5-14-1999

Pendexter, Faunce oral history interview

Meredith Gethin-Jones

Interview with Faunce Pendexter by Meredith Gethin-Jones

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Pendexter, Faunce

Interviewer
Gethin-Jones, Meredith

Date
May 14, 1999

Place
Lewiston, Maine

ID Number
MOH 092

Biographical Note

Faunce Pendexter was born in Norway, Maine on January 7, 1915. He was home schooled for elementary school, and then attended Norway High School. He went to Bowdoin College, graduating as Salutatorian of the Class of 1937. His brother also attended Bowdoin. Faunce married Mildred Muriel Greenlaw in 1937. Mildred was president of the Women's Literary Union and served as Education Advisor to the Androscoggin County Head Start program. He worked one year in Portland for the Writer's Project. He wrote news for WGAN radio for a short period of time, and then worked for Sun and Journal in Lewiston for 40 years. He started with the *Lewiston Evening Journal*. For two years he became the agricultural editor of the *Lewiston Daily Sun*; then a news reporter for five years, and later served as the editor of the Saturday magazine. He served as President of the Lewiston Chamber of Commerce and was a member of that organization for several years. He was also President and a member of the Kiwanis Club.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1955-58 Muskie's two terms as governor; weekly meetings Muskie held with the press; 1969-72 presidential campaign; the Manchester Union Leader incident; golf game with Muskie and Hathaway; Democratic Party in Maine; visits to Pendexter's home; his father, Hugh, and his work as a newspaperman in Rochester, New York; *Lewiston Journal*; 1933 Bowdoin College hazing; Kennedy's visits to Maine; the negative effects of term limits; Norway, Maine as Republican in the 1920s and 1930s; Lewiston prices back in the 1940s; his ancestral roots traced to William the Conqueror's time, and specifically his name originally being *point de ster* (Point of the Star); the Kiwanis Club's Annual Pancake Breakfast; Louis B. Costello; Lewiston-Auburn economic progress from 1950 to 1970; and Maine's problem of disparity between Southern and Central Maine and Northern counties.

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Transcript

Meredith Gethin-Jones: We are here in the Muskie Archives interviewing Faunce Pendexter

on May 14th, 1999. The interview is done by Meredith Gethin-Jones. Mr. Pendexter, could you please state your full name and spell it?

Faunce Pendexter: Faunce Pendexter, F-A-U-N-C-E, P-E-N-D-E-X-T-E-R.

MJ: Could you please give me your date and place of birth?

FP: January 7th, 1915, Norway, Maine.

MJ: And could you please give me the names of your parents and siblings and your place in the family?

FP: I was the younger of two sons, and my brother's name was Hugh, H-U-G-H, Pendexter.

MJ: And your parents?

FP: And my parents were Hugh Pendexter and Helen Pendexter.

MJ: And could you tell me where and when did you meet your wife?

FP: Well, I met her… She and I were both in a play put on by one of these traveling individuals who apparently went to a number of places and did this play. Can't remember the name of it; I remember that I saw my wife (*telephone ringing*). You need to go to that?

MJ: No, it's okay.

FP: And we were both quite young and I thought she was very attractive and so we talked in the corridor between acts, and I then invited her to go to a dance with me about a month later and she accepted.

MJ: Great. What was your wife's name?

FP: Mildred Muriel Greenlaw.

MJ: Okay, and has she shared your involvement in politics and community concerns?

FP: Well she's, she's been, as a younger woman she was active in, locally here. She was president of the Women's Literary Union and she, for quite a few years was the education supervisor for Androscoggin County and Head Start. And that was quite an important position at work, and she had about, students under her and, whom she wasn't teaching but was supervising the teachers. And there were about I think sixty to eighty people that she was a superior to in terms of the job, what she did. There was a, she was not the, she was not the head of the whole thing; there was one other lady. But she did that for twenty years. And when she retired, why, the state agricultural, not Agriculture, State Department, the House of Representatives sent her a

certificate of appreciation. It was very nice, we (*unintelligible phrase*) I was in the hallway. And so she did quite a job on that. I'm very proud of her.

MJ: That's wonderful.

FP: We've been married now sixty-two years.

MJ: Wow!

FP: And that is not so common in this day and age as it used to be. But we've been very happy.

MJ: Wow, that's great. Can you tell me where you attended elementary school and secondary school?

FP: Well, I never went to elementary school; my mother thought I should stay home. She had been a teacher and she didn't think my health warranted my going to school every day, which was not an accurate judgment at all but that was her opinion. And I didn't mind; I had a lot of time off. And how I ever got to the ei-, started in my education at the eighth grade level I've never known because it didn't seem as if I studied much at home. I didn't have any set schedule. I read a lot, and living in Norway I'd get out in the morning in the winter and snowshoe up on Pike's Hill or ski at another place and kind of had a ball.

MJ: So you began school in the eighth grade?

FP: Yes.

MJ: And where did you attend school?

FP: Norway High School, which is no longer in existence in terms of, it's now become Oxford Hills High School; Norway, South Paris, Oxford and so on are all tied up in that.

MJ: What were some of your experiences in school?

FP: Well, I was lucky I guess. A new boy sometimes is not greeted with particular welcome I wouldn't say. Girls sometimes, but, girl for a boy, or boys will go for a new girl, but normally the boys were, could be difficult. I didn't have any problem. No one tried to bully me and no one tried to, you know, be disagreeable. That didn't last all through high school; there were one or two fellows in high school that I never got along with. But in fact when I was senior level I, there was one boy I never liked in my neighborhood and he was always, he would, he was the type wanted to be a bully. So I wouldn't put up with that and I had a fist-fight with him on the corner of Paris Street when the circus was going by.

MJ: When what?

FP: A circus parade was going by, yes, and he'd been to military school. He was, he just, he and I just didn't catch, and that was the last time I ever had a fight. And an older man, lived down below, why he told us to stop it and we did. Nowadays we'd probably slugged him and, (the way some of the kids are today), and, or told him to mind his own business, but we stopped right off. I'm not proud of that in a way but I did, that put an end to his trying to bully me. That's the only thing you can do with a bully; you don't have to kill him as they do today, but it put an end to his actions.

MJ: So after high school, after Norway High School, did you attend college?

FP: Yes, I went to Bowdoin.

MJ: You went to Bowdoin College.

FP: Yes, graduated in '37, *cum laude*.

MJ: Why did you choose to go to Bowdoin?

FP: Well my brother had gone to Bowdoin and so I heard "Bowdoin" quite a lot. And it was, I, in those days you didn't have to take an exam to get in if you were in Maine, to Bowdoin, if your grades were good enough. And I was salutatorian in my class so I had pretty good grades. And in those days you took Latin and that meant reading Caesar's wars and others. And I liked Latin; it wasn't bad at all.

MJ: How did you become involved in news and media?

FP: Well, I got, first job in Portland was, I went down, went to Portland and I had a job in the, (oh, that program that was on in those days, what was it?), providing work for people that didn't have a job. And I was fortunate enough to work about a week, a month, a year there I guess it was.

MJ: Was this immediately after Bowdoin?

FP: No, not immediately. I worked up in Norway in a grocery store for about a year and I didn't particularly like that work. And I felt I should try to do something a little more in line with my studies. So I looked around and some people came up from Portland; they heard about me I guess. And it was a writers' project, I got it now.

MJ: A writers' project?

FP: Yeah, that's what they called it. And it was a, a federal government program and I did that for about a year I guess. And then I had an offer to go on to the radio, WGAN in Portland, and write their news. And I did that for, oh, maybe half a year, maybe nine months, I can't really

remember. I know it was somewhere in that range. And that was kind of, to me after a while, hack work. You took the major news stories and rewrote them, making them shorter because of course they didn't have time in a news program to give too many details. And I, as I say, I thought that was a tiresome job and I'd had my eyes set on being a newspaper man. My father was in Rochester, New York.

MJ: Your father was also a newspaper man?

FP: Yes, in Rochester, New York. And then he came back to Maine and he became a writer. He wrote seven boys' books, and then he started writing historical novels involving different aspects of American history. He wrote forty. And he really was one who was very fussy about being accurate and, which in a sense was a good lesson to me. If you're going to do newspaper work, you want to be accurate, and, although there are some newspapers I don't think are particularly careful about whether they're accurate or not. But, so I had a background of a father who was a writer and a good writer. His historical novels are very well done, and I've reread every one of them I bet ten times. Like old friends, you know; you don't want to give them up.

And so that's the basis of where I started. And then I drove up to Lewiston after a couple of years with the radio station and talked with the general manager up here and asked if there was any opening. And as it happened there was. So I went to work for the *Sun* and *Journal*, there were two papers. And I was on the *Journal*, evening side; when they hired me they put me there. And I stayed with them forty-four years.

MJ: So there was the *Sun-Journal* and the *Lewiston* . . .?

FP: It was the same company. They had to cut out the, publishing the evening paper but that was a long time later. Television is what killed it, and it was true across the country I think. Evening newspapers even in major cities didn't fare very well. Everybody was glued to a television set in parts of the day when they were up and awake really, particularly evenings. I mean mornings, early breakfast time, they wouldn't be but it forced the decision to go to one paper. Your costs obviously would be less and your circulation for that one paper would be, morning paper, would be substantial and you'd pick up a lot that hadn't been with the *Sun* because with the *Journal* gone they'd want a local paper. It's worked out pretty well.

MJ: So have you always been in Maine?

FP: Always lived in Maine.

MJ: Always lived in Maine.

FP: Never wanted to live anywhere else.

MJ: Really.

FP: No, because the state has everything. It's got all the natural beauty. You've got sea coast, you've got mountains, (they may not be the Rockies but they're beautiful, four thousand footers, we have a dozen of them), and I think New England folks, especially in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are pretty much their own people. They're not blown about by the winds of change much. We can accept television and computers and all of that, that's fine, but I mean we aren't inclined to be as impressed with all the modern developments as folks in, many folks in other parts of the country. I still like to read. And TV, I particularly like sports if they're Boston teams, and I've followed them since I was six years old, the Red Sox; unfortunate choice maybe but that's the way it is.

MJ: Now you've been all over Maine it sounds like; you've been in Portland and Norway and Poland and Lewiston, correct?

FP: Well, I've been in the southern, south-central part of the state a lot. I've gone over Maine from Fryeburg over to the east and I've driven around the state to different places. I never went up north country much; up in Aroostook County once I guess. And then the wife and I have gone south in the, for a vacation; we like a change, see something new. And I had a spell when I was hooked on the Civil War so we went to an awful lot of battlegrounds; Gettysburg, the Wilderness and so on.

MJ: So, can you tell me, how would you characterize people in the Lewiston-Auburn area?

FP: Well I think they're, people are interesting. You have two major ethnic backgrounds, Canadian French and English, and we get along pretty well. And then of course you have quite a few Irish and the mixture is okay; it works out for the most part.

MJ: How do they differ from other people, from other people in different communities in Maine?

FP: Well, for example in Aroostook county you have a, I do know they, you have an awful lot of farm people. We have quite a few here in Androscoggin County; we have quite a few farms, cattle, and of course some that deal in vegetables quite a bit and so on. Oh I did have two years agricultural editor along with my other job; that was interesting. I, although I grew up in Norway I was not a, I was not a farm boy and… But I like the farm folks, they're, they say what they think and, which is a good nice thing, quality, and I enjoyed those two years.

MJ: Can you tell me what the people in Lewiston are like from a political perspective?

FP: Well when I came here they were heavily Democrat; they were just the opposite of what folks were like down south where they were mostly Republicans. And, oh, they had, they were, I don't think, the northern part of the state they weren't mostly Democrat. But I'm, I shouldn't have said it the way I did. Lewiston and Auburn were about seventy percent Democrat.

MJ: What year did you come here?

FP: Nineteen thirty-seven.

MJ: Nineteen thirty-seven.

FP: And there was a switch in Lewiston. I mean, the first ones here by and large that were not English were Irish and they ran the city government and that's before my time here. And then the Franco Americans came and went in the mills and worked, and in shoe shops, and worked in large numbers. All of them did, and they became the majority.

MJ: So do you think that ethnically the Franco-Americans dominated the mills and the shoe shops?

FP: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

MJ: I see. How would you characterize Lewiston from an economic perspective?

FP: I think it's doing pretty well now, really; I think it's improved in recent years. It was tough I think back along there when the first of the mills shutting down and the shoe shops too, some of them, in Auburn. And, but I think they've replaced that with a mix of all kinds of businesses which in the long run probably is better. And I would predict they may do pretty well in the future; they have more people employed now than they did ten, twenty years ago.

MJ: Really. What do you think is the cause for the improvement?

FP: Well, I think overall the government, government, local government, has displayed a wiser handling of problems than they used to. And I think we've outgrown, (not everybody), but I think most people have outgrown what was at one time I think an (ethnic) hostility of… Not major, but the type that would hurt the community.

MJ: Political hostility?

FP: Well, I don't know as it was all that much; of course Maine was a pretty Republican state from Lincoln's time to forty years ago maybe. And so politically, why that was a time when things could get a little bitter. But I don't think it's as significant now as it was earlier years.

MJ: How would you characterize this community socially?

FP: I think the people are friendly overall, much less… I lived in Portland for a couple of years and down there it seemed like people were kind of stiff and self satisfied and that is something I never particularly cared for. Of course in the small towns in Maine they used to, sometimes if there was an industry, why, the owner of the industry might get pretty high and mighty (*unintelligible word*) some people were not too friendly toward him. And I say toward him because businesses by and large were not run by females years ago. You get more now that are,

and some have done very well with them. But I know several towns where the local bigwig would be a man who owned the only sizeable business in the town. And people would kowtow; that always bothered me because I'm not one that's going to kowtow. I don't believe in that so it's one of those things.

But anyway, we struggle along with a lot of that foolishness and some of the small towns, the, three hundred, in terms of society… A lot of them are females and that's because of their husbands being lord of the manor, you know, type. But that's going away now pretty much I think compared to what it was. But there was a, there was a clique in Norway when I was in high school and I just didn't go for that. And my mother was not a part of it exactly but she was in a group that included these folks, women, and some of them were pretty impossible. And my dad didn't give a damn; he was very independent. He'd stop and chat with the man that cleaned the street in Norway. We had horses in those days, and so, it didn't matter to him, he took people as he found them.

MJ: Did your father influence you in terms of independence?

FP: I think so, yeah I think so.

MJ: How did your college experience shape your beliefs and attitudes and interests and so forth?

FP: Well, I enjoyed Bowdoin very much; I had a ball down there, and I liked it. It was interesting to meet out-of-state guys that would be, had different interests than what I had made. I was a member of a fraternity. Incidentally, I think fraternities are on the way out. It's probably a good thing. I joined the fraternity that wasn't my brother's. He was quite disappointed but how was I . . .

MJ: It was not your brother's?

FP: No, I, my brother's fraternity was okay but they weren't the kind of chaps by and large that I thought I'd be too happy with so I joined another one and was very happy. It was just a, when I was a freshman there were a couple of seniors that were a pain in the butt, but, (excuse my saying it but it's better than, gentler than I could have put it). And, but the, of course they got over the worst of the hazing by then, 1933. They didn't beat you half to death or anything like that. I enjoyed the fraternity but I'm not one of those who was an ardent fraternity man. They, some of them just; that was their major interest, that wasn't mine. I didn't care for it that much.

MJ: What was your major interest?

FP: Oh, I liked to, one major interest was being sure I… I tried to do my lessons well but I didn't let my lessons prevent me from enjoying pickup basketball. I went home every weekend because my wife-to-be lived in South Paris so I was up there on the weekends seeing Muriel as much as I could. Of course there was a limit, but I mean, and I'd go back to college. I

hitchhiked sometimes going up and then mother, poor mother, she'd have to drive me down to Brunswick or drive me down to Lewiston and let me take the trolley. Then there was a time when I could get a, there was a bus that went down to Lewiston; went through Norway. And I'd grab that and it worked out all right, but. So I didn't spend many weekends at Bowdoin.

MJ: Did the time that you spent at Bowdoin change you do you think?

FP: I wouldn't know. I think my attitudes, you know, haven't changed much. They may have and I may not be aware of it. This "know thyself" is not easy. But I've always, I've liked to read a lot and I read the paper from stem to stern and, well I watch TV a lot on the news; Channel 18. This business that's going on now, you can't, you shouldn't be ignoring it, (not that I can do anything about it but I like to know what's going on). And so news has always fascinated me.

MJ: What was your occupation specifically?

FP: Well, I started as a news reporter; five years of that. And then I edited the paper's Saturday magazine; twelve-page affair. And it had about four or five stories about individuals, about businesses or whatever, and, not just in Lewiston-Auburn but different parts of the state. And I did quite a bit of driving out, I went down to interview, (do what you're doing right now), two artists, not at the same time but, and probably more. But I mean I'm just illustrating. I went to, I'd, down on the coast there were a couple artists and I wrote stories about them. And then there were five or six writers in an area from the coast and one or two that were inland who wrote and sent their articles to the paper. And I edited the copy and I had to oversee the way the placement was made and all that of course. The whole thing that way was under my general jurisdiction and that was all right.

MJ: And this is when you were editor of the Saturday?

FP: Yeah.

MJ: Saturday edition.

FP: And I wasn't doing anything else then, unless they called on me for, occasionally for something that needed to be covered and the newsroom itself was overburdened and then I might get asked to do something, you know, some story. But, I remember several weeks when I had to, (and there was one or two others that did, too, not necessarily the same week), over a hundred inches of copy. I had five straight days I remember one week; that's quite a lot of copy, picking up the information, covering whatever it was, a court case or this or that or the other. So writing came rather naturally to me I guess.

MJ: Why did you choose to work for the *Sun-Journal*?

FP: Well, it was the nearest location that I guess I could find to the girl I was interested in and it

was kind of in my type of country. I liked the territory and I had a lot of friends in Norway that I'd get to see now and then. So, and I just, I just, and it was the one that had a job vacancy so I grabbed it. And I liked it, I got along all right. I didn't get too many call downs; one or two maybe. But it was all very interesting and I liked it.

MJ: Who did you hear about the job vacancy from?

FP: I didn't; I just went up cold turkey.

MJ: What role do you think you played in the community in Lewiston as both a writer and an editor?

FP: Well, I was president of the Chamber of Commerce for one year, and a member of the board for several years and just a member of the Chamber of Commerce for quite a few years. And a member of the Kiwanis Club, president.

MJ: I'm sorry?

FP: President of the Kiwanis Club for one year.

MJ: Oh really.

FP: Yeah. And that was a lot of fun; I liked it. We had a bunch of nice fellows; a lot of fun to be with, a lot of kidding, and a lot of… And they did some good works too of course.

MJ: Who did you work with at the Chamber of Commerce? Do you remember some names?

FP: Well, Ted Ames was one. And we had a member who came from, oh dear, Africa; he was born in Africa and grew up there and now I can't say his name. Makes me so mad- names are a problem. I never would have done well in politics because I couldn't go up to someone and grab their hand and say, "Nice to see you Mr. Ludicum," or whatever his name was. But yeah, he was an Indian; not an American Indian, an Indian Indian and it was down there in Africa and I can't say the province.

MJ: Who did you work with at the Kiwanis Club, do you remember any of those people?

FP: Well, yeah, there was, I'm trying to think. Ted Ames was one . . .

MJ: It's okay if you can't remember. Let me just turn the tape over.

End of Side One, Tape One
Side Two, Tape One

MJ: This is side two of the interview with Faunce Pendexter. Could you tell me, you, I asked

you about names from the Kiwanis Club but I'd like to move on to names of people who you worked with at the *Sun-Journal*.

FP: Well, I worked… At the time I was there I was in the same office with Art Suter, Rose O'Brien, and then in the newsroom there were, there was Ed Kisonek, K-I-S-O-N-E-K. He was the city editor. And Clifford Hodgman, H-O-D-G-M-A-N, and Bruce Huntington, Margaret Mitchell; this covers quite a span in years.

MJ: That's great.

FP: Maxine, I can't say her last name of course.

MJ: Maxine?

FP: Her first name, Maxine, damn.

MJ: Can you tell me some of your most interesting political stories from working at the *Sun-Journal*?

FP: Well, one was that I… John Kennedy came to Maine; he was running for president and I asked him a question he didn't like.

MJ: Do you remember what that question was?

FP: In effect it was, "How can you hope to do what you're planning to do when the cost will be as high as it obviously will be?" And he answered it as most politicians answer things; circle round without giving you a real answer.

MJ: So he did not give you a straight answer?

FP: It was pretty oblique, yeah. And I remember that, yeah. As far as Ed Muskie was concerned, I found him very straightforward for the most part. He'd side step something a little bit now and then as all politicians do but he was very, very straightforward generally, and, something that I always appreciated. Maddening when you can't get a "yes" or "no", like some of these questions they ask the public to vote on and we have more of votes of this type where "yes" means "no" and "no" means "yes", which is an asinine way to do it. And in Maine we've had a little trouble with that, it's not, doesn't make any sense. And hopefully they'll get away from that technique. I don't go for it. I remember Ed writing a letter on that after I was through with the paper.

MJ: After you were through with the paper?

FP: Well, after I retired. And I was with them right through my sixty-ninth year. I liked the job, I liked the writing of editorials. And, but then I thought I'd rather play a little more golf. And I

played golf with Ed Muskie once in Washington. My wife and I had gone down there with our daughter too thinking it would be a good educational experience for her, (the daughter I'm talking about), and I had the chance that time… I'd planned it in advance; Ed Muskie has just taken the game up within a year I guess and Hathaway . . .

MJ: Bill Hathaway?

FP: Bill Hathaway, who was a good golfer, played with us and he had the low score by quite a few strokes. And this was the first time I'd played since the year before because, up in Maine, playing in January and February is a little difficult. So I, Ed and I tagged after and I did edge Ed out by two strokes, but it was fun. And he was fun to play with; he didn't blow his stack and you know, carry on when he flubbed a shot. [It] took me twenty years to get over that when I played. I started at age eleven and I used to have a ridiculous temper on that.

MJ: But Muskie was calm?

FP: Oh yeah, and I did get so after I was fifty, when I was calm. I wasn't as bad as one of the two fellows I heard of. One threw his bag of clubs in the water, not when I was playing with him, and another one threw his caddie in the water. That was not around here, it was a story; it may be an old fib too. I've seen some pretty ridiculous performances put on by golfers.

(*Taping stopped.*)

MJ: . . . . other, were there other incidents that you can remember with Ed Muskie?

FP: I remember once I'd written an editorial which he (*unintelligible word*) over, he wasn't very happy.

MJ: Ed was not very happy?

FP: Nope.

MJ: And why was that?

FP: Well, he didn't like what I wrote.

MJ: What did you write?

FP: Well, it was an opinion and it kind of questioned whether the Democratic bill affair, Democratic Party bill affair was as wise at it could be. And it was at a time when as I recall preparation was being made by Ed to present his program as governor and he didn't care for that too much. And he told me so directly at a meeting and I said, I guess I just said, "Well, that's the way we saw it at the paper; what are you going to do?" So, he got over it. I never got into extensive arguments with politicians on things if I could avoid it because it doesn't change their

mind and they don't change yours.

And the, I had a pretty free hand as an editorial writer. I was lucky that way; I didn't get many front office call-ups to ask, "Why in hell did you write that?" you know? And the paper's policy was quite liberal I think in terms of… Not liberal in a sense of let's spend a lot of money and see what we can do, but liberal in a sense of viewpoints. It was pretty good. And it, it was pleasant to… I don't think I could have stayed with a paper which had views that were much different than mine.

MJ: In what ways?

FP: Well, oh for example on major questions like abortion, certain foreign affairs items; all of that. I would have found it quite impossible to write things I didn't believe in. And I didn't have to do that. And if I did, if the paper's position on something was different than mine, I just didn't write about it. Worked out pretty well. Had a general manager there that, the last years that I wrote, was very good, and, about things. And if it hadn't been basically pleasant, why I would have left before I did. But I just, by then I was sixty-nine years old; I thought, "Well, you've written enough; let somebody else pound the keys." I figured I, I figured out that over the years at the newspaper I probably had written about sixteen million words; that's a lot of words. I may have been off a million or so but it wasn't far different from that, you know. So I guess perhaps I'd mouthed off enough when I quit. But I enjoyed it. If I could go back to age twenty-five, I'd, if I had a choice of occupations, that's what I'd choose because it was interesting.

MJ: Can you tell me when working with the newspaper, how frequently did Ed Muskie visit this area, the Lewiston-Auburn area?

FP: Oh, fairly even, fairly often. Probably every, somewhere around, you'd see him every three months. But I went up to Augusta to the, a weekly meeting he had as governor up there to fill the press in on what he was thinking of and what, what happened, transpired and so forth; sort of similar to the sessions that presidents have carried on. And as governor he held these and they were well done; he did a good job.

MJ: What events or circumstances do you remember that brought Ed Muskie to this area particularly?

FP: Well of course he grew up in Rumford which isn't too far away, and he had a strong base here; this was a Democratic area by and large. And so he had a lot of friends in this area; political friends. And he, I'm sure he wanted to be sure he kept the constituents he had. And of course, Maine has kept a lot of different politicians in office quite a few years; Margaret Chase Smith and Bill Cohen. So they put in this limitation on how many years you could hold office of course, and I wouldn't be surprised if they might lengthen it eventually. I don't know that but I wouldn't be surprised. I think the worst of it is with that, if you are doing a good job, a real superior job as governor or as a House member or Senate member, and then you've got to leave,

it's too bad. In the Senate, why the amount of clout you have in the federal government is important. In the House, the amount of common sense that you can provide and maybe prevent some stupid thing being done, is worthwhile and valuable. So I'm not all that gung-ho on term limitations. Actually the electorate for the most part can determine that pretty well I think, but not in all the states, not in all circumstances. I'd rather have a competent state senator or state representative staying in office for four terms than to have a bumbler there for two, that's all. But . . .

MJ: Can you tell me, do you think, do you think the political views over the years have changed in this area? You said that it was strong, a strong Democrat area, roughly seventy percent?

FP: Well, it may have changed locally a little bit. I, but it's still fairly strong leaning towards Democrats.

MJ: Does the newspaper reflect that?

FP: I don't see that the newspaper has gone into that much; they don't seem to encourage it or discourage it. I think wherever that kind of situation develops, if it gets too one sided it's unfortunate, personally. For years I was a, growing up I was a, leaned Republican but the way this Republican House is acting I right now think they're a bunch of, not all of them… But I mean they're really making a mess of things.

MJ: So your family background is Republican?

FP: Yeah, I guess I'd say it was. But there are Republicans and Republicans and I never saw a party that didn't have a number of lemons in it. So I voted for quite a lot of Democrats over the years.

MJ: Was Norway particularly Democrat or Republican when you were growing up?

FP: When I was growing up it was Republican.

MJ: It was Republican.

FP: It may have switched now.

MJ: What was it like growing up in Norway?

FP: Well, very nice. I liked Norway; it was a pretty place, had a beautiful lake and it was country. It isn't like it is now. Our main street now is kind of nothing really, in a way. They had a couple of shoe shops there. That provides a lot of employment in terms of the town's population and that of South Paris which is right next door, a mile and half away or less. But, hell, it was a nice place to grow up in; better than it would be today probably. I don't mean to indicate I think that the past represented the grand old days, because the past had its flaws. But I

think it's harder today to raise a child and the violence problems.

MJ: Can you tell me, what did you do socially growing up in Norway, Maine?

FP: Well, as a young fellow, before, you know, I went to high school dance they held every week I guess. And, but basically I was out playing sandlot baseball, throwing my hundred and ten pounds into fellows that weighed a hundred and seventy playing football. And best sport I had was hockey; I really liked hockey and played it pretty well. I learned how to hip check and you can do quite a job on a big ox hip checking if you know how to do it.

MJ: What was there to do socially in Lewiston?

FP: Well, Lewiston… My wife and I, I guess we went to quite a lot of movies more than anything. There wasn't too much to do. From Norway, though, we used to drive down and go to the dance hall out in Auburn, by the Little Androscoggin River. And that was nice. They had some big bands come; not the biggest but they had some real good ones. And we used to come down and dance; enjoyed that a lot.

MJ: What were some of the most well-known social clubs in Lewiston?

FP: I don't know, frankly. I've seen the names but I don't… I think there were more Franco-American clubs, and still are, than any other really.

MJ: Did the social clubs serve any political purpose?

FP: Yes, I would expect so, yeah.

MJ: Do you know anything about that?

FP: Not too much because I didn't… In local elections they may have served quite a purpose but I didn't know which club was tied up with which candidate. I just covered the election maybe at times, I mean, but by and large I didn't, didn't get into that. But I'm sure they played a part.

MJ: What was the economic situation for you and most of the people you associated with in this area?

FP: When, when I got here, or?

MJ: Yes.

FP: Well, it wasn't as bad as it sounds. You could make out pretty well, (as far as being comfortable), if you earned twenty bucks a week. But the costs of things was way down. Hamburg was twenty-five cents a pound; ice cream was thirty-five cents a quart. Although if you

got butter pecan it was thirty-nine cents a quart, so you didn't have butter pecan too often because that was something you didn't need to do. You could get, you know, get along with coffee ice cream, chocolate ice cream, vanilla ice cream and so forth. But it was an interesting experience to budget and you could do it.

MJ: What is your ethnic background?

FP: I'm English, Scots, a wee bit of Welsh maybe. But I go back on my dad's side to the days of William the Conqueror. I remember being with William. No, but the name was *point de ster*, Point of the Star, and some aunt of his went into the genealogy and there were members of the family that were back there with William. So I, Norman French, so there is that side of it. It's pretty thin I think that line, but it's there. The only thing that bothered my father, a lot of his historical novels had a… He was recognized as an authority on the American Indians and he regretted we couldn't, he couldn't find, nobody could, that there was any Indian blood in the family. And, you know, you'd think somebody might have, like Uncle Oscar, might have jumped the fence at some time or some point that, I didn't have an Uncle Oscar. That's the point. We never found it, disturbing. Dad always said it was kind of disappointing not to find, that there was not one pirate in the family and of course in the seventeen hundreds and the eighteen hundreds, early eighteen hundreds there were pirates coming along up here. Dixie Moe and . . .

MJ: So did both your parents live in Maine growing up?

FP: Yes, damn. Um, I'm not sure whether my, my mother might have been in Massachusetts when she was born maybe. I guess not, no, it was some older members, aunts of hers that were; Weymouth, Mass. And, no, she was born in Norway.

MJ: She was born in Norway, Maine?

FP: And dad was born in Pittsfield, Maine.

MJ: Now you've told me a little bit about the Chamber. I'd like to go back for a minute. You told me a little bit about your work in the Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis Club, and the newspaper obviously. But so, besides your job, what other roles have you played in the Lewiston community over the years? What did those jobs entail?

FP: Well, Kiwanis we had an annual pancake breakfast and one year I was, had charge of that. And it involved cooking it seemed like an endless number of pancakes. And, but, and you had to see that the ones who were cooking them had their gas line adjusted right; otherwise you'd wind up… We had one fellow; he was one that didn't like to be told anything. And he'd get pretty cranky so people were complaining about some pancakes that were black on the outside and runny in the middle. If you get it too hot that's what'll happen; you get a black pancake with a gooey center. That isn't very good; no one wants one like that. So that was the year I was in charge and I remember going down, and he'd gone into the store to have a little nip and so I went

down to his grill and turned the thing back, and from then on he made pretty good pancakes. But there were; it was a lot of fun. You saw a lot of people from around the community that you knew.

MJ: So the Kiwanis Club sponsored many community events?

FP: Oh quite a few, yes, just like Rotary. And it was, it was worthwhile. As far as the Chamber, why, it was concentrating on keeping the business climate here reasonably logical. And I think the Chamber's done a lot of good things. But you have to, if you're a member the Chamber though, I think you have to be sensible; don't get carried away like American Rifle Association or groups like that. You have to know what is plausible and possible and reasonable for your community or the state. And you can be sure that whatever you decide, there'll be some businessman who will think you're nuts. I know there were several businessmen when I was president of the Chamber I thought were nuts. They were, you know, kind of peppery or a little bit overbearing. I had to tell one fellow off I know.

MJ: In doing these various jobs, what were some of the most significant changes that you've noticed over the years in Lewiston?

FP: Well I've noticed the last few years that overall it seems like the people who are clerking in stores, or running a business like selling lumber or whatever, are more polite and more outgoing in their relationships with customers. You know, any, when you leave they wish you a nice day [or] whatever, "thank you" and all that. You didn't get too much of that years ago. And I think that's probably due to owners waking up to the fact that if you don't do that you're going to lose some business. And I think it's important for Maine to have the people who are waiting on customers or whatever to keep that up. Courtesy seems to have gone out the window general speaking, I mean, but not in the businesses.

But elsewhere and the parents aren't doing a very good job on the whole teaching their youngsters to be polite. And now that I'm eighty-four years old, I'll say to be respectful. They don't have to agree with you. But at least, you know, some of them are just ridiculous. And parents at times, like, will give in on something that they probably shouldn't or will interfere with something the school's trying to do to improve discipline and will take the kids' side. Like, to me it's an offense to see a big gom sitting in school, in a classroom with a hat on. I think it's ridiculous. I had a principal; if you sat in school with your hat on, he'd a whopped it off you. Nowadays if that happened, why the principal would get sued by the parents for cruel and abusive treatment of their darling boy. And that's too bad. I mean, I don't think, I don't think fundamental, or respectful behavior is, should be outlawed but it seems like it's getting less and less over the years.

MJ: So you think fundamental beliefs have changed a lot?

FP: I think in some ways they have.

MJ: Were you religious growing up?

FP: I went to church some but I wasn't a fanatic about it.

MJ: What was the religious, the religion of the majority of Maine communities, particularly the Lewiston-Auburn area?

FP: Well here there was of course a strong Roman Catholic population and in the small towns there was more apt to be Congregational, Methodist, Universalist and some others. I never particularly, I never felt just gripped by religious intensity in terms of this church or that church. As a kid I guess I went to the church that served the best suppers. But, I'm a believer but I'm not one that, oh, gets carried away by all of it. I think it's a, people have their own beliefs and I wasn't brought up particularly to go to one particular church. And I think it's very good that children are brought up to have a belief but not to put down other beliefs. Same way with races. I didn't feel, I never felt threatened by blacks or others. We had, at Bowdoin there were three black students when I went in there. And one of them was, I was an English major and one of them was an English major and he came over to my room a couple of times or we'd study together, great guy. He's passed away, but he was an intelligent, top-notch fellow. And I was very sad to read that he had passed away.

MJ: Do you remember his name?

FP: Knoxdale. He was a nice, nice chap. And yet at that time, and I look back and I think how dumb you were, when I was in college I didn't, the fraternity wouldn't accept blacks.

MJ: Really.

FP: No. And that's horrible when you think about it.

MJ: Were you politically affiliated in college?

FP: No.

MJ: Were you, you mentioned that your family background is somewhat Republican...

FP: It was. But dad I know, one occasion, he told me once, he said, "I voted," (I can't remember who it was for), but he said, "He's a Democrat", but he says, "he's got his head on his shoulders." He'd vote Democrat when it seemed more sensible. I vote for the individual's capabilities and the type person he is, or she is, and that's all that matters to me.

MJ: Were your parents politically active?

FP: No.

MJ: What was the political outlook in this area when you moved here in '37?

FP: Strongly Democratic.

MJ: You said it was strongly Democrat. But were there groups or unions at all, or did groups from the mill . . .?

FP: Well there must have been unions from the mills I suppose, but I, I just never saw any sense in it. Voting for someone because they were one or the other, or even some independent group type. I couldn't see any point in just saying, "Well I've got to vote for so and so because he's this or that." I want to know what type individuals they are. You make some misjudgments. But, same way with the ethnic business. That's a lot of foolishness.

MJ: Did you become interested in the political arena when you had to start doing stories?

FP: Oh sure. I was interested in the ones that were running and what they stood for and so on, and what the prospects were if this one or that one got in and so on. But I didn't really base it much on which party they were with, which, how their brains worked.

MJ: Who were some of the key people involved in politics in Lewiston?

FP: Well, I'm not up on it today like I was. I wouldn't… There were two or three I knew in the past that were very prominent.

MJ: Do you remember their names?

FP: Yeah, Louis Jalbert, Paul Couture and probably a couple others. But I, those are two that are most prominent in my mind.

MJ: How did politics function in a highly Democratic area like Lewiston?

FP: Well, it was pretty one-sided. You didn't get many people in Lewiston who were Republicans who were appointed to anything. It was a sparse desert out there for them by and large. Here and there somebody would break through but it was a minor miracle. And I never thought either party was capable of proving they were right a hundred percent of the time. I just can't; it doesn't happen. Not all the wisdom is within the brains of people who are only Democrats or people who are only Republicans. So…

MJ: Can you think of others in the community who would be valuable sources of information for this project?

FP: I'd have to think that over a bit. You see most of the people who were involved at the time I was with things going on around here, in Muskie's day, were, have gone too. I mean, they haven't, they've either just retired and they aren't doing anything anyway in their line, or they've

passed on.

MJ: Okay, I need to stop the tape; we're running out of time.

End of Side Two, Tape One
Side One, Tape Two

MJ: This is tape two, side A of the Faunce Pendexter interview at Muskie Archives on March [*sic*] 14th, 1999 with Meredith Gethin-Jones. I was asking you about some of the people who would be valuable for the project, but, and I'd like to go on to ask you about some of the people who were influential or of significant influence on you and your community involvements in Lewiston.

FP: Well, of course the owner of the paper here was influential on me in a sense. He was a very dedicated individual: L. B. Costello, Louis B. Costello. And he was very dedicated to the communities of Auburn and Lewiston and he wanted editorial commentary that reflected the pluses of the communities. And not imaginative writing but accurate and down-to-earth commentaries that would show the communities up in their proper light.

And we, back in the forties and fifties of course, why, Portland was the golden swan in Maine as far as the economy. And Lewiston and Auburn were working on it to get more, a better piece of pie. And during the periods of 1950 to 1970 I think they have, did make progress. And they've made some since then. So the, of course there's another problem that Maine has to face and that is that the northern counties are not as well equipped to deal with business growth as the southern and central ones. But I think they're going to make gains that will be helpful, too. I'm sure there'll be a cooperative effort and Maine will stand out as a state that has a lot of, a lot to offer. And if we utilize our resources wildly, wisely not wildly, wisely, I think the state will make a lot of progress the next decade.

MJ: You mentioned Costello; do you remember any other significant figures in this community?

FP: Well, there were, I think in a ways groups of people, there were the Traftons . . .

MJ: Right, the Trafton family.

FP: . . . and Costello's son Russell, and . . .

MJ: How did you meet these people who were influential?

FP: Well when I moved here and working at the newspaper, why I, obviously reporting and this and that, I'd run into some of them. Steve Trafton went to Bowdoin College. He was ahead of me of course in the years but I met him here and at one or two Bowdoin times. I'll be going in May, this month, or maybe it's June. I'm going down to Bowdoin and I'll, as one of the old

guard I'll meet a few people who were there when I was there. Been out for forty, sixty-five [*sic*] years and I imagine there'll be one or two from this area; I don't know but guessing there probably will be.

MJ: How did L. B. Costello influence you?

FP: Well, he was a very kind individual and I suppose it would be termed quite conservative, but he emphasized in newspaper work the need for stories to be accurate and not colored by personal opinion. And of course editorials, you probably now and then get a little coloration on personal opinion but he wouldn't have ever gone for outlandish positions on issues. It kind of made me think that what was important was getting it right, and in the case of social matters be on the liberal side to the extent of not condemning anything that was proposed as a change, but when it came to financial matters being conservative. And those two positions I think if they're adopted pretty generally by individuals and businesses will pay off in the long run for those involved and for others who are involved with them.

MJ: How have politics changed since, say, the 1950s in the Lewiston-Auburn area?

FP: Well, it seems to me they aren't quite as involved with vitriolic commentaries by people as they used to be, which is just opposite of the federal politics which have become quite disagreeable and nasty I think. Thirty years ago or more, probably more, Lewiston politics used to get pretty, pretty peppery and a lot of foolishness as a result was uttered at times. It wasn't limited to one party; it seemed to be a rather general situation. I think that has improved a lot basically.

MJ: So was there political tension between the two cities?

FP: Yeah, when I first came here Auburn and Lewiston were rivals on some things. I don't know as, well, at times it probably was bitter. And now they are cooperating pretty well. I think that's good.

MJ: So the political tension has subsided since then.

FP: Yes, I think so. Once, if cities border each other, it's not uncommon to have jealousies flare up and undercutting attempted and all of that. But I think Auburn-Lewiston have become quite civilized now on that score and they're trying to work out a "common denominator" approach to improving their respective economies.

MJ: Now, can you tell me what are some of the memorable events or circumstances from your experiences in politics in Maine, aside from Muskie or connected with Muskie?

FP: Well I guess the most significant event involved Muskie and that was when the owner of the *Union Leader* newspaper in Manchester, New Hampshire attacked Muskie's wife in a editorial commentary that was utterly uncalled for and brought Ed out into the street crying, he

was so mad. It may have cost Muskie a presidential nomination. It was a rotten thing that was done. And when it, after it happened I think one of the strongest editorials I ever wrote involved this incident and it was absolutely a inexcusable thing that the, that Loeb, the owner of the Manchester paper did. It's the kind of thing that should never happen in any newspaper that pretends or claims to be fair and not going to go into mud slinging.

MJ: Did other editorial writers in Maine have similar reactions?

FP: I think most of them did. I didn't get to see all the papers but I know… I'm sure I read editorial comment from one of the Portland papers if not two of them, and the Bangor paper I think. And as far as I was concerned, I thought it was the most disgusting write-up, editorial write-up that I had seen in years, and I still do.

MJ: What was your association with Ed Muskie?

FP: Well, really that of a reporter who attended his news conferences and liked the man. And as a matter of fact Ed came to our house here in Lewiston two or three times, set and chatted with me about public affairs. And I obtained some useful knowledge on the issues at the time, and very helpful.

MJ: Do you remember what some of those public affairs were at the time?

FP: I can't. It's, after forty-four years of that business, why it just, it's sort of like a kaleidoscope of activities that went on. But it was, we had very, we had very nice conversations together and we didn't always agree and I think that's wholesome, too. If everybody agreed on something, why the day would come when if everybody agreed and all the whole world took this agreement and accepted it, that whatever is agreed upon might prove to be very unsatisfactory.

MJ: Did you and Ed Muskie meet at his weekly governor meetings in Augusta?

FP: Yes, usually.

MJ: That's where you first met him?

FP: I'm sure I missed a few because there'd be other things I had to do but I liked to go up there and get the, hear the comments he made and the comments made by fellow newspaper people. And you could learn quite a lot from that.

MJ: Do you remember any of the major issues?

FP: Not really. Well, I'm afraid, (maybe I need to take more gingko pills), I don't know, but no, I can't really, specific.

MJ: But you did become somewhat friends?

FP: Oh we were good friends.

MB: You were good friends?

FP: Yeah, it wasn't a next-door neighbor type of friendship but it was a basically sound relationship that was satisfactory and enjoyable.

MJ: Did you and he have differences?

FP: Oh yes, we didn't agree on everything. I never met a politician in Maine or outside Maine or reading about the various presidents and their comments, I never met, have read their comments with whom I agreed on everything. That would be too much to expect. Now, I don't, it may sound fat-headed but I just don't think that you can accept all the ideas that presidents make, give out. And in some cases there might be a president that you remember with whom you didn't agree hardly ever, so there. But that's what makes life interesting I guess.

MJ: How did you deal with those differences?

FP: Just talked them out. If there was no hope of a… I think you make adjustments because sometimes you might disagree with a person and yet that person would have one or two very good points in your mind. And maybe one or two of the points you made would be acceptable to him or her. And just, if you don't get into a emotional discussion, why, generally you can come out with something that seems reasonable.

MJ: What do you think were some of Ed Muskie's major qualities as both a politician and as a friend?

FP: Well I think he was, he was capable of telling it like it is on most issues, and not involving himself with appearing too assertive and too, (oh, what do I want to say?), too aggressive. He said about what he thought and he generally made pretty good sense. And he was likeable and in view of his height and overall stature he was an impressive figure to look at. He looked something like [Sen. John F.] Kerry of Massachusetts if you're on, you've seen Kerry on TV? You haven't. Well, he's tall, relatively thin and he was an all-around good chap really. And I guess that's what counts with me more than individual political point. He was very good.

MJ: Do you remember any events or circumstances that illustrate has character and abilities?

FP: Well, not when, not particularly when I was on the newspaper. But I was thinking the time he became, he was dealing with the Secretary of State's job. He did an excellent job; common sense approach to things.

MJ: He had a common sense approach to things?

FP: Oh yes, very much so. And he did generally on issues. As I say, not always did I agree with him but that isn't, wasn't what I was being paid to do. But on the other hand I think it's… I do sense that some news people are so impressed with their own significance that they like to pick and disagree every time a politician stands out. They go at 'em as if they were the devil, and I think that's too bad. I think there's too much of that today. The same idea as, really, if you were a racist why that means that anyone who is of a different hue, color, you've got to needle them. And the same way with religion, people who are narrow-minded on that subject consign those of other religions to hell, which doesn't seem to accord with the teachings of the major religions.

But that's why they, I have no patience with that sort of thing. And I think people should be judged for what they are. If somebody turned up who was green through some crazy malfunction of birth, they shouldn't be ostracized and criticized and maybe brutally assaulted because they're different. That's one problem with our society. And it's pretty scary when you think of it that the human race which has existed since eight, ten thousand years before the birth of Christ hasn't learned how to get along; with members of it, with each other. Oh I can understand two individuals not liking each other. But I don't understand, I don't understand it being based on color or religion. It's too bad.

MJ: Can you tell me . . . . I'd just like to go back to Ed Muskie. What influences did he have on you? You talked about his common sense a little bit, during his term as Secretary of State.

FP: Yeah, well I think he, I learned a lot about how you head a state government, (not that I had any ambition to head a state government). But I learned quite a bit because he handled himself very well. He was very competent. And he displayed a temperament that was very acceptable. And I just liked him, he was… But there again you like somebody maybe very much, but if you're writing editorials you should treat someone who is your friend exactly the same way you treat someone whom you thought was a pain in the butt; doesn't matter. When you're writing those editorials you should be… You don't want to get into personalities too much.

MJ: What influences did Ed Muskie have on Maine?

FP: Well I think he spoke out for Maine and as governor he was a prominent figure, and later as senator of course, and he kind of helped bring Maine into the mainstream if you will. And that was important. I think, I feel that during his leadership in Maine and then his prominence in the Senate that he really advanced the overall national view of Maine as a, not the state tucked way up in the northeast and out of the routine of things, but definitely as a state that had produced and was producing some outstanding people. Of course I'm prejudiced; I'll admit that, I'm a Maniac all the way. But if I could be born again, I would not choose to be born in any other state than the state of Maine.

MJ: Really. What do you think were some of his other major contributions to Maine besides putting it in the so-called "mainstream"?

FP: Well, I think he had basically sound judgment. As governor, this stood us in good shape. And I felt that as a senator he carried on the same kind of sound function that had been displayed by Margaret Chase Smith. She was an outstanding senator. And then we had Cohen come along. Maine, in Washington at the time, had some pretty outstanding people, just as it did at the turn of the century when we had Czar Reed and, oh, I can't say it, but anyway. We would have had James D. [G] Blaine as a president if some idiot minister hadn't stood up and had a political get together and said, "and he's against Rome, Romanism and rebellion." "Romanism", imagine saying that. Can you imagine saying anything that would anger more people than that charge? Crazy. And the man thought he was helping Blaine; he killed him right there. So when you make a political speech, you'd better be careful.

MJ: What do you, what was Ed Muskie's reputation in the Lewiston-Auburn political circles?

FP: I think he was held in generally, in general high esteem, in my opinion.

MJ: Have I missed anything important from your experiences that you want others to know about you, your times, or Ed Muskie?

FP: I don't think so. I don't think we're too concerned with how, what success I had as a fisherman or that sort of thing. No, I don't think so. I think I really said more than I intended to. I didn't expect to say much.

MB: Well, thank you very much for your time, Mr. Pendexter.

FP: Oh, you're very welcome.

End of Interview
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