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## Pringle, Anne oral history interview

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## **Interview with Anne Pringle by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Pringle, Anne

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

November 2, 2001

### **Place**

Portland, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 320

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### **Biographical Note**

Anne Pringle was born in Providence, Rhode Island on April 19, 1947, and grew up in a suburb of Providence called Barrington. She graduated from Connecticut College for Women in 1969 with a major in Government and an emphasis on American History. She married Harry Pringle, and they moved to Boston, where she worked for the Bank of Boston. In 1973 they moved to Maine and Anne became Treasurer of the Maine State Housing Authority from 1973 to 1977. She then worked for the Maine Savings Bank, where she became a vice president, and was active in city politics. She helped obtain the UDAG grant to build the Portland Museum of Art and improve Congress Square. In the early 1990s she was elected city councilor and for one year served as Mayor of Portland. She served on the Maine Commission on Legal Needs, which Senator Muskie chaired.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Maine Commission on Legal Needs; UDAG; Portland Museum of Art; Muskie's speaking abilities; Portland, Maine community history; Democratic Party in Maine; and Pine Tree Legal Services.

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## **Transcript**

**Don Nicoll:** It is Friday, the 2nd day of November, 2001. We are at 44 Neal Street, N-E-A-L Street, in Portland at the home of Anne and Harry Pringle. Don Nicoll is interviewing Anne Pringle. Anne, would you state your full name and spell it for us, and give us your date of birth and place of birth?

**Anne Pringle:** Anne Pringle, A-N-N-E, P-R-I-N-G-L-E. I was born in Providence, Rhode Island on April 19th, 1947.

**DN:** And did you grow up in Providence?

**AP:** I grew up outside of Providence in a suburban town called Barrington.

**DN:** And were your folks from that area for a long time, or had they come recently to Providence?

**AP:** Native Rhode Islanders, both of them. My father's family was from France originally, emigrated to the U.S., immigrated I should say, at the turn of the century, as did my mother's father who was from Germany. So, they both, they were both first generation Americans.

**DN:** And growing up in that family, did you get an introduction to American politics, or did your folks stay away from politics?

**AP:** I don't recall really, much discussion about politics. The first election I really remember is the Kennedy-Nixon election in 1960, and I must have been twelve or so. And that was very vivid, I remember actually listening to the Democratic convention in a tree fort in the backyard of a friend of mine, and we listened to it all night long. Maybe not because, so much because it was interesting as it was that we were afraid to go to sleep. Maybe a little bit of both.

**DN:** And you went to school in Barrington?

**AP:** Yes.

**DN:** And where did you go on to school after high school?

**AP:** I went to Connecticut College in New London, it was actually at the time Connecticut College for Women, and was a government major, which at the time was not the very popular major that it is now. We had actually, the year I graduated, 1969, there were eight government majors, so it was a very small major.

**DN:** What led you to major in government?

**AP:** Well I, actually I started off as a history major and was very interested in history, American history in particular, and I took a lot of government courses because it's obviously associated with history. And I found that I became much more interested in political theory and government administration. So I actually had a double major but, I took my, what they called comprehensive exam, three-day exam in government, in the end.

**DN:** And how did you come from Rhode Island and Connecticut to Maine?

**AP:** Well that's, that's a story. My husband was a student at Harvard Law School following a stint in Vietnam. And when he, it was in his third year in law school and we really were pretty much settled on staying in Boston because we loved Boston, but he was interviewed at Harvard Law School by Dan Drummond who was the founding partner of a small firm at the time, Drummond, Wescott and Woodsum. And he invited us to come up to Maine to interview with this firm, and he said, and we'll pay for a car and we'll pay for you to come for the weekend. We had absolutely no money, so this was a free weekend in Maine, as far as we were concerned, and so we said, AWe'll just go do it.@ And we came up on a glorious October day, much like today is, the second day of November, Don, and Dan took Harry for the day, interviewed at the firm and then we had a wonderful dinner party that night at the Drummond's home, with wonderful company, and we just said, AWow, this is the way we want to live.@ So they offered us, Harry a job and we came, to make a long story short. And we said, AIf we don't like it we'll leave after a year.@ And that was almost thirty years ago, it is thirty years ago.

**DN:** When did you and Harry meet?

**AP:** In college. I was a junior at Connecticut College and he was a senior, so it's 1968, on a blind date. And -

**DN:** And there you have it.

**AP:** Right.

**DN:** And when you came to Maine and you settled here, and Harry was in the law firm, did you work outside the home?

**AP:** Yes, yes. Actually, when I was in Boston, when he was in law school, I put him through law school and I worked at the Bank of Boston, really because when I graduated from college I was not able to get a job in government. It was in Boston, and getting a job in government was very much associated with who you knew in government, and we knew nobody, so I wasn't able to get a job in government. So I ended up in a bank in the investment field, and through that connection I met some Maine bankers. And when I moved here one of them kindly put me in touch with a job opening at the Maine State Housing Authority, where I became the treasurer. So I was able to meld my financial experience that I had by that time with my interest in government, because the Housing Authority is a quasi-governmental agency. So it was a wonderful transition for me.

**DN:** And was this in the mid-seventies?

**AP:** 1973 to 1977, I was there; very early years of the Housing Authority.

**DN:** And you continued with them until '77 you say. And then, did you go to the bank then?

**AP:** I went to Maine Savings Bank, originally as the assistant to the president, Bob Masterton. And that was an interesting transition because Bob was a Republican, I was a Democrat, and one of the roles I began to assume, working with him, was working with the legislature on banking issues. It was good to have somebody who could, you know, we sort of had both parties covered, if you will. And we just really enjoyed working together in that regard.

**DN:** And Bob himself was an interesting fellow.

**AP:** Yes, yeah.

**DN:** And his wife, who was active in the League of Women Voters.

**AP:** And a legislator. She was a legislator at the time, I think.

**DN:** And when did you get involved in urban politics, that is, the city of Portland?

**AP:** Well, during my years at the bank I evolved from being his assistant to being vice president for retail lending, which is mortgage lending and consumer lending, and the bank was a very active public citizen in terms of affordable housing. So because of my experience with the Housing Authority, and because of my role at the bank, being head of mortgage lending, I was very much involved with state initiatives for affordable housing at the time.

**DN:** And that led to involvement in the city.

**AP:** Yes. When I testified before the city council numerous times about, you know, the bank's view of housing needs in the city of Portland, and also at the federal level before the House Banking and Currency Committee supporting the issuance of mortgage revenue bonds.

**DN:** So you went to Washington to testify.

**AP:** Yes.

**DN:** And when did you meet Senator Muskie?

**AP:** Well, one of the things I did at the bank was, I was on the board of the Portland Museum of Art when it had the wonderful opportunity presented by Charles Shipman Payson to bring his wonderful collection of Winslow Homer paintings to Maine, back to Maine if you will. But we needed to build a new museum to accommodate the works, which were incredibly valuable and not really able to be adequately maintained in the then existing museum building which was very small and was not climate controlled and so forth. So we were working on developing a new museum to house these works, and also an expanding museum collection, and we knew we would have to raise a lot of money in a small community and that this would be a daunting challenge, notwithstanding that Mr. Payson ultimately made a major gift.

The board chair at the time, as I recall, was [D.] Brock Hornby, who's now a federal judge, somehow came across a federal program called the UDAG Program, Urban Development Action Grant Program, and said, AGee, maybe this is a source of money for this museum project because we will become an economic engine for the city of Portland and because people will want to come to the museum to see these Homer paintings, and also the other paintings in the museum's expanding collection.@ So because I had been in government, state government, he asked me to look into the program and determine was this something that we might be able to make a case for. So I got the UDAG regs and I read through them and I thought, well, this will be a long shot. But, you know, maybe we can make the case, but we need to wrap it into something beyond just the Portland Museum of Art because, you know, that'll be a hard case to make.

So, working with Bob, we approached the City of Portland and said, you know, AWe have a vision to make the Portland Museum of Art the centerpiece for the improvement of Congress Square,@ which at that time was a very downtrodden section of the city. There was a Dunkin' Donuts on the corner next to the Eastland Hotel, as I'm sure you remember, that was the hot spot for prostitution in Portland. And it just was visually not a very attractive place. So we approached the city manager at the time, A.J. Wilson, with this notion of applying for a UDAG grant to include doing something about that corner, doing some streetscape improvements, you know, sort of spiffing up the whole area. And it was interesting at the time because I don't think he thought this was something that could be pulled off, that, and they didn't, the City was very reticent about being embarrassed in front of HUD by coming up with some half cocked idea, that they would laugh them out of Washington for it. But we said, ANo, no, you know, we think we can make this case, just give us a chance.@ So they kind of grudgingly agreed to go along with

us, if you will. And Bob said, "Well, we'll go to Washington and we'll meet with these UDAG people."

So he had me call Senator Muskie's office, and I called Estelle Lavoie who I'd met I think through housing connections previously, and asked could, is there any way that she could help set up a meeting with the appropriate staff in the UDAG office, and I explained why, what we were looking for. And as I recall, Estelle as you know, knowing her well, is and was then a very cautious person in, I think, the use of the office of Senator Muskie and the influence that he had. So she wanted to know what we were there about and wanted us to know what they could do and could not do. And basically, as I recall it is, you know, "this may be a long shot but what we can hopefully arrange for you is the opportunity for you to tell your case in the best possible way to the right people. And if you're successful, that'll be great and we'll do what we can to be supportive in an appropriate fashion. But, you know, this is probably not something . . ." The impression I had was that Senator Muskie would not come down with both feet and say I want this grant, that that was not his style. His style was to provide an opportunity for a case to be made as persuasively as possible.

So we did get the meeting, we got the meeting with the director of the UDAG program, who I don't imagine met often with possible applicants. Estelle went with us, and there were several other UDAG staff in the room. And we made the case, which probably did not usually come from the direction it came from, you know, a bank president is not the usual applicant, it's usually a city, and . . . . But we were taking the lead and the City was there as well, but we were taking the lead and I think made the case. We submitted the application, I wrote the museum piece of it, working with a city staff member. Obviously we sent a copy to Estelle, and I only hope she was impressed by it. I assume that we did not embarrass the senator's office with the application. And we were successful, which, you know, we were quite thrilled by obviously, but also rather amazed.

What we were able to do is, the UDAG program required a match, and what we said is, "These Winslow Homer paintings are very valuable, we had them appraised. And they were worth at the time (I think) twelve or thirteen million." And we said, "We want to use that as the match." Because we didn't have a lot of money to persuade, you know, make available to match. And we said, "These paintings are what will create the economic value, these will create the jobs, these will draw people, they will support going to the hotel, and so forth. And that was the case. And you could tell, it's not, if you know anything about the UDAG program, not the usual kind of financial investment they expect to see in the private sector. But it worked."

**DN:** They accepted it in this case.

**AP:** They did. And we were thrilled, needless to say. And after we got the grant, which I think was, oh, I wish I'd remember the number, it was three and a half million or four million or something, and the museum got 2.3 million, and it could not have been built without that, without that grant. We never could have raised that money locally. So, you know, the senator, through his office making that opportunity available to speak directly to these people and tell our case, was totally instrumental in the museum being built.

**DN:** Do you know whether or not he endorsed the application at a later date?

**AP:** I assume he did in some appropriate fashion, but it was not in any way, to my impression, heavy handed or, my impression of him was that that was not his style, at least in that kind of context. But maybe I'm wrong about that.

**DN:** That was his style.

**AP:** To be heavy handed?

**DN:** No.

**AP:** To be?

**DN:** To do just what was done.

**AP:** Yes, yeah. Well my impression just, yeah, from very limited contact with Senator Muskie is just the epitome of a decent person who would do the right thing. And, you know, my impression was the right thing would not be to be pushing around the bureaucracy to do something because you wanted it but, as I say, to make the opportunity available. And, you know, I think, I hope we did him proud by it.

**DN:** You had a very successful project for a variety of good purposes.

**AP:** Yes. Subsequent to that, when we got the grant, of course, we wanted to have a little celebration for the people that were involved. So Tom Valleau, who was assistant city manager at the time, who was the key liaison for this project for the City, arranged a little reception in the State of Maine room, to which Senator Muskie was invited. And it was just maybe ten or fifteen people, and that was the first time I'd ever physically seen Senator Muskie. And it was interesting because he was much different in physical, in the physical presence than I expected. I always considered him kind of Lincolnesque, very tall and big somehow. And he was tall I guess, but not as tall as I somehow had in my mind, but also very slight in physical stature. And it was interesting to see him, and he was a little remote I would say. And I'm sure now that I recognize, having been in politics myself, how many of these things you have to be there for. I think he was pleased to be there and be honored.

**DN:** But there's not a hail fellow, well met -

**AP:** Well, I don't think he, I think that, maybe what I really should be saying is that I don't think he felt that he needed to be thanked to that degree, you know, that he was just kind of doing his job of making our opportunity available to us, and it was successful.

**DN:** Did he speak on that occasion, or?

**AP:** Just very briefly, is all I can recall. Just, you know, you made the case and how he was happy to provide the opportunity, something like that. But, again, it was all just very low key.



**DN:** Now, you continued your increasing involvement in city affairs, and ran for the council ultimately?

**AP:** Yes, in 1990, after I left the bank. 1990 to '94.

**DN:** And served as mayor during that period.

**AP:** Yes, '93 to '94.

**DN:** And you came to be a member of the state Legal Needs Commission.

**AP:** Yes, yeah.

**DN:** How did that happen?

**AP:** Well, I can't remember now, Don, what was the year, is that, was that, I thought I was still at the bank when I was on that, but maybe not?

**DN:** Well that was the early -

**AP:** Early nineties?

**DN:** Early nineties.

**AP:** Oh, hmmm, well, I don't know who asked me to be on it. I'm trying to, it probably would have been through Estelle, I would think, because, you know, we had that good experience. Estelle was, I should say, to get back to UDAG, she was incredibly helpful, very supportive in giving advice and so forth at the time about how best to pitch the thing and so forth, and having sat in on the meeting. But from that we became friends, and I think she must have thought, when they were assembling the team, that this would be something I'd be personally interested in as well as, to have a contribution to make.

**DN:** Had you been involved at all in legal assistance before?

**AP:** No, not at all, no.

**DN:** What, and Senator Muskie chaired that commission. How did the commission work?

**AP:** I don't remember very much about it, frankly. Just a couple of meetings. One meeting, the one meeting which stands out in my mind is, I think there were about, say, fifteen to twenty people on the commission maybe, max, and I remember meeting around a horseshoe shaped table with the senator at the head, obviously. And we had some preliminary stuff, and then we broke down into smaller groups to do some sort of problem solving and actions, developing some recommendations, and then we reported them back. But before we did that I think, or maybe it was before we even set off into this, he spoke about fundamentally what the legal needs

were for the poor. And I was just so taken aback. Again, I cannot remember what he, the substance of what he said, but the image of it to me was just, first of all his resonant voice. And when he spoke he just spoke from the heart about how fundamentally important access to legal services are regardless of your income, and I think maybe giving some examples. And it just was, you know, almost a jaw dropping thing for me. I'm sure for everybody. Many of the people there were friends of his, or who had worked with him and known him before, which I had not. But it just made a huge impression on me. Again, I didn't make the connection at the time, but reemphasizing the core of the person, you know. With the UDAG program, he was not going to use his influence to assure results for a project that might not have been worthy, but he would give an opportunity for us to make our case. And this was, that's just a very decent kind of approach to something. And this was the same thing, it was just like looking into his soul to see how, I'm starting to tear up a little bit over it because it was just such a wonderful example.

As I think back on it now, because I've become involved in recent years in mental illness, which is an important public issue. You know, I hadn't made this connection until we started to talk about this but, when I became involved it was not because I don't have any connection with the issue, I don't have anybody in my family with mental illness or whatever, but it's just a very important public issue. And, you know, so it's sort of like a citizen coming forward to contribute whatever the person can contribute to an important public issue. And, you know, I think that's what Senator Muskie did, that's what, he was just the epitome of public service to me, from my very limited exposure to him.

**DN:** In the course of the work of the commission, how much time did he put in? Did he seem to be putting in a little time, or a -?

**AP:** I think he was, he came to meetings as I recall, he was clearly informed of what, where we were going, he'd done his homework or been briefed.

**DN:** But the small groups in the commission worked on the detailed areas, and then brought back recommendations to the full commission?

**AP:** Yes, yeah.

**DN:** And did he -?

**AP:** And again, he didn't dominate the result or steer it in any fashion. It was, you know, it was giving us the inspiration really to find a way to make this fundamental service available to Maine people.

**DN:** At the end, what did he do when the final report was ready, in your recollection?

**AP:** Well we had, we had some public hearings I recall, and he must have come to one or more of them I think. We had one that I recall at Reiche School, and I think he was at that one. And then we, most of us were, because a number of us were from the Portland area.

**DN:** And after it was over, did you continue your involvement in legal assistance, or had you

by this time focused your attention on mental health needs?

**AP:** My, I did not continue with my focus on the legal system because I'm really not connected to it, except for being married to a lawyer. But we did continue in the sense we began to contribute to Pine Tree Legal Assistance which had not been on our contributions list previously.

**DN:** In the uh, in the end, you've mentioned Senator Muskie's contributions to you as a member of the commission. What was your impression of his general contribution to the legal needs issue at the end of the commission?

**AP:** Well, I think he brought, I think he obviously by his stature and his ability to convey in such incredible and powerful terms the need. He really, I think, made the issue, gave the issue the prominence that it deserved and would not have had without that connection to him.

**DN:** Did you ever discuss the work of the commission with your husband?

**AP:** Yes, yeah. I said, now why isn't your firm doing more, you should be, you know, how much *pro bono* work do you do, how much *pro bono* work do you do personally. And we do, every once a while, we do talk about that. He tries to tell me that he wouldn't be too helpful to too many people, but I'm not sure of that. And his firm is, as I understand it, they have one of the highest rates of contributed *pro bono* work. Bob Hirshon, you know, is Harry's partner and that's something that Bob personally is very proud of, he's the new ABA president. In fact, Bob was on the committee I think.

**DN:** Yes, he was.

**AP:** Yes, and Tony Buxton, and you probably know the other members, Howard Dana.

**DN:** We're interviewing a number of them because this, one of the intriguing questions is why at the time in his life, not very long before he died actually, did Senator Muskie devote so much time and energy to that project. And your, your description of him at that initial meeting is a telling one. As uh, as you look back on your experience, coming to Maine, getting involved in public affairs, and your encounters with Senator Muskie, what do you think about him in the context of Maine politics and Maine civil life?

**AP:** Well, I think he is, you know, obviously the founder really, not the founder, but the founder of the modern Democratic Party. And I think he, by his example, really inspired before me other people who I hold in great regard. I mean, people like Ken Curtis, George Mitchell, Frank Coffin, who is, you know, right up there with Senator Muskie in terms of, I don't know what the words are, but just a marvelous, marvelous person. As are Ken and George as well. But there's just, in all of these people, there's a thread of just fundamental decency and wanting to do the right thing for the right reasons and not for self aggrandizement or stature or anything like that, but just to be true public servants. And that has just been really inspiring to me in my limited public life, to have the example of people like that.

**DN:** Thank you very much, Anne.

**AP:** Oh, I hope it helps.

**DN:** Yes, thank you.

**AP:** I wish my memory were better, Don, but the other -

*End of Interview*