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Interview with Andrew McInnes Sinclair by Mike Richard

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Sinclair, Andrew McInnes

Interviewer

Richard, Mike

Date

August 16, 1999

Place

Exeter, New Hampshire

ID Number

MOH 138

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Biographical Note

Andrew Sinclair was born in Rumford, Maine on July 15, 1914 to William Sinclair, a bookkeeper at the Oxford Paper Company, and Annie McInnes Sinclair, a homemaker. He attended Stephens High School, where he was on the track team with Ed Muskie, and the Portland School of Art.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: high school track team; family recollections and connections to Edmund S. Muskie; Rumford ethnic communities; weak unions and a strike; and Lucille (Hicks) Abbott.

Indexed Names

Abbott, Lucille Hicks

Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996

Muskie, Stephen
Sinclair, Andrew McInnes
Sinclair, Annie McInnes
Sinclair, John
Sinclair, Mary (Hill)
Sinclair, William
Sinclair, William, Jr.

Transcript

Mike Richard: The date is August 16th, 1999, and we're here at the home of Andrew Sinclair in Exeter, New Hampshire, and interviewing is Mike Richard. And, Mr. Sinclair, could you state your full name and spell it please?

Andrew Sinclair: Yeah, my full name is Andrew M. Sinclair, and I, the M is for McInnes, M-C-I-N-N-E-S, that was my mother's maiden name and they were from, she was from Scotland. And my father was from England.

MR: And what were their full names, your parents' full names?

AS: My father's full name was William Sinclair, no middle initial, and my mother's name of course was Annie McInnes, M-C-I-N-N-E-S, Sinclair, Sinclair her married name of course.

MR: And what is your date of birth?

AS: My date of birth is July 14, excuse me, July 15, 1914.

MR: And where were you born?

AS: In Rumford, Maine.

MR: And for how long did you live in Rumford?

AS: I lived there probably through high school, then I left there.

MR: And did you come to Exeter after leaving Rumford, or was there. . . .?

AS: No, I didn't, this is only of recent times that I've been in Exeter. I had no real Exeter connection prior to this time.

MR: And so where did you go immediately after leaving Rumford?

AS: I went to art school, to the Portland School of Art in Portland, Maine.

MR: And then where did you go after the Portland Art School?

AS: I went to New York City and I was in the, at the Art Students League in New York City.

MR: And then you lived in, did you live in New York City after that?

AS: I lived in New York for a few years. I can't give you the exact amount of time.

MR: Oh, that's okay. And then you've only been living in Exeter for the past few years, or a couple of years?

AS: Even more recent than that. I've probably lived in Exeter for a year, about a year, that's a ballpark figure.

MR: Have you lived in Maine since, since moving to New York back. . . .?

AS: Yes, I've been back in Maine for various times.

MR: And the Rumford area, or was it. . . .?

AS: In Rumford, yes.

MR: All right, well let's get back to your family background. I'll ask you, how many siblings did you have, if any?

AS: I had two brothers, yes.

MR: And how did you fit in with the brothers, were you older, younger, or middle?

AS: I was the youngest.

MR: The youngest, okay. And what were your brothers' names?

AS: My oldest brother's William, my other brother was John.

MR: Okay, and, I asked you about your parents, what were there, I'm not sure if you mentioned this already, but what were their occupations?

AS: My father was a bookkeeper and he worked in the- for the Oxford Paper Company. That was the main industry of Rumford, Maine. The only industry, I should say, honestly.

MR: Yeah, I visited Rumford recently and that really just dominates the landscape, at least that mill does.

AS: What about the smell?

MR: Yeah, that does too.

AS: It's quite noticeable, I mean. It's not one of the most aesthetic things about Rumford. It's typically a mill town, paper mill, which when you think of it, the product that they produce, that clean white sheet of paper, to get to that, to that stage, it was quite a, quite an operation.

MR: And your mother, did she work out of the home, or was she. . . .?

AS: She worked hard, yes, a housekeeper, yeah, she never, she never did any other kind of job. Like today, the women are into a lot of different things besides housework.

MR: And what were your parents' political beliefs, as far as you could tell?

AS: They were Republicans, their political connection would be Republican, yes. I don't have much information to provide for that part of their life. They were quite- they were politically active in a way. They, you know, they were interested in political things. Particularly my mother, she seemed to be more in that direction, right.

MR: Would they discuss politics with you and your brothers very often?

AS: Oh yes, yes we would. Not to any great extent. They were, we had, well in family conversations there were political issues, you see, and that, they were politically interested in things.

MR: How did their beliefs and discussions affect you and your brothers while you were growing up and talking about politics?

AS: I think it was a, not a very strong influence. They, how do I express it, they were, they were not rabid political people, they, you know, they were very mild. Maybe that's a Scottish trait, I don't know.

MR: Were you or your brothers ever interested in politics?

AS: No.

MR: No?

AS: Well, I might amend that, maybe my brother, my middle brother who was, he was interested in political things but not to any great extent, not that he, it became any kind of major interest in his life. He was interested politically, but I guess when you come from a small town you're politically interested in the comings and goings of the town, politically.

MR: Okay. And what were your parents' religious beliefs?

AS: They were, well, they were Episcopalians and they became Episcopalian when they came to Maine. I would say that my, the Church of England, my dad probably was Church of England, and my mother was Presbyterian. Presbyterian is the religion of Scotland, if there is such a thing, I guess you call it that.

MR: And then they both, they both became Episcopalians upon coming to Maine you said.

AS: I can't give you the historical (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Okay, and. . . .

AS: There were other, in the town there were other Protestant sects and so forth, but they were the, I guess I'd say they were Presbyterian in Scotland, in Great Britain (*unintelligible word*) I know, I have to dig these things up. So you'll forgive me if I'm a little rusty.

MR: Oh, yeah, don't worry. In Rumford when you were growing up, what were some of, you mentioned there were many Protestant sects, what were some of the other religious and ethnic groups?

AS: Well the, religiously you mean?

MR: Yeah.

AS: There was a Methodist, Congregational, Episcopalian, and there were others that I can't give you, enumerate all the different religions that, in the, there were all, well of course there was the Roman Catholic and they were always more or less prevalent.

MR: Was there a significant Jewish or Orthodox or, and even Muslim population at the time?

AS: Not, some Jewish people, yeah, but no other Protestant sects that I can enumerate now.

MR: Okay.

AS: I'll tell you of a typical, the Protestants were in the majority, you know, there was Methodist, Baptist, Congregational and so forth, typical Protestant religion, you know.

MR: And what were some of the ethnic groups that were significant in the town?

AS: I would say that there weren't any real ethnic groups in this, in the town. There was the, there was a Protestant religion and of course the Roman Catholic, some Jewish, but the Jewish people were in the minority.

MR: But there wasn't a strong French or Italian or Irish community?

AS: Oh yes, well I mean that, I include the French as Catholic, yeah. There were, the two main denominations, Catholic were the French and the, we called them the Irish-Catholic but they were not just Irish, they were just non-French, you know.

MR: And who was, and the Protestant was mainly, they call it maybe Yankee or the English?

AS: Yeah, right, yes.

MR: And were there any that you noticed, were there any tensions between these groups, either religious or ethnic at the time?

AS: Nothing serious. No. There was a very, it was a benign sort of relationship there, they, I guess they kept to their own religions and it was peaceful as far as, there were no problems as far as I, any religious problems.

MR: And you mentioned before a little bit the mill and how that was such a part of the industry of the town?

AS: Yes, oh yes.

MR: Or almost defined the industry of the town.

AS: Well I think it's, that's a typical situation in a mill town, is the majority of people worked in the mill because that was their livelihood which I think you'd find to be typical of Rumford or any small town in Maine, any industrial place.

MR: And what was the situation economically, more generally, especially as you were growing up and your somewhat later years during the Depression, what was that like in Rumford, and for your family also?

AS: What, you're slanting this (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Oh, I'm sorry, that was. . . .

AS: No, no, no, that's all right, that's okay.

MR: But I was just wondering maybe, well first of all I should probably break that up. You're general impressions of Rumford in the Depression era and the economic situation of the community.

AS: Yeah, it was very harmonious. There was never a, I believe at one time there was a strike

at the paper mill. I don't think it developed into much, it wasn't a strong, what is the word. . . .

MR: Union?

AS: Union, yeah, well union, organization and so forth. I think that there was a union in the paper industry and, but I don't think it was ever, ever any real over, what's the word, very, very strong influence I think it was, you know, in the paper (*unintelligible word*). In other words, they didn't have any serious labor problems, it was all very benign so that we didn't- we weren't brought up with any background like that. It was all very peaceful.

MR: And what was the economic situation of your family during that time, and even in the '20s or a bit earlier, what was that like growing up?

AS: What did you say, that last part?

MR: Well even in the '20s, even before the Depression and then later during the Depression, how did your family situation economically develop, what was it like growing up that way?

AS: It was, I had a very peaceful relationship with my family. There was never any, if you're thinking of unions and organizations. . . .

MR: Or even just how your family got by, or was it difficult to. . . .?

AS: They, well, they were of modest means. They were not wealthy or, I think the, kind of the run-of-the-mill people.

MR: So that, was your family situation pretty standard for most families in Rumford during that time?

AS: I would say yes, yes, I think so, yeah. No outstanding situation with them as far as their economic life there. You know, it's a tough one to go back to, because, see there were three brothers in my family, and we were not, we were not politically oriented and my parents were not into political things, were just kind of benign. So this doesn't give you much to work on, does it?

MR: Oh, no, no, that's okay. But actually, mentioning politics for a little bit, do you have a notion of maybe the dominant political registration of the town, was it mostly Republican or Democrat or (*unintelligible phrase*)?

AS: I would say yes, off, just off the top of my head would be the Republican, no radical political associations of a typical mill town.

MR: And what were some of the groups or organizations or clubs or anything in the town, outside of your family, that were very influential on you or that were important to the town?

AS: That's a tough one to answer.

MR: Was there maybe some type of club that you'd frequent, or the church or community organization.

AS: We were Protestants, and, but we were not, my family were not very religious, not into politics, and politics and religion, they were kind of benign.

MR: Okay. I guess we'll talk about your educational experience in Rumford, and did you go to the Rumford public schools through high school?

AS: Oh yes, sure, through high school, yeah.

MR: And what were some of your interests, taking in the entire elementary and high school period, what were some of your maybe academic or extracurricular interests during that time?

AS: Well I was always interested in art. I remember I wanted to become an artist and pursue that type of work, activity.

MR: And do you remember any teachers or classes or clubs that you were particularly involved or interested in, or who influenced you somehow?

AS: I belonged to the Latin Club, that was, Miss Murphy was the, (*laughing*), the name Murphy, she was a Latin teacher (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

AS: What is the word you use there, a little, not quite, living off the main path, something like that.

MR: And did you become interested in Latin also. . . .?

AS: No, none whatsoever.

MR: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

AS: It was a high school subject, college, college subject, yeah. I guess I'm not your typical student to be, your interviewing. Just, no, I didn't go to college and so forth. Oh, I went to art school and that was not really like going to college, it was a different, art school and college, education classes were quite a thing removed.

MR: Was the art school, was that a four-year or two-year program, or how was it set up?

AS: That would be, there was no. I went to Portland School of Art, but there was no, they didn't have any, well they did have a college that had art training, but it was not, it wasn't particularly emphasized, it was, you know, one of those subjects, art school.

MR: Okay, and I guess I'll talk to you about your experiences in high school and one person we were mentioning off the tape, the teacher Lucille Hicks who'd later be Lucille Abbott. Did you get to know her well, or what were your impressions of her as a teacher (*unintelligible phrase*)?

AS: Well I had a very good impression of her and, but I, you say get to know somebody well, in that, I guess I wasn't maybe a typical student, I just, or wasn't interested in high school and so forth. I got through my classes and everything. I didn't flunk out, I know that.

MR: But did you get to know Miss Hicks outside the classroom at all, or was it more just a class related?

AS: No, it was more school related, yeah.

MR: Well I guess, actually one thing I should probably ask you about, did you know the Muskie family very well when you were growing up in Rumford and, do you have any impressions of them?

AS: Well, let me put it this way, the one in my family who was better acquainted with Muskie was my mother knowing Muskie's father [Stephen Muskie], and he was a tailor in Rumford. She knew him very well, I mean, or quite well, and she was quite impressed with Mr. Muskie. And I think maybe one reason is that she was from Scotland and I think he was, I don't, I can't, I don't want to be quoted on this, I think he was, they were Polish or Lithuanian, one or the other, I guess it was Polish. As a matter of fact I think they were about the only Polish family in Rumford. The majority of them were Lithuanians. You know, they, when they come to the country, a new country, they bring their, all their relatives after they become, you know, (*unintelligible word*), better known, religious influence and so forth.

MR: And did you have an impression of how they were looked upon by the community, how their, through their political or social standing?

AS: No, I can't give you anything on that, I just, I, because, I'm not trying to avoid that, I just, I just don't know how they, and don't forget that they were not there, there were not a great many of any particular foreign nationalities. They were more or less certainly in the minority. See, the, Rumford, Maine was a paper mill town and industries attract other religious interests. I mean, I don't want to sound prejudiced, I mean they just, they were. . . .

MR: Yeah, that, usually like in Lewiston the French would work in the mills, you mean that type of thing?

AS: There you go, yes, right. But I think that's a typical thing. They are found in towns where

their either religious background or nationality background, that's, I think that's a typical situation, as you probably have become acquainted with that.

MR: And what was Ed Muskie like in high school, how did you get to know him and what was he like?

AS: Well, we were, one of the, I think that what we shared together in that respect was we were both on the track team, yeah, and so, for the two or three years in high school we were quite friendly and, but we did have a, that kind of a common interest, if you can call it interest, is being in that, being on the track team that we did share an interest in.

MR: And what was he like as a person (*unintelligible phrase*)?

AS: Very nice, very even, very nice fellow. One that you would like and not have any feeling of rivalry, I don't have any of that in my opinion of him.

MR: And do you have any maybe just stories or anecdotes about your time with Ed, maybe on the track team or in a class or something, or in another club?

AS: Well, that's a tough one to answer, that's kind of all encompassing. No, I, I guess a good test for that is if you can think back, say I or anybody has a common interest in school, you think of the times you, when you were associated with somebody, whether it be the track team or scholastically or whatever, so, anyway that is a tough one to, (*unintelligible phrase*).

MR: Okay, and you said you were never politically interested or involved particularly during the rest of your life or in high school or. . . ?

AS: No, no.

MR: No, okay. And have you married, have you been married?

AS: Yes, I have four children, yeah.

MR: And what is your wife's name?

AS: Her name was Mary, Mary H. Sinclair. H is for Hill.

MR: And when did you marry, well when did you marry Mary?

AS: Well, sometime after our being in school, I can't give you that, that's a tough one to answer.

MR: Has she been, or was she politically involved or interested or?

AS: No, oh no.

MR: Have any of your children been?

AS: Oh, no, not any, not to any great extent, no, no.

MR: Okay, I guess I'll just, I'm not sure if this is too broad a question, but I'll just ask you what you think in general Ed Muskie's effects on Maine and on politics has been?

AS: I think, I can quite easily answer that. I think Ed Muskie's effect on Maine is a most favorable one. He, I think he was very popular, I think he did a lot for the state of Maine, politically and as a person.

MR: Okay, great. Well, is there anything that you'd like to go over that maybe I've missed, or anything about your life or about Ed Muskie or your relationship with Ed?

AS: I don't really feel there'd be anything more I can talk about in that regard, except that I, I come to a point where, you know, I don't seem to be able to give you much information.

MR: No, you've been, given us a lot of info I think (*unintelligible phrase*).

AS: Oh, I mean it's just little bits and pieces of my experiences, you know, in school and so forth.

MR: Well, thanks a lot for taking the time to do this.

AS: Is that all you wanted to know?

MR: Oh, yeah, there's, or unless there's something else you wanted to share.

AS: No, I think we've covered as far, your main thing that you were seeking was my association with Ed Muskie and. . . .

MR: Right, and impressions of Rumford and things like that.

AS: Yes, well, I always had a good impression of Rumford, I think that it was a nice place to live and we never had any, never any political problems. The paper mill there was, that was unions and so forth but I think everything was very harmonious in the town of Rumford.

MR: Great, well thanks a lot.

AS: All right, well, I feel that I (*unintelligible phrase*).

End of Interview