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## Wheeler, Milton oral history interview

Greg Beam

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## **Interview with Milton Wheeler by Greg Beam**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Wheeler, Milton

### **Interviewer**

Beam, Greg

### **Date**

July 5, 2000

### **Place**

Portland, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 201

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### **Biographical Note**

Milton "Milt" Wheeler was born in Boston, Massachusetts on August 14, 1908 and grew up in Lewiston, Maine. He attended Hebron Academy, where he was a state basketball champ and played football. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1932 as a history major, then went to Harvard law school and passed the Bar in 1937. For a time he served as Corporation Counsel for Lewiston. He helped establish Portland Law School, now called the University of Maine School of Law, teaching Constitutional and Administrative law. He worked for both the Office of Price Administration and the Office of Price Stabilization where he had some contact with Muskie. He was deputy attorney of the Urban Renewal Authority for New York and New England (HUD) as well as an attorney for the Small Business Administration until 1973. His wife, Mildred F. Wheeler, was a representative in the Maine legislature from Portland. He worked on Peter N. Kyros's campaign and was a delegate to the 1960 Democratic National Convention.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: AmVets; Democratic National Committee; 1952-1954 Maine Democratic Party; 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1955-1956, Muskie's first term as Governor; 1956 Chicago Democratic National Convention; 1968 vice presidential campaign; environmental protection; Republican party in Maine; Democratic party in Maine; Lewiston,

Maine: labor organizing among mill workers; Office of Price Administration (OPA); Peabody Law School; Judge Charlie Pomeroy; Office of Price Stabilization (OPS); Mike DeSalle; Hatch Act; emergence of women's vote helping Democratic vote; and Angus King.

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## **Transcript**

**Greg Beam:** This is Greg Beam and I'm here with Milton Wheeler at his home at 48 Neil Street in Portland. It's approximately 9:30 A.M. on July 5th, 2000. To begin, could you please state your full name and spell it?

**Milton Wheeler:** Milton George Wheeler, W-H-E-E-L-E-R.

**GB:** And when and where were you born?

**MW:** I was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

**GB:** And did you grow up there?

**MW:** No, I, my father came to Maine when I was five years old.

**GB:** I'm sorry, when were you born?

**MW:** Nineteen-oh-eight, August 14th, 1908.

**GB:** So you grew up in Maine?

**MW:** Yes, lived here all my life.

**GB:** Where in Maine?

**MW:** Lewiston, Maine for the greater portion of my life.

**GB:** And what was the Lewiston community like when you were growing up?

**MW:** Well, it was a nice community, Franco-American, a lot of Franco-Americans lived there, and a very pleasant community. My father was in business there, and I spent the first I would say thirty three-years of my life there.

**GB:** And what was your father's business?

**MW:** He was a retailer, clothier.

**GB:** And what was your father's name?

**MW:** Maurice Wheeler.

**GB:** Maurice Wheeler. And do you have any recollections of how he was involved in the Lewiston community when you were growing up?

**MW:** How I was involved?

**GB:** How your family was involved.

**MW:** Well he was quite active. He had two stores there, one the Economy Clothing Company and also the Wheeler Clothing Company, and he was highly respected. He believed in politics,

engaged in politics and became an early Democrat.

**GB:** And do you have any recollections of the economic, of the, rather, political climate rather in Lewiston around that time?

**MW:** Lewiston was a Democratic city, and it was mostly Democrats that won the elections locally. The mayor was always a Lewiston, well known Lewiston man and Lewiston was a great community, as I said it was Franco-American largely, that it is today I believe, and a fine city.

**GB:** All right. And what were your family's religious beliefs?

**MW:** They were Hebrew, my father was Jewish. I lost my mother when I was very young. I lost my mother when I was eight years old.

**GB:** So what was it like growing up Jewish in a predominantly Franco-American Catholic community?

**MW:** Well, religion wasn't, didn't play a great part of my life. I attended the synagogue, I was Bar Mitzvah'd there, and went to school there, one year of high school, and then I matriculated at Hebron Academy, and I graduated from Hebron Academy in 1927. From there I went to, I engaged in athletics, played football and also basketball. I recall we were champions of the basketball team, of the state, and I graduated as I said before in 1927. And I then went to college, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire where I graduated in 1932. I engaged in freshman football and tried out for the varsity. In my sophomore year I got hurt and so I couldn't play football the rest of my, that was the end of my football career.

**GB:** Now what were your academic interests in high school and later in college?

**MW:** History.

**GB:** History, and so you majored in history in college?

**MW:** Majored, yes.

**GB:** Were you ever interested in political or social issues?

**MW:** Yes, I was.

**GB:** What were some major public issues at the time when you were young?

**MW:** Well, it was about the beginning of the recession and things were difficult. There was great unemployment and the beginning of the labor movement, organizing the workers in the mills of Lewiston, I recall that. But it was peaceful, and as I said before it was a great community, good city to live in. And I lived there until I was, well, I was away, after I went to school. I went to school as I said before, and I graduated from Dartmouth in 1932.

**GB:** And what did you do upon graduation from Dartmouth?

**MW:** I went to law school.

**GB:** Where?

**MW:** I went to law school.

**GB:** Where did you go to law school?

**MW:** Harvard.

**GB:** Harvard, and what was that like?

**MW:** Well, it was difficult. I got married my second year at law school. That was in the midst of the Depression. But my father saw me through. He had enough money to pay my tuition, and I spent three years at Harvard Law School. After law school I returned to Portland, or returned to, my wife was a Portland woman, but I wanted to practice law in Lewiston, Maine. So I returned to Lewiston and passed the bar in 1937 I believe, and opened an office in Lewiston, Maine. And I was fortunate, I was elected corporation counsel for the city of Lewiston the first year I was there because I had, there was a vacancy, and my, as I said before, my father was interested in politics, and through politics I was elected the corporation counsel in the city of Lewiston for one year.

**GB:** And what exactly is that position, the nature of that position?

**MW:** What was that?

**GB:** What exactly is the nature of that position, the corporation counsel?

**MW:** City attorney.

**GB:** City attorney.

**MW:** I represented the city of Lewiston.

**GB:** Alright.

**MW:** That I was for one year.

**GB:** And at that time were you interested in politics yourself?

**MW:** Oh sure, very active. That job was a political job. And the next year I was, I, the mayor was defeated and I was fired, or reappointed.

**GB:** And were you also affiliated with the Democratic Party?

**MW:** Oh yes, I've always been a Democrat. My father before me was a Democrat. I support the Democratic Party financially.

**GB:** All right, now to back up a little bit, why did you choose to go into law? Was it because of your interest in politics?

**MW:** Well, when I graduated from Dartmouth my father was in business and I didn't care for business and he asked me what I wanted to do. I says, "I think I'll become a lawyer," or try to become a lawyer, so I opted to go to law school. During the summer I worked in a law office here in Portland and, during summer vacations. That's where I met my wife, who was a secretary in the office in which I was employed. And I was kind of a messenger, did the odd jobs around the office during the summer vacation before I had a degree in law.

**GB:** Now as you said, you were attending college at the beginning of the Depression and law school during the Depression. What are your memories of that era and did they shape your perspective?

**MW:** Well, I really didn't suffer because my father at that time had enough money to see us through. I was comfortably ensconced in the ivory towers of Harvard Law School and didn't have to worry about paying any bills because my dad always sent me a check every week. And I got married while I was at Harvard Law School. I married the boss' secretary, she kind of, office manager, she ran the law office.

**GB:** All right, so following your little stint as the attorney for the city of Lewiston, could you tell me about your career path for the next few years?

**MW:** Yes, well, the war came on, and I was drafted. And I was about to be admitted into the service, but one week before I was to report a directive came down from the president deferring all pre-Pearl Harbor fathers, of which I was one. I was married and had a child, providing I got into some essential industry to help the war effort. So one of the essential industries to help the war effort was the Office of Price Administration. And at that time a very dear friend of mine, Judge [John D.] Clifford [II], federal judge, happened to see me on the street and asked me what was happening. I told him that I was going to the service, but I'd been deferred. And he said, he asked me whether or not I was interested in working for the government. I says, "I'd be happy to work for the government." He says, "Well, we're looking for enforcement attorneys in the Office of Price Administration." So I interviewed the chief attorney and he gave me a job in Augusta as an enforcement attorney with the Office of Price Administration. That was during WWII.

And I worked for the government for the duration of the war, and after the war I decided, well the chief attorney asked me, his name was Dick Armstrong, who later founded the Portland University Law School, asked me if I would join him in the firm that he was going to open up in Portland, Maine, which was my wife's home town. So I had the option of going back to Lewiston to practice law or come here to Portland. I opt to come to Portland and join him in opening up a law firm, and the law firm was opened up in the name of Armstrong and Wheeler.

But another attorney by the name of Charles Pomeroy, who later became judge, who also was an enforcement attorney, and he asked me if he could join our firm. I said, by all means, we're just starting up. So we formed the firm of Wheeler, Armstrong, and Pomeroy. And I came to Portland and opened up a, started to practice here in Portland. That was after my service in OPA.

**GB:** All right, now let's back up to the Office of Price Administration for a moment. Now, how long did you say that you were employed for them?

**MW:** I must have been with them during the war, probably three, two to three years, I don't recall exactly how long.

**GB:** Right, and just to give some historical and to provide an historical backdrop, what exactly was the function of the Office of Price Administration?

**MW:** To control prices, to control rationing, to administer the rationing program, but mainly to control prices and keep them as, to avoid inflation.

**GB:** And you said you were an enforcement officer, was it?

**MW:** Yes, I was enforcement attorney.

**GB:** Enforcement attorney. And what exactly was your role as an enforcement attorney? What would be your daily duties?

**MW:** I had a staff of investigators that I supervised, would send them out to various areas to check on businesses to see whether or not they were in compliance with the law, with price control laws. There were four enforcement attorneys. I had one commodity group, consumer goods. There was an enforcement attorney for food and also an enforcement attorney for some other commodity, but mine was mainly commodities.

**GB:** And who were, do you remember any of the people you worked with while on OPA?

**MW:** Yes, I worked with Charles Pomeroy, Milton Bradford, who later became attorney general or worked with the attorney general of the state of Maine, and George West, who was the, who became the attorney general of Maine. There were four enforcement attorneys and one chief attorney, and we shared a commodity group to control.

**GB:** Did you work with Ed Muskie at all in OPA?

**MW:** No, no, I didn't even know, I only met Ed Muskie when he became the, about the time that he became the director of OPA, OPS rather. That was during the Korean War.

**GB:** Okay, okay. Now, after OPA, as you said, you got involved in the Portland legal community. Did you know a lot of people within the legal community?

**MW:** Did I know a lot of people?

**GB:** Yes.

**MW:** I knew everybody. We were all brother attorneys.

**GB:** Who were some of the major players in Portland law back then?

**MW:** Well, there was the office of Berman & Berman and several large firms. When we come back to Portland and opened the office, Dick Armstrong, who was my chief attorney at OPA, wanted to start a law school. He had a charter of the old Peabody Law School that was now defunct. So he asked me to help him set up a staff of lawyers and set up a law school, which I did. I first, we didn't have much money, so I asked Jack Agar, who was an attorney, if he wanted to serve as treasurer of the law school. He was quite a promoter, Jack was, so I knew he would help. So we set up the law school, which is now the University of Maine Law School. It became the University of Maine and certified by the state. We had a board of trustees. One of the members of the board of trustees was Judge Clifford, who was federal judge, and the woman who ran the *Portland Press Herald*. What was her name? Her father founded the paper.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Oh, you remember better than I.

**MW:** She was the boss of the *Portland Press Herald*, she was a trustee. And we set up the Portland university because it made a, under the law a lot of returning veterans could get an educational grant and go to law school. Let's see, there was, the only two trustees I remember right now is, Gannett, she was Mrs. Gannett [Jean Gannett Williams Hawley]. My recall is getting better. And Judge Clifford, who was a great friend of mine, good Democrat and good friend of my father's and active politically before he became judge. So under the G.I. Bill a lot of returning veterans could go to the law school, and it became a very popular project. Today some of our best lawyers and judges are graduates of the Portland University Law School, or now the University of Maine Law School.

**GB:** My brother is a student there right now actually.

**MW:** Really, the University of Maine Law School?

**GB:** Yes, he's just finishing up, he finished up his second year and he's going into-.

**MW:** That's very interesting. Well, I helped them found that school.

**GB:** That's wonderful. Were you involved with the school, with the administration of the school?

**MW:** Yeah, I taught there. I spent a, I taught constitutional and administrative law at the law school. Most lawyers, we recruited mostly local lawyers to teach at the time, you know, part time job. I don't think I was paid very much. And we, an hour a week, no, let's see, three days a week I think I taught, administrative and constitutional law. Some of the graduates of that

school were Judge Childs, Dana Childs, who recently died. Well, there were a great many, I can't think of them all. But they're spread throughout the state now and quite successful. A very successful project, and it helped the community, and I'm very proud of what I did with Dick Armstrong, who was the head of the school. But I was the managing (*unintelligible word*), and arranged for, politically, money and so forth, had the connections so-called. That was, then the University of Maine took over the law school and, the legislature passed an act that accredited the University of Maine Law School, was the successor to Portland University Law School.

**GB:** Right, and when did the state take over?

**MW:** The state took over, well, I don't recall. A couple years after we founded the school.

**GB:** All right. Now, at your law office, Armstrong and Wheeler was it?

**MW:** Yes, Wheeler, and Pomeroy.

**GB:** And Pomeroy.

**MW:** Pomeroy joined us. He became a judge afterwards, appointed by I think it was Muskie at my request. At my, now, I asked him to do it and he agreed to it. And Pomeroy went to the superior court judgeship, superior court judgeship, and later he was appointed to the supreme court judge by I think it was -

**Mrs. Wheeler:** I can't help you Milt.

**MW:** Well, later he was appointed by a subsequent Democratic governor. Ken Curtis. My recall isn't that good but I'm doing all right.

**GB:** Great, fine. What kind of law did you practice, did your office practice?

**MW:** I did a lot of criminal and bankruptcy law. Administrative law as well, but there wasn't that much administrative or constitutional law in this area, so I, most of my practice was criminal and bankruptcy. And, let's see, Pomeroy was appointed bankruptcy referee, that's right. Clifford appointed Judge Pomeroy bankruptcy referee. That was before he became judge of the superior court. Muskie appointed Pomeroy justice of the superior court, and Ken Curtis appointed him to the [Maine] supreme court. He was one of my partners, had quite a career.

**GB:** Now, did you remain with this law firm for the, for your entire career?

**MW:** No, Dick Armstrong died. Pomeroy became judge, so I was by myself. So I formed, let's see, what happened was I think it was in, oh, the Office of Price Stabilization came along during the Korean War, that was about forty-, the Korean War was what '48? Around that time. And I started, I went to work for the Office of Price Stabilization after my partners all became judges and referees and one died. So I went to work back for the government. That's where Muskie enters into the picture. Do you want to go there?

**GB:** Yes, yes, I would. For a little bit of background again could you describe the purpose of the Office of Price Stabilization and your position there?

**MW:** Well the Office, congress passed the law creating the Office of Price Stabilization. Korean War, the country was afraid of inflation, so they passed the pact, the Office of Price Stabilization. Mike DeSalle was the governor of Ohio, became the national director, national administrator of the Office of Price Stabilization. He called me up, had a contact politically with him, he called me up and asked me to head the Office of Price Stabilization here in Maine. That's the beginning of the Korean War. I accepted the position. A couple of weeks later he called me up on, providing, accepting the position providing the office would be set up in Portland, the district office, which was my home.

A couple of weeks later he called me up and he says he's in a dilemma, he has a dilemma. The Democratic National Committee had recommended a young lawyer by the name of Muskie for the job as office- for the job as director. But he says, he had committed to me, the job is mine. I says, "Wait a minute. We can serve, we can handle it this way: I'll defer to Muskie to take the job as director, I'll take the job as an enforcement director for the same money providing the office remains in Portland." Muskie always kidded me about moving the office away from Augusta which was nearer his own, but the office, so it was agreed. I deferred to Muskie to become director. I'd never met Muskie but I knew he was in the legislature and had a fine reputation and was very active in politics so as a good soldier I deferred to him and was willing to take the enforcement director's position, which was the same GS-14 grade, the same money was involved. And the proviso was that the office remain here, and DeSalle was delighted to do it; he had no political problems then. And Muskie was appointed director, and I was appointed enforcement director.

Now, that's the first time I met Muskie. He come down to set up the office in Portland, and I got to know him. He commuted from Waterville to Portland for the first few weeks, so I says, "Listen, why commute? You can stay at my house while you're setting the office up with me." He asked me to help him set up the office, to recruit staff and people, you know, politically expedient. And so he stayed with my home for about six weeks while we were organizing the office. I got to know him real well and got to like him real well. My wife loved him, and we got along fine so we got some of the best, I set up the enforcement division, and we worked together setting up the entire staff for the Office of Price Stabilization. We opened up our office across from the old Langley Restaurant on Congress Street. It was above the old Langley Restaurant on Congress Street, and we were there temporarily until we finally moved down to the old Falmouth Hotel on Miller Street. My memory's getting better. The old Falmouth Hotel on Middle Street where we set up the office, finalized the office. Now, I recruited several fine lawyers to be enforcement attorneys on my staff, and he worked on appointing other qualified men to work in the office, and we worked together. But I saw in him a very affable, comfortable person and grew to love him very much, and everybody loved him.

So while we, the staff that we set up became the organization for his first trial as governor subsequently, later. We used to meet at the Pagoda Restaurant across from the office, Chinese restaurant. The Pagoda was run by Henry and Danny Wong who were clients of mine, so we'd go over there and conspire to set up a political team for Muskie. That was even before he was

considering running for governor. So we had many meetings over there. Afterwards he, after he left my house, he stayed only a couple of weeks there and went back to Waterville and commuted daily from Waterville to Portland. And we set up the staff in the office, which became the Office, the district Office of Price Stabilization. And he had to go around and make speeches before civic groups, the Lions Club and other economic, small business admini--, small business clubs. And he learned to, he became a very good speaker and he spoke on the theory of compliance with the law. And he apparently was very well liked because he was invited all over the state of Maine to make speeches. And he did, and that's where he made a lot of his contacts, which later helped him when he ran for governor.

Well, that lasted for a couple of years, the Office of Price Stabilization, the Korean War ended, and the office was terminated. But before the office was terminated he retired, and I became the acting director. He retired and went back to Waterville, and he was active in the AmVet veterans' group, I think he was one of the national officers, and he went back to Waterville and I closed up the office when we finally liquidated the office when the war ended, and the staff was dispersed throughout the state. There was forty or fifty people that were working there, and they all became active in Muskie's campaign when he ran for governor. Now when he left the office, he resigned, I think to take some national office with the AM Vets, he became some AM VET national office. My recall is getting better. And he went to the convention in Chicago for the presidential convention and was, became a player in the Democratic Party, which he always was. He was always a good Democratic and was always active and he even held the office as a Democratic legislator from Waterville.

Now he returned to, let's see, after the war ended he went back to Waterville. First he took the job with AmVets, and at the time he met the paraplegic, what was his name, the veteran that, the paraplegic, they, there was a movie about him? Russell! A gentleman by the name of Russell. He was a paraplegic, and they made a movie, remember? He had the hooks, he used his hooks. Well, he became very friendly with Russell, and when he ran for governor, Russell came down to Maine to campaign for him. We got Russell to come here.

And then we decided he'd be a good candidate for governor and all the members of our staff and all other top wigs, bigwigs in the Democratic Party urged him to run for governor. We thought he had a good chance, I thought he had a good chance because he was so likeable, such a decent man, an honest man, complete integrity, a moral man, a person you could go in the trenches with and be contented he'd cover for you. He was a fine man. Well, he ran for governor, and we had a campaign committee, which I organized here in Portland, raised money. I contributed myself a substantial amount, which I didn't have, and I got my Chinese friends to help. Does this remind you of Dore, Gore? Well, anyway, it was a small budget, we raised enough money, we got him to run for governor. And he won. Russell come down and campaigned for him, the AmVets were active, the fifty member staff of the OPS were very active in organizing support, so it was very small financial support. I went to a half a dozen of my clients and got a hundred here, a hundred there. And to make a long story short, he won, he became governor of Maine. A Catholic, which was unusual in Maine, I think he was the first Catholic governor of Maine. Was he? Who was -

**Mrs. Wheeler:** *(Unintelligible phrase).*

**MW:** Well, anyway, religion was not important. The point is he was a very fine man. Now where were we? He became governor, that's the end of story isn't it? Or do you want some more?

**GB:** Well, during the campaign how did you feel about his chances?

**MW:** I thought they were good. Everywhere he went the members of the small community enjoyed him because everyone he met, he was so affable, he made friends so easily. I thought he was going to win, and he did. We had meetings for him, we'd hold coffees, held meetings at various homes in town.

**GB:** Now Maine was predominantly Republican at that time, right?

**MW:** Exactly, that's why it was a long shot, but he, I think the OPS connections where he went out and spoke to all these small towns and made friends everywhere he went, and the staff that he, that we appointed were active in his campaign. He appointed several judges from the staff. Bill Mahoney, Judge Mahoney became a superior court judge, Judge Campbell, who was also on my staff became a South Portland judge. He appointed Dick Broderick, Millinocket, became a judge, Limberis of Bangor became a judge, all members of the old team, the old . . . .

**GB:** I'm going to pause for a second and flip the tape over.

*End of Side A  
Side B*

**GB:** Right, now you were just mentioning names of some people who were on Muskie's campaign staff with you. Could you tell me about some of them?

**MW:** Yes, well, Judge Campbell, who later became a partner of mine in the firm I founded after I left OPS. Judge Campbell. He's deceased, he died.

**GB:** Was that Wallace Campbell?

**MW:** Wallace Campbell. And old Judge McCarthy, became a superior court, he appointed to the superior court, and he's passed away. I'm the survivor.

**GB:** Was that Bill McCarthy?

**MW:** Bill McCarthy, yes. Let's see, some of the other judges he appointed; Limberis in Bangor. I guess he's still alive, I don't, I haven't seen some of these people for a long time. Judge Broderick.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Charlie Pomeroy.

**MW:** Charlie Pomeroy, he died. I'm the last of the Mohicans.

**GB:** Did you know Tom Delahanty at all?

**MW:** Very well.

**GB:** Very well. Could you tell me about him?

**MW:** What?

**GB:** Could you tell me about him?

**MW:** Tom Delahanty, the judge, or the old judge?

**GB:** Yes.

**MW:** Former judge?

**GB:** Yes.

**MW:** Well he's the son-in-law of Judge Clifford, and I was very friendly with him and his wife. We were social friends in Lewiston and afterwards, here. He has two sons I believe that are judges, one is a judge also. You're talking about the old judge Tom Delahanty.

**GB:** Yes, yes.

**MW:** He was a very good judge, very good friend, very capable. I guess his boys are doing real well, too.

**GB:** And did you know Albert Beliveau?

**MW:** Yes, very well. That was Bill McCarthy's father-in-law. My recall's getting better.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Wonderful.

**GB:** Could you tell me about Albert Beliveau?

**MW:** He was a gruff old man, I loved him very much. I got along with him. He'd call a spade a spade, and he'd sit you down in the courtroom, he wanted courtroom decorum at all times, but he was a very decent man. Incidentally, where are you from originally?

**GB:** I'm from Lewiston.

**MW:** Oh, good. Do you go to Bates?

**GB:** No, no, I don't. Actually I just graduated from St. Dominic High School in Lewiston, and I'm going to the University of Chicago in the fall.

**MW:** Oh sure, right, yeah. Judge Beliveau was a fine man. Tough but good.

**GB:** Did you know anyone else in the Beliveau family?

**MW:** Well I know his wife, who is McCarthy's sister. He's a good man. But he was tough, you had to toe the mark when you went into his courtroom. Yeah.

**GB:** All right. Now, you mentioned starting another law office after closing OPS; what was that?

**MW:** Let's see, yes I started an office here in Portland with Wally Campbell, who was on my staff in OPS. I found he was a very capable guy, and I asked him if he'd set up, we had, I wasn't doing anything, just, the job was terminated, so I went back into practice. I subsequently went to work for the government again. Several years of practice, and then I went to work for the urban renewal authority. I became the deputy attorney for the New England and New York region for HUD, Housing and Urban Development. So I had one, two, three hitches with the federal government. And I went to New York for about, no, I had four hitches with, well, I forgot the rest of the story. I went to New York and worked for HUD for a year and a half, and then a vacancy opened up here in Maine. So I wanted to come back to my family, and I come back here and went to work for the Small Business Administration, as the attorney for the Small Business Administration, and worked a couple of years as attorney for the Small Business Administration. And then I was appointed small businesses administrator for Maine. I became the head honcho until I retired in '73 I think it was. And I'm still living. So I had four government experiences, OPA, OPS, HUD, and Small Business Administration.

**GB:** All right. And during all that time did you remain actively involved in the Democratic Party or Democratic politics?

**MW:** Well, my wife became a representative from Portland.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** That's not me.

**GB:** Oh, okay.

**MW:** My previous wife.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** His late wife.

**MW:** Late wife. And naturally as a government employee I couldn't be too active because of the Hatch Act, so I wasn't too active, but I supported all Democratic candidates including my wife, late wife.

**GB:** Could you tell me about her? What was her name?

**MW:** Mildred, Mildred F. Wheeler. She ran for the legislature and was reelected five times.

And then she, when I retired she retired and we moved to Florida.

**GB:** I see. All right, I -

**MW:** Come back here three months of the year in the state of Maine which we loved. My new wife -

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Not new.

**MW:** - of thirteen years. Great wife, her best, my first wife's best friend -

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Mildred and I were -

**MW:** She was a widow.

**GB:** Oh wow. All right. And were you involved in any other campaign besides your wife's?

**MW:** Oh yes, I was active in the congressional campaigns, Peter Kyros' campaign, very active with Peter Kyros, was a congressman here.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Kennedy.

**MW:** I was a delegate to the national convention when Kennedy was nominated for president. So that's the history, a long and sort of quite controversial history.

**GB:** All right. And did you maintain contact with Ed Muskie during his time as governor and then -?

**MW:** Oh yes, yes. We were friendly socially, and I visited him in the Blaine House.

**GB:** And what did you perceive of, well, what did you think of his politics? How do you think he handled the office of governor to begin with?

**MW:** Great, he was more of a moderate. He wasn't a reactionary, naturally. More towards the liberal bent socially. Economically, I guess he was in the middle of the road. He was a man of great talent. As you know he became senator later and Secretary of State.

**GB:** Now did you remain in contact with him while he was senator and then secretary of state?

**MW:** Oh yes, I was with the government and. Well, he helped me get these jobs, by the way. He didn't, I used his office to get these appointments whenever I needed one.

**GB:** Now, when did you see him during that time, while he was serving in Washington?

**MW:** Well, I used to see him when I was with HUD in New York. I used to visit with him when he was in Washington. On my way to Florida we'd stop, my wife and I would stop and say

hello and have dinner with him and, occasionally. He was always very supportive of any position I sought in government.

**GB:** Do you have any particularly interesting stories about encounters you had with him? Do you remember, have any little vignettes?

**MW:** Yes, we had a, I remember when the, when he became governor, a client of mine sent me four tickets for the World Series. So we went down to New York, Muskie and I and Dick McMahon, who was one of his campaign managers, who is since deceased, Dick McMahon, and Wally Campbell. We went, I had four tickets, and we went to the World Series in New York.

**GB:** Could you tell me about that trip? What was Muskie like socially when you'd -?

**MW:** Well, he was a social drinker, he'd take a drink occasionally, nothing excessive. Modest drinker like I am; cocktail before dinner. I never saw any evidence of any temper, although they say he could get mad occasionally. But he was very supportive, he was a good friend.

**GB:** Did you have an impression of his sense of humor? Was he a humorous person?

**MW:** Yes, he was a very, very outgoing and could tell a story and would listen to a good story also. He was a good listener. Not only was he a good talker; he was a good listener. And he's sincere. You had a grievance, he'd listen to it. Anybody could come to him. They had a problem, he'd try to solve it. He was a doer. He should have been president. One more week, he would have been vice president at the time of the Humphrey campaign. He just, they, the last week they picked up almost enough to overcome it, they'd beat Nixon that year. But life is what it is; you win some and you lose some.

**GB:** Were you involved in that campaign, the Humphrey-Muskie ticket in '68?

**MW:** Oh yes, yes, my wife was very much involved. I was involved in all presidential campaigns. I was involved with McGovern, McGovern and Shriver, Shriver was his vice presidential candidate.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** He came to Augusta.

**MW:** I was very active with, well listen, Judge [Frank] Coffin was a good friend also. Judge Coffin was, he's now on the circuit court of appeals in Boston, federal. He and Muskie, he was the chairman of the Democratic Party during Muskie's tenure. Very fine man, top grade.

**GB:** Now, I'm sorry, were you about to say something?

**MW:** No, no, go ahead.

**GB:** Over the decades while Muskie was in politics as governor, as senator, as Secretary of State and during the campaigns, did you notice any personal or political changes in him over the years?

**MW:** Well, not really. He was a man of principle, and he retained that principle during his tenure. He would get angry occasionally, but that's human.

**GB:** When you knew him in OPS, did you see in him the potential to achieve such high offices as he did?

**MW:** Exactly. I saw in him a great deal of promise. He was a communicator. Wherever he went to speak, everybody loved him, admired him. He was forthright; he was direct. Highly principled, as I said before. Great moral, great character, and great integrity.

**GB:** What do you think were his major achievements during his years in politics?

**MW:** Mr. Clean was number one of his achievements, environmental. He became the environmental king of the congress, a leader. He demonstrated leadership quality in any endeavor that he undertook.

**GB:** Do you remember feeling the effects of legislation he was involved with as you were back here in Maine?

**MW:** Oh sure, Maine and the environmental laws.

**GB:** All right.

**MW:** He always voted right, believe me, when he voted in the senate, and he'd stand up to what he believed in. He was highly principled. As they say in the vernacular, he was all (*unintelligible word*).

**GB:** So you think his environmental work will be his legacy, is that safe to say?

**MW:** Well, yes, I think that's one of the top items. What other substantial legislation was he involved with, I can't recall now. But believe me, on most issues he was on the wrong side, right side.

**GB:** All right, now backing up, looking back at the forties through the sixties when we saw a resurgence of the Democratic Party in Maine, what do you think initiated or facilitated that resurgence?

**MW:** Well, I think you had a leader to do it. People in Maine were subject to change, ready for change, and Muskie came along at the right time. He had the leadership qualities and the personal qualities to become a great governor and a great senator and would have been a great president.

**GB:** Now, beyond its growth has the Democratic Party, the structure of it or its I guess ideals, changed over the decades?

**MW:** Well, I think they, I think the activists in Maine have become more active on liberal issues. I think there's, it's been education. The old philosophy, "My father was a Republican, therefore I'm a Republican," doesn't carry out now. Things have changed. Younger people have taken ano-, are more open philosophically. Maine today is a Democratic state, which was unheard of fifty years ago. This was the bastion of the Republican Party, but today it's a toss up. I think Governor [Angus] King used to be a Democrat. I think his leanings are more Democratic than Republican; he's more a middle-of-the-roader, moderation. The issues and the emergence of the women's vote have substantially helped the Democratic Party as I see it. That's why I predict that Gore will win this election. When the chips are down, although polls show a close race now, he'll win out eventually. When they get to the debates, he'll destroy [George W.] Bush. He's a good debater. And he's affable, he's knowledgeable.

**GB:** Have you seen, so would you say politically as far as platforms and so forth, do you think the Democratic Party, particularly in Maine, has become more liberal or more conservative, or neither? Has it remained about the same?

**MW:** No, it's become more liberal.

**GB:** Really.

**MW:** It attracts the younger voters. And the older voters today are attracted by Social Security, so they vote Democratic. So Maine has become I think a Democratic state. I think the legislature's now Democratic, isn't it? Yeah.

**GB:** I believe so.

**MW:** And King is a Democratic who won as an independent, although his, he worked for congressman, Senator Hathaway as his top aide.

**GB:** All right, now I have one more little thing. You mentioned before that you had worked on Peter Kyros' campaigns?

**MW:** Yes, Peter Kyros.

**GB:** Yes, could you tell me about him?

**MW:** Well, he was a handsome young Republican, not, oh boy, handsome young Democrat. And he hasn't been around here for several years now; he's in Washington. He's with some law firm in Washington. But he was, very likeable, and he got the women's vote, believe me. He looked good, didn't he?

**Mrs. Wheeler:** Very nice looking man.

**MW:** I was very friendly with him socially, too, his wife, and the Greek community, I'm quite friendly with them. They're a great community here in Portland. Kyros, Hathaway was a good friend of mine. He's also a former senator.

**GB:** Could you tell me about him?

**MW:** Great guy, personal, decent, regular guy; capable. I'm giving everybody accolades, all Democrats, you notice?

**Mrs. Wheeler:** And Dana.

**MW:** Huh?

**Mrs. Wheeler:** And Dana?

**MW:** Dana Childs, oh yes, he was a great guy. Judge Childs was a good personal friend. He's the former speaker of the house when the Democrats controlled it.

**GB:** Did you know any prominent Republicans?

**MW:** Oh sure, some of my best friends are Republicans.

**GB:** Such as?

**MW:** Well, Judge Sewall is a good friend of mine.

**GB:** Is that Joseph Sewall?

**MW:** Judge Sewall, was formerly from York County.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** What was his first name?

**MW:** Sewall, I forget. Bermans of Lewiston and the Bermans of Portland, Republicans, they're good friends, they were good friends. I have many good Republican friends.

**GB:** Do you know how these, your Republican friends viewed Muskie?

**MW:** Admired him, respected him.

**GB:** Even politically?

**MW:** Well, they voted against him, but they feared him, fear, fear is the word. They respected him, that's the answer. They couldn't pin anything on him. You know this idea of negative politics. He's clean as a whistle, Mr. Clean they used to call him. No corruption, not a scintilla of a scandal ever. That's why he was a poor man.

**GB:** Right, now could you tell me about, do you ever still visit Lewiston? Have you seen the Lewiston community lately?

**MW:** Well, no, my parents are buried up there in Auburn cemetery, but I don't have occasion to go to Lewiston much. I did, my, one of my best friends, in fact a dear friend, Judge [Alton] Lessard, who's since passed away, he practiced law in Lewiston, became a judge in Lewiston, and he helped me politically many times; very dear friend. Unfortunately his poor wife was, has suffered a shock, but she's alive. But he was a great fr--, great buddy. I used to buddy with him a lot, vacation with him, he and his wife, his family and my family.

**GB:** Well, have you noticed any changes over the decades in either the Lewiston community or the Portland community?

**MW:** Well, the Lewiston community, I don't know how they vote up there now for mayor, but it was more or less a conservative community. I think it's more liberal now. I consider myself a moderate, center of the road Democrat. I'm not extremist in either end of the, and I think that's where America is today, in the center.

**Mrs. Wheeler:** I hope.

**MW:** I'm fearful of the far right, I recoil at the thought of the far right, I recoil at the thought of [George W.] Bush becoming president. Although I like him personally; his father's a great guy, a good, you know, I know him, but -

**GB:** Oh really?

**MW:** Oh yes, I've met him, I'm not socially friendly.

**GB:** Could you tell me about him? George Bush, Sr.?

**MW:** Senior? Dedicated, personal, a man that I could vote for if I weren't a Democrat, although I don't put the party label as a criteria. I usually vote Democratic because I was bred that way, and of course I believe in their philosophy and their issues, I think they have winning issues. Especially Social Security, of which I am on.

**GB:** Now, did you say you had also met George W. Bush?

**MW:** No, I haven't met the son.

**GB:** Okay, you haven't met him. Now, what about the Portland community over the years? Have there been any economic, social, or ethnic or political changes over the years?

**MW:** Well, certainly it's Democratic; it's become Democratic. Economically it's great, it's the most livable community I think in America. Although Brunswick, I understand one of the, was declared one of the most pleasant cities to live in America, Brunswick, Maine. Did you hear that?

**Mrs. Wheeler:** No, I didn't.

**MW:** One of four cities. I read it somewhere. Portland is a good community. Ethnic, on balance people are tolerant. I think there's very little prejudice here. There's some blacks that are treated well here, Orientals are in here, they're accepted in the community like everybody else. There's always been discrimination, goes with the territory. You have a constitutional right to hate. But it doesn't make it right. Some people hate. My philosophy is live and let live. That's why I'm around I guess. Pretty good for a ninety year older, huh?

**GB:** Not bad. Right. Well, -

**MW:** Do you have enough of your interview?

**GB:** I'm done with my questions, so are there any final remarks you'd like to make? Anything we haven't covered or anything you'd like to emphasize?

**MW:** No, I think I covered the waterfront pretty well.

**GB:** All right, great, then thank you very much.

**MW:** Very nice to meet you.

*End of Interview*