very successful attorney general, outstanding attorney and mayor of Waterville. Worked for many years for the Democratic Party. Passed away at a very young age, he was only forty-nine when he passed away in 1969, but he was an outstanding person I thought. I knew him quite well. His father, Harold Dubord, was an elderly person by the time I became involved in the city council. And I knew who he was and he knew who I was, but we were not exactly what you'd call political friends.

Paul Dundas was a very successful mayor in the city of Waterville, served five consecutive terms, or six terms, I don't recall, was a very prominent politician in Waterville. Didn't serve, I don't believe he ever served statewide, but was known statewide. I'm sure worked very diligently for the senator in his early, in the early years of his campaign. Paul was mayor in the city of Waterville in the mid-thirties and continued to work with the Democratic party right on up until he passed away, which was probably some time in the mid-sixties.

Paul Julian was another fellow who, he ran for governor in, I believe in the late thirties [*sic* 1944]. He was a Democrat, he was a Democratic candidate for governor, did not win the election. The agency that I, I should back off a little bit and tell you that I own the GHM Insurance Agency in Waterville. And the forerunner of the GHM Insurance Agency was the J. B. Freel Company. Paul Julian owned the J. B. Freel Company. And in 1959 when I came back to Waterville, late '58, early '59, I came back to work for Paul Julian in the insurance industry, in the insurance agency. I had been working for Liberty Mutual Insurance Company for a period of about eight years in New York City and Boston. Then I decided I wanted to return to Waterville, so I returned and went to work for the J. B. Freel Company.

And I became familiar with the, you know, much more active I should say, in the Democratic Party to a considerable extent because of Paul Julian. He encouraged me to run for office, which I did do and served two terms on the board of aldermen in the city of Waterville, I was chairman my second term. And he talked a great deal about the Democratic Party. I was already registered as a Democrat, as were most, all the members of the family, including my wife's family. And he, he always, you know, pushed me to do something politically in the Democratic Party. He was friendly with Senator Muskie and worked with Senator Muskie and for Senator Muskie. He was part of that inner group, as well as Paul Dundas. Both of these gentlemen were significantly older than I was and had been involved in politics to a much greater extent than I was, and much earlier than I ever got involved in it. He was a really nice person. I enjoyed both Paul Dundas and Paul Julian, they were both very fine people.

Richard Carey, "Spike" Carey, was in the council same time as I was. He was a very unique kind of person. He was a hard worker, very, very politically active, still is for that matter as a state senator at the present time. And was eight years as city, Waterville, city of Waterville's mayor. When he moved out to Belgrade he became the town manager I guess, or selectman, I don't recall, in Belgrade. [He] has served in the legislature in the house of representatives for a number of years, is presently a state senator. So he really is a politician. More so than probably anyone I knew in my generation, knew well. And Richard was very, very active, very bright. On tax matters is probably as capable as anyone understanding the issues. And has worked, I always thought, worked very, very hard for the city when he was the mayor, and for the people that he represented as representative, and now as a state senator. I think over the years, I'm sure, I'm not aware of precisely what he might have done, but I'm sure he's worked on many campaigns for the senator as well.

Of course, Dick McMahon was really key per-, one of the key people with Senator Muskie. He was with him in the first campaign for the governorship when they won, in the second campaign, reelection campaign. He was with him when he ran for the U.S. Senate, he won that seat, and was with him right on up through until he became involved as a director of the Federal Housing Administration, at which time he had to divorced himself from political campaigns. But I think, probably, he was one of the closest if not the closest advisor that Senator Muskie had throughout his political career. And I think he looked at Dick McMahon for some very, very, for some strong advice and certainly, in the early parts of the senator's career, leaned a great deal on Dick McMahon. I don't know that he ever served any office himself, I don't believe he ever did. He

lived in Winslow. He wasn't, he was originally from Waterville, but he, after getting married, he lived in Winslow. But it's the same thing, Waterville-Winslow is like Lewiston and Auburn. He was really, I think, a very astute politician.

Erlon Nadeau was very much involved in politics in Waterville. He was really much more involved at the local level, and at the ward level in the local level. He was in a very highly Democratic area and he worked very diligently to get the votes out in that area. He served, or, he never served, he was a city, city clerk I believe, when I was on the board of aldermen. But he was very much involved, at all times, in political campaigns. And I'm su-, I'm certain without knowing precisely what he might have done, that he was also very much involved in the senator's campaigns throughout the senator's career. Starting with running for the mayorship, then the house of representatives, the governor's office, and then U.S. Senate. I'm sure he was very much involved. I don't think he got involved outside of the city of Waterville, but he did a lot of work right in Waterville.

I never knew Frank Coffin very well. In fact, I barely knew Frank Coffin other than that he was the, a member of the House of Representatives, but I never had much to do with Frank Coffin. By the time I got involved in the urban renewal program where I would spend some time going to Washington, he had already run for governor and lost the seat in the election I believe in 1960 or '61. So I did not have any real contact with Frank Coffin to any extent, other than going to, let's say, the Democratic convention and seeing him there, you know. And at that time it was basically, "I'm Paul Mitchell from Waterville," and that's the extent of my But I think his reputation certainly was out there, right at the top of the list. He was considered a really, he still is for that matter, an outstanding person and outstanding judge and would have been outstanding in any office that he held. He was a member of the House of Representatives, U.S. House of Representatives. He would have been just an absolutely magnificent governor. And he would have been magnificent really, in anything he did, because I think he had a reputation for the highest integrity and a marvelous mind. And he served well as, in the judgeship that he held.

MR: Yeah, if you want to continue (*unintelligible phrase*)?

PM: Well, the, the, Max Codere I didn't know very well. He was in Waterville. He worked for the Democratic Party and I really never knew him very well. I didn't have very much contact with Max.

Don of course, Don Nicolls [*sic* Nicoll], I had a lot of contact with him when he was working in the senator's office as his administrative assis-, primary administrative person. And he would be the party I would do most of my business with when we were doing the urban renewal program. Don was great, he was absolutely super. I'd give him the facts, he'd carry the facts forward, I'd meet with him in Washington from time to time, meet with the senator. But Don really is the party, I've got to believe, in the senator's office who really took the information to the next level, with the senator's blessings, and he was absolutely magnificent. And I don't have to tell you how smart he was. He was a very, very capable person. And George, my brother George obviously worked with him, under him, and they had a great relationship. But I don't think

anyone ever met Don that didn't come away feeling that, 'here's a fellow who really is very talented'. So you feel comfortable if you have him working for you and with you, that he's going to give the best possible effort that you might be able to get from anyone.

Paul Fullam I never knew at all. Paul Fullam passed away just about the time I returned to Waterville and I never knew him at all.

George Jabar of course was very much involved in the labor unions. I don't think he was too much involved in politics. I knew Mr. Jabar because we were neighbors. His family, George Jabar was my father's age, so he was a contemporary of my father. So I knew him as Mr. Jabar, one of the neighbors in the neighborhood that we lived in, in Waterville. And he was very, very much involved in the political, in politics through the union. He was a labor organizer, very much, obviously involved with the Democratic Party. I think that was the party that is generally perceived as the party that the labor unions have generally supported. And I grew up with his children, I know his children very, very well. Politically I would presume, and I don't know for a fact precisely what he might have done, but I'm sure that through the unions he did a great deal of work for Senator Muskie and all Democratic candidates in all of the campaigns. Whether they were at the local level or the state level or the federal level, all through his career.

MR: And, well, I've just got one other person to add to that list. Do you know anything about John Jabar? I believe . . .

PM: John Jabar? Oh, John was one of Geor-, Mr. Jabar's children. In fact I played golf with John yesterday. He's my golf instructor. I know him very well. John worked, of course, for the senator for a number of years as his representative in the state of Maine, and John is an attorney in Waterville. I think he's probably semi-retired at this point.

John was always very, very . . . He was my first campaign manager, I might add, when I ran for the board of aldermen in a district that was three to one Republican. In a ward I should say, in Waterville, three to one Republican and we won. That's primarily because the Republican candidate decided he really didn't have to do anything because it was a three to one registration. The mistake he made was the fact that it was a dem-, it was the ward that I grew up in and I knew as many people as he did, if not more. And at the local level, politics doesn't count quite as much as friendship, you might say. This, the first fellow I defeated didn't under-, didn't bel-, well, whether he believed it or didn't know it or didn't care about it, he just thought he didn't have to do anything. And I beat him.

But John was my campaign manager, in any event. And he and I went out, the campaign really was about three weeks. We'd go out every night and visit every house in the entire ward. And these are people I'd known all my life. I'd still go out and ask them, "please vote for me". Well, they did and I won. And that's how I won my reelection two years later when another fellow ran and again felt he didn't have to do anything because the Republicans still had a significant enrollment advantage. And he lost as well. Neither one could figure out what happened. But John was my campaign manager in both campaigns.

So we've been friends, you know, for sixty years. And obviously before he became the senator's representative in the state of Maine, and while a representative of the senator of the state of Maine, and after he got done being the representative of the senator, he has always worked for the Democratic Party. He's been very, very much involved. He was the city solicitor of Waterville for a number of years, but he's always been, he and the entire family, have always been ardent Democrats. And his brother presently is a representative from the city of Waterville in the State House. He's always, the whole family has always been very, very much involved with the Democratic Party in the state of Maine.

MR: And do you remember anything about John's confrontation with Senator Muskie? I don't know if confrontation's the right word.

PM: No, I really don't. That was a long time ago, and I don't recall what the details were.

MR: And you mentioned that you were board, you were on the board of aldermen for two terms, consecutive terms. What years were that?

PM: What years was that? Fifty-nine, '60, '61 and '62.

MR: Okay, and what was the time like there, what were some of the issues you dealt with or who did you work with, or?

PM: Who did I work with? Well, Al Bernier, who was a partner of Dick Dubord's in the law office, was the mayor at the time, my first two years. And my second two years it was a fellow named Cyril Joly, who was a Republican by the way. He won the seat after Al Bernier decided not to run for reelection for a third term. And in my second term I might add, I left mid-way through the term to become the director of the, take over as the executive director of the Waterville Urban Renewal Authority. That was while I was the chairman of the board of aldermen. And Cyril Joly was the Republican, who was the mayor at the time, served two terms as well, and then was defeated by a fellow named Malcolm Fortier.

As far as the Democratic Party was concerned then, we had a significant majority on the board of Back then, by the way, Waterville was governed just a little differently than at presently as far as the form of government is concerned. We were one of the few remaining municipalities that had a bicameral system of government. We had a board of aldermen and councilmen, two councilmen from each ward. So there were fourteen--, seven wards, fourteen councilmen, one alderman from each ward, kind of like the senate and the house of representatives. That was pretty nice. So in the board of alder-, in the council I think of the fourteen it was like ten to four Democratic. And in the board of aldermen my first two years it was seven to one, six to one, six to one. And then in my second two years it was four to three. And the council at that time was probably about eight to six, still Democratic with a Republican mayor. But as far as the Democrats were concerned, most of the fellows were, worked, I think ardently, on the state and national level for the Democratic Party. Two or three of the members, three of the members if I

recall, were very strong union members and represented the unions during the national and state campaigns, and so worked for the Democratic Party.

There was a much stronger organization, I think at the time, and much more cohesive at the time as far as each party was concerned. It was not quite as fractured as it is now. What you see now is, this is a phenomenon to me that disturbs me a bit, but it's going to happen I guess. But in the last several, I'm talking local elections now. If a person decides he wants to run, he's been a Democrat for umpteen years and decides that he wants to run for mayor. This just happened, fellow who was representing, still on the city council of Waterville representing a ward, has been a city councilor for six years I guess, as a Democrat, and decided to run for mayor, and seek the nomination for mayor I should say, at the last election, and lost it to another person. And [he] decided to become an independent and run as an independent against the fellow who was, who received the nomination. The Republicans seized this opportunity not to have anyone run on their party, hoping that Republicans and enough independents would vote for this particular person who was a Democrat but decided to become an independent because he couldn't get the nomination. Well, he lost in any event. Not by much, but he lost. But that's happened a couple of times now.

As a matter of fact, four years ago the candidate who lost the Democratic nomination for mayor became a Republican, because she was so upset over the fact that she lost the nomination. I don't understand that kind of politics, you know? So, but I guess it happens and it happens a lot. I don't know where it's going from there over the, you know, over the next twenty or thirty years. I have no idea. But it just, it confounds me at times that, how people can change. I mean, if you've been something for all these years, did it suddenly become not worthwhile at all because you just couldn't become the leader of that particular group? And so you're going to change to another group that has values that are significantly different than what you've professed to believe in for all these years? And now all of a sudden you're upset and you decide, 'well, I'm going to change over here'. I wonder just how deep a conviction you have in what you profess to believe in, see. So, I don't know where they go from there.

MR: Well, we'll see I guess. And how about, going back to your time as alderman, what were the differences, some of the differences and similarities between working with Mayor Bernier for the first term, and then Mayor Joly for at least a year in the second term?

PM: Well, you know, of course most of the issues at the local level are local issues. Under Mayor Bernier, prior to my being elected on the board of aldermen, we, the city was, or I should say, the city government was trying to get approval to build a new high school. The old high school was inadequate for what they wanted and what they needed, really. And they'd been working for a number of years and had not yet attained enough votes to get it, in the council. I was very much in favor of it, it's one of the platforms I ran, very much in favor of a new high school. And I became a swing vote at that point, so I voted for it. It was a four to three decision. But in any event, the issues were primarily local issues.

And during Mayor Bernier's last term, the vote was held, or during the election I should say, the

vote came out in favor of creating an urban renewal authority, that's when the authority first became created by the city. The state had just passed enabling legislation. Portland was the first community in Maine to become, and I only digress for a moment to give you this background, the first community in Maine to operate in the urban renewal area and they had special legislation by the state, for Portland. But then the legislature passed enabling legislation for any community in the state of Maine that voted in the desire to establish an urban renewal authority. They could, under the guidelines established by the state. So Waterville voted it in. Al Bernier was very much in favor of getting involved. When Cy Joly became elected mayor, he was a very conservative Republican. He was the campaign manager for . . .

End of Side A
Side B

PM: During Al Bernier's term while I was on the board of aldermen, most of the issues were local issues. When Cy Joly became mayor and the urban renewal, the creation of the Urban Renewal Authority was authorized by city vote and already established by Mayor Bernier, the board was already selected, Cy Joly brought a brand of conservatism with him at the local level, where he wanted nothing to do with any governmental program. He just felt that the government had no place in private, in an area that he felt private initiative should be doing it. But he had a bit of a problem with some of his constituency. Most of the business owners in the downtown area were a significant amount proportionately, of the taxes the city of Waterville were paid, were Republicans, and they were very much in favor of the project. And so Cy found himself preaching a brand of conservatism that was at odds with his supporters, many of his supporters. And so he allowed at least the projects to go along, but never really was in favor of them to any great extent.

And the second project, which was one that was, well it was in the downtown area, it was on the periphery of the downtown. [Cy Joly] tried desperately to prevent it from occurring. And before we got to the third and fourth projects he was gone as mayor. But he did, you know, and he believed it, I guess I'll give him credit for that, he believed in what he was trying to do. I didn't agree with him and I don't agree to this day with the philosophy that he espoused. And I just felt that what we were doing was in the best interest of the city and in the long run the best interest to the citizens of the city. And I think that's been proven. The creation of the Waterville Housing Authority, for instance, he didn't want any part of it. But he allowed the vote to go through and it got approved. And since then there's been a significant amount of public housing created in Waterville, primarily for elderly citizens. And it has been, I think, a very beneficial kind of thing for the city.

Well, when he got done there was a, a Democratic mayor came back in and again the philosophy changed back to the Democratic type philosophy. In the one and a half, or the little over one year period I served while Cy was the mayor, we had numerous conflicts, he and I. We've remained friends all these years, but we had a lot of conflicts in what, you know, was in the best interest of the city. But I think history has proven that the projects we did helped the city tremendously over the years since. And while he may disagree with me on that, I think that

overall the downtown of Waterville was a strong downtown. And a downtown that got significantly renovated, as well as rehabilitated, and with a whole bunch of new construction all from the project that was, or the two projects that were done in that area there.

MR: So you would say that the economic situation of Waterville is, or at least the downtown area is better than it was?

PM: Well, I'll tell you. I'd say yes and no, and for this reason. When it was being done, this is thirty years ago now, thirty-five years ago, it had a significant impact, positive significant impact upon the city. In the last eight to ten years the downtown in Waterville, while it is still a viable downtown, is undergoing a transformation. But that's no different than the downtown in any New England community. If you go to any New England community, just take the state of Maine for instance. Say, we don't have any downtown department store any longer in Waterville. Well, you go to Portland, Porteous, Mitchell is gone. You go to Lewiston, Ward Brothers is gone. You go to Bangor, Freese's is gone. The downtowns in all of these communities is being transformed into a different type of downtown. A downtown primarily of small specialty type shops or financial institutions. The banks have become very much entrenched downtown. I think that the shopping centers that have been created around all of these communities has significantly limited what can happen downtown, as far as retail shopping is concerned.

When I go back to when I was a young boy growing up in Waterville, even in my twenties and thirties, the downtown in Waterville was very active on a Friday and a Saturday. You go downtown in Waterville now in the evenings and there isn't all that much happening down there, certainly from a retail point of view. There are some activities going on at the opera house which is right in the city hall, at the center, which was the old Stearns Department Store. Or, it's not an old building, it's a relatively, it's an old building but significantly renovated just, not too long ago, during the renewal process I might add. And it is now a home to a number of small enterprises, as well as adjacent to city hall and a connection between the two, so there's a lot of activity going on down there. The restaurants are down, some nice restaurants are downtown.

But there's no significant retail activity like clothing, furniture, in the downtown of Waterville. You don't find that in the downtown of Portland, which is the, you know, the largest city in the state of Maine. And you don't find it in downtown Lewiston. You don't find it in downtown Bangor. You go there, to those communities, you go to the Bangor Mall, the Auburn Mall, or the Maine Mall, but you don't find them downtown. So Waterville is no different in that regard. As a result, I don't think the downtown is quite as strong now as it was, say, thirty years ago, twenty-five years ago following, the initial period of time following the redevelopment of downtown Waterville.

But from the standpoint of offering opportunities to the kinds of businesses I mentioned, the small specialty shops in the downtown area, Waterville is a very desirable downtown because of the significant renewal that's been done down there. Affording a great deal of off-street parking, which you don't find in many of the communities. You have a hard time finding it in downtown

Portland, other than paying a rather significant fee to park in the parking garages or parking meters. We have no parking meters in Waterville. And, so I think it's poised.

What Waterville needs, more than just a significant downtown, is some significant economic development and job creation which will bring in the kinds of shops I mentioned earlier, in the downtown area. That's where we, I think that's what we lack more than anything else. The, you know, the closure of what was the Scott Paper Company, owned, and Kimberly Clark took over and closed it up in Winslow. The closing of Cascade Woollen in Oakland. These are communities adjacent to Waterville that have a significant impact upon the shopping area. And I think it's a question now of trying to get some things in there that develops, that will develop jobs and additional payroll and get some discretionary income built into the wages, so that people have money to spend. That will create or fill up the stores that are, or the vacancies that are existing at the present time in downtown Waterville. It'll fill up any place that creates that kind of thing, whether it's Augusta, Waterville, Lewiston, Portland or any of them. Portland, of course, isn't suffering at all, I don't think, at this present time. But they're not suffering because they're doing so very well, from an economic point of view, in the entire area of southern Maine.

MR: Now you said your stint as alderman, that was your first political office that you served in?

PM: That's my first and only political office.

MR: First and only? Okay, well that answers my question.

PM: I was telling my brother George, I'm the only one in the family who's never lost an election. There was a difference in the type of election we were running.

MR: Hey, well, it's still a distinction, I'll buy that. Well, I guess then we can move on to your general impressions of Muskie and his effects on the state of Maine and his effects on national politics, what your impressions of him are.

PM: Well, I think he's had tremendous effects upon the state of Maine, but more importantly I think even on a national basis, I think Muskie was good for Maine. I think the representation that he brought to the national level as a U.S. Senator is recognized in Maine, but it's recognized nationally, it's recognized internationally. And just what happened yesterday on the Kennebec River with the dam reopening, with the dam coming down, opening up, and they're going to take out the Edwards Dam. I mean, here's the man who authored the Clean Water Act. He changed what was an open sewer, two open sewers, maybe even three. Certainly the Androscoggin was considered one of the ten worst rivers in the United, the most polluted rivers in the United States. The Kennebec wasn't very far behind it, and I'm sure the Penobscot was right behind that.

And now you've got rivers that are clean, or they're cleaner, and they are clean enough in many areas to swim in, they're talking about fishing opportunities on the Kennebec all the way up to Waterville. It might not be something, well as a matter of fact I heard on the news last night, it isn't something that's going to happen tomorrow morning, it might take ten or fifteen or twenty

years to get all this straightened out. But in the meantime you'll be, you know, you'll live in an area where the water is reasonably clean. And a ten or fifteen year period is a relatively short period of time when you consider that the river's been there for ten thousand years, or twelve thousand years since the last glacier. And so if they can get that . . . And he's the fellow primarily responsible for writing the act and carrying it forward, Clean Water, Clean Air. I mean it's something that we all need and we all want for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren.

But I think he brought a sense of intellect, and any time anybody talks about the state of Maine and they talk about the representation they've had over the past twenty-five years. As a matter of fact, I think any time they talk about senators from Maine or even senators from any of the states over the past fifty years, he ranks right at the top of all of them. I think he was noted for his quick temper, but more importantly he was noted for his keen mind and for his . . . He cared for people. He cared for people and I think he hurt when people hurt. And he did everything he could, I believe, to, you know, raise the standard of living and assist those people who needed assistance most - the poor, the disabled, the young and the old.

And he was just, I think he was a great person, a really truly great person. I think he would have made a magnificent president. Those things don't happen, but that doesn't take away from the good things that he did and his tremendous capability. We were lucky in this state we had a fellow like him representing us. That's what I remember most about him. And I, he wasn't a great athlete, but who cares about athletics at that point in time, you know. He had a great mind and boy, he, and he knew how to use it. He used it well and he used it for the right things. He used it to promote the welfare of the population and welfare of this country and the welfare of this state.

MR: Well, is there anyone else you can think of in the area, the Waterville area, that's still around that we could interview for this project? Someone that would have useful information?

PM: You know, I don't even know who you've interviewed. Why don't we do this, Mike: you let me know who you have interviewed and I'll then tell you who I think might be able to assist you in some future interviews on this.

MR: Yeah, maybe we could talk with Andrea after, we've got a big list.

PM: Yeah, yeah, otherwise than that I wouldn't have a clue as to who to suggest that you talk to. Okay?

MR: All right. Well, is there anything that you think we've missed or you want to go over again?

PM: Not really. If there is, I'll certainly get back to you if there's something I think would. If I got a transcript of this . . .

MR: Oh yeah, we'll be sending you a transcript.

PM: . . . then I can then look at it and tell you whether or not I feel there's something else I can add to it. Okay?

MR: Okay. Great. Well thanks a lot.

PM: Well thank you very much. This has been really kind of nice. It gives me a chance to think of a person. You know, you don't always think of people. After they've gone you think of them from time to time when circumstances arise, but this really has had me thinking more and more. And when I realize, you know our lives are impacted by some of the decisions the man made. And more importantly, you know, in my situation, I'm seventy-three, but I've got four children and I've got twelve grandchildren. And I think how the decisions he made, the battles that he fought and won, and even those that he might not have gotten everything he wanted, but at least moved it in that direction, will have a significant impact in the long term future of certainly my children and my grandchildren.

And I think, and not just children in the state of Maine but children throughout the United States of America, that's where it's all at, really. We really have to think about what's in the best interest of the entire country. We want the best interest of Maine obviously, part of the best interest of the entire country. And we've had some great people representing the state, and I hope we continue having them. Thank you very much.

MR: Thanks, Mr. Mitchell.

End of Interview