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## Webber, Curtis oral history interview

Marisa Burnham-Bestor

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## **Interview with Curtis Webber by Marisa Burnham-Bestor**

### *Summary Sheet and Transcript*

#### **Interviewee**

Webber, Curtis

#### **Interviewer**

Burnham-Bestor, Marisa

#### **Date**

October 7, 1999

#### **Place**

Auburn, Maine

#### **ID Number**

MOH 153

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#### **Biographical Note**

G. Curtis Webber was born August 29, 1933 in Lewiston, Maine and grew up in Auburn. He attended Edward Little H.S., class of 1950 and one year of prep school at the Loomis School in Windsor, Connecticut. Like his father, he attended Bowdoin College and Harvard Law School. In 1958 he joined Frank Linnell's law firm and continues in the current firm: Linnell, Choate & Webber. In 1965 he was Auburn city solicitor.

#### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: 1968 vice presidential campaign; Republican Party in Maine; Democratic Party in Maine; Donald Webber's judicial career; Young Republicans group; Curt's personal transition from Republican to Democrat; Auburn school system former rule: married women could not teach; fraternity culture at Bowdoin College; Harvard Law Review and social status at Harvard Law School; replacing Bill Hathaway in Frank Linnell's law firm, 1958; Webber's work as Auburn City Solicitor; involvement with Linnell and Lewiston/Auburn Shoe Workers Protective Association and Bates College movie about the shoe strike, "Roughing the Uppers;" impressions of Muskie; issues in Cohen v. Hathaway campaign; Frank Coffin and the "Wranglers": Hathaway, Lee, Webber, Scales, Gamache, and Trafton; straight ballot voting debates; and the Dickey-Lincoln Dam controversy.

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## **Transcript**

**Marisa Burnham-Bestor:** The date is October 7th, 1999, we are in Auburn at the law office of Linnell, Choate & Webber, and present are Curtis Webber and Marisa Burnham-Bestor. Could you please state your full name and spell it, and begin with G.

**Curtis Webber:** All right, my name is Curtis Webber and sometimes I put a G in front of

Curtis.

**MB:** Could you spell the full name for me as well?

**CW:** Oh, C-U-R-T-I-S W-E-B-B-E-R.

**MB:** Thank you. What does the G stand for?

**CW:** George.

**MB:** What was your date of birth?

**CW:** August 29th, 1933.

**MB:** And where were you born?

**CW:** I was, my family was living in Auburn and I was born in the hospital in Lewiston.

**MB:** What were your parents' full names?

**CW:** Lucie Nourse, N-O-U-R-S-E, Webber and Donald Wedgewood Webber.

**MB:** Did you have any siblings?

**CW:** A sister, Faith.

**MB:** One sister? Older or younger than yourself?

**CW:** She's five years younger than I am.

**MB:** So you were the youngest in the family? I mean the oldest in the family?

**CW:** Right.

**MB:** And what were your parents' occupations?

**CW:** My mother was a teacher until she got married and after that she didn't work outside the home, and my father was a lawyer and later he became a judge, there's a picture up on the wall there. He was in the superior court system for a number of years, and then he was appointed to the Maine Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the state. After he retired from there he joined this office as off-counsel and he did private reference work, meaning that if the lawyers on both sides wanted him to resolve their disputes, the superior court would refer the case to him and he would decide it just as if he had been a judge.

**MB:** How old was he when he, ballpark range if you don't remember his exact age, when he was appointed to the various offices and then when he retired from the supreme court?

**CW:** He was younger than the retirement age, mandatory retirement age of seventy, when he retired from the Supreme Court, by a year or two. I think he was in his late forties when he was appointed to the superior court; that's about the best I can do in terms of dates.

**MB:** What were your parents' religious affiliations?

**CW:** They were both members of the High Street Congregational Church, across the street here on Pleasant Street. They were very loyal to that church.

**MB:** Was that church a very involved church in the community?

**CW:** As I was growing up it was not a church that was particularly involved in social action, at least as far as I recall. Now I believe it really is. I'm not a member of that church, but they have, I think, become much more active in community matters. And they run a sort of a food pantry for low-income people that are having problems making ends meet, right now for example, and do several other things.

**MB:** Where was your father educated as far as, you know, where did he grow up and do his high school then?

**CW:** He grew up in Auburn, he graduated from Edward Little, and he went to Bowdoin and Harvard Law School.

**MB:** You went to Bowdoin as well, right?

**CW:** Uh-huh.

**MB:** Did you go to Harvard Law, too?

**CW:** Uh-huh.

**MB:** Oh, and then did he come and start a similar practice to yours before his judgeships?

**CW:** He joined his father; there's a picture up on the wall there over in the corner of my grandfather, for whom I was named, and my father is standing. And they practiced together for a number of years until my grandfather retired. And then at a later time Willis Trafton joined my father's firm and that firm later became Trafton and, well it became Trafton and Scales, then Trafton and Matzen, which still exists.

**MB:** So your father by that time was then moving on so he didn't remain with the firm.

**CW:** No. And when he, as I said earlier, when he retired, he actually joined this firm in an off-counsel status.

**MB:** And this was your firm at that time?

**CW:** Uh-huh.

**MB:** How was your family involved in the community, what were some of the activities or social organizations?

**CW:** Well, my mother has belonged to a number of social organizations. My parents were very heavily involved in church activities. My father was a very successful Sunday school teacher; my mother was in charge of the church Sunday school for a number of years. They belonged to the College Club. They were, particularly my father was active in a little theater [Community Little Theatre], and he was, you know, in a number of little theater plays here. He was in Kiwanis' for a while. He was active in Republican politics at one time. And I think my memory's exhausted.

**MB:** Do you know anything about his involvement in the Republican politics?

**CW:** Well, not very much, only what few things he's told me. He was appointed by one of the governors, it might have been Governor [Horace] Hildreth, to be on a commission to revise I think it was the, some aspects of the motor vehicle laws. He told me he belonged to a group of young Republicans; I think a number of the other people were lawyers. I'm not sure exactly what they did, and it was, I'm sure the fact that he was, had been active in Republican politics was one of the reasons that Governor Hildreth appointed him to the superior court. A political affiliation in the past has been important for those judicial appointments.

**MB:** Has your lineage been Republican from, you know, you spoke of your grandfather earlier?

**CW:** Yes, on both sides. And I remember in 1960 when John Kennedy ran against Richard Nixon, I was really, I was, you know, still had those Republican roots and I was really agonizing. I watched the debates and I'm embarrassed to say that I voted for Nixon. Although I was torn, it wasn't long before I regretted it. And it wasn't too long after that that I switched my registration. My friends were saying, "You talk like a Democrat, you think like a Democrat, why don't you face up to it, you are a Democrat!" So I finally agreed they were right.

**MB:** In your initial decision making when you were selecting a party, was it largely family?

**CW:** Yes, I voted for Eisenhower. I don't like to talk about that now.

**MB:** How did your family respond to your change?

**CW:** Well, I think they were used to the fact that I was going to be different in some respects although they may have just put it down to youthful rebellion. I stopped being a Boston Red Sox fan; I didn't go to High Street Congregational Church. I think they felt that I was just trying to be different than they, so that's how they regarded it. I remember when my wife and I came back after law school, my father said you should go around, look at all the churches and, you know, see which one you're really comfortable in. And we did go to several, and we decided to go to the Universalist Church up the street here. Then I discovered what he really meant was go

and look at all these other churches and then come to High Street Congregational Church.

**MB:** How old were you when you made that change?

**CW:** Well, let's see, I was married when I was twenty-one, so it was essentially three years, twenty-four, twenty-five, in that range.

**MB:** So it was youthful rebellion to your parents.

**CW:** Yes.

**MB:** You mentioned your parents' political beliefs. Was your mother on the same wavelength as your father?

**CW:** Yes, she was a Republican. Still is, but she was kind of operating in his shadow. She didn't always vote, I don't think, for the same person that he was going to vote for, but often she went with his choice, whatever it was.

**MB:** Can you tell me a little bit more about her teaching career from before she was married?

**CW:** I can't tell you a great deal, but she did, she taught at Webster School here in Auburn, which is still a school that's being operated. I think she was a seventh or eighth grade teacher, and I think in those days teachers taught all the subjects. There weren't, they didn't, classes didn't move around as much as they do now. I remember she said at least one year she had a group of kids who were not the brightest group, and she occasionally identified people, who all seemed rather old to me, who she said, as former students of hers.

**MB:** Oh, wow. What grade range does the Webber [*sic* Webster] School. . . .?

**CW:** Webster.

**MB:** Webster, pardon me.

**CW:** It, well it's changed. Then, I think it was still a grammar school, sixth to ninth. It's now been converted to an elementary school.

**MB:** And what were your mother's reasons, if you know them, for ending her teaching career?

**CW:** I'm not sure then whether they had a rule that a married person couldn't teach. I think that was the rule in the Auburn school system for a number of years. But she got married and in those days, you know, that was long before it was accepted that women could be mothers and homemakers and also have a career. I think she's had a little trouble with the fact that her daughter and daughter-in-law and, you know, her grandchildren are, the women in the family are working outside the home.

**MB:** So, would you not say that she was interested in continuing to work outside the home?

**CW:** Well, I don't know the answer to that. I don't, I don't think she felt that was the right thing for women to do.

**MB:** Your sister Faith, what does she do now, or what?

**CW:** She's retired. She married a man who graduated from MIT and eventually joined the World Health Organization. They've lived in various parts of the world. She worked for a business school, sort of like, modeled after Harvard Business School over in Switzerland helping Ph.D.s translate their papers from whatever language to English for several years, and did other kinds of related work. But she's retired now, and she and her husband live in Raymond.

**MB:** Where was she educated?

**CW:** Wheaton and Simmons.

**MB:** Oh, okay. In addition to their involvement in the church, and you mentioned some of your father's outside involvements, what was the social life like for adults in Auburn, for your parents' experience at that time?

**CW:** Well, they had a number of friends who were couples that played bridge with a lot of people. They attended social gatherings with other groups of, couples of their, generally of their age. I think that's essentially it.

**MB:** Were these organized activities, or were they kind of done by the group of friends?

**CW:** I think some of both.

**MB:** In addition to that, did the people that they mostly interacted with, were they members of the church as well or were these outside sort of friendships?

**CW:** I'm sure some were, but some weren't, you know. I think they were people of essentially their age. I think they were, to the extent I know who they were, they were typically also Protestants and, Protestant Anglo-Saxon types, but they didn't necessarily belong to the High Street Church.

**MB:** What were some of the values that you would describe as important to your parents, and what were the ones that they impressed upon you and your sister?

**CW:** Well, I think being trustworthy and keeping your commitments. They both had a real social conscience about helping other people who needed assistance and they were active formally and informally in different ways in the community at helping other people, a sense of sort of having to give something back.

**MB:** How would you compare your beliefs to your parents' in terms of your social consciousness? You had mentioned your switching politics, but how would you describe your



change in men- your difference in mentality in that sense and also your religious attitudes as far as being Unitarian versus Christian?

**CW:** Well, I think very similar in many ways. I simply couldn't accept the Christian myths, divinity of Jesus and that sort of thing. My parents would tell me, particularly my father, "Well you can really believe anything you want to, you know, High Street Church, you know, it's a big umbrella." But when I would go over there on Mother's Day or something I just felt assaulted by the Christian theology. And what he said wasn't true to me. It just, I found myself, you know, being (*unintelligible word*) to mouth a lot of things I didn't believe. But other than that, I don't think we differed much in our values.

**MB:** Politically-minded, you said that you'd always been, even when you were a Republican, you were more Democratic-minded. Were your parents sort of similar in that they wavered, or were they more strongly conservative?

**CW:** Well, they would occasionally vote for Democratic candidates. Like Frank Coffin, for example, was a lawyer that my parents knew because he lived in this community for a time. He lived, you know, right over on the Bates campus really, and so they were definitely liberal Democrats. They didn't vote for Goldwater, for example. I said liberal Dem-, I meant liberal Republicans. Now I've forgotten your question. You were asking about their political values?

**MB:** Yeah, you had mentioned that you were more kind of the, Democratic-minded, even though you were affiliated with the Republicans. I was wondering if they were kind of more liberal Republicans or more conservative.

**CW:** No, they were moderate liberal Republicans.

**MB:** Do you think that that kind of was one of the reasons that they were more accepting of your choice?

**CW:** Oh yes, I think it would have been much harder for them if they'd really been evangelical types or conservative Republicans. It would have been much more of a wrench.

**MB:** How has your sister's development in terms of her political and religious beliefs been similar or different to your parents'?

**CW:** Well, she and her husband have always been a little more conservative than we, but in general we agree on most political issues, I would say. They're essentially agnostics in their, from a religious standpoint, so I guess I would say that on most issues we probably come out about the same.

**MB:** Where did your family fall into the structure of the Auburn community economically and sort of socially as well, I guess?

**CW:** Well, when my grandfather came back from the First World War [WWI], he had no law practice left and things were really rough. But he gradually developed, redeveloped his practice

and when my father started with him in the, it was in the Depression, he didn't make a lot of money and they kind of scraped by. But he did well and when he got out of the service, he was asked to represent several insurance companies and that really helped his practice take off, I think. And so when he went on the court he was doing fairly well. He never was wealthy, but he was certainly very comfortable.

**MB:** Tell me about your primary and secondary education here in Auburn I understand?

**CW:** Yes, I graduated from Edward Little [high school] in 1950, and I went to prep school for a year after that. I went to the Loomis School in Windsor, Connecticut, and then I went to Bowdoin and then I went to Harvard Law School.

**MB:** You took an additional year, so you did four years of Edward Little and then one at Loomis?

**CW:** I had skipped a year way back and so I was a year younger than my classmates and my parents thought I was, I guess they thought I was immature for my peer group and a year at Loomis would help me catch up.

**MB:** What were some of your experiences at Edward Little, teachers you recall, major events?

**CW:** Well, I played in the band for three years. The bandleader, Donald Guay, has been recognized in the last couple of years by alumni classes and so forth as being a fine, outstanding person, and he was. I did well academically, but in high school academic success is not recognized as being a social plus. I was a really a borderline athlete, you know; I was sort of an athlete wanna-be and I was, I didn't have great success there. I had a math teacher named Margaret [sic] [Marjorie] Jordan who was, is actually a Bates graduate, absolutely a lovely person. And in fact I've developed a very small, helped to develop a very small scholarship fund in her name in recent years. She taught algebra. Arthur Beliveau was another Bates graduate, the baseball coach, is another person I was, I admired.

**MB:** What were, you mentioned being a sort of borderline athlete, what were some of the athletic opportunities and what were some of the athletics that were kind of viewed as very important in the community?

**CW:** Well, football was the dominant sport I would say although Edward Little had a tradition of good baseball teams and so being a good baseball player was also recognized as giving you a lot of status at Edward Little in those days, basketball a little less so. Skiing has always been important in Auburn, long before it became popular in other Maine communities. That was, you know, long before Sunday River and Sugarloaf and those mountains that can make snow and have ski lifts. I played on the JV basketball team, but that was about the limit of my success.

**MB:** Had you been a skier, or?

**CW:** No, I, as a child I skied at one of the local hills, but when I discovered basketball, I really, I started playing in the Y and other places and played basketball ever since.

**MB:** How tall are you?

**CW:** Six-one. In fact I play, even now in the noontime basketball group over at Bates, plays with; it's a group of faculty and staff, people, and some townies are admitted in order to keep a quorum viable.

**MB:** So you participate in that?

**CW:** Um-hmm.

**MB:** Wow.

**CW:** I got the scars to show it.

**MB:** Yeah, that Bates faculty, they can be harsh. And then, how would you compare your year at Loomis and kind of the prep school sort of atmosphere, and I guess education as well, to your experience at Edward Little?

**CW:** Well, it was like night and day. I learned to drink tea; I learned that you can't, you should not put lemon and milk in your tea at the same time. But the whole atmosphere at Loomis was, academically was different. One of the things I've told people, to try to illustrate the point, is that I was used to doing well academically, and I was the co-valedictorian at Edward Little, but I was getting Cs in all my English themes. And so I asked the master after a number of weeks, "What am I doing wrong?" We were reading *Ethan Frome* or something like that. He said, "Well, if you supply a correct factual response to the question, that's a C. And if you do it in a way that's very interesting and you use interesting language in your answers, that's a B. And if your answer is just absolutely outstanding and really blows me away, that's an A."

So I realized I had to loosen up. In high school I actually didn't use vocabulary that I possessed because I was afraid of being viewed as a show off by my peers, so I was always sort of pulling back, and I realized at Loomis to succeed you had to go in the other direction. So that really changed the way I tried to use written language. In high school often I wouldn't volunteer when I knew the answer because I didn't want to seem like a teacher's pet. Well, that kind of thing changed as well. So it was, it wasn't the happiest year in my life but I must say it was a very big learning year for me, and it gave me a real head start at Bowdoin. I had my best academic year at Bowdoin my freshman year, you know, while the public school kids were kind of catching up. You know, the bright public school kids that did after a while, but I had a real jump on them because of Loomis.

**MB:** That's great. Did you end up finding success at Loomis after, you know, you kind of loosened up and. . . ?

**CW:** Well, I eventually became an honor roll student. I never was a top scholar there, but I achieved modest success.

**MB:** What was the boarding experience like, I gather that was, you had to board there?

**CW:** Oh yeah, Loomis then and now has a lot of day students who commute from West Hartford. But that was, you know, I had been away to summer camp but that was certainly a different experience for me, and it wasn't always easy.

**MB:** Were the opportunities offered to the private school or prep school students, as far as extracurricular activities and sort of well-rounding of the students, comparable or better or worse than a public school experience, or your public school experiences?

**CW:** Well, it was better in the sense that participation in athletics was essentially mandatory. You could opt out, but you had to do something else; it wasn't very desirable and I can't remember what. So I played on various kinds of intramural teams. I continued to really not make it as a varsity athlete; I got cut from both the baseball and basketball teams. I survived toward near the end but didn't make it, so I played on intramural teams, and that was a generally a positive experience.

**MB:** Was it at all common to do what you did and to go for an extra year at a prep school, or was that pretty. . . . ?

**CW:** Well, there were not many of us; there were a few. I can remember the admissions letter was that, and you've got to remember I'm receiving this as a person who's been used to having some academic success, saying, "Well, if you really apply yourself here, you can probably make it." I was a little borderline in their view as I, to get in, I didn't do well I think on the, whatever the comparable thing to the SATs is for prep schools. So they were, I guess they must have been looking at my high school grades and saying, "Well, this guy doesn't test very well but he's done well, so maybe he can make it here."

**MB:** Was that, well, I just lost my train of thought. Ohhh. . . . What were your reasons from choosing Loomis over some of the other schools?

**CW:** Well, my father went down and talked to one of the admissions directors at Bowdoin and asked his suggestions, and he suggested Loomis. He had taught there actually and, before coming to Bowdoin. And he suggested another school in northwestern Massachusetts; I'm blanking out on the name of it now. So we, my father and I went on a, I really didn't want to do this but we, I reluctantly went with him to these two schools, and I liked Loomis better. I remember the other school, which is a well-known prep school, which I can't think of the name of, you had to do a lot more work; all the students were expected to participate in kitchen work and other stuff, and somehow that didn't seem very appealing to me. So that's not a very good reason for making a choice of prep schools, but, and also physically the campus, I liked the campus appearance at Loomis better.

**MB:** I remembered my other question. Being accepted in the final year kind of as already a high school graduate, what sort of courses were you allowed to take at Loomis, were you taking senior courses, or?

**CW:** Yeah, I took the same courses that I would have taken had I been a third or fourth year student there.

**MB:** And then, we've already said that you attended Bowdoin College, what was the reasoning behind that choice?

**CW:** Well, it wasn't, I'm not proud of that. As you perhaps can tell, it's more- I told you already, there's a pattern of my kind of following along in family patterns. And I had gone to football games with my father; I had developed a very, you know, a very superficial view of the college, that I wanted to go there. I had the notion that some other colleges were kind of for rich families' children and I thought, my impression was that Bowdoin was more cosmopolitan than that. I thought that I wanted to go to a relatively small college as opposed to a big city college or university. So, actually that's the only college I applied to, and I can't believe that I; that's what I did, I didn't have a back up. I don't know if it's just I was conceited or what, but golly, it's a good thing I got in.

**MB:** Did you commute from Auburn, or did you live. . . . ?

**CW:** No.

**MB:** Was that common in those days, to be an on campus student? Or has it become just more common in recent years?

**CW:** No, virtually everybody lived on campus. There were a few, very few, students from Brunswick that lived at home.

**MB:** I've been trying to figure out over my past few interviews if that's true of Bates as well because I know a lot of the Bates students back in those days were Lewiston-Auburn, had grown up in Lewiston-Auburn and many of them commuted, and I was kind of wondering, I guess Bowdoin didn't have the same.

**CW:** No. I had some friends who were going to Bates that way, and there was a group of them. And my impression was they really didn't get fully integrated into the college life because of that.

**MB:** What was the Bowdoin experience like for you?

**CW:** It was very positive; I really enjoyed my four years there. I guess maybe the biggest negative was that I joined a fraternity like virtually everybody else and you, in those days you did that the first week or two when you showed up on campus, when you, you know, didn't know what was going on. And I joined a fraternity which I later discovered had restrictive clauses in the charter, and that was very embarrassing. And I can remember, I don't know, maybe I was a sophomore, I was just, I was a little late for a fraternity meeting which was in the basement room, and I was hurrying down there. I noticed a Japanese exchange student was standing in the living room and wasn't going down, and I asked him, "Why aren't you going to the meeting?" He said, "I can't be a member." So that was, I guess my first awareness that there

were those kinds of restrictions. It was all Caucasian, all white in those days, and. . . .

**MB:** Was that true of most of the fraternities, or were there opportunities for students of color?

**CW:** Well, it was, it certainly was true of a number of them. And of course this, Bowdoin was all-male at that time. There was a fraternity that was primarily a Jewish fraternity. So in those days the college had not done a good job of integrating the students, and it hadn't even confronted the presence of women yet. There was another fraternity that was primarily intellectual types who weren't into athletics and things like that, so they were kind of segregated in a way, too. So those aspects of college life weren't good, plus the fact that if you didn't get pledged to a fraternity, you wanted to, and most people did just because there were so few fraternity members, non-fraternity members, that was a social stigma. So that, again, was not good. I really applaud the fact that the college is abandoning fraternities at long last. My, sort of to appease my conscience, I actually was one of the graduation speakers when I was a senior, and I spoke about the restrictive clause in the fraternities and urged the college to take action to require that they be abolished, and I like to say that the college was listening and only twenty years later they did it.

**MB:** Have you been back to visit since, in past years, I suppose?

**CW:** Oh, yes.

**MB:** Has the college changed much with, the feeling of the college, with the acceptance of women now and the phasing out of the fraternities and sororities? How is that changing the college?

**CW:** Well it was, over time, fraternity life was becoming much less popular so that even when the college finally made a decision to eliminate the fraternities. Well, first they went through a phase of requiring the fraternities to get rid of these restrictive clauses, some of them, and then required them to accept women. And along the way some of them went local, including the fraternity I had been in finally went local. I think there was over the Kappa Sigma, you know, to it's disgrace, on paper of eliminating its restrictive clauses but then tried to use pressure on local fraternities below the surface to still enforce these restrictions. That happened to the Bowdoin chapter and they, to their credit, said, "*(unintelligible word)* this is too much," we can't handle this, and with alumni support the students voted to disassociate from Kappa Sigma.

**MB:** What were you, why I suppose were you appointed the honor of speaking at graduation, what was that?

**CW:** Well, I can't remember exactly how it worked, but I think I was invited along with a number of other people to make, to prepare something and sort of try out for it. I'm not sure how they do it now, but that's what happened then and so I made the grade. There were four speakers. I can remember so distinctly even now talking with a young man who was, oh, maybe a couple years younger than I, who is Jewish, somebody from Auburn whom I knew. And he was asking me about Bowdoin because he was thinking about Bowdoin as a possibility, and then he was also asking me some questions about the fraternity system, and I can remember talking to

him and perspiration was pouring down my face. It was, I couldn't tell him that he could not get into my fraternity. That was one of the most awful experiences I ever had socially and that, I integrated that into my speech as a matter of fact.

**MB:** Were other people in your fraternity similar in the fact that, you know, they were more kind of evolved liberally beyond those restrictions?

**CW:** Well I think, somehow It didn't, it didn't seem to get discussed very much. I think that may be one way in which the college has changed in that the students now, I think, would be much less ready to put up with that sort of thing. And the fraternity that I was in at that time was the kind of fraternity where you'd think that that would happen because there were a number of intelligent; I think we were about like third ranked in the college academically, there was a lot of active discussion at meals and so forth, but it didn't deal with those issues, those social issues. People just seemed to kind of accept it, I'm embarrassed to say.

**MB:** After your experience would you say, would you still consider Bowdoin to be more cosmopolitan at the time than the other colleges that you might have looked at?

**CW:** I, remember I didn't look at other colleges. Well, my daughter went to Williams, one of my sons went to Middlebury, and I certainly felt that the presence of money was rather evident, and they talked about things in which it was at those schools. My impression still is that it's more so. A lot of my classmates at Bowdoin were- came from not very wealthy families who came from small towns in Maine and so forth, and they fit in very well.

**MB:** When you, when did you decide that you were interested in law?

**CW:** Well, somewhere along my, during my college career I began to agonize about what I was going to do next. I was an English major, and I enjoyed my English courses. My father had suggested to me that he thought I would make a good lawyer, and I wasn't sure. I took a constitutional law course hoping that would be, tell me something, and I didn't really, wasn't really thrilled with it. So ultimately, and in a way this is more like a confession than a narrative I think, but I sort of backed into going to law school because my father said, "Well, now give it a try and, you know, if after a year you don't think you really want to stay with it, no hard feelings." And he was going to pay for it.

So I, not really being sure this is what I wanted to do, I went to Harvard, got admitted to Harvard, and I went to Cambridge. And there the, I didn't really choose to continue so much as my pride was so bruised at the end of the first year where I really did very poorly. . . .

**MB:** You can continue; we have another minute.

**CW:** . . . . That all I could think of was coming back and redeeming myself academically. I thought I had flunked out actually at the end of the first year. So that's not a very good way to choose a career, so I really feel that, in retrospect, I sort of backed into, backed through life I think is the way I sometimes put it, made decisions because I was sort of following a pattern of family or something. But it's just been dumb luck really that I ended up doing something that I

found I enjoy doing.

*End of Side A, Tape One*

*Side B, Tape One*

**MB:** This is side two of the interview with Curtis Webber. We were discussing Bowdoin a bit more and your kind of choices on law school. Were there any teachers who kind of encouraged you in either direction, helped with that?

**CW:** I don't recall consulting any teachers about career choices. If I did, I've forgotten it now.

**MB:** Did you go on as an English major, or did you change to poli-sci or government?

**CW:** No, I continued as an English major, and actually that turned out to be a very good major to have, I think, for law school. And it, at some point during my Harvard career they published a list of what people had majored in, in undergraduate colleges and many were English majors; that was like maybe the third or fourth most popular major. And you know, lawyers have to use language in lots of different ways so that it seemed to me that it was a very good thing to be, actually. I had a creative writing course at Bowdoin which I think was particularly helpful, taught by the former president, [A. Leroy] Roy Greason. And that was useful in thinking about how you use language to create certain kinds of effects, you know, sort of like thinking about language in the way poets do using different lengths of words and different lengths of sentences, for example, to create a certain kind of effect on the reader. So things like that, law is the art of persuasion in a large degree, and how you use language can be a very effective tool.

**MB:** That's interesting. What were your experiences like at Harvard? You had mentioned that, you know, you kind of felt like you needed to continue. Was it enjoyable?

**CW:** Once in a while. It was very, very hard work, there are a couple things that I think of that sort of symbolize the experience. You know, in high school being a successful scholar was nothing in terms of social respect that you would get. At Loomis it was somewhat more so. At Bowdoin people who were James Bowdoin scholars or on dean's list did get some respect. But being an athlete, or outstanding athlete was still, you know, perhaps more, gave you more social prominence. But at Harvard, Harvard Law School, being able to sit at a table in the library that had a little thing that said, "reserved for Law Review editors", that was the key, that was the highest social pinnacle that one could achieve. Harvard Law Review was the highest ranking students who then become the writers and editors of this publication. So there's a sort of gradation as you move up the line in terms of how much respect and honor are given to people who are successful academically.

**MB:** Was that something that you were involved with, the Law Review?

**CW:** No, I wasn't close to Law Review.

**MB:** At what point did you realize that law was something that you enjoyed?



**CW:** Well, not really until I started doing it, I think. There were, you know, there were some classes that I enjoyed and found challenging and many times the intellectual discussion was challenging. And of course in those days the Socratic Method was used even more widely than it is, I think, now at Harvard. So many times you were left frustrated at the end of a class because you didn't really feel you knew what the law was. You'd go in having read some cases thinking you knew, well, this is sort of, these are the rules that apply, and you'd go out totally confused because the professors would oppose hypothetical examples that made those rules, the application of those rules seem stupid, absurd and unfair in various cases. And so that would leave you, you know, somewhat tormented and wanting certainty. And many times the professor would never say, "Well this is what is or should be." They would just, you know, leave you to try to work, to work that through.

**MB:** Had that, had the method been used at Bowdoin, a similar sort of questioning rather than. . . ?

**CW:** I don't recall that it was. Certainly not in, if it was it wasn't anything like the way, because it was a teaching method that was, you know, used throughout, especially first year courses, but even in some of the upper level courses, very extensively I remember.

**MB:** Did you feel that that was more helpful, or hurtful?

**CW:** Well, I don't know. It certainly I think was intended to make you think for yourself trying to work these things through. People used to say, well, what we're really trying to do here is to get you to think like a lawyer, you know, to be able to analyze issues and see what really was important and deal with that, and not be distracted by stuff. And I suppose the Socratic method was helpful in sharpening your skills in that regard.

By the way, there's one other vignette that to me sort of symbolizes my Harvard Law School experience, and I remember this so clearly. Saturday afternoon, it's a bright fall afternoon, and I've got several books and I'm going down to Langdau Library. And as I'm walking up these, this long flight of stairs, I can hear the Harvard band off in the distance marching across the bridge, across the Charles to the Harvard stadium. And then I open the door, this huge door, and I disappear into the darkness inside; it's so, it was very poorly lit then, and it's like going into a mineshaft. And the door closes, I can't hear any more of the Harvard band, the fall colors are gone, and I'm there for the afternoon. It was a grind.

**MB:** That was more challenging than your challenges faced at Loomis or Bowdoin?

**CW:** Um-hmm. Somebody told, said to my wife at some point during our stay there, "Golly, you and your husband must have a secure marriage. I mean, you've survived Harvard Law School." And she said, "Oh, *au contraire*, we've hardly seen each other, so it hasn't been a test at all."

**MB:** When did you meet your wife?

**CW:** I met her the summer/fall of my freshman year at Bowdoin. She's a summer camp

counselor here.

**MB:** And she then went to Harvard, to Boston with you?

**CW:** We married after we graduated, she went to Penn, and we graduated at the same time and we were married after that. And she taught in Waltham, a community out there, while I was in law school.

**MB:** Were you a summer camp counselor as well?

**CW:** No, I was just a blind date.

**MB:** Was it a summer camp in Brunswick or here in Auburn?

**CW:** Neither, it was out in Casco on Lake Sebago.

**MB:** Oh, okay. And were you out there as well for some reason?

**CW:** No, it's just that, (this is a little ironic), but there were two junior counselors who had been seeing a couple friends of mine. And in order to go to this dance they needed a counselor with more senior status to sort of chaperone, so they talked my wife into being that person, and my friends enlisted me to be her date. And I can remember so vividly, we're in the dance and we're, suddenly we realize that these other folks weren't there. And we looked out in the parking lot and they were sitting, the four of them, in the car that we had come in, but we couldn't see in- we were standing some distance away- but you couldn't see in the windows of the car because they were all steamed up. So we thought, "Wow, we're total failures!" So we went back and danced.

**MB:** And then you continued a long distance relationship from Penn to Bowdoin for several years?

**CW:** Um-hmm.

**MB:** Oh, wow. Okay, so then after law school, after that experience what were you planning to do, were you planning on coming back and starting a law practice, or. . . ?

**CW:** Well, my father was on the court then so there was no family practice to join, and I felt that I wanted to go to a smaller community and be in a smaller type firm. Many of my classmates were going to New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Boston, places like that and joining very large firms. That didn't appeal to me and I didn't seek employment in any of those. So I applied for a couple jobs, I applied for a clerkship, I applied for a job in Hanover, New Hampshire, and I didn't get either one. Frank Linnell, who is in, was the senior partner in this firm back then, this is 1958, was a close friend of my father's; I'm sure that had something to do with his decision, so I approached him about this firm. I had worked in the summer for another law firm in this area, in Lewiston actually, the year before so I knew a little bit about what was happening here from that; and he took me in as an associate. William Hathaway, who later became Senator Hathaway from Maine and upset Margaret Chase Smith, was just going out as I

was coming in. He had been the third person in the firm at that time, it was a three person firm.

**MB:** And he left to. . . ?

**CW:** To go on his own. Actually, he practiced with Frank Coffin for a brief interval before Frank went to Portland and joined one of the big firms there.

**MB:** And what sort of law were you practicing here?

**CW:** Well, when I started I spent most of my time at the Registry of Deeds. I reflected occasionally, this is what my Property 1 professor; I was doing the kind of work that he said, "the girls will do this," and I said, "I'm the girls." I was just doing grunt work in the Registry of Deeds searching titles. That was a substantial part of it. And beyond that I just did odds and ends of all kinds of things.

**MB:** When, at what point did your career begin to become kind of a more important position in the firm?

**CW:** Well, at some point several years later I became a partner in the firm and my practice began to evolve some. I became attorney for the city of Auburn in 1965. Mr. Linnell had represented Durham and Poland, two other nearby smaller communities, and I began to do some amount of municipal work. And we represented other communities on a per case basis, and so that became part of my practice and continues to be.

But I, as the firm grew, we're nine now and have been for some time, we began to concentrate our practices more narrowly, and there are a number of things that now, that I don't do any more. At one time I did some bankruptcy work, I did domestic relations at one point, and I did some amount of estate planning, not terribly complex but some. And I don't do any of those things now. So it's been kind of an evolutionary process over time.

**MB:** Where do you focus now?

**CW:** About half and half in municipal work and employment law. I continue to represent the city of Auburn, although other lawyers here do more for Auburn than I do now. And we represent a number of other communities as well, and we litigate against communities that we don't represent as well.

**MB:** When you say represent the city of Auburn, what, in what way?

**CW:** We're the attorneys for the city.

**MB:** Okay, so that's your municipal court?

**CW:** Well, we don't have a municipal court. We provide legal advice to department heads and the city manager. If the city of Auburn is involved in litigation we're involved in that. We prepare agreements and contracts. We don't get very much involved in labor relations any more

although that used to be part of what we did. One of my partners, who does a lot of real estate work, works with the community development office; and they're working with some of the new industry, working out agreements to encourage them to come, he does that kind of thing.

**MB:** What was the name of, what is the name of the position of the sort of legal advisors?

**CW:** It's called city solicitor.

**MB:** Okay, and how did you come to that position?

**CW:** Well, I'd like to say it was because I was sought out because of my merit, but in fact I was, I think Mr. Linnell suggested there was an opening and that maybe I could become appointed. So I went around and talked to the city councilmen, there are five of them, and I'll never forget the conversation I had with one who later was my political ally in the Democratic, that's not the end of the world, that's a train going by. There's a lot of ledge I gather between this office and the train track so I occasionally see my clients' eyes widen as the building shakes. So I remember going to talk to him and, at his doughnut shop, and he said, "Well," something like, "You know, no one else come and see me, and far as I'm concerned you got the job."

**MB:** Who was this?

**CW:** His name was Andre Potuin.

**MB:** And he was a . . . ?

**CW:** He was a city councilman from ward five, which is the, which is New Auburn which is the most heavily Franco-American part of the city. He's a wonderful person, and, as I said, later my political ally. But that's how it was, so by default. And the person I was replacing hadn't really worked very hard at it, and so he was a wonderful guy to follow. I can remember once I was talking with the city clerk or somebody and she, and I was helping her work through a problem, and she said, "Boy, this is great." I said, "Well, you know, so-and-so, the prior person, would have done the same thing," and she said, "Well actually, he, I remember this conversation where he said to me, you got the statutes here, don't you? Look it up." So I was doing something so I was, you know, the sort of the fair-haired boy for a while.

**MB:** Do you remember who it was who came before you, or. . . ?

**CW:** His name was Israel Alpren [Bates class of 1930], and he became a district court judge in, the first district court judge when that position was established, the district courts were established in Maine for this area.

**MB:** Oh, wow. I had found an article someplace that said that you were appointed to the Auburn municipal court, but you said that they don't have municipal courts.

**CW:** That's right. The municipal courts disappeared because they had a lot of things wrong with them. They were part time things so that lawyers would spend a few hours certain days of

the week doing this, but the rest of the time they'd be in private practice so there were all kinds of chances for conflicts of interest. It meant that there was a lower level of professionalism because it was a part time thing. So I was associate judge of the Auburn municipal court for, I don't know, two or three years, until the district courts were established and that we were abolished along with the court.

**MB:** How did you get the municipal court appointment?

**CW:** I think the judge may have recommended me to the governor? I can't remember who was governor then. It might even have been Muskie, but I'm not sure. But it was a governor's appointment I think.

**MB:** Do you know who recommended you?

**CW:** I think that the, Judge [Harris] Isaacson, who was the judge, may have done so. But I really don't have a clear recollection of that.

**MB:** Did you have a relationship at all with Judge Isaacson?

**CW:** Yes, it was, he's the Isaacson of Brann & Isaacson in Lewiston, and he still practices. Yeah, we had a good working relationship. He's a very hard worker and very intelligent, highly motivated, so he was a good person to work with.

**MB:** Once the district court system became in practice, did you continue on as, in a position, or was that when you became the solicitor?

**CW:** I can't remember what the time sequence was there, whether I had become city solicitor by that time or not. But the, none of the, or maybe there were a few municipal court judges who were appointed to the district court, but what happened was all the local courts were abolished. The district courts were established throughout the state with regional responsibilities and jurisdiction, and new judges were appointed as district court judges who were willing to commit to a full time career as judges. And I wouldn't have accepted that position even if someone had asked me to because I didn't want to be a full-time judge at that point, especially at the district court level. I wanted to continue my practice.

**MB:** At what point did you actually start to enjoy law?

**CW:** Well, right from the beginning I didn't, I felt like my work in the Registry of Deeds was kind of like being in the salt mines, but I found that there were really opportunities to help people. I definitely, and this, I guess it may sound a little suspect, but I really saw being a lawyer as an opportunity to do some useful things in the community, socially useful things, and I found that was true. And I, you know, I would have a very direct relationship with a client, something that I, many of my law school classmates didn't have as associates in very, very large firms on Wall Street or someplace. And I could accomplish something very tangible often for people, and that was rewarding. And as my work in the Registry began to diminish, in those days lawyers did most of that work. Now you rarely see a lawyer in Registry; it's done by, that

work is done by paralegals. And as that structure began to evolve and I was doing less and less of it, I was also, I had more opportunity to do other more interesting things.

So, I can remember that Frank Linnell had represented the Lewiston-Auburn Shoe Workers' Protective Association. That's the union that, an independent union that evolved after the shoe strike here. And I sort of began to take that over and I did a certain amount of labor work and I enjoyed that. I really felt that I was on the side of the angels there, really believed in what I was doing. So that was just another place where I felt good about what I was trying to accomplish.

**MB:** What was the shoe strike? I've never heard of it.

**CW:** It's actually the subject of a film that was made by some Bates students and Professor Branham, who died, you know, a couple years ago, called "Roughing the Uppers." In fact my father appears in that film briefly and not very favorably. It was, the CIO, AFL-CIO tried to organize the shoe workers here, and it was pretty rough. There was a certain amount of violence and some of the shoe factory owners had paternalistic views about, thought they were doing a terrific job for their workers and were very hurt by this, and others were mean-spirited and deserved unions. It ultimately was not successful, and, but this independent union sprang up and some people I know regarded it as a sort of a company union that was sort of a patsy. But it, when I was involved with it the union represented, had contracts with five of the shoe companies, and as far as I know none of them exist now. But that was a very interesting experience doing that.

**MB:** Did you remain on as the Auburn city solicitor even when you got your position on the Auburn Democratic City Committee, or. . . ?

**CW:** Um-hmm.

**MB:** So how long were you actually the Auburn city solicitor?

**CW:** Well, I am still. Although, as I said before, I actually do very little work for Auburn now. I do a little, but most, other lawyers here do most of the work for Auburn. My relationship with the current city manager is not the greatest, and that doesn't help. But besides that, other people have concentrations in their practice that make it, make sense for them to do work for. . . . I mentioned one lawyer here who does a lot of real estate work, and it makes sense for him to be involved in the community development issues involving new enterprises and providing funding through second mortgages and so forth to encourage certain kinds of industry and other kinds of activity that the community development department is trying to support. And that, we have a, one of the lawyers here concentrates his practice on bankruptcy and it makes sense for him to assist the city in, when the city's involved in a bankruptcy procedure, that kind of thing.

**MB:** And then, I gather, I'd like to hear a little bit more about your position on the Auburn Democratic City Committee. I'm not particularly familiar with what the city committee does.

**CW:** Well, it's a group of local people who are interested in politics. It's, typically has a real ebb and flow, and as an election year comes, more people get interested in it. There are always a

number of people who are themselves interested in becoming candidates at some point in the future and they're kind of trying to get an understanding of how the political process works and get involved at a grass roots level, and there are some current office holders usually involved. Plus there are some other stragglers and volunteers and idealistic types and do-gooders and other people who just are kind of hanging on, so it's a kind of a motley group, typically.

**MB:** Is it a selection process, or may anyone be a part of that?

**CW:** No, anybody can show up and probably be given considerable responsibility almost instantly. They're always looking for people.

**MB:** What were your responsibilities?

**CW:** Well, it varied as, it, you know, I wasn't immediately the city committee chair; I was just a member of the committee for a while, I can't remember how long. But as chair, in between elections you were just trying to kind of keep the thing alive somehow. But when elections were coming along, then the city committee would provide forums for candidates to speak and meet. We would always sponsor some kind of a dinner where the candidates would get a chance to circulate around, and also there'd be some amount of speaking. We would support Democratic candidates in all the ways that grass roots political work is done: working with voting lists, calling, transporting people to the polls, getting absentee ballots, things like that.

**MB:** You had mentioned before we began the interview that you had your most exciting experience in politics; that was on this committee, correct?

**CW:** That's true. Whoever the chair was at the time was not going to continue to do it, and maybe at that time I was thinking about the possibility of running for something at some point and thought this would be sort of a low level stepping stone to do that. So I decided I was going to be a candidate and to my astonishment another person who was then, a state senator, ran against me. And he had, you know, some existing, he had a lot of name recognition and because he'd been involved in politics, was an elected political official, he had some amount of clout. So that was a little bit daunting. But Andy Potuin, whom I mentioned earlier, had been active in politics a long time, and he and I were friends because he'd been on the city council while I was city attorney and we'd gotten to know each other. I might even have done some legal work for him. And so he helped me, and he had a number of political friends and a lot of relatives, and I certainly lined up everybody who was politically active that I knew. And so we had a meeting or a caucus, I'm not sure what it was called, that was more heavily attended than any that I'd ever seen like that. We had, we actually might even have had a secret ballot, it was pretty amazing, and I won but by a very close margin. The ironic thing as I mentioned to you earlier was that as soon as the smoke had cleared, and the drama and excitement of the election had died down, everybody kind of forgot about it. And in fact it wasn't that much later that I can remember, some bright weekend afternoon I was by myself painting the front of the area that was going to be our Democratic headquarters in a rather seedy section of the city of Auburn; and I thought to myself, so this is what it means to be chairman of the Democratic City Committee. It was really a come down from Olympus to that realization.

**MB:** Who was the person that you ran against?

**CW:** His name was Donald [J.] Bernard. You probably never heard of him but he runs a place out on Turner Road called Skin Diver's Paradise. If you're into skin diving you probably would go out there and buy equipment from him.

**MB:** So you were elected to the position as the chair of the committee, and then how did your responsibilities change at that time?

**CW:** Well, then I just became in charge of doing these things that I was telling you about and trying to find people to do them. I can remember running around like crazy trying to manage a candidate's dinner and all the things that you have to do to make one of these things happen. I guess probably it was useful in terms of learning these administrative tasks and how to do them: how to learn to delegate things, (not, I found, an easy thing to do), how to figure out who's going to do what they say they're going to do and who isn't, and who you have to have back up for in case they fail. And at times important people would, in election years, you know, would come by. I remember that Senator Muskie was campaigning here while I was city committee chairman. So I was asked to sort of walk around with him, sort of a local person, when he visited the local Shop 'n' Save store- it was called something else then- and I was amazed because there were television reporters there, and we were just kind of walking through the store shaking hands with people. And I was introducing him occasionally if I, if there was somebody that I knew. My other major responsibility there was that I had to be sure to get a bottle of scotch and have it available to him when he stayed at the, one of the local motels.

**MB:** That was Senator Muskie?

**CW:** Yes.

**MB:** Oh, wow. What was it like meeting him?

**CW:** Well, he, that, let's see, that was the year he was running for president I think. I don't know, maybe it was. . . . He was, well he ran for president two different years and ended up being the vice presidential candidate the second time around; I think that's right. Anyway, he was enough of a national figure to attract television coverage, and you know, that was sort of a little moment in the sun so to that extent it was dramatic. And he was a somewhat charismatic person.

**MB:** What was the Shop 'n' Save? Was it still a grocery store, or was it (*unintelligible word*)?

**CW:** Yes, it was a large grocery store. It was the previous incarnation of Shop 'n' Save; it was called Foodtown then.

**MB:** Oh, okay. And what were you, were you kind of just showing him around the area, or were you kind of campaigning with him?

**CW:** Well, I guess it was sort of both because a candidate from out of town often is aided by



having local people who can say, “Senator, this is Mrs. Schmuck,” you know, and sort of introducing him to local people and being kind of a bridge between the out of town politician and local folks.

**MB:** How did the people that you introduced him to receive him?

**CW:** Well, because he was a person, it’s my recollection is that because he was a person who was getting national attention, and there were, and you know, like, television lights were shining on people; they were a little bit awestruck by (*unintelligible word*) was my impression.

**MB:** Wow. Up to that time, when he had been governor and so forth, how had he had impact on the Auburn area? Had. . . ?

**CW:** Well, I’m not sure I can answer that question. I only have sort of general vague impressions, and they’re not really responsive to that question either about impact on the Auburn area. I can’t think of ways, I’m sure there were many, only I can only think of, that he, you know, he was appointing people. Like I’m, now, I’m pretty sure he appointed Judge Isaacson. And he was appointing generally good people to serve in roles where he, where there was a power appointment in the governor, so that was one way that he was affecting things in Auburn. But beyond that I can’t give you any concrete examples.

**MB:** Okay. What would be your vague impressions of him as a person, or. . . ?

**CW:** Well, for one, he was a large person, a tall person. He had a very resonant speaking voice so those physical features I think helped to make him a more imposing political figure than he would otherwise have been. And of course he was a Bates debater, and so it’s not surprising that he was very facile in the way he used language. And so that was also something that helped to make him effective. And he would often use themes which were not, as I recall, intended to appeal so much to people’s selfish instincts as to a sense of participating in something having more significance on a more global basis, something that the state itself would benefit from.

**MB:** Do you, I’m not sure if you’re familiar with this, but what would you consider his strengths and his weaknesses?

**CW:** Well, he was certainly able to attract people of all, all kinds of people, to get involved in politics. He seemed to be able to, maybe it’s because of his roots in Rumford, to speak comfortably to people who were in unions, for example. But on the other hand, he was able to mobilize a more ivory tower kind of group, you know. He got college teachers and professional people like lawyers interested in politics, and was just absolutely a critical figure in making the Democratic Party in Maine a viable competitor to the Republicans, which it never had been.

**MB:** What about weaknesses?

**CW:** I think he took himself quite seriously, which is a failing many politicians have, I’ve discovered. So I think he might have suffered a bit from arrogance. I think he liked to hear his own voice, he was impressed by it too, the way the rest of us were.

**MB:** I do want to get back and talk more about Auburn as well. Who were some of the other people who were on the Democratic City Committee? Who were some of the very active Democrats, or even some of the just kind of not so active grass roots Democrats in the area?

**CW:** Well, there's a gentleman named Arnold Leavitt, I can't remember even what he did at that time, but he had been active in Democratic politics long before I showed up and he still has some small role. And his wife Janice, she still has a job that has a political connection dealing with, she, I can't think of the name of the office that she holds, but she's one of the people who supervises elections in the city. And they rev up with every election cycle, keeps the voter list up and that sort of thing, and that's, because she was pretty much proposed by the city committee.

I mentioned Mr. Potuin. And there's a fellow named Sam Michael and his wife Doris, their son John became a legislator and active in politics; he's the person who always is interviewed on tele-, radio and television when the issue of term limits comes up because that's something he has really sponsored, he's been involved with the reform party. But Sam Michael was a promoter; he promoted the Clay-Liston fight and was a boxing promoter, and he promoted other events. And he was also active in the local politics.

There were people who were, this is, I'm talking way back now, there were people who were, actually candidates; Richard Rocheleau who just got some media attention because he later ran Maynard's Boot Shop on Lisbon Street, which has just closed and there's been some articles in the paper about how this shoe store that's been running for all the zillion years is just now closing. He was involved and became a state legislator. There were many others whose names I can't now think of.

**MB:** I wanted to discuss the Auburn community when you were an adult compared to when you were a child. How has your experience as an adult here been different from how either you saw your parents' experience being or how your experience was as a child, socially and so forth?

**CW:** Gee, I don't really know how to answer that. You know, it's just a world of difference between perceiving things remotely as a child, not really fully understanding what was going on, and as opposed to actually having a participatory role as an adult, finding that sometimes that people had feet of clay and that institutions that seemed from a distance to be impressive up close didn't look quite as awesome when you actually got involved in them.

It was certainly interesting to see, although I'm not sure this is responsive to your question, that a person who wanted to get involved in local politics or local affairs could do it very easily. I remember coming back from my first Harvard Law School reunion thinking, my God, I'm the only member of my class who hasn't floated a five million dollar bond issue lately. But on the other hand, as the relative size of the frog in the pond, I was able to do some things that they couldn't dream of doing in New York City.

I knew the senators; you know, just think, I went to college with George Mitchell, I knew him very well, I played basketball with him. I knew Bill Hathaway very well, who was a senator. So

I knew that the, Bill Hathaway was also a congressman; he came from Auburn as I mentioned earlier, served in the congress for several years, and I knew him well. That was, and being able to be, to have a role in politics; I was sort of an advisor to Hathaway on certain issues when he ran for congress one year. And that would be incredible for my classmates in large metropolitan areas.

So it was kind of interesting and challenging to find that you really could have a role in, a role of some significance just because Maine is so much more thinly populated than these other areas, and people who, with some interest and some amount of talent, were really wanted and needed.

*End of Side B, Tape One*

*Side A, Tape Two*

**CW:** . . . most influential period in politics?

**MB:** Sure, that would be great. One second - this is tape two of the interview with Curtis Webber. That would be great.

**CW:** Well, for years the Register of Deeds had been a political person. And it was a job you got as sort of a quasi-retired job, or because you didn't like what you were doing. And you had political friends, and you would get, and you would run and your political friends would support you, and there were some political bosses. So that's how you got to be Register of Deeds, not through any talent or experience. Register of Probate was the same, these are county offices.

And a person who had, the Register of Deeds was retiring August. . . . I think, no, he had a heart attack, and one, a person who had been in the, working in the Registry of Deeds for a number of years as a staff person was interested in running. Well, this was unheard of. And she invited some of us who had been somewhat involved in politics to meet with her for lunch and talk about it and hoping that we would help her. And the political wisdom appeared to be that she had no chance. There was a legislator who was retiring who was a Franco-American person, and often that's critical, at least it was then, to getting elected to anything in Androscoggin county, was going to run against her, was going to run. And I thought, this is awful, this guy doesn't even know where the Registry of Deeds is. And here we have a woman who we know as competent, experienced, and who could do a heck of a job, and that she would lose, and I was affronted by that idea.

So I told her I would try to help her. And I became kind of an informal campaign chairperson and I helped her with publicity, because she needed to somehow get the word out that she had experience, and we finally decided we would not just attack this other person as a carpetbagger, but we'd try to emphasize the fact that she was not a political person, she was an experienced person. And we leafleted, and I can remember doing that with my wife in various parts of Lewiston I really wasn't familiar with. And it happened, that was the year Senator Hathaway was running against Margaret--- against Bill Cohen, and I was also handing out materials for Bill, and I had some connection with his campaign. And while I was finding that there was a lot of support for Miguette Thompson, she had a Franco American background, but she had married somebody named Thompson, and we were sure to emphasize wherever we could that her first

name was Miguette.

I found that there was a lot of support for her, and I was also finding that Bill Hathaway was in deep trouble. Cohen had several issues that he was pushing: Hathaway gave away the state to the Indians in the Indian Land Treaty, he supported the stupid Dickey-Lincoln dam, he gave away the Panama Canal with Jimmy Carter, and he supported a pay raise for congressmen and senators, which the taxpayers shouldn't have had to do, it was one other thing. And people were buying those issues; they maybe didn't care about four but the fifth one was the one that really turned them on. "This pay raise is more than I ever earned in my life and they're going to get that in one year." So, and Miguette won, and that was wonderful. And not only did she win, but that stopped, at least for that office, the pattern that had been, existed over the years, of political people just coming in there without knowing what the heck was going on and sort of being there part of the day and going off and doing something else and letting the staff do the job. She was there all the time and she ran again successfully. And she was succeeded ultimately when she retired by another staff person who was a good person, and so it stopped being a political job and I really feel proud of that.

At the same time, I was, you know, getting these disquieting things. I remember I went to a political gathering that Hathaway was going to attend; it was fundraiser here in Auburn and, of course I knew him personally. I spoke to him separately and I said, "Geez Bill, I'm going around and I'm talking to people and this is what they're telling me. I don't see how you're going to beat Cohen with just organizing; I don't think that's going to do it. It's going to have to, somehow you have to meet his television blitz with some other kind of publicity like that. And I don't know whether it's getting down and dirty or what." He said, "Well, you know, I think you're wrong, I was able to overcome Margaret Chase Smith with a last minute, you know, I was way behind in the polls until a month or two before the election. I caught up. I think I can do it again. But even if I can't, I can't campaign that way, and if that's the way it is, if that's what it takes, I'm not going to do it." Which was a, you know, I was proud of him for saying that. I thought it was the wrong thing politically, and of course he lost to Cohen. But, so I had really mixed feelings at that election. I was, really felt bitter toward Cohen because I felt his campaign was unfair. There were false issues, and he had, you know, supported the Dickey-Lincoln dam earlier. He was pandering to people's worst political instincts on the Panama Canal issue. I remember President Carter speaking later about those senators who had gone down with him on that issue, and speaking with great gratitude for their supporting that treaty even though it was so costly to them politically. So I had real mixed feelings about that; I was so proud of Miguette on winning that election, but that was so local, you know, and just so sad that Hathaway lost. Part of it was that he was a liberal, and as a congressman, that didn't come out as much as it did when he ran for senate. Then it became much more apparent, and some people who were kind of moderates said, "Wow, he's more liberal than I ever realized." You know, a great office in terms of providing constituent service so he did well there. Al Gamache, who died in the last year, who was his administrator, I've forgotten what the title of that office is, was really effective with the local people. But that didn't work as well when running for senate, so that was a great sadness.

**MB:** How did you know Senator Hathaway so well, when did you first get to know him?

**CW:** Well, he lived in Auburn, and we played hockey together and socialized together some, even after he was in Congress. He, we had some, there he is in that picture there, that's just after I was admitted to the supreme court, he proposed -

**MB:** The black and white?

**CW:** Yeah, this is on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court, he's a much younger person as a congressman, well, we both are. He's congratulating me, this is a, you know, sort of a press release kind of thing. That's his wife Mary on his right, and my wife.

**MB:** So you two were rather close?

**CW:** Well, rather close is probably a little too strong, but we knew each other well and actually had a social connection. We belonged to a group of relatively young lawyers that tried to promote some changes in legislation where we saw unfairnesses. And he was an idealistic person like myself, and so, and I had worked with him on his previous campaigns too.

**MB:** Was he a member of the Democratic City Committee?

**CW:** He may have been, but he never, I don't recall him ever really being active in it while I was. Because he was from Auburn, he maintained connections with people who were on the city committee.

**MB:** How did you first meet him, was it through the social interaction or. . . ?

**CW:** Probably, we, I know I met him when I was coming into this office because he was going out the other door as I mentioned. I dealt with him as a lawyer in various ways, so I think that was where it started; we had professional connections.

**MB:** And then what were some of the social activities that you engage in in general, as well as specifically with him?

**CW:** Well, I remember another connection that we had which was, there was a group of youngish professional people which included a number of lawyers called the "Wranglers." In fact I think Frank Coffin mainly was the person who started that group. We'd meet once a month and one person would present some topic which hopefully was of interest and controversial. And Bill belonged to that and so did I, so that was another way that we interacted.

**MB:** Why was the name "Wranglers" given to that group?

**CW:** Well, because it was hoped that there'd be enough controversialness to the topic so people would wrangle about it.

**MB:** Was it successful?

**CW:** Yes, although it sort of, after a while it kind of petered out. I don't know if it was because

Coffin moved away and his charismatic presence was needed to keep it going or what it was that caused it to collapse. But I can remember, for example, that I argued that a lawyer could in good conscience tell a client that, whom he believed to be guilty of a crime, "You've got to plead guilty or find somebody else." And you didn't have to take that person's case, didn't morally have to do that even though you believed him to be guilty. That certainly was controversial because a lot of lawyers believe, or have talked themselves into believing that we have a moral duty to defend even the people that we believe to be guilty and that the system should make that determination, we should not personally decide if this person should throw in the towel.

**MB:** Oh, wow. So it was kind of lawyers discussing their personal beliefs?

**CW:** Well, that was one topic, but I gave that as an example of the kind of thing that I recall being discussed. Shepard Lee, who's a well known auto dealer and was a very close friend of Senator Muskie was in that group as well, and I remember he presented the issue; can a businessman be a successful businessman and also be completely moral and honest at the same time?

**MB:** Oh, wow. What was his position on that, do you remember?

**CW:** I think he argued that it was possible to do, but it was a close question.

**MB:** Do you remember any others, of specific people and what they kind of felt was interesting to present?

**CW:** I can't remember another single topic there were. Damon Scales was a lawyer here and was at one point in the office that my father had been in with Willis Trafton was a member. And Al Gamache who later became Bill Hathaway's administrative assistant was an active member of the group. I can't remember any other names right now, you know. Others would occur to me probably during the day after you leave.

**MB:** As far as the issues going on politically in Auburn at the time, what were some of the major areas of political need?

**CW:** Well, I recall that one issue, I'm not- I don't think I'm able to come up with many; one issue that was heavily debated back then was whether you should be able to vote a straight ballot by just checking a box at the top of the ballot. There were political bosses like Louis Jalbert, who was a very successful political boss here, you must have heard his name, who very strongly urged that we should retain the straight ballot. My recollection is that Bill Hathaway argued the other way, even though he would have benefited probably from retaining it. And eventually it was dropped as a possibility for straight voting. I know the Dickey-Lincoln dam as an economic development issue was debated over a period of years. Environmentalists opposed it, some people thought it was just an economic boondoggle, some thought it was, like Hathaway, that it was a way to bring economic development to an area of the state that was struggling, had traditionally struggled economically. I, I'm just not coming up, I'm drawing a blank on some of the other issues that we thought were important at that time.

**MB:** What was the Dickey-Lickey [*sic*] [Lincoln] dam issue? I'm not familiar with that.

**CW:** Well, the, wow, I'm not sure I can even remember the name of the river, but it runs through Aroostook County and through the northern part of the state. And it's a river that is, promotes local, makes it possible for local fishing and - is this the end of your -?

**MB:** Continue with what you were saying and then.

**CW:** Okay, well, it's a river that has fishing so that sportsmen weren't enthusiastic about dams being constructed. But it's an area that, where inexpensive power might have been a factor in encouraging economic development, where there just weren't a lot of economically viable jobs available. And that's why Hathaway thought that having a hydroelectric dam, or dams, on the river would be really important for the region, so that was an issue that he got very much involved in.

**MB:** Was this river just, close to Auburn, would it be benefiting this area?

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

**MB:** It was up north you said?

**CW:** Yeah, and that's, he was the congressman from, for the district two which is the northern part of the state, the district Baldacci now represents, so this was within his district.

**MB:** Okay, I see.

*End of Interview*