

11-21-2008

## Nicoll, Don oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

## **Interview with Don Nicoll by Andrea L'Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Nicoll, Don

### **Interviewer**

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

### **Date**

November 21, 2008

### **Place**

Portland, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 450

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### **Biographical Note**

Donald Eugene "Don" Nicoll was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on August 4, 1927, and grew up in the West Roxbury section of the city. He is the son of George and Mary Nicoll. He attended Robert Gould Shaw Junior High School and Boston English High School and graduated from Colby College in Waterville, Maine in 1949, majoring in History with a minor in Government. Don met his future wife, Hilda Farnum, also a Colby student, when they worked in the resort town of Ocean Park, Maine, in the summer of 1944. Nicoll began his graduate work at Pennsylvania State College in 1949, where he received a teaching fellowship in the Department of History. His graduate studies concentrated on American history, specifically the period from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. His M.A. (1952) thesis was on the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Starting in 1951, Nicoll and his family settled in Buckfield, Maine where he picked apples and taught part time at Stephen's High School, located in Rumford. Nicoll began working as an announcer for WLAM radio in Lewiston, Maine. He became a reporter and then news editor for WLAM and WLAM-TV. In June 1954, Nicoll left WLAM to become Executive Secretary of the Democratic State Committee at the request of Frank M. Coffin, who has just become chairman. Mr. Coffin was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Maine's Second Congressional District in 1956 and Nicoll went to

Washington, DC, as his administrative assistant, continuing in that post until December 1960, the end of Congressman Coffin's second term. Mr. Coffin ran for governor in 1960 and was defeated. After the election Senator Edmund S. Muskie asked Nicoll to join his staff as legislative assistant and news secretary. Nicoll served in that position until 1962, when he became administrative assistant. He continued in that post until 1971, when he became personal advisor to Senator Muskie. He left the senate office in mid-1972.

From 1972 until his retirement in 2005 Nicoll worked as a program and policy planner, first as a consultant (1972-73), then as chairman and chief executive officer of the New England Land Grant Universities Joint Operations Committee (1973-1975), then as coordinator of planning and vice president for planning and public affairs for the Maine Medical Center (1975-1986), then as a consultant (1986-2005). His clients were primarily in the non-profit sector and included, universities, libraries, education associations, health care organizations and social service agencies. He also worked as a volunteer, heading a variety of public policy projects, including the Maine Task Force on Government Reorganization, the Maine State Compensation Commission, the Maine (Mental Health) Systems Assessment Commission, the Maine Consortium for Health Professions Education, the Southern Maine Community Television Consortium, the Maine Special Commission on Government Reorganization (co-chair), the Board of Visitors of the University of Southern Maine's Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council and the Governor's Allagash Wilderness Waterway Working Group.

From 1998-2005, Don Nicoll was the Director of the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College.

### **Scope and Content**

Interview includes discussions of: politically active Democrats, and descriptions of them, in Aroostook County, Penobscot County, Washington County and Hancock County.

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## Transcript

**Andrea L’Hommedieu:** This is an interview for the Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Project at Bates College. The date is November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008, and I’m at the home of Don Nicoll in Portland, Maine, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu. Don, I know we pretty much finished last time with the end of your time with the senator and a few things you did later than that. And I thought today we might talk about some of the people you got to know in the context of the senator over the years, and give a sense of who they were and what connection they had to the senator. And if we start maybe in Aroostook County?

**Don Nicoll:** Okay, we can start way in the north with “The County”. And let me go at it chronologically and go back to 1954 and that campaign. Two people were most prominent in that campaign in the County as I recall. One was Kenneth Colbath, C-O-L-B-A-T-H, who was the candidate for Congress from the third district in that race, and the other was Joseph Freeman, F-R-E-E-M-A-N, who was a businessman in Presque Isle, both Ken and Joe came from Presque Isle – talk about them and then we’ll move along.

First, Ken Colbath was a fellow who owned a small record shop in Presque Isle. He was a local businessman, was a Democrat, which was not usual in Presque Isle in those days. The business community was largely Republican. And Ken was not the most prominent Democrat, but for one reason or another the Democrats in the area thought Ken would make an excellent candidate for Congress. He was really rather a shy fellow. Lean, very thin, had a lovely wife and daughter, and very reluctantly agreed to run and would go around campaigning and shaking hands, going with Senator Muskie, going to the areas in the third district – in an impossible race. He was running against Cliff McIntire, the congressman from that district, who was a leader in the potato industry and a very popular figure, and reflected the political biases of the time.

And I can remember working with Ken, who looked at his role with some bemusement and wry humor, knowing perfectly well he wasn’t going to win but doing whatever he could to contribute to the ticket. And after the campaign he continued to participate in party politics in the County, but had absolutely no interest in ever running again and did not. We used to refer to Ken, by the way, as the colossus of the north, and it was an affectionate tease, because he was taking on such a role.

Joe Freeman, actually he didn’t come from Presque Isle, he was living in Presque Isle at the time, and Joe had come from I think it was Frenchville, but one of the – no, excuse me, Joe came from Wallagrass Plantation, that’s W-A-L-L-A-G-R-A-S-S Plantation,

which is a settlement less than a full-fledged town just north of Eagle Lake, between Eagle Lake and Fort Kent. And Joe's wife Anne came from that area, too.

Joe had, during WWII, had started up a restaurant, or a lunch business, on the Presque Isle air force base, and I suspect it was a contract operation with the government. And with the capital that he accumulated from that business in the war, then went into the soft drink business and became the Pepsi Cola distributor for northern Maine and was extremely successful and very well-to-do by the time we met him.

Joe had real trouble with English. He had grown up speaking French and was one of those individuals who never quite made the transition. And as a result, he was more than modest; he was terribly shy, in spite of his accomplishments and his obvious leadership in the community. His wife Anne, on the other hand, made a very smooth transition into English, and if you met her and didn't know who she was or where she came from, you wouldn't dream that she'd come out of a little village speaking French as a girl and moved into the Presque Isle community.

Joe and Anne had a son and a daughter, and the last I knew the son, Greg [Freeman], was running the business in Presque Isle. But Joe was the person who was always there with a willingness to raise money, always there ready to drive the senator around or do most anything, and frequently when Senator Muskie went to Presque Isle in campaigns it was at the Freemans that he stayed. And Joe was one of those wonderful figures who made politics in that part of the world a very pleasant occasion and always helpful.

Another figure I remember from the County came from Fort Kent, and I met him only briefly but knew him by reputation. His name was Rene Cyr, Irene, I-R-E-N-E-E, Cyr, C-Y-R, and Mr. Cyr was in 1954 a member of the state legislature, and he had been first elected to the legislature in 1910 and served as a member of the house in the legislature that was presided over, the house of representatives that was presided over by Judge Coffin's grandfather, Andrew, no, yes, Morey, Frank Andrew Morey, yes, who was the speaker in those days and a great influence on Frank's life.

And what I remember most about Mr. Cyr, who was a very sweet man and revered in the County, and particularly up along the Valley, was that I went to a dinner in, it would have been 1955, a Democratic dinner up in the Valley, and as executive secretary was seated next to Mr. Cyr. We were talking during the dinner hour and at one point he interrupted me and asked me to repeat what I had said, and when I repeated it he apologized and said, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. My wife, she says I have convenient hearing" – which I've always kept as a memory Rene Cyr.

Moving into the Valley, the other person who was very important to the party then and later was Emilien Levesque, E-M-I-L-I-E-N, L-E-V-E-S-Q-U-E. Emilien was a paper worker in the Fraser Paper Company and president of the papermakers' union local, and was an active Democrat in Madawaska and the surrounding community. He later ran for the legislature, and I believe he served at one time on the governor's council, and still later was one of the Unemployment, or Employment Security Commission members and

ran the program essentially for unemployment insurance in the state.

Emilien and his wife Augie, whose full name I think was Augusta, were very prominent in the party and always ready to help. Emilien was a big man, he had served in WWII and was a machine gunner I believe, and had been wounded, had seen a lot of combat service in Europe, and was one of those people involved in politics not because he was looking for a career, he already had a career in the paper mill and was a leader in the community, but because he believed it was important for his community to become engaged, and somewhat like Mike Michaud much later, became a very effective legislator and represented a new kind of leadership in the legislature, which had been dominated for years by lawyers and retired insurance salesmen, etcetera.

And Emilien, I remember one occasion, I was dispatched to Madawaska for a meeting of the union local, they were having an annual meeting, and the president of the Maine AFL at the time, Ben Dorsky, D-O-R-S-K-Y, of Bangor was the featured speaker, and I was there speaking on behalf of the Democratic Party. And Ben was a Republican, and had assiduously cultivated his position as a Republican as a way of getting benefits for labor, as much as he could in a state dominated by Republicans. And he was not particularly friendly at the time to the Democrats because he didn't think they were going to go anywhere and therefore had no power to help him and his union members. On the other hand, unions like the papermakers were interested in boosting the party, particularly when they were from the Valley.

And at that meeting, Ben spoke and then I spoke, and being young and brash said in the course of my remarks that the time had come for labor to stop cozying up to the Republicans – that wasn't my exact phrasing, but that's what I meant – and looking for crumbs from the table. Well Ben was not pleased, and I discovered later, neither was Governor Muskie because I was being a little too direct and stirring the pot too much, and I got the word that I could tone down my rhetoric henceforth. But I remember Emilien, who presided at that meeting, being delighted with the needle being given to Ben Dorsky.

Moving further into the Valley you come to John Martin. John was not involved in the 1954 campaign, but came along in '56 as I recall.

**AL:** But he had an uncle.

**DN:** He had an uncle, and we first met his uncle, who was a member of the legislature, Claude Martin and, yes, for some reason, when we went to Eagle Lake campaigning, I don't recall meeting John. He was probably at the university at the time. But we did go and there was a Democratic gathering at the lodge, at the, I think they call it the Pines of Acadia, or Acadia Lodge, that was the name of the little sporting camps on Eagle Lake that Claude owned, and Claude was a member of the legislature and had been for some time. He was a fairly conservative Democrat, and I remember him as a man probably taller than John, with a moustache and very carefully combed hair, wherever he was, and very carefully dressed, even in the setting of the Camps of Acadia, I think that's it, Camps of Acadia, even in the Camps of Acadia. And he was a power in the town of

Eagle Lake, as his nephew would become later.

And I forget exactly when I met John, but we were aware of him as a bright young candidate for the legislature, and member of the legislature, who challenged some of the older leaders and particularly challenged Louis Jalbert for a leadership post. And over the years John became not only a very important figure publicly and politically, but he was a very important figure in our own lives because of his schedule as a legislator and a teacher in the Fort Kent High School. And so we got to know John very well.

John, in election years – let's see how this worked – yes, in the first session of the legislature, which was the longer session, John took leave, John was able to teach in that year – let's see, how did this work? Generally, John, yes, John was able to teach in the fall of each year, but in the spring he was tied up with the legislative session and so he had an arrangement with the school district that he had off in the spring. And then in the summer and up to the fall school year, he would come to Washington, and he would particularly do this in an election year. He didn't have much opposition when he was running for reelection, so he would come down, and this is in the 1960s, and would work in the Muskie office and do case work for us and some work on legislation affecting Maine. It was a way for him to get some experience at the national level.

The first time John came to Washington, as I recall, was with two other people, Elmer Violette and Emilien Levesque. They came to testify before the House Public Works Subcommittee on Rivers and Harbors about the St. John-Passamaquoddy Power Project, and the three of them came and stayed with us at our house – another sign of how impecunious we all were. They didn't come and stay in a hotel in Washington, and unlike the presidents of the three big auto companies did not fly on a private jet. But they came down and stayed with us, and I worked with them on testimony before the House committee.

And so my first vivid memory of John, actually, was his testifying before that committee, which was chaired by Representative [Robert Emmett, Jr.] Bob Jones of Alabama. Representative Jones was an older man, had been in the Congress for some years, and was a fairly typical, old line Southern Democrat, a liberal when it came to rivers and harbors projects and development projects for states, and he was presiding. John and Elmer and Emilien each had a statement. Emilien and Elmer, in typical fashion, had fairly brief statements, and John got all wound up with his statement and was talking about the importance of the St. John project in particular for the economy of northern Maine and the people of the Valley, and went into some detail on the economic problems there and how they could be corrected, and repeated himself a couple of times and finally Representative Jones broke in and said, "Mr. Martin, that's all right, old Bob gets the message." Which as we have said to John on more than one occasion, it was one of the few times that somebody stopped him in his tracks.

But John continued in the sixties, this was mid-sixties, and in 1968 he came for the vice presidential campaign and worked as the office manager for that campaign. George Mitchell was the director of the office and the principal liaison with the Humphrey

campaign and the National Committee, but John made things run in the office on all the arrangements with the airline, Eastern Airlines, and the advance people, etcetera, seeing that they got what they needed. And he stayed with us, and Hilda has talked many times about how John would come home in the early evening to have supper with her and the kids and would tell them what was going on in the campaign and where I was and what we were doing, because I was on the plane. This is a campaign that was run literally from the plane, and they would not see me for a week or two at a time as we flew around the country. Well John was their link, and he would come home and report and then he would, after supper, he would head back for the office and work late into the evening.

The other thing he did, which Hilda didn't learn until much later, in the morning he would carefully time his departure from the house to the office for when the two younger members of our family, Melissa and Jessica, were on their way to school. And I guess Jonathan was involved to some degree, but mostly the two girls. And we had said that they must walk to school, it wasn't that far and it was good for them to have the exercise, and Hilda would not drive them. And she learned much later that John would carefully leave just before they were leaving, drive around the corner and wait until the girls came walking along and then they'd hop in the car and he'd drive them to school, thus undermining mother's discipline.

But John was a very good friend and we have remained good friends over the years, family friends, and through his trials and tribulations as speaker and then the ending of that phase of his career. And John has called on me on several occasions to help out with some troublesome things. One which continues is the Allagash, on which I'd worked with him and Elmer Violette, and another was the special commission on restructuring state government, which I ended up co-chairing with Merton Henry.

And there's a very funny story that goes with that and John. There was a big battle between Governor McKernan and the Democratic legislative leadership, principally John Martin and the president of the senate, Charles Pray over some proposals to restructure state government and save money. And they had struggled over creating some kind of a body and it was something the governor wanted to control and something that the Democratic legislators wanted to control, and they finally reached what they thought was a compromise in which the governor would appoint a certain number of members and the Democratic leadership would appoint a certain number of members, and they would agree jointly on a chair. Now, the chair would be elected by the members of the commission, but would in essence have been pre-selected by the governor and the legislators.

And the day – the governor dragged his heels on making his appointments, and in the end appointed almost exclusively Republican legislators. And this was not supposed to be a legislative committee, but that was the direction he went. And then John – I don't think there were any legislators in the group that John and Charlie put up. And before the meeting, they had an understanding with the governor that he would endorse Nicoll as the chair and then the committee would elect the chair. Well finally he made those appointments, and we had a meeting, the organization meeting, and several of the

Democratic members were not there because they couldn't make it, and as soon as the session started the Republican legislators nominated Sumner Lipman, a senator I believe from Augusta.

**AL:** And lawyer as well, I think he's a lawyer as well?

**DN:** A lawyer and, a prominent lawyer in Augusta, as chairman. And they had the votes and he was elected forthwith. I was nominated and he was nominated. And as soon as that was over, he adjourned the meeting abruptly, there was no time for discussion. It was not a very well handled affair, and the Republicans thought they had it in hand though they had not reckoned with John and his knowledge of state law. None of them had taken the oath of office in connection with their appointment, assuming that since on legislative committees they didn't have to take an oath every time. But this was a separate commission established by statute, and they did have to have it so the actions of the group were null and void. And John and Charlie let it be known that nothing was going to happen until they resolved this and, after a series of negotiations with the governor, came up with a proposal that there would be an equal number appointed by the governor and by the legislative leaders, and the chair, or there would be co-chairs of the commission with one appointed by the governor and the other appointed by the legislative leaders. But the governor would have to approve the legislative selection, and the legislative leaders would have to approve the governor's selection, so they each had a veto.

Well John and Charlie let the governor know that they were going to name me as one co-chair, and the governor started looking for a member and apparently struck out with a couple of people. And it dragged on for weeks, literally, and at the time I was doing some work in Augusta and went over about every week or so and would poke my head into the speaker's office and say, "How are we coming?" And, "No answer from the governor yet." Well one day I went to the office, poked my head in and asked my question, and the assistant sitting in the outer office said to me, "Oh, the governor sent up the name of Mert Henry, who's a long time Republican, and John and Charlie are just about to call the governor and tell him that they're not going to approve him; they're going to veto the selection because they don't want a Republican hack." And I said, "Oh no, do they know who Mert Henry is? There's no one who would be better. And it so happens that Mert is an old friend of mine, dating back to the 1950s, and he and I both cut our teeth on legislative work in the Congress and share a lot of the same views about the executive branch of state government and the national government, and he'd be superb. They can't do that." And she said, "Well, you better get in and tell the speaker." Well, I got in before he made the call and explained who Mert Henry really was and why it was important that he be approved. And they did, and Mert and I co-chaired the committee.

And I don't know whether I've told the story before, but when Frank Coffin and I went to Washington before he was sworn in, in the fall of – it would have been mid to, probably late November, early December – of 1956, the first place we went for advice on setting up a congressional office was Senator Fred Payne's office, and Mert was legislative

assistant to Senator Payne at the time and was one of the first people with whom we talked and got advice and assistance. And over the next two years I worked regularly with Mert, and when Senator Payne was defeated by Senator Muskie, all their case work that was still pending, that they hadn't wound up that was in the second district, came to our office and we worked with Mert on that, so the history was a long one.

And Mert and I, I think the stroke of genius for the two of us was insisting, when we agreed to serve, that we had to have assistants, staff assistants for this commission from both the planning office, which is in the governor's executive office, and the office of Policy and Legal Analysis, which is the non-partisan legislative research staff. And so we, a lot of the very good work of that commission stemmed from the fact that we had highly professional staff members, and staff members who were in competition with each other, and so we were able to play that off and get some very good work done.

But that was one of the things. The other thing that John got me to do – well two other things – one was heading up the State Compensation Commission that dealt with legislative compensation, and ultimately with compensation for the governor and for the courts. And then the third area was the work on the mental health system in the state, and the Systems Assessment Commission, which dealt with mental health services, where John asked me to head up a small group. And it's that sort of thing, but a combination of the personal relationship and then calling on me for volunteer work as a professional that made the links.

And John and I have made probably at least fifteen, between fifteen and twenty trips on the Allagash together with our groups over the years, and that is a great passion of his, preserving it. And John's a remarkable person. He is, he's functioned in many ways as a, the local almost priest, except for the religious aspects of it. As a counselor and guide and leader in his community, fulfilling a number of roles, and teaching, first in the high school and now for years he's been on the faculty at the University of Maine at Fort Kent. And no one who has not seen John in the Valley and interacting with his constituencies fully understands him.

I remember one occasion, after the election in which Charlie Pray, the president of the senate, had been defeated, there – and this followed the special commission on restructuring state government – the legislative orientation session that year was to be on the subject of the recommendations from the commission and it was being, the session was being managed by the Margaret Chase Smith Center at the University of Maine. And the then director of the center, who's long since gone, was a real Republican and conservative and buttoned down, up tight person, who obviously did not think much of people like John Martin. And he was organizing this effort and we had a meeting or two, and the first meeting, which was before the election, it took place in late summer, both Mert and I, as I recall, asked him, as he described what they were doing and the arrangements they were making with the legislature and what they wanted for the program, we said now, have you worked this out with the speaker, because he talked only about Mr. Pray, the president of the senate. And he said, well the president of the senate's taking care of that, and he's keeping the speaker informed and he's told me

that's fine. And we said, well, if you really want the maximum number of house members there, you should be working directly with the speaker as well. Oh, it's all taken care of. So we said, all right, you're in charge of managing this.

The election came, and Charlie Pray was defeated. And we were faced with information that we hadn't known before, which was that Charlie had not really communicated with John about the details of this affair and John didn't know what was going on. And now the manager of the program had to get to talk to the speaker, and within not much more than a month had to get it straightened around. So he called a meeting, and I got a phone call saying, we're meeting on such and such a day and we've arranged an appointment with the speaker, could you come and attend the meeting with us, and I said, "Sure." So we went to Augusta, we met in the planning office, the governor's planning office, and talked about what needed to be done. But a lot of the conversation around the table was, how in the world did the voters up in the Millinocket area vote against the president of the senate? It is so important to an area that doesn't have much economic power or political power. And they kept shaking their heads and sort of gnawing on this bone.

Well finally it came time to walk over to the capital and go up to the speaker's office, and that conversation died off. We headed off, came to the capital, went up the stairs to the third floor, and were going from just off the rotunda toward the speaker's office when whom should we meet but Charlie Pray. And they stopped and commiserated with him and wished him well, and then we continued on toward the speaker's office. And this triggered a whole new round, how in the world could the voters in Charlie's district turn him down after all these years and with his clout in state government, and this was still going on when they were ushered into the speaker's office. And one of the group said to Speaker Martin, "We don't understand how the voters in the Millinocket district could turn Charlie Pray down." And John looked at them with a twinkle in his eye and said, "Well, you see, the voters in Charlie's district felt that he was being arrogant." And I was watching their faces, knowing that every one of them practically thought John was arrogant, and John knew that. Their jaws dropped and John said, "You see, I may be arrogant here, but I'm never arrogant at home." And that is a very true statement, and an important reflection on his relationship with his constituents. They revere him, but they don't, they don't mind telling him when they disagree with him, and teasing him, and that's just one of the great pleasures of having known him and worked with him over the years.

The other person from the Valley that – and there are lots I could talk about – but the other person up there who really is a giant from my point of view, not physically but as a human being, is Elmer Violette.

Elmer, who came from Van Buren, a town that was originally called Violette Brook, and his ancestors were among the first settlers in that community and were the ones for whom they were named until the election of President Van Buren and the decision by the town to rename itself for President Van Buren.

Elmer was something like Joe Freeman in that French was his original language and he

had some trouble with the transition to English. Was very articulate, but was clearly troubled by his accent and feeling that he didn't quite manage to be as fluent in English as he wanted to be, so was rather shy but he was a very good lawyer, made a very good reputation in the county, and was elected to the legislature first in the house and then in the senate. And I had met him in '54 briefly, and then saw him in the subsequent years and then of course got deeply involved working with him in the sixties on both the Dickey-Lincoln Passamaquoddy Project and particularly the Allagash.

*End of Side A*

*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on Side B.

**DN:** Elmer Violette was really a product of his community and a splendid example of the St. John Valley and the culture of the Acadians in the Valley. He was devoted to the church, was very active in the church, over the years participated in the liturgy as a lecturer, and was someone to whom people came for help, outside the law practice and outside the legislative responsibilities. He was an avid canoeist, fisherman, perfectionist about all of these things. And in later years I became his companion on the Allagash trips. John Martin was the one who always assigned us our places in the canoes, and I was assigned to Elmer and I can remember Elmer instructing me over and over again on the finer arts of paddling – I was a bit of a duffer. And he and I would have great times going off, in addition to running the river itself, going off on fishing expeditions.

And Elmer, one can't talk about Elmer without talking about Marcella, his wife. Marce was also from Van Buren, and had been educated at – what's the name of the college in New Rochelle, New York. I'm missing it now, but –

**AL:** I think I know what you mean, I'll look it up.

**DN:** And also at a university in Quebec where she got her Ph.D. and her dissertation was a history of the Acadian people in the Valley. Which unfortunately from those of us who are Anglophones, is in French. I would like to see it translated into English. But Marce, Elmer was quiet, retiring and tended not to say very much, much of the time, and a very slight man, all the years I knew him, and a trifle nervous in a shy sort of way. Marce was a bundle of energy and voluble and always driving hard, and she was another kind of leader in the community.

And one of the great stories about the two of them came during the early days of the University of Maine system when the then chancellor, [Donald R.] Don McNeil, proposed that the University of Maine at Fort Kent either be closed or converted into a junior college and argued that they didn't really need a university branch up there. And there was a meeting called and held in, I think it was in the Fort Kent High School auditorium – I wasn't there, but the reports are still rattling around in Aroostook County. Apparently, the chancellor and members of the board went to this meeting, and Elmer spoke and then Marce spoke, and Marcella chose to speak in French and gave a fiery

speech about the importance of the University of Maine at Fort Kent to the St. John Valley, and why it shouldn't disappear and roused the crowd, and the reaction generally was so strong that the chancellor and the board abandoned the proposal to close or change.

And as a matter of fact, over the years there have been proposals from time to time to do what he wanted to do, but they never got anywhere, certainly while Speaker Martin was speaker. And then in recent years it's been one of the fastest growing campuses in the system, and has demonstrated its worth with a large number of foreign students coming and some very good working relationships across the border in Canada and students coming to the programs. But Marce was the one who led the fight, as it were, and made her mark. And today there's a collection of their papers and memorabilia at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, which is an important addition to the archives of Maine history.

But the County is, the County and Valley in particular for me has been one of the great joys of working in Maine politics and living in Maine. It's a different society, and a wonderful culture I think, and one that's not fully appreciated in this part of the state.

**AL:** In that part of the state, have they retained more of the French traditions?

**DN:** Oh yes, the Acadian traditions. And you have at least two very distinct cultures, French cultures, Franco, I should say Franco American cultures in Maine. The one is the culture of the Valley, the Acadians, who were for the most part people who settled what is now Nova Scotia and part of New Brunswick along the coast, and were driven out of Nova Scotia and driven up the river, up the St. John River in New Brunswick, as a result of the French and Indian War and the defeat at Louisbourg on Cape Breton in '63 I think it was, 1763. And then – that was the first stage, that was the defeat by the British of the French – and then the second stage came after the American Revolution when a number of loyalists went from the United States to Nova Scotia further – and this is after the period referred to in Longfellow's "Evangeline" – and drove more of the French Acadians out of -

*(outside interruption)*

**DN:** And after the Revolution, the loyalists, a batch of loyalists went to Nova Scotia and to the St. John area in New Brunswick and pushed up, particularly the group pushing up the St. John River, pushed the Acadians up into what is now called the Valley, and they settled on both sides of the river, forming the settlements that are there today. And that culture is essentially agricultural; interestingly enough has tended to be politically more liberal than the culture one sees in the mill towns in central and southern Maine, where most of the Franco-American families came from Quebec, rural Quebec, particularly between the St. Lawrence River and the Maine border. And those people were also rural, but were much more conservative in their attitudes on money and social patterns. And I'm not sure, because I'm not a sociologist, what all the reasons are, but it's a different kind of world. And part of it may simply be the consequence of having

large mills dominating the economy and organizing life around the work in the mills. Whereas in Aroostook and in the Valley they were farmers and lumbermen, and it's a society not driven by the discipline of mill employment.

And it's intriguing to go there and see how it works. And John and Elmer and the others reflect that.

**AL:** If we go further south to the Bangor area, I see we're not getting very far, but I think it's important to capture some of that knowledge you have of where people came from and what they were like. We're talking about the Baldaccis, Bob and Vasco, we're talking about the Cutlers, the Barretts, which I don't think many people have talked about at all and we weren't able to interview them, so that would be important to talk about. And others as well, but those are the – Ed and Marshall Stern – if those are people you have a perspective on.

**DN:** Bangor, Bangor is a fascinating community. It's, from my perspective, a much healthier community today than it was in the early fifties. In the early fifties, the community was really split along ethnic lines, much more so than in many communities in Maine. And the lines were different from, say, what you'd find in Lewiston, and they were lines that went between not only the Yankees and the more recent immigrants, but also between the Irish and the Italians, etcetera, and that was played out in party politics.

The Bangor area had been dominated during the thirties by Katherine Hickson who – I'm trying to remember – she became, I think she was clerk of the federal courts, but it would worth going back and reviewing that. But she had been a leader in the Democratic Party, had benefited from the patronage that went with the Roosevelt/Truman years, and in '52 that ended, and although Katherine Hickson was still a formidable figure in the community, she didn't have the clout any more that she'd had and some new folks were emerging.

And those included one person who became the state committeewoman from Penobscot County, Madelin Kiah, K-I-A-H, and Madelin was one of those women with great drive, great passion about politics. Her family had come from northern Penobscot County, and she had an uncle named Garfield Jones who came from the Millinocket area, Uncle Garf he was called. And what I remember mostly about Uncle Garf, who was a retired postmaster by the early 1950s, and he had a, he had a niece, either a niece or a daughter, I think she may have been his daughter, is Madelin's cousin, and she was active and she was from up in that part of the County.

But Madelin became state committeewoman, largely through energy and attention to detail, and she was one of those hyperactive people. She had two kids, a daughter and a son, and we've interviewed her daughter for the oral history project, and they were sort of the original kids pushed by their parents – dancing classes, and Mary Ellen, the daughter, and the son whose name escapes me, used to perform at Democratic gatherings, dance performances. And Madelin was organizing the refreshments, etcetera. Her husband was a very retiring sort and was the manager of the Northeast Airlines operation at the Bangor

airport, and I think he'd worked also at the *Bangor Daily News* in the business office at one time. But Madelin was a leading figure.

The others active in the party at that time – the Irish leadership had sort of faded into the background during this period, after the Eisenhower years, and many of the Irish leaders in the community had migrated, because of their business position, into the Republican Party, so there were very few of them left. The Murrays, Cynthia's father, Father Frank Murray's father, Bob Murray's father and mother, were very active Democrats, and they were rank-and-file Democrats, never prominent in the public sense but always there and always working, and they were the good salt-of-the-earth, rank-and-file Democrats.

And then the more vociferous ones and the ones that you were exposed to more often included Bob Baldacci, his brother, older brother Vasco, and Charlie Butera, who was in Brewer. And Charlie was a sometime ally of Madelin Kiah and sometimes on the outs, and Charlie was always on the fringes, he was an avid fierce Democrat but you were either with him a hundred percent or you were against him from his point of view, and as a result it wasn't always easy to deal with Charlie.

Bob Baldacci was the more active of the two brothers, Bob and Vasco, in terms of party politics. Their mother's restaurant was famous and a great gathering place for Democrats. At that time, Mama Baldacci's Restaurant was sort of under the bridge, under the Chamberlain Bridge across the river between Bangor and Brewer. And Bob, I think Bob Baldacci at one time was the county chairman, and he was also a member of the State Committee and very active. And they, I dealt with them primarily through campaigns and party activities and not, I did not have the same kind of association with them that I did with the folks up in the County. It was a very different setting.

And Bangor, Bangor was always an area where we felt, during the fifties, less than comfortable about what was going on. There were so many internal -

**AL:** Factions?

**DN:** Factions, and they were shifting factions, you never knew what was, who was on whose side at the time, and you worried always about offending someone. Up in the Valley, if you go and say this is what we want to do, and people would tell you what they thought. And they would also tell you what other people were thinking, whether they agreed with it or not. But in Bangor that wasn't always the case.

John Baldacci and his brothers of course were infants during the fifties, so we didn't know them at all, and came to know John, I didn't get to know John until he was in the House of Representatives, as a matter of fact, in Washington.

Bangor was a fascinating place, and I remember mostly going to Bangor for party events and occasional meetings of the Maine AFL-CIO; that's where Ben Dorsky had his offices.

**AL:** Now who was Ed Stern, and Marshall Stern?

**DN:** Oh, Ed and Marshall Stern. Ed Stern was a lawyer in Bangor, and he was again one of those, Ed and Molly, his wife, were people who were salt-of-the-earth, always there, always helpful, quiet, good workers, outside the factions, never involved in one of the factions in Bangor. And Marshall was their son, one of their two sons, I believe, and Marshall came to be involved with us first as a, I think he came as a student intern at one point, and then in 1968 he joined the campaign as the assistant to Paul Brontas, who had also come from Bangor. Paul's family owned a restaurant and ultimately owned the franchise for the Greyhound Bus Lines terminal. And Paul was – I've told the story I think of Paul coming to us and volunteering for the '68 campaign and becoming the manager of the plane's operation, that is our staff operation on the plane and on the road – and Marshall was his assistant through the campaign; very different from Paul.

Paul is quiet and very, almost strait-laced. Marshall was ebullient and raucous and full of energy and funny, and he handled the baggage, he was the chief of the baggage operation and worked with Peter Kyros, Jr., who was involved there as well. And Peter, Peter had – I'm trying to remember exactly how they divided their labors. I guess Peter, Jr. was probably, yeah, he was – correct myself – Peter was the assistant to Paul, and Marshall was sort of a junior assistant in that operation, Peter and Marshall between them handled the baggage on the plane. Which was a massive undertaking, because we would frequently, well every night we had to stop somewhere and you had to get the luggage off and to the hotel, and then the next day get it back and on the plane. And we were talking about a changing cast of characters from the press, as well as some changing groups of volunteers who would come on board the plane for a short time, and the regular staff, and the senator's gear, etcetera, and that was a, I don't think they ever lost a bag but it was quite a job.

And Marshall went on to law school and then went back to Bangor and practiced with his dad, and we would see Marshall from time to time. He was very close to John Martin and to others, and was heading toward becoming a sort of senior figure in the party when tragically he was killed in an auto accident. Not his fault at all, somebody who, matter of fact someone who pulled head on into his lane, and Marshall saved his son's life, by the way, he managed the car in that crash. But Marshall was funny, witty, ebullient, somebody you could depend on, and brash, quite in contrast to his father. His father was an extremely quiet person, and his mother, who was a little more outgoing than Ed in some ways, was not, not particularly assertive. Marshall was a character in his own right.

**AL:** Do you have recollections of the Barretts?

**DN:** Yes, I remember the Barretts slightly.

**AL:** Robert and Kay, right?

**DN:** Robert and Kay, and they, this is a vague impression, I remember dealing with them both in campaigns and then in some constituent service work. Not on their behalf

particularly, but on behalf of some community questions in which they had an interest. And the Barretts, the Barretts were part of, as I remember it, they were part of what I'd call the sort of upper level Irish Democratic community, and they did some fund raising, although my recollection is that there was more talk about their fund raising capacity than production. And they were one of those party workers who demanded a lot of attention. But I'd have to go back and look at correspondence. I just have this image of them, and I can see them in my mind's eye, but they were – and they were not so prominent in the fifties, they became more prominent toward the sixties and in the sixties, after Senator Muskie was elected to the Senate. I don't remember them as being particularly prominent in the early days, when it was a struggle.

From the early days, the people I remember are Madelin Kiah, Garf Jones and Madelin's cousin, and Bob Baldacci, Vasco Baldacci, and Charlie Butera, and Katherine Hickson, and a few more.

**AL:** Was Bud Schoenberger and his wife Maralyn active that early?

**DN:** They were active, Maralyn originally as I recall was more active in the League of Women Voters, and then became more active as a Democrat. And Bud was always sort of on the fringes, and I'm not sure exactly when he came to Orono but I think he may not have come until '55 '56 or even a little later than that. I remember mostly his anxieties and criticisms of Senator Muskie on the subject of the war, feeling that he wasn't anti-war enough. Although we worked with him a fair amount on what I call senatorial business, and we tried to make use of the university faculty as much as we could on public policy issues. And in fact, when talking about that area I really should mention Win Libby, who was president of the university for several years, and before that was dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and was a great help to us on any number of issues where we needed the technical expertise of members of the faculty.

And another one was Fred Hutchinson, who was a later president of the university and succeeded Winn as dean of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture. Oh, and Gerald Grady was a faculty member at the university who was very active, and I believe organized Young Democrats on the campus and ran for congress from the third district in 1956, and Gerry subsequently went to Clark University and I think finished his career there, he's a political scientist. And I think I read several years ago a very brief obituary referring to the fact that he had died. But Gerry was another person who was important in those early days in the Penobscot County area.

**AL:** Now, if we go down to the coast a little bit, sort of. I'm thinking of Guy Twombly and that, I mean we're going -

**DN:** Yeah, well before we get there, before we get there, just a couple of notes on Washington County and then Hancock County, we can move -

**AL:** Right, right.

**DN:** In Washington County, the Democrats in those early days and for a number of years thereafter who were most prominent, starting in Eastport, were Mim, Miriam, known as Mim, Cohen, and her husband Nate, Nathan Cohen. They had a business in, a store in Eastport, and were active Democrats, people you could always count on for help on fund raising or organizing a meeting; wonderful people, one of the only Jewish families in that essentially Yankee town, and universally respected and very helpful. And their loyalty and support just continued from as far back as I can remember in '54 on up through Senator Muskie's, my time with Senator Muskie.

In Lubec, the Mahlmans, Bob, Mahlman, M-A-H-L-M-A-N, and his wife, I forget her first name. They were active Democrats, felt quite isolated because of the Republican community of Lubec, and a bit feisty and sometimes a little difficult because of this, but we understood what the problems were that they faced. We actually in some ways had more dealings with Sumner Pike and company in Lubec than we did with some of the Democrats because of Sumner's roles, several roles during Senator Muskie's time as governor, and then later on in connection with the Roosevelt Campobello Commission.

And in Machias, one other person to call attention to was Julian Davis, who was a long time friend of the senator's and had worked with him on the OPS, in the OPS operation. And Julian was a long-time Democrat, had his own views on things, and you knew that you always had to check with Julian because the senator wanted to know, what did Julian think? And Julian was a very good source of information about people and attitudes and interests in Washington County.

And that pretty much covered the county. There were other figures, but none of them as important as the Cohens, Julian Davis, the Mahlmans, those are the ones that stick out in my mind.

Then we come to Hancock County and there are two, yeah, two people who I remember most from the fifties, we're talking. One was Roland Guite of Ellsworth, who was the State Committeeman from Hancock County, and Roland was, I think Roland may have been Mrs. Robert Murray, Sr.'s brother.

**AL:** He was, yes, there is that familial [connection], yeah.

**DN:** And he was a real estate agent and insurance man, and in Ellsworth stuck out as somebody in the business community who was willing to be counted as a Democrat publicly. Roland was a very pleasant guy, who performed when asked, and he was not an aggressive party person but he was willing to be counted.

And in many ways the most interesting character in Hancock County at the time – oh, I just thought of a third one – but the second one and the most interesting character in Hancock County was Peggy Murray, who lived in Brooklin, B-R-O-O-K-L-I-N, down on the coast, and with her husband, they had retired to Brooklin. George Murray, her husband, was a Yale graduate who worked for the YMCA I believe, and at Yale he was in one of the three student suites in the dormitory, and one of his two roommates was

George Herbert Walker Bush [*sic* Prescott Bush, father of George H.W. Bush]. And you have the wonderful story about, that George loved to tell, about their senior year when the three members of that trio had achieved all of their required course credits and had to fill in with one course which could be a gut course, that is one that they could pass easily. And they looked over the catalogue and decided to study U.S. Government I. And George when telling this story would say, “Oh, we all three took it, two of us passed and one failed, and guess who failed? George Herbert Walker Bush [*sic* Prescott Bush].” Those of us who are not Bush admirers have cherished that story.

Peggy was a fireball. She grew up in New Jersey where her father was a fierce opponent of Boss Hague in I think it was Jersey City, Jersey City or Newark, I forget which one. And Peggy was a member of the State Committee, very active, just vigorous in recruiting Democrats and raising money for the party. And also very, and very quick, very bright, very quick, and sometimes a bit difficult.

My first recollection of having difficulties with Peggy goes back to the governor, Governor Muskie’s election and the inaugural ball invitations. We had sent out from the party office a request of all the members of the State Committee that they send in a list of people who should be invited, and when Peggy sent in her list, promptly as usual, and based on those lists, the invitations were addressed and sent out. And about two days before the events I get an irate call from Peggy, all of her friends had gotten their invitation to the governor’s inaugural ball; she had not gotten hers. Well, I said, I don’t understand that, Peggy, but let me check the records. And so I called the Blaine House and found that they didn’t have her name down, and I went back to the list that she had supplied us and she’d given us the name of every Democrat in Hancock County except herself. So I had to tell her that she was the one, and it was in the mail.

But Peggy stuck with the party. She was a great friend of the editor of the *Washington Post*, who retired to Hancock County, and was very critical of Senator Muskie on the subject of Vietnam, because she felt he wasn’t aggressive enough. And generally, unless he toed the liberal line, she was very critical.

The other person in Hancock County that I almost skipped over, who is a fascinating character, was James Sawyer, who was the Democratic state chairman from 1952 to 1954. And Jimmy – he was called Jimmy by everybody – Jimmy was a WWII veteran who worked as a maintenance man and driver for a couple of elderly women who came to Castine, where he lived, every summer, and Jimmy took care of them and apparently earned enough money from them to stay alive. And Jimmy was an avid Democrat and funny, funny speaker, with a kind of natural oratorical skill. He was not, I don’t think he had more than a high school education, but I can remember him, when I was covering Democratic gatherings, getting up and saying in his high squeaky voice, first attacking President Eisenhower for proposals to close lighthouses along the Maine coast: “He doesn’t give a damn about the fishermen along our coast.” And then during the campaign for governor, his rallying cry when Jimmy spoke was, “Let’s cross Cross off the ballot.”

Jimmy was the state chairman who, in putting together the pre convention platform

committee in 1953 named Frank Coffin, Roland Guite and Jim Oliver, and announced it, neglecting to tell Frank that he was appointing him and as a consequence, almost lost him. Frank was not happy to read about it in the paper.

*End of Interview*