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Interview with Arnold Roach by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Roach, Arnold

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

August 26, 2000

Place

Smyrna Mills, Maine

ID Number

MOH 217

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Biographical Note

George Arnold Roach was born July 28, 1929 in Rockland, Maine. He grew up in Houlton and summered in Rockland. His father, Herbert Roach, was a potato farmer, buyer, and machinery dealer. He attended the University of Maine and later joined the military, where he spent 30 years. He became interested in politics, particularly the Democratic Party in Maine. He worked on several of Muskie's campaigns and stayed involved, both distantly and actively throughout his career. At the time of this interview, he worked for the State of Maine Department of Agriculture as a political appointee.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background; Franklin D. Roosevelt; Roach's military service; Maine and racism; Roach meeting Franklin D. Roosevelt as a little boy; Muskie's 1954 campaign; politics in Maine from the 1930s on; Roach's work with Muskie in the 1980s; Muskie as Secretary of State; Jane Muskie; Glenn Manuel; Joe Brennan; Bob Rush; Joyce Roach; Jim Pierce; Maine's potato industry; Maine Department of Agriculture; Freddy Vahlsing and the sugar beet industry in Maine; farming in Maine and the United States; McGillicuddy family; regional political divides in Maine; George Mitchell; Ed Muskie; and the "inner sanctum" of the U.S. Senate.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Arnold Roach on August the 26th, the year 2000 at just about 1:00 P.M. at his home in Smyrna Mills, Maine. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by giving me your full name.

Arnold Roach: It's George Arnold Roach. R-O-A-C-H, and it's a good Irish name.

AL: And where and when were you born?

AR: I was born in Rockland, Maine on the 28th day of July in 1929 and I was in the same group of people born as Jacqueline Kennedy.

AL: And did you grow up in Rockland?

AR: I grew up in northern Maine but I summered all the time, because my mother's family was from Rockland and my dad was from Aroostook County. So I had the best of both worlds.

AL: And your father, what was his name?

AR: My father's name was Herb, Herbert Roach.

AL: And what did he do for a living?

AR: My father was a potato farmer, potato buyer, machinery dealer and active Democrat.

AL: So he was active in Democratic politics.

AR: Oh yes, yes, my father was a, my father was a Franklin Delano Roosevelt Democrat. He worked through the, he remembers the Depression, and he was a staunch, staunch, he never met a Republican he voted for.

AL: Now he, now you were really just born when the Depression hit so you probably, have any memories?

AR: Yes, I can just, I can remember the, I can remember the Depression and I can remember through the thirties traveling with my dad. My dad was a selectman in the town and I can remember him, not knowing much about politics then, I can remember him swearing about the policies of the Republicans and what they were doing to the little people, what they were doing to the farmers and how bad they were. And he was out working and he was an activist in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his campaigns.

AL: And your mother, what was her family background, what were her parents' names?

AR: She was, her parents, my father was full blooded Irish, he came from Ireland, and they were part of the group that the English moved out back in 1848. And my mother's family came from Norway and they were sea, he owned a, he owned some four-masted sailing vessels and

that's what he did out of port of Rockland.

AL: And growing up in Houlton -

AR: I grew up in the Houlton area, Smyrna Mills, went to schools, at Ricker, I went to the local schools. I went to Ricker in Houlton and attended the University of Maine.

AL: And what was your degree in?

AR: My degree, I'd actually excelled in the military. I stayed in the military and in addition to doing my other stuff I retired from the military, I retired as a full colonel. I had thirty years military service along with other things I did in the agriculture. I had active duty time, then I come back and joined the Maine National Guard and retired from that a number of years ago, fifteen years ago from that.

AL: And your experience in the military, did that take you all over the place?

AR: I've been all over the world, yes, I've been about every, I've been in Russia, China. I've been all over the, I've been in Japan, Korea, clear down to Hong Kong, I've been all over the, I've been all over the Pacific arena, yes.

AL: What, do you have anything that sticks out in your mind as being a really important thing that you learned from all your travels?

AR: How lucky it is to be an American.

AL: In what way?

AR: Just how you see these other countries, what they're like, the way the people live and the way they get through, and the way their governments are. And ours is the best in the world sometimes in spite of itself, so, when you travel and see those other countries you get pretty thankful that, you know, that we do live in a country like this.

AL: Now growing up in this area and in Maine, it was very Republican.

AR: This was a Republican, my family was Catholic and Democrat and this area early in the late '20's and '30's was probably the biggest contingence of Ku Klux Klan and Orangemen that there was in the state of Maine. And one time in Smyrna Mills they had the biggest rally of Ku Klux Klan and Orangemen, which they were the same thing, that was ever held in New England. So we were pretty much in the minority part in this area. We were one of about four families of Catholics and Irish and Democrat that were in the area.

AL: And -

AR: I can remember my father years ago, he was driving a, I can remember just what it was, it was a 1933 Chevrolet and we were driving along the road and I didn't know until many years

later what he meant. But we were driving along the road and there was a dead skunk in the road and my father looked up, yup, he says, another Republican gone to hell. And that's how partisan my father was, my father was a very, very partisan Democrat. Because he saw what the Republicans had done under Herbert Hoover and he saw the directions that they had taken the nation. And he saw what Franklin Delano Roosevelt was doing to the country and trying to bring it up and, and he, that's why he was just a strong, strong Democrat. And he was a farmer, he was a, he was probably one of the few people in the farming community in his time that were Democrats outside the Rushes. Bob Rush and his family at home, they were probably the few Democrats there were in Aroostook County at the time.

AL: Did he ever feel, did people ever make it, or come out against him as, you know, you darn Democrat?

AR: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. Oh yeah, that's (*unintelligible word*), I've handled it all my life, see, with Dad, you know, being, and it wasn't darn, it was always damn Democrat and stuff like that, you know. It was always sort of, although being, not only being Democrat but being Catholic to boot was always a, was always a, always the great thing.

I, I can remember my dad, back in the, back just before the war we were in Rockland, went down there for something with my dad, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was coming into the port of Rockland. He'd been to a conference with Churchill and he was coming in. His yacht came into Rockland and he was picking his car up and was going over to catch the train to go back to Washington. And I can remember like it was yesterday, it was, my dad took me downtown and stood on the corner where, coming up from the pier where the Navy, where the Coast Guard base was then. We got up and we watched Roosevelt, and Dad picked me up, I was pretty little then, and Dad picked me up in the air. He was a huge man, Dad was a big man, rugged. And when Roosevelt's car came up around the corner to make the turn, it hesitated right there on the corner and I was, Roosevelt looked out and saw me, he says, hi there little boy. And I tell everybody I was a Democrat because I was ordained by Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself. So that's when I became a Democrat.

AL: That's a wonderful story. So, did, were you at all politically active, or tell me when you - ?

AR: I was politically active all, all of my life, yes. And even, you know, not so much in school but after I got out. I was in the service, I was always, here again in the military everybody was, most of the people were, particularly in the officer corps, were Republican, I was a Democrat. And I got very heavily involved in the Democratic thing when Ed Muskie was running for his first time for governor because he was a good friend of my Uncle Ace in Houlton. They were both graduates of the same law school, I think they'd been to school together at the time. And they had a lot in common, they both were, served with distinction in WWII. And he used to stay with my Uncle Ace, this is when he was running, and I'd go out there with him and that's how I first, that's the first campaign I really got heavily active in and working for, with my Uncle Ace on Ed Muskie's first campaign for governor. Along with Jean Larson, Bob Rush and the rest of them, Glenn Manuel in the Houlton area, that was the crew that we had working at that particular time.

AL: And what sorts of things did you do?

AR: Well, we did everything we could. We put up signs, called people and, we just did everything, everything we could think of to get the vote out, to talk. I used to go out and talk a lot to people and we formed all kinds of little clubs and stuff to try to get Muskie, Ed Muskie elected and we finally were successful.

AL: Did you get an impression of people's thoughts? I mean, there must have been a lot of Republicans in town that went over to Muskie.

AR: Oh yeah, at the beginning, I ran into it all the time with Ed Muskie, of course there was a lot of resentment because Ed Muskie not only being a Democrat but being Polish and being a Catholic. You know, the Pope's going to get you, and the Pope will get us and all that foolishness. But when people, when he finally got elected people saw what a great man he was and that's when the Republicans started speaking out, would say hey, this is all foolish, worrying about what the Pope was going to do. And he started converting a lot of Republicans to Democrat and he's the one that primarily is responsible for Maine being the political state that it is with having two political parties because then it was all just strictly Republican. If you wasn't a Republican you just didn't do anything, unless you come from a small little town. But you didn't get anywhere in Augusta or anywhere. But Ed Muskie broke that taboo and made it, he made a two party state out of it and the state has been much stronger ever since.

AL: So you met Ed Muskie during that '54 campaign?

AR: Oh yes, I met Ed Muskie many times during the campaign and, when he was campaigning for governor, while he was governor. My Uncle Ace served as his, he also was a full colonel in the Maine National Guard, and he served as Ed Muskie's aide de camp. And I used to go with my Uncle Ace a lot and, down there, I got to know Ed Muskie on a very, very personal deal. And then, I was active in the potato industry at the time up here, too, a lot of stuff. And I would be around it and being the only Democrat there that, Ed always would come to me and myself and a gentleman by the Chip Bull, who is now deceased, used to do a lot of things for Ed in the, as he was governor. Doing things to help him and we'd work very closely with him doing, doing stuff to help him that he, (*unintelligible word*). And we just did it, he'd want stuff done and we'd do it for him.

And then when Ed went on to be senator I had the great privilege of being with him. He took me into the sanctuary a couple of times in the, in the senate, which nobody's supposed to go. But Ed, I went there with, I've had the privilege of being in there with Ed Muskie on two different occasions and that was really a unique thing. And then I had the very distinct privilege of being with him that he announced that George McGillicuddy from Houlton was going to be postmaster. And I, he told me, go call George McGillicuddy and tell him. So I went out and called George McGillicuddy from the senate, from the senate building, told George that he'd just been confirmed as the postmaster for the town of Houlton.

And the other thing I had with him, I was down on a, Chip Bull and I were with him, we were at

the executive building at the White House. And we were with Ed Muskie with a, to a meeting, and they were having, just the same as it is now I guess, things don't change, they were having problems with the potato industry. The price was real bad and they were trying to get some help to help people, help the potato industry. And we went down there for a meeting and we're meeting with the, it was, Jimmy Carter was president, and we were meeting with Vice President Mondale, a group of us. And so Ed Muskie wasn't getting very far with Mondale, and Secretary Bergland who was Secretary of Agriculture, and he said, hey, this is, this going to change. And he turned to Chip Bull and I, he says you two come with me. So I can remember that Ed Muskie, he was getting pretty ugly. When Ed's temper got up he, he had a temper that you wanted to beware of because it was fierce. And so we, Chip and I were, he was taking these gigantic steps and we were walking behind him, we went through from the executive building to the White House and down through a series of passages and every time we'd open a little door (*unintelligible phrase*) there'd be a Secret Service agent standing. When we come up we were up over the, in the White House, heading for the oval office.

And Muskie was saying that's what we (*unintelligible word*), he says, we're going to straighten out, that we're going to go see the man. He said, I am going to be Secretary of State, I've told the president that I will be. I will serve as Secretary of State, and he said, I'm going to go tell him I've got unfinished business to do. So he went over and told the president what he wanted, he said I've got some unfinished business, Mr. President. And Carter says, fine, senator, whatever you want, we'll do it. He took care of it. The president turned to Chip and I, he says come on, let's go back. We went back up to the meeting and they were all standing in disbelief because nobody knew, nobody at that time knew that Ed Muskie was going to be Secretary of State because it hadn't been announced. And he told them, he said well, he said, you check with the man. He said, this is going, this is what's going to be, this is what it's going to do. And he turned to the vice president, he said, I expect you to take care of it, Mr. Vice President. And they did. That was quite an experience, that was an experience of a lifetime.

AL: So you, you know, I mean you knew Ed Muskie in the very earliest of his career and you knew him at the very end. Do you have -?

AR: Yes, yes, I knew him at the very end, I knew him and stayed in touch with him. I, I, he was a great man and, you know, he, I visited Washington a while ago. I went over to, I have a daughter that works there, she took me over to where he's buried and went over around to look and paid my respects and left, yeah.

AL: Did you see, was there a difference in the Ed Muskie in '54 and the Ed Muskie in '80 in regards to style and personality, or -?

AR: Oh yeah- No, there was and there wasn't. There was a st-, there was a difference in him, yes, he was a more, he was a master politician that had become even more skilled. And he would have made a wonderful president and the country really would have been so much better off had he become president. But, yeah, he'd become more polished, more skillful, and he was an orator that was a spellbinder when he got. But as far as being a person, no, Ed Muskie was still Ed Muskie and you'd meet him and he'd kick his shoes off and he really liked, liked a drink, and we used to make sure that we had a little of his favorite stuff around so he could, he could

always have a little something when nobody was looking. And he, no, he was, he was just a wonderful person.

AL: What do you -?

AR: The whole family was, his wife Jane, she is too and, you know, I've lost touch with a lot of them since that but she's a, she was just a remarkable person, too, so they made a great couple.

AL: Talk to me a little bit if you could about some of the people in this area that you know and their backgrounds.

AR: Well, Glen Manuel was one that worked very hard. He also was a farmer from up north of Houlton, Littleton. Glen is now deceased. And Glen was very active back in those days working for Ed Muskie. He worked, did everything he could work, and he was an activist. And he was very controversial because he was a little more outspoken and sometimes, sometimes he didn't choose his words quite wisely. He'd offend people or, you know, he wouldn't really tell them what they wanted to hear sometimes, but he was good. He ran for the senate in those years and become a state senator for a term or two. And then he went on under Joe, when Joe Brennan become governor he went on to serve as Joe Brennan's fish and game commissioner and he did an exceptional, exceptional job as fish and game commissioner. And I used to be, I was very friendly with Glen Manuel and I used to go with him and we used to travel a lot to meetings. And even when he was fish and game commissioner we used to go a lot together and I probably was one of the last persons that spoke to him just before he died. He was a nice man, a real, he was a Democrat's Democrat.

AL: Do you know anything about his family background?

AR: I, Yeah, Glen, Glen came from a poor family, came out from the Hodgdon area. He had a brother that got shot down in the South Pacific and wrote a book. He was a very famous individual, he survived on an island with the Japanese, the Japanese were looking for him over there. And he worked, but Glen was a worker, he did everything he could to make a living. He worked as a potato inspector and he did all kinds of things on the farm, bought potatoes and different things to survive. But when he finally had an opportunity to become fish and game commissioner he left the farm and went and did that and he retired from that. It gave him a pension, but he was a, he was a, he never quit being an active Democrat to the day he died. He wife Bernice still lives in the Houlton area and his family have all, the girls, they've all moved away. The nearest one I think is Barbara who lives in the Bangor area, works for, she used to work over at broadcasting, now she has her own company.

AL: Yes. You mentioned a book, do you know the title? I've tried to find it.

AR: I think it was, I think it was Fifty Thousand to One or something like that.

AL: Okay, somebody said seventy thousand and I couldn't find seventy thousand.

AR: Something like that, I think it's Fifty Thousand to One. And he, he has a, Glen has a nephew who is the spokesman for -

AL: Gordon.

AR: Gordon Manuel, for Great Northern Paper or for Bowater Dow, whatever it is now, and he would, he has a copy. I have one somewhere but I have no idea where it is now, but I did have a copy of the book. I really, I think it was Fifty Thousand to One was the name of the book.

AL: Okay, I'll look under that title. And Bob Rush, you said his family also farmed with your uncle?

AR: Oh yes, Bob Rush was a, they were farmers and, he and his brother, they farmed out in Houlton area. And he was, he and his wife, his wife was a staunch Democrat. And they, he farmed out there for years and years and years and he finally ran for the job clerk of courts of Aroostook county and he won. And he, here again, he decided to leave the farm and continue on that in manner than they did, rather than do the, working on a farm. Because farming in the last thirty years in Maine has not been a profitable venture. You know, it's one of those things, the best you can get is to break even. But Bob is a tremendous individual, well respected. Even the Republicans who give him hell, I mean they all hold him in great respect. Probably, Bob Rush probably was one of the most respected people in the Democratic community and he still is in Aroostook County because probably just, he was able to work with the Republicans. He could give them hell and swear at them and curse them but he'd get, always had a smile on his face and he knew how to do it.

But he was a, he and his wife Anne, they were great, great Democrats. They worked very close with Jean Larson out there and probably at the time, we used to kid about the Democrats could have a meeting in Houlton and we could hold it in a phone booth because there were so few of us. And that's why I used to work with the people in Houlton so much. Because in this area was always a strong Pentecostal area and a strong Republican so there weren't many, there weren't many Democrats over here. So my wife and I, who is also a staunch Democrat worked with the people in Houlton.

AL: And what's your wife's name?

AR: Joyce.

AL: Joyce, so she's been active with you over the years?

AR: Oh yes, she's been a very, my wife Joyce has been very active. She's active in education and she served as Joe Brennan's chair of the state board of education during the, during the, Governor Brennan's term and she was very active in the political field (*telephone interruption*).

AL: We were just talking about your wife Joyce and her position on the board of education.

AR: Oh yes, my wife Joyce, yeah, she was a, she worked in education all her life and she's worked, she was Joe Brennan's point person for education for years. And she's been a Democratic activist and she's been a very outspoken person for women's rights, people's rights. And, although she's, when it comes to money she's a typical Scotsman, she's pretty shrewd with a dollar. But when it comes to issues and people's rights and whether you're white, yellow, green, black, gay, lesbian or whatever, I mean, she could care less. She just, people's rights are rights. But, so we've been married fifty years and so we've survived that.

AL: We talked, I mentioned Jim Pierce to you earlier?

AR: Oh yes, Jim Pierce was a, he was a, he was unique in the fact that he was a Democrat and he used to, he was, he used to attend all the Democratic functions. He used to contribute which was the main thing that we needed to go on. Most of us were working, Bob Rush, Jean, Glenn Manuel, we never had any money to contribute large dollars. And my Uncle Ace didn't. He was an attorney but he was struggling with a large family, had five kids, and that was a work bringing those kids up. Jim Pierce always would contribute a little bit of money and would keep us going. And then, and my Uncle George worked with him, who was, he was vice president of that bank so he worked quite closely with Jim Pierce. But Jim Pierce was a very interesting, very interesting person. He was well known throughout the state. He was a pretty shrewd old fellow, too.

AL: He was president of which bank?

AR: It was the First National Bank, which has now been bought by Key.

AL: Okay. And do you know any of the rest of the Pierce family or the history of them?

AR: Well no, I knew the other ones, I knew Leonard. I knew all the family but not, not as well as I did, I knew Jim better mainly through my Uncle George. I knew all the, I knew all of the other Pierces but not well, just knew them to speak to, who they were. And you used to see them coming or going into the bank, and with my Uncle George and things. And so that was my connection with Jim. Everybody knew Jim Pierce.

AL: Now you were talking a little earlier about farming and barely breaking even in the last thirty years.

AR: Yeah, farming has been a, it's been a very tough, and the potato thing. Ever since back in the war it's been, you have a good year and you have a bad year, it's been a very, very hard way to make a living. You've got to really, really do things to stretch the dollar to make it work. We've had continuing hard times. When we, when my father was active in the potato industry they were growing over two hundred thousand acres in the state of Maine and today it's around sixty-five thousand acres. So you can see the decline that Maine has had in the potato industry. And although we've tried and tried to do many things to, to do it, we, we're not able to compete in the potato industry because of the heavily subsidation that the Canadians have and the advantage that the West has with their, you know, they have low cost water and power and huge tracts of land that they can, they can grow huge leaves. They grow three times the production in

an acre than they do in Maine so that makes a big difference in selling. So competitively we've been very much at a disadvantage for a long, long time.

AL: What do you see is the future for farmers?

AR: Well, it's going to level off with the McCain people in here buying for processing and it's going to level off in that. We're slowly losing all of our fresh markets because we can't compete with the other people. We're going to continue to have a limited seed acres in industry, you're growing seed, which is what I used to do, I used to grow seed. And they're going to have the processing industry and that's going to be it. We're going to level off around seventy thousand acres probably and that's why we can probably sustain for over the few years. But it's going to be tough because when you deal with the processors and you deal with every-, you deal with contracts and it's just a, it's, it's, you've got to be lucky. One bad year and you can really get in trouble because your margin is so close that you operate on, you know? They don't allow you much come and go. It's a very, very highly competitive business.

AL: Is this a lot of what you deal with in your present position with the Department of Agriculture?

AR: Yes, I do, I deal, I handle everything in the agriculture community in the state of Maine. *(Telephone interruption.)*

AR: Where were we?

AL: We were talking about your job as, in the Department -.

AR: Oh, my job, I work for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, I'm a political appointee there. There are four of us in the state of Maine, there's myself, Seth Bradstreet, and there's Jay McCloskey the U.S. Attorney, and the U.S. Marshal. So there's four people, we serve at the pleasure of the president. And so I handle everything in the agriculture, whether it's to finance a farmer, to buy a farm, to grow a crop or anything. I handle the dairy industry, blueberries and everything. We have officers scattered from Portland to Fort Kent and so it keeps me pretty busy and traveling and doing that and trying to, trying to tie into the things I can. It's one of those things, they watch you very closely on the political things that we we're not supposed to do. On the job we're not supposed to do any political politicking but there's always things that you do that you can, you can help the party with.

AL: Sure.

AR: And I made close ties with the political people within the state.

AL: And do you also, do you make trips to Washington often and meet with President Clinton?

AR: Oh, yeah, I met with Clinton *(unintelligible phrase)*.

AL: After the (*unintelligible phrase*).

AR: Oh, okay, right. I do everything, everything in agri-, everything in the state of Maine that there is, lending money, whether it's financing a farm or everything, buying farms, tractors, truck, whatever they need. I handle it for the, handle disaster programs if there's money going out to farmers, to help programs, flexibility payments for, if they get grain prices and stuff that they, compensate for the prices that they're not getting at the market. So everything in the agriculture for the federal government I handle it for the state of Maine.

AL: So how does Seth Bradstreet (*unintelligible word*)?

AR: Seth Bradstreet, he's the director of rural development. He handles everything in, he handles housing. And he handles B & I loans, business and industrial loans for towns and puts out the money to, sewer projects and grants to different communities who apply for it. And he's, it's the Department of Agriculture but it's a different department than mine.

AL: And Jay McCloskey also?

AR: He's the U.S. attorney, yeah, and he serves at the pleasure of, and then there's a U.S. marshal, too.

AL: And who is that?

AR: I've never met the U.S. marshal. I really don't know him, I don't know what his name is.

AL: We're hopefully interviewing Jay McCloskey in a couple weeks and so I think. So I'm getting, just getting an idea of what, his job is important, too.

AR: Yeah, he's, he comes from Bangor but he's a, he's been a, he was a very prominent attorney, Democrat. And of course he was selected by George Mitchell to the position, same as Seth and I were, I mean we were. We knew George Mitchell and we were friendly, we'd worked for George and he selected us for these, the four of us were selected by George Mitchell. The way these positions are selected, they're you serve at the pleasure of the president but it's the senior political person within the state recommends you to the president from the party that controls the White House, and that's the way that they're selected.

AL: Okay, so in other words, whoever wins this election this fall is very important to whether you maintain you position.

AR: Whether the four of us, well, yes, if George Bush wins the election we won't be around long, no.

AL: Is it unheard of that they would keep the people that were there?

AR: Very seldom, very seldom, very seldom. Because these are political jobs and our job is, and it's the way it should be. We, our job is to carry out the directions and the policies of the

president and that's what we're doing. I mean he, they have directions and policies that they carry out and there are people like us in every state that are responsible for carrying out his guidelines and his policies and that's what we do. So we report to him. And my immediate superior, both Seth and I, is the secretary of agriculture and of course he's the same thing, he serves at the pleasure of the president. But, so it's necessary that the people who are in control have people in these jobs like Seth and I. You need to have people of your own political party in there because you don't want people out working against you to get a job done. I happen to think the Democrats do a better job of doing it than Republicans but that's -

AL: I had, when we had paused the tape you were talking a little bit about something I had mentioned about Freddy Vahlsing and the sugar beet industry. Could you tell me more about that?

AR: Oh yes, yes, the sugar beet industry was a, it was a very political football for a long time and we worked with it. We worked with the senator in getting a sugar allotment and getting money in here to build an industry. And we thought it was going to work and it should have worked. But circumstances, it just didn't go, the sugar industry didn't get off the ground. But we poured a lot of money, put a lot of money into Eastern and built the facilities and structures that they have up there today. And although people who are critical, they talk about the money that was put into the Eastern and the government money, the waste, there wasn't any. Because had we not done that, had the money not been put into the sugar industry and had Vahlsing not done what he did-. It was a gamble, we wished it was successful but it wasn't. But it paid off in the long run because we wouldn't have had Huber up in the eastern area doing what they're doing, we would not have had the McCain's processing plant up there doing what they're doing. So we would have been a loss so whatever money the government spent in that ill fated venture, the sugar beet, was gained back over the years for what was done by putting those buildings and structures at the Eastern plant and bringing Huber in and bringing McCain's in there. So it was, in the end it was a positive, it was very positive. And had we hadn't of tried it, we'd never would have known.

AL: And did you ever interact with Freddy Vahlsing, get a sense of what he was like?

AR: Freddy Vahlsing was a real character, yeah, I knew Freddy. And he lost an arm in a helicopter accident, they used to call him the one-armed bandit. He was a character and he really, he was a wheeler-dealer of the utmost, and that was part of the problem. He was too much of a wheeler-dealer. A lot of people didn't like it. But he was a pusher and he tried, and I felt very bad that it didn't, that it didn't go. We tried to make it work, I served as a director of the Maine sugar industry here when it was going, both Glenn Manuel and I worked on it and we tried to, we tried our darndest to get it to go and we worked very much with the political to make a success. But the circumstances, the weather, and there was other things that happened to kind of prevent it from going and being a success.

AL: Did Muskie have any input on -?

AR: Oh sure, oh sure, Muskie -

AL: What was his involvement?

AR: Muskie, he was pushing, he was a plugger for it. He was working, doing behind the scenes, getting money, bringing in sugar allotments and doing this. Oh yeah, he was a big player in the scene. Of course all the political people were but it played on both sides of the aisle because all of the, all of the political people at the time were working at it, Republican and Democrat, it was a joint venture by everybody. And of course when it fell apart they tried to blame the Democrats for it, but it was not, it was a venture everybody did, everybody shared in it and I still say that in its failure it was a success.

AL: And, let me think, oh, I know what I was going to ask you. Did Glenn Manuel, did he invent something, a mechanical process of some sort, do you remember that?

AR: Oh Glenn, Glenn did all kinds of little things. He had one of the first potato harvesters, mechanical potato harvesters there ever was.

AL: Maybe that's what it was.

AR: And he also had a, he had some different machinery that he'd made for sugar beets, and he had all kinds of those little-. He, Glenn Manuel was a very, was a very clever individual, yeah, he made a lot of, he never had anything patented to make any money on, but he did all kinds of things like that, yes he did. Probably the machinery is still probably up there in his farm.

AL: The um, what do you, I'm trying to get a sense of farming in this community and what people are going to do in the future?

AR: Well, it's shrinking, the farm community is shrinking and we're losing our dairy herds (*unintelligible word*). Fact is, I've had four farmers in the area who I was financing in the area, they've all gone out of business just this summer. And the dairy thing is shrinking. And the potato thing is shrinking down to a point that if you don't have a contract with a processor, either for potato chips or for, or for french fries or unless you've got a seed contract for somebody, to grow for somebody, you can't, you can't do it because the costs are so high. You're looking at eighteen hundred to two thousand dollars an acre to grow potatoes, where back thirty years ago you probably had five hundred dollars in them. And so the costs are just too large so you can't afford to have a misstep.

And this year the prices are, right now they're cheaper. Potatoes are cheaper now in the markets than they were probably in 1954. Terrible. All food commodities, with the exception of blueberries, low bush blueberries in the state, are doing fairly well price wise because of the demand in the Pacific Rim. But every other food commodity in the United States is right down in the cellar. Farmers are really having a tough go, yeah. Farming is a great way of life, you can't beat it. But it's just a tough way to make a living.

AL: But we need, we need farmers.

AL: You need farmers, you need to grow food, you need food. We're slowly becoming dependent on other countries shipping food into us. You got Mexico and Canada, and we're going down into South America. And some of these other countries are growing food so much cheaper than we can do it and they're shipping food into the United States. So it's, it's, it worries me that sometime if we ever have a problem or something should happen that we might not be totally self sufficient in agriculture. In Europe, you travel all through Europe, you travel through Asia, and they've treated their farm community much kinder than the United States have because they've all had wars and the countries have been ravished and they know what it is to go without food, they know what it is to go hungry. This nation has been blessed ever since its been born of having an adequate overabundant food supply at a low cost. And so the American farmer today is carrying the burden of overproduction and being too efficient, so efficient that it's costing him money. Growing too much food.

AL: We haven't talked about George McGillicuddy yet.

AR: George McGillicuddy was postmaster of Houlton.

AL: Oh, we did talk about him briefly.

AR: Yeah, he was the postmaster out there and he was also a very active Democrat and a super individual. He was a, he was another, his brother Paul still lives in Houlton. He has a brother lives there in Houlton.

AL: Would he be somebody that would be knowledgeable?

AR: Paul McGillicuddy would, yes. He lives up on Pleasant Street in Houlton. Fact is I, I bought, it's interesting, I bought George McGillicuddy's, he had a house in Florida. He built it in 1980 and when he got sick a few years ago he couldn't go back any more, my wife and I bought his home in Florida, it's over in St. Petersburg, so we have his home.

AL: Do you know any of their family background, were they, did they come from strong Democrats?

AR: He and his wife didn't have any family, they didn't have any children at all and they had all nieces and nephews who became their children. But no, he was, he was a staunch Democrat.

AL: Were their parents, Paul and George's parents?

AR: I don't know whether they were or not, I'm not sure whether they were or not. But Paul McGillicuddy would be somebody, if you get a chance you could, he'd love to talk to you because he's retired and all by himself up there. His wife passed away a few years ago, and he'd love to talk to you, I know that. And he grew up in the Houlton political system, like Jean Larson and George Mitchell, and Bob Rush, rather. And he knows how the political system worked up there. And he was a, sold household, household appliances and furniture and so he was, he had to be careful on his political things because you could, Houlton got so bad that, you know, if you got too active as a Democrat they might not do any business at all. So it was a

tough venture for people to become active in the Democrat Party up there.

AL: Now Houlton seems to have a lot of things called shire town in it. Is there a reason for that?

AR: Yes, shire town, years ago it was a court, the court. It was the courthouse, the jail, the courthouse, all the records and everything was in the town hall, it is, it still is the county seat for Aroostook County. They branched out a little over the last few years and have got a satellite in Caribou so it's slowly weaning away from the town of Houlton, but the reason that Houlton. Is the shire town is because it's the county seat, and the county government and all the government structure of the county was located in the town of Houlton.

AL: Right. Now I have a county question to ask you. Aroostook County, take that as a whole with politics, concerning politics. I've understood that there, or is there differences between different parts of the county politically, like the valley and southern and central?

AR: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, (*unintelligible word*), you start up north, at the northern part and the St. John valley is staunch Democrat. In fact is, over the years it was probably the Democratic vote in the St. John valley who kept the Democratic Party going up here. And for a long number of years it used to be that we'd have three senators in the county, for example, and the total vote, whether the total vote got of the county was elected. And for the, it was such a heavy Democratic vote in the St. John Valley that they would, they would, they'd take the south as Democrat. And back when Glenn Manuel was, I think it was just after he won his election or shortly after, they changed it and they went to districts within the state. So we now have three districts of the state and we, ever since we, in the northern part we have one Democratic senate seat. The other two are usually Republican, Presque Isle and Houlton area.

But the Houlton area has been staunchly Republican over the years, really strong Republican. And the greater part of Presque Isle and that area has too, with the exception of the St. John valley. That is, there are very few, very few Republicans up, and to this day there are not that many Republicans in the St. John Valley. It's French, Anglo Sax--, it's French and the, where I, the English town here, it's the, Houlton is the, and toward Presque Isle is the heavy effect of the English, settled from the English. And they were loyalists to the queen, and they've become Republican. And the Irish people that moved in the area from Benedict or over in that area was a strong Democratic stronghold. And a few in this area and a few in Houlton, and the Irish were always, were always the opposite of what the English were anyway, so they become Democrats.

AL: Now the, do you have, because Aroostook County is so large, do you have many county meetings where you all get together?

AR: Oh yes, always there's a lot of county, they have a county committee, every county has a county committee and they have county meetings, oh, quite a, last few years they were kind of inactive. Fact is the last eight or nine years all politics in both parties has kind of declined because people aren't getting involved like they used to. Particularly younger people coming along, they don't see the need to it, they don't see the benefits of being, they don't see the political need of it so therefore they're not getting involved like they used to. But, oh yes, they

have a county Democratic committee that meets once a month up here. And they, Marsha Gartley is the chair of the county committee who is Congressman John Baldacci's staff assistant in Presque Isle this year, but.

AL: Wonderful woman.

AR: Yes, she is. I work with her, I work with her a lot, yeah.

AL: I'm going to stop and turn the tape over.

AR: Okay.

*End of Side A,
Side B*

AL: We are now on side B of the interview with Mr. Arnold Roach. And we were talking about [Aroostook] County politics, and I guess Ken Colbath.

AR: I didn't, I knew Ken but not that well, I just met him and knew him and talked to him. But I really never was around Ken that much so I don't know him well enough even to say that much about him really, just that I did.

AL: Sure, sure. Now over the years you've known Ed Muskie -

AR: Oh, yes.

AL: As well as George Mitchell?

AR: Yes, I knew him, as well as George Mitchell, yes.

AL: Can you give me a comparison, or?

AR: Well, they're both, they're both great men and very distinguished, but they were different. Ed Muskie was a big man and he had a different type of personality. He had a fierce temper and you, and when he started getting up you wanted to move out of his way. And, but it was altogether different, he was a, just a, more of a, more of an outgoing person than George Mitchell. He was more of a fun loving person, you know, we'd go out and he'd, he enjoyed having a good time, he enjoyed having one or two drinks maybe followed by three or four more, and he was just a, he was just a more of a fun person. And George Mitchell was a tremendous man but he was quite serious, more focused maybe in some ways and, but they were both of them of equal character but just totally different in their personal.

And all of this in the upbringing they came to. Ed Muskie came up through Polish, his ancestry, and of course George Mitchell came up through his other side, growing up around the docks in the Portland area. So it was an entirely different background and their youth in growing up so that's why they're so much different. Although they're both Democrats but there was a huge

difference in the men and, policies were the same, but just were different.

And George Mitchell was a tremendous guy, he was a, he, here again Maine had an op-, missed an opportunity to have a, two presidents. I think that Ed Muskie would have been a good one and I think George Mitchell would have been a fantastic one, too. So Maine, the nation's, it was the nation's loss in both cases that they did not have an opportunity to become president.

AL: Do you have any, do you know any of George Mitchell's thoughts on what he might have in mind for the future?

AR: Well George, George Mitchell, yeah, George Mitchell, if he (*unintelligible word*) health care would have been a big issue with him. He would have made sure that all people, women, kids and the elderly particularly, had an adequate food supply that, nutrition program for the kids and health. So people in their, in their golden, so-called golden years could have adequate health protection and dignity, they could live dig-, that's what he would have pushed for if he'd been president. And the other things in between come and go but those are big issues that he was very behind, I mean, had he become president we probably would have had a health care system today that would have been adequate instead of the mess we have.

AL: Do you think he'll run for an office ever again?

AR: I don't think he will, no, I don't think George Mitchell will. I think that he's, he might serve in a major capacity like Secretary of State or something like that, it wouldn't surprise me any. But I mean he's in a position now where he's making huge dollars, I mean up in the mill-, making millions, and he needs it with a new wife and a very young family. He needs to make money to put the, you know, put two kids, now he's got two very, well one young one and one on the way. He's got a lot of mon-, it's going to take a lot of money to bring them, putting them through school. So he needs to make some money. So I think that's what he's focused on now, but there's no question that George Mitchell would do whatever called upon to do, he's a very loyal Democrat. And he's a nice man.

But Ed Muskie is probably the, of all the people we ever had in the state of Maine probably is top notch. He's, if it wasn't for Ed Muskie there would be no Democratic Party in the state of Maine, it would be one party, it would be Republican. He's the man that changed it, he's the man that brought the Democratic Party into play and made Democrat, made being a Democrat a good word instead of a dirty word that Republicans always tried to use.

AL: During that campaign of '54, did you meet some of his entourage like Frank Coffin, Dick McMahan, Paul Fullam?

AR: Oh yeah, I met a lot of those people over the years and some of them I, I have forgotten and. But I knew them and I knew them not that well because I was, I was awful busy trying to, I'd come back to the Maine, I was back home and I was running the, taking over the farm for my father and I was very active in the Maine National Guard. I was a, you know, an officer, a senior officer in the guard and that was a, almost a full time job at that time. And so I was busy, but I did take time all the, Muskie's years to work, to help him in the campaigns. And that was due to

my Uncle Ace and the friendship that my Uncle Ace had had with Ed Muskie, that's how I got involved. Hadn't been for that it would have probably been different and I'd have lost that great privilege that I had.

AL: Did you say they went to law school together?

AR: Well, I think they went to the same law school, or I -

AL: Cornell?

AR: I think they graduated, yes, and but they were lawyers and they knew each other and got to know each other very well and, over the years. Ace was a graduate of Colby and then he went on to law school from there. So they were both in the same, same age, same category. And as I say, both had served, both had served with distinction in WWII and they had an awful lot in common and just become friends.

AL: Sure. Now, did you or your uncle know Anne and Joe Freeman?

AR: Yes, from Presque Isle.

AL: Yes.

AR: Oh yes.

AL: They ran, I guess in the very early years ran a restaurant.

AR: Yes, and then they got Pepsi Cola, yeah, yeah. I knew them (*unintelligible word*), here again I knew them, met them, but not -

AL: You didn't know them intimately, yeah.

AR: Not that well, not that well, no. I, Muskie used to stay with them a lot, he'd be, he was, he was very good friends with them. We used to be around them, along with Floyd and Jean Harding. Now you must have met them or talked to them, too.

AL: Oh yes, yeah.

AR: Yeah, great people, yeah.

AL: I knew, of course knew Floyd, my husband's an attorney so, when we lived in Presque Isle, yeah. Do you have any Muskie stories other than the ones you've told me that pop into your head that -?

AR: Oh no, no, I don't have a lot of stories. I knew, I can remember times we had the potato industry up there and that Senator Muskie would be up there, would be coming in and he'd have a room in a hotel somewhere. And he'd always, he'd always call and say someone's going to be

around. Chip Bull and I used to be together a lot, and he, we'd, we'd always want to know where we're going to be, if we're going to be, come up to his room and why he wondered because he always wanted to make sure that there was a bottle of bourbon or something up there that we could have a little drink with. Because a lot of times the staff people or family, they would try to make sure there wasn't any around. And Ed always wanted to make sure he had a little drink afterwards and he'd kick his shoes off and -

AL: Relax.

AR: And relax a little bit with all of us and have a few drinks. And so we always made sure, sure of that.

AL: Did you ever experience his sense of humor?

AR: Oh yeah, he had a sharp wit, and he could turn in a minute, I mean you could, he could tear somebody apart so easily. He was the type of person that could really tell somebody to go to hell and when he got done they'd believe that they should go and they'd enjoy the trip. That's the type of man that he was, he just had that ability. He was just, he's just, there was an aura about the man that, you know, you felt a sense of greatness when you were around the man. He was just a, of course he was big, too, you know, he was just, he just commanded the situation all the time. Yeah, he was a great guy.

AL: What do you think some of his, his greatest strengths were?

AR: It was his personal character, that's what it was. He was personally a great man and people knew it, and he, they recognized him being a, you know, he was just a good man. And he didn't have any bad, he just, he wasn't, nothing bad about him. Didn't have a mean streak in his body and just, I think that's what it was, it was his personal character.

AL: What do you think his most lasting contribution will be?

AR: Secretary of State, yeah; did a good job as Secretary of State. That's what he'll be remembered for. In Maine we remember him as the senator, some people as governor, but I think his greatest contribution he made was when he become Secretary of State because he did a great job, and had Jimmy Carter re-won his election Ed would have (*unintelligible word*) on. He'd have probably been one of the greatest secretary of state because he just carried, there was an awe about the man that, you know. When you'd go with him and be with him around Washington, when you'd be with the, he'd just, he commanded the situation whether, even when you get all these different political people around him. There's some huge egos when you start working with these people at that level, and Ed always was able to use their egos and bring them into line and they respected him. And he was extremely, extremely well respected (*unintelligible phrase*). And everybody who knew him or worked with him knew, when they could see his face and eyes start to twist, and they'd say his temper was starting to row, they moved out of his way and he got what he wanted. He was powerful, he was a powerful man, nobody wanted to cross Ed Muskie.

AL: Did you ever play golf with him?

AR: No, I'm not a golfer, no. I never played, I've heard people, I never did. I never, I used to tell everybody I couldn't go. I just never had time to, I was always doing the other stuff so I don't play, I'm not a golfer.

AL: Is there anything I haven't touched upon today that you think I should ask?

AR: Well, not that I know of, I mean I really can't think. I think that the, I still, I still think sometimes when I, you know, I, here a couple of days ago I was listening to a talk about, in Washington about the senators going into that little inner sanctum, the little room that they use, just for senators. And nobody could go, reporters couldn't go, and I say, I kind of smiled to myself, gee, I was there. I was there with Ed Muskie.

AL: The Senate Nobody Knows, that book, is the first time I had heard about that in the senate.

AR: As I say, I was right there, I was in there, I was in that place maybe three times with the senator.

AL: Was it plush?

AR: Oh yes, as I recall, it was quite plush. There were people that kept things that they wanted, and they can go in and talk and listen to the news and they could have a highball or two, a cup of coffee or tea, whatever they wanted, to just get away from everything. Just kind of let, and they weren't worried about reporters being around listening and no interviews and no. They could just get away and they could talk, you know, they could go in and talk and they didn't have to worry about some reporter overhearing what they're doing it was a-. And so they could do a little business there, too. But, that was a, that was probably something to have done that with the senator. Yeah, yeah.

AL: Well I think that's all the questions I have. Thank you so much for your time.

AR: Well I, if it's any help to you at all I'd be glad to, pleasure.

AL: Thank you.

End of Interview