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Interview with Robert C. “Bob” Shaw by Andrea L’Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Shaw, Robert C. “Bob”

Interviewer

L’Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

November 16, 2004

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 440

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Biographical Note

Robert Curtis “Bob” Shaw was born November 22, 1943 in Manchester, New Hampshire and moved to Naples, Maine when he was about three years old. He graduated from Bridgton High School in 1961. His father, Gus Shaw, worked in television repair and eventually got involved with broadcasting. Through experiences with his father, Shaw met political figures such as Edmund Muskie. He moved to the Lewiston-Auburn area in 1968 when he went to work for the Department of Defense and is a veteran of the Army. He has been an active member of the American Legion Post for twenty-eight years.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: family background; meeting Edmund Muskie; time spent with his father in broadcasting; influence of Edmund Muskie; Parker Hoy; family genealogy; connection to Frank Coffin; recollections of Muskie’s 1958 election to the U.S. Senate; reaction to Muskie’s victory in 1954; and anecdotes about his father and politics.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Bob Shaw in the Muskie Archives at Bates College on November 16, 2004, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by telling me your full name and spelling it?

Bob Shaw: Robert C. Shaw, R-O-B-E-R-T, C., my middle name is Curtis, named after my grandfather who was born in Naples, Maine, where I'm from originally, S-H-A-W, Shaw.

AL: And you were born in Naples?

BS: No, I was born in Manchester, New Hampshire, but I've lived in Maine all the rest of my life. My dad was born in Naples, and he worked for the Federal Communications Commission in Manchester, New Hampshire, back in the '40s, and then moved back to Maine. And I got back here when I was probably around three years old and lived in Naples until I moved over to Auburn-Lewiston area when I went to work for the Department of Defense back in 1968, I worked for the Army.

AL: So what is your birth date?

BS: Eleven twenty-second, '43 [November 22, 1943]. That was the, I was twenty years old; that was the day they assassinated President Kennedy, on that date. Which is coming up on forty-one years this month.

AL: And growing up in Naples, what was that area like? Socially, ethnically, religiously?

BS: Well my, I've been working on my genealogy and my grandfather, great grandfather I should say, Harry Shaw, the Shaws settled in Sebago and the Naples area, and my great grandfather and my great uncles and aunts and people were some of the first people that settled in that town and helped form it. I graduated grammar school there, and I'm also a graduate of Bridgton High School, class of '61. Naples is, it's changed like everything else through the

years, but it's a nice town. My mother is still alive, she owns her home there. And I belong to the American Legion Post, Memorial Post Naples-Casco-Raymond 155 and have been very active in the American Legion, being a retired military person. I've been there, a member there for twenty eight years. And even though I live over here, I work Beano every Wednesday night over there and it keeps me in touch with my fellows over there, and some of my classmates and a cousin whom I admire, Delvin Merrill, who was a Korean P.O.W. and wonderful, wonderful man. And his father, my great uncle Evert, his dad was a wonderful man. And I guess some of the things that was instilled in me through my teachers and through my older relatives, instilled in me the kind of person that I am today. Very much involved in service organizations, the Lions Club, the Grange, the Knights of Columbus, the American Legion. And it keeps me active, and being retired I have to be involved in something, I'm not a couch potato, and it's time for me to give back and try to make the community a better place for people to live and reside, and help those that need help. And I guess that's why I'm a Democrat, because the Democratic Party reaches out for people. And as Senator Muskie always said, you know, "People need a hand up, not a hand out," and I always remember that. And he was a wonderful man, and some of his ideals and things that he instilled and talked about when I was a little kid, you know, I admire him tremendously even today. He was a wonderful man.

AL: Do you remember him from when you were a kid?

BS: Yes, I met him. I was ten years old, and he campaigned in Naples, I remember he came through Naples, he had, it was Jim Oliver because I remember "Oliver for Congress", and he was a congressman out of, you know, the first district. And my dad was, and my relatives, were all loyal Democrats. My dad, I remember we had a get-together at Pleasant Mountain, it was a Democratic get-together, where Ed Muskie had gone up there and other fellow Democrats and Jim Oliver and some of the other associates. I think there was, was a judge, Thomas Delahanty, I remember. And I was just a, oh, I was probably around eleven, twelve years old, and the minute that I met, when I met Mr. Muskie when he was running for governor, I was ten years old. And here I was a little kid and I'm looking up at this big tall man, and he patted me on the head, and he said to my dad, he says, "Now there's a good loyal Democrat, he is going to be a good Democrat some day." And, you know, I remember him telling me that and I was just thrilled, you know. And I guess that's what started me on the road to liking politics and to being involved, and being involved in my state, being involved in my country. And I remember we had a Grange supper that night. They came back, I guess he went up to Bridgton and some of the surrounding towns, and Fryeburg, that area, touring that area that day while he was campaigning. And that night, it was in September, I can't tell you the day, but we had a Grange supper and it was a dollar a head for this baked bean supper we had, raising funds for his campaign.

AL: This was 1954?

BS: This was 1954, yeah, and I was ten years old. And, you know, it was quite an exciting time. And I remember standing there at the door there and passing out the tickets, you know, people come in and give me a dollar, and I'd give them a ticket. It was, you know, I guess that was my start; that was my introduction to politics. When I got in, I guess you might as well say I was involved with his campaign back then. And, I mean, it was just, he turned the tide and

brought this party to life and, you know, went on to be Secretary of State. And I was up in 1980, and I was a delegate from here and went to the Democratic Convention. It was up in Bangor, and of course he spoke and it was just, it was awesome, it was awesome.

And I remember as a kid my dad's half brother, Howard Rogers, used to run the speed boats in Naples, and when, of course when Mr. Muskie became governor he would come to Naples, and him and his wife Jane and the family would go out on speed boat rides, and take a plane ride. And I remember going out, my uncle took him out on this Chriscraft, and I went out with them and it was, it was a wonderful time, we had a wonderful day that day. It was in July, it was in 1956, somewhere around there, in July, and it was a fun day. I'll remember that the rest of my life. It was awesome. I really enjoyed that. And just to see what this man has done to our state and to bring this party to life, and the values that he's instilled probably in, you know, millions of people. And it's through his efforts and Senator Mitchell that started the Clean Air Act. I remember this river in Androscoggin here, the Androscoggin River, and you go down to Westbrook and it would smell, you know, it was awful. And to see what he had done to get this legislation passed and work with Senator Mitchell on this, it was, a lot of people don't realize that these ideas came from people from Maine. And that's how, I have a friend of mine in Florida, and he worked for the EPA, and he didn't even know who even started the Clean Air and Water Act. And I informed him, I says, "It was through Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell. They wrote this legislation back in the '70s and got this stuff on the books." and I says, you know, "There's fish in the rivers now." But unfortunately, cutting back on the, what is it, the coal fired oil plants, our lakes are getting polluted again with mercury and everything. But I think things will turn around, one day at a time.

But I really admire Ed Muskie in the things that he's done, you know, has been and always will be a fan of mine, and I cherish the memories. And one of the last things that, when I saw him alive, and I regret I didn't have my camera that day, which I wish I had. And he remembered me and he called me by name, and we were having a get-together, a campaign leaf drop that day, it was in 1988 when Dukakis was running and spoke at, I guess it was Happy Jack's back then, it's now Governor's Restaurant up in Lewiston. And he said, "We've got a lot of work to do, folks," and he says, "Get out there and hit the pavement." And he says, "Remember what we fellow Democrats are," he says, "We are the party of the people, we care about people, and that people need a hand up, not a handout." Then he said, "God bless you all, and let's all hope for the best," and that was the last time I saw him alive, and I'll cherish that moment. It was really great. And he shook my hand, and I gave him a hug. And he remembered me from way back when and he says, "I want to tell you, I want to thank you for all the things you've done, for being involved." And I says, "Well, you were the instigator of this." And I says, "You know, it became habit forming" And I, I says, "I just love every minute of it." And that's the last time I spoke to him, and it's one of the memorable things that I'll remember the rest of my life, and it was great.

AL: Can you recall any occasion when you were growing up, at your dinner table or in your home, your parents talking about Maine politics or Ed Muskie? They must have been thrilled to have him . . .

BS: Oh yeah, my dad was, Gus, and he was just delighted and all excited, you know, about it. And my dad was involved in the county politics. He didn't run for office, but he helped out and

did things and, you know, passed out leaflets, I guess, like I did, and was involved in different things. And, you know, I remember Dad saying, he says, "You know, now that Muskie's in there," he says, "I remember that when Burton Cross there was running," he said, "I don't want to see dinner pails on my, people walking with dinner pails in the streets of Portland, Maine." Well, that's what men and women do, they carry a lunch bucket. And as our Congressman Mike Michaud, he has his lunch bucket on his desk ever reminding him that he was a working man for a company and was one of us, like Ed Muskie was, a simple plain man that cared about people. You know, you, when he was together with Hubert Humphrey, and they ran on a ticket, I mean, I remember that, was involved in that, and it was so, you know, it was exciting. But, you know, he stood up for principles. But my dad was very excited. He would talk, you know, with my great uncle Burton who lived in Harrison, and he is deceased, he was a WWI veteran, he passed away two years ago, he was 98 years old, and he still had all his faculties, rest his soul. But he was a staunch Democrat and he admired Senator Muskie also. And yeah, there was a lot of gab around the dinner table about Senator Muskie, especially when we had that win. I mean, people in the town, it was just, you know, it was like a new rebirth, you know, it was excitement, it was wonderful.

AL: And did you say your dad was involved in TV?

BS: Yes, my dad put, in fact I have his diploma. He graduated, took a course on electronics in December of 1943, I was only a month old. And I remember this, a couple of the gentlemen at the Legion Post, Clarence Hunt who lives in Casco, he's still alive, he's a WWII veteran, and Eddie Webber is 91 I think. Clarence is in his eighties. And both of these gentlemen are very active still in the Post, been members for over fifty years, and part of those gentlemen, and were friends of my dad, knew my dad quite well. My father used to repair TVs and stuff. But Dad got involved in electronics.

I remember when we lived in Naples he, there was nothing here, and he worked at Raytheon in Massachusetts and traveled back and forth. And then there was a job opening, I was ten years old, it was 1953, and he went to work for Parker Hoy. And my dad, I'd say, was one of the pioneers in broadcasting, and my father put, helped put the first TV station on the air in Portland, WPMT TV, channel 53 in '53, and I remember that. I used to go to work with him when I was a kid on the weekends, and I, he always wanted me to get into electronics, and in fact I used to fix TVs, my high school years, I'd go with my dad on television calls. And then my dad later went to work for WGME TV where he retired, in Raymond, Maine, and he wired the FM transmitter in Raymond.

I remember going to work with him when I was at school, and he'd work the third shift, you know, and I'd help him pull these wires up through the floor, and he had this big schematic, and he was hooking all this stuff up. And it was, it was really something, it was quite a challenge. And one of the gentlemen that worked with my dad, Ralph Estes, lives in Raymond near the tower right now. He's a member of the Legion Post, and I see him every time I go to a meeting, and Ralph made comments about my dad, he says, "He taught me a lot and was a very smart man." And it made me feel proud. Because my dad is a, was a pioneer in broadcasting, and I guess it's through his efforts, part of the things, why we have television and different things today because of these people that, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: Were you old enough to recognize the role that television played in that election in '54?

BS: Yeah, we had a little Helicrafter TV. We had one of the first televisions, I remember it was a, I think it was like a six inch screen, with little push buttons in the front. And it was a Helicrafter, I remember that. And my dad had this big antenna and strung up in a pine tree. And I remember seeing Mr. Muskie on, they had ads on TV, you know, and I'd say, "There he is! There he is!" and I'd point, you know. We'd get all excited when we'd see him on TV. And on the weekends kids would come over and we'd watch cartoons, and we'd have a whole house full. It was, you know, it was an exciting time when I was growing up, it was something, yes.

AL: Do you have recollections of Parker Hoy at all? What he was like as a person?

BS: Yes, I had met him, you know, a few times. He'd come down to the station and, you know, and pop in once in a while and, you know, he'd speak with my dad. And he'd see me there, you know, and he'd pat me on the head, and he says, "Looks like he's going to be a strapping young man," you know. And he'd always have a, you know, either a Tootsie Roll, or he had something in his pocket, you know, and always giving me a piece of candy or something. He was quite a generous person, and very likeable, nice personality. I liked him a lot. He was a, he cared about his employees and cared about people, and he did a lot to, you know, get the broadcasting industry, and being a pioneer in broadcasting in this area, to get things up and going. In fact, Dad worked for him after the TV station, before he went to work for GME, WGME TV, I think he went to work, in 1966 he started with them.

Dad worked at the radio station, WLAM in Auburn, and that's where I learned to drive, out in the field out back there where the radio station is, is still standing there today. And there's a lot of history, you know, a lot of, I think about that, you know, when I come by there because it's part of my growing up. Even though I was a little kid, my dad worked over here in this area, so I guess I've had connections to this area for well over fifty years, you know, with my dad working over here. And then I ended up moving over here, and my dad, of course, never moved, they, we stayed in Naples, and then I moved over here back in, at '68 when I went to work for the Army. But it's funny how that coincidence, how the family ties come together within the Androscoggin county area. And it was quite memorable to go to work with my dad and watch him, you know, doing his thing, you know, putting all the, he'd have to do all these sound bites and push all these buttons. And of course everything is computer today, but everything that he had to do was all by a clock and manual buttons and stuff, so he had to be, you know, you had to be pretty attentive to what was going on. And of course my mother, the other day when I saw her, we were talking about getting together Thanksgiving and, you know, my dad always worked on the holidays, we never, you know, communication people, they're busy on holidays, they never get a, you know, unless you swap with somebody or something you never get a Christmas or a Thanksgiving because it's just like police and firemen and anybody else in these special jobs, it's hard to get time off.

But I can reflect back on Mr. Hoy. He was a wonderful man, and I enjoyed meeting him and seeing him, it was, I get excited every time I see him, you know, he always. In fact, I used to mow the lawn. I had a little lawn mowing business when I was a kid, and he used to pay me and

I'd mow the radio station lawn, and then I had Shangri-La, the dog hospital that's still there today, I used to mow their lawn, and I think a couple other people up the street. So every time I'd go to work with my dad on the weekend, I had four lawns to mow and, you know, I'd get money for doing it, it was part of my, I guess part of my learning as a kid and earning my own money, and I guess that's why I, you know, learned to manage my money and do things, you know, and work and earn everything that we have. And I didn't have much when we were a kid. We weren't poor, but we weren't rich and I remember some, you know, tight days here and there. But we always had enough food on the table and had clean clothes, and it was a nice experience growing up in that area. Naples is a great town, and still is today.

AL: Do you have brothers and sisters?

BS: Yes, I have a twin brother Richard. Richard T. Shaw. I have an older sister, Judith Shaw, who is crippled up and disabled now, she has Lupus but, God love her, she does the best she can. And her and my mom live together. My mother's eighty-five, does quite well; takes care of herself. She, you know, goes out to these exercises classes and takes vitamins and never smoked or drank, and she's a very healthy woman, reads a lot. And, you know, can be motherly at times and, "Bob, you should do this." I'm, "Ma, you know, I'm grown up." And, you know, hey, what can we say, a mother's a mother I guess, and it's okay, God love her.

And then I have a younger sister, Susan Shaw, and she's a doctor. And she is on Baldacci's staff, works for the governor. She visits the, has to go to Togus, to the VA Hospital. It's part of her job, I guess, is to inspect the nursing homes and the paperwork and all these different things of the medical agencies through the state. So I don't see too much of my kid sister. I did a couple of weeks ago. I finally called her up on a Sunday, and we made a date and I took her out to lunch, and we had a nice little visit together. But I'm pretty proud of her, she's done quite well. And my older sister worked for the state, and had to retire due to this disability. But the good Lord's been good to us all. My brother also was employed with the government, he worked for the Social Security Administration for years, and he's also retired military like myself.

And I guess for four school kids that went to school and grew up in a small town, we've done pretty well, and God has been good to all of us. And, you know, it's been quite rewarding to see, you know, my brothers and sisters, how, what they've done and what they've accomplished. And, you know, I guess, you know, when you sum it all up, it's through my bringing up and through my relatives, and through people who run for office that instill ideas in people and, you know, do things to help people, to reach out to make that person step out on their own, to give them a better life. And that's something I don't see today. It's quite disturbing to me to see how politics has changed. And hopefully one day to a time, things will turn around.

AL: I forgot to ask you, what are your parents' names?

BS: Yes, I should have, my, I am half Italian. My grandmother and my grandfather, they were wonderful people. My father met my dad [*sic*] when he was in the service, in Coney Island, New York. My grandmother and grandfather are Joseph and Sarah Fina DiGennaro.

AL: How do you spell that?

BS: Well, capital Di, capital G, E-N-N-A-R-O, DiGennaro. They were immigrants from Italy. I've been working on our family genealogy. They came over here on a ship that was owned by France, and they settled in New Jersey. My mother's name is Carmella Phyllis, Carmella P. Shaw. It was DiGennaro, of course, Carmella DiGennaro. And she was born in Camden, New Jersey, my mother was. And of course when my dad, my dad and her got hitched up, married, the only thing I remember is we lived in Manchester, New Hampshire where I was born, and he had worked for the FCC, Federal Communications Commission, was employed there for, I don't know, but for a while, for maybe three, four, five years. And then his, my grandmother got sick. Nellie Shaw, she got sick and my, that's why we moved back here to Maine. And then she, you know, I guess she got on the mend, God love her. Dad moved back here because he wanted to get a little closer to family, and then that's what I had said, he went to work for Raytheon after that because there was nothing here in broadcasting, and worked down to Massachusetts for four or five years, and then when stuff started moving up here that's when he got into broadcasting with Parker Hoy, that was the, that was the first job that he had in the state, when Parker Hoy brought communications to life in this state.

AL: Did you know Frank Coffin at all?

BS: Yes, I met Frank Coffin. I remember him being with Mr. Muskie on occasions, and my dad admired him, and he met Mr. Coffin and Jim Oliver, in fact. I remember dad having the bumper sticker, "Oliver for Congress." I wish I had those now because I'm an avid political pin collector. In fact, I do have a couple of pins that people have given me, Ed Muskie, and I've got Peter Kyros, and I am looking for Jim Oliver's pins. I'll probably find one somewhere, I go to these antique shops and different shops, you know, and try to find things. I have one that somebody had given me that was a FDR pin. And I have a vest with about a hundred and fifty pins on it that I wear, and I have, part of the display. I have one of these old time hats with a donkey setting on top, and pins all over that.

But Frank Coffin, he was a, just a wonderful person, such a smart, intelligent man. But he, you know, a man his caliber, he always treated everybody like they were the same. He was a simple man, you know, he was a good man. There was no high falutin' big air about him. Frank Coffin was Frank Coffin. You'd meet him, and it was just like, you know, you felt like you were related to the man when you met him. He, very warm, very warm man, a nice man, intelligent and smart. And he, you know, was fair in being, you see, he worked his ranks up to a federal, he was a federal judge. But he cared about people and he took his job seriously, and, you know, and it isn't like things today. Even the judge, the judges today, you know, some of the principles, some of the things, they just seem to be fading away. And as to how people conducted themselves, you know, back forty, fifty years ago, you know, they were their own person and they made decisions on what was based on facts, not by leaning towards what other people had to say to try to coerce some of these decisions. And that's what I've seen in some of these cases, and it alarms me. Mr. Coffin, people like him are far and few between today.

AL: Are there any recollections that you have of that '54 election for Ed Muskie that I haven't asked you about that you think are important to add, or anything in general?

BS: Well, I remember settin' up that night and we were, you know, just, the returns were coming in. And of course they had the old chalk board, you know, and nothing like they have today. And I remember when my dad went to go vote, it was a little old pine box, and it was just a little, almost like a piece of scratch paper back then, you know, they didn't have the things today, you know, what we have today to vote. And you'd check off who you wanted. And I remember a couple of my neighbors, and they were up the road, you know, and they'd always tease my dad, you know, "Oh, Muskie, he's not going to win this one." And I remember my father making a bet with them. He says, "You're wrong this time", he says, "We're going to pull it off," he says. "I haven't spent all these man hours and doing things for nothing." And he says, "We've got the candidate this year and we're going to win." I guess he made like a ten dollar bet with my father it was like, probably be like a hundred dollars today. And my father said, "You're wrong."

And each of them gave me the ten dollars to hold. And that was, you know, it was, that was a big deal for me, you know. And I remember my dad saying, "I'm giving this to Bob, he's going to hold this money." And it was, Elman Barker, his name was, Mr. Barker, and he was the postman. But him and Dad, I mean, parties didn't have that much to do with it, you were still neighbors, you know. But that's what democracy's all about, you know. We have our own concept and ideals. And unfortunately, it's too bad today because all these TV ads that they put on and they, you know, when they did politicking back in the early years the candidate would get on and speak himself. And it isn't that way today, they can have an advertising agency fan and put anything they want, and change the positive to make it look negative towards the campaign. It'll be either party, and I feel that, you know, part of the rule should be if the candidate's going to speak, he should be in front of the person talking. And that's the way it was back then, you know. Mr. Muskie was on TV, and he told what he was going to do for this state and the program, and what he was going to put forward.

And it happened. And we were excited, oh, jumping up and down. I don't believe we even got to sleep that night, we were so excited, you know, we were up half the night and just exuberant and excited. It was like a new fresh dawn, a new day arising, you know. And Dad says, "I won the bet! I won the bet!" And I says, "Well, I'm going to hang on to this money because we've got to go see him and you're supposed to go shake his hand, right Dad?" He says, "Yeah, we'll do that first thing in the morning," he says, "well it is morning, it's four o'clock." But that's one of the big key things I remember as a kid. I was just, you know, it was exuberating, exciting that. I remember Dad saying, he says, "Boy, he's brought this party to life. Thank you, God, I remember Dad saying that, thank you God." And I used to have to go to church in Bridgton, because there wasn't a, I was raised Catholic, and we don't have a Catholic church in Naples even to this day, and so I had to go to St. Joseph Church in Bridgton. And I remember bumming rides with the neighbors, and I'd have to hitchhike. And I also was an altar boy, and I'm still involved in church things. And in fact being a member of Knights of Columbus over here in Lewiston and, I'm involved in events, well, certain things, too.

But between, you know, growing up and going to school there, and my grammar school teacher is still alive, Ruth Pitts, she's ninety-one. Her sister and two brothers, they're all up in their nineties. They all live on this old farm in Naples, all good Democrats. And I remember when I saw her this May, she always attends Memorial Day and Veterans Day. I didn't see her this

Veterans Day in Naples, maybe she was sick. I don't know, but I'm going to give her a call, we still keep in contact. But part of her respect and what she taught me in school, and I remember her coming up to me one day, she says, "It never hurt you, Bobby, when I used to rap you on the knuckles?" And I says, "No, Miss Pitts." And she says, "Bobby, you don't have to call me Miss Pitts any more. You call me Ruth." But you see how that stuck with me. And here I am sixty-one years old today, and the respect that that school teacher of mine instilled in me.

And part of her ethics and teaching me, and part of the people that ran our government back then and their ideals, is, you know, what has made society and made me the person that I am today, versus what's going on today with this No Child Left Behind Act. And I'm very concerned about, you know, the schools getting funding. Because the future of our country is our kids, and, you know, Ed saw that back then. And even Margaret Chase Smith, and even though she was a Republican, she was a good lady, too, and, but she always reached out across the aisles, which what you were supposed to do. It isn't about Republicans and Democrats, it's about doing what you're supposed to do, what you're put into office to do, and that's to represent the people of this great state of Maine and to do what you feel is right, and, you know, stick to your guns and work things out over the table. Unfortunately, today they don't do that.

AL: Great, thank you very much.

BS: You're welcome; it's been enjoyable for me. And like I said, Mr. Muskie and Senator Muskie and Secretary of State, I mean, it's quite an honor to have known him, to know Jane and the rest of the family whom I had met over the years. That part of his being and doing things that he did in the state, and just meeting him and talking to him, and things that he had shared and said. It instilled a lot of things in me. Thank you.

End of Interview