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Beliveau, John oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with John Beliveau by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Beliveau, John

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

August 25, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 147

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Biographical Note

John Bertrand Beliveau was born February 17, 1937 in Lewiston, Maine. He attended St. Patrick's elementary and Lewiston High School, class of 1955. He attended Notre Dame and earned his Master's in Business at New York University and then attended law school at Georgetown. He was a member of the Lewiston Finance Board, county attorney for two years, and served as mayor of Lewiston, 1969-1970. He was a partner at the Marshall, Raymond and Beliveau law firm from 1964-1984. At the time of this interview he was a district court judge in Lewiston, Maine.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1955-1956 Muskie's first term as governor; 1968 vice presidential campaign; environmental protection; urban planning and development; Republican Party in Maine Democratic Party in Maine; Model Cities (Lewiston); bullet voting and straight ticket voting; Louis Jalbert, anecdote in which Jalbert tried to muscle Beliveau when he ran for mayor; old Charter and new Charter and its effect on Lewiston politics; finance board mechanics; Aliberti defeated Jalbert; Hal Gosselin; Beliveau beautification program; Central Drug Committee; Youth Commission; Lewiston gun ordinance as a result of Robert F. Kennedy's assassination; the importance of social clubs in Lewiston;

anecdotes of Tom Delahanty's interaction with Muskie; Frank Coffin; a Public Works strike during his first day as mayor; Phil Isaacson helping as corporation counsel with municipal labor relations act; Housing authority controversy as mayor; Muskie's effects on the Governor's Council; feeling that Muskie lost touch with Maine; and Franco-Americans in support of Muskie.

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Andrea L'Hommedieu: . . . -view with Judge John Beliveau on August 25th, 1999 at his office at the Lewiston District Court. Mr. Beliveau, could you start by giving me your full name.

John Beliveau: Yes, John B. Beliveau.

AL: And what does the B stand for?

JB: Bertrand.

AL: And where and when were you born?

JB: February 17th, 1937 in Lewiston, Maine.

AL: And were your parents also from this area?

JB: My mother died at childbirth, she was from Biddeford, Maine, she was Irish, and my father was from Lewiston, was born in Lewiston.

AL: Are you any relation to the late Judge Albert Beliveau?

JB: We're distantly related, but it's not the same actual tree, but we're like cousins, I mean there is a connection, like with Severin for example, you probably interviewed Severin, I don't know if you did or not.

AL: We will be shortly.

JB: Yes, he's going to be a very interesting character. He'll know a lot more about Muskie than

I do.

AL: How many siblings do you have, brothers and sisters?

JB: Si-, yeah, two half sisters.

AL: And are they older or younger?

JB: No, I'm, I was the oldest. They are, you know, one's fifty-two and one is forties.

AL: What was your father's name and occupation?

JB: Bertrand A. Beliveau, he was a physician who practiced medicine in the community and was attached to St. Mary's Hospital. Nineteen thirty-five he started I believe.

AL: Now when you were growing up, did your father have a strong political affiliation?

JB: I never really knew what his affiliation was, except it was kind of more Republican than Democrat.

AL: So you didn't get a set, like politics weren't discussed at the dinner table?

JB: Oh yes, all the time.

AL: All the time.

JB: To an extent. But he was very kind of physician-oriented. You know what it was like back then, physicians, like it still is today. I, they adopted pretty much, or he did, the Republican philosophy.

AL: Where do you feel you got your political attitudes and beliefs?

JB: I was not interested initially until after, kind of after law school and deciding to establish myself here, I got involved with the Democratic Party.

AL: And who was it that got you involved, or influenced you along the way?

JB: Well, John F. Kennedy was the one that really, that helped me to think more about politics. Because, you know, back then it wasn't a big, well, as interesting, and then when Kennedy came along it became very interesting. Because I wasn't, I don't remember the Roosevelt era, and that was a very interesting era too, so.

AL: Who were some of the other people locally that you interacted with or got involved politically with?

JB: Well, Severin, because Severin and I went to the same law school, he ended up back in

Maine, Severin Beliveau, and ended up being chair of the state Democratic Committee and on from there. But I got involved with a lot of the local individuals, and trying to remember specifically, there was Bill Hathaway who was then just starting out his career when I started practicing. And he ended up running for Congress and then was elected. And then he left and there was Frank Coffin, who I believe at the time I was starting to practice was pretty much, had a federal appointment because he had gone to Congress while I was in college. Anyway, and Ed Muskie who I remember in high school when he was elected, and it was a big surprise to everybody of course when he was elected of that time, so.

AL: What, do, so you have some recollections of the '54 campaign? You must have been in high school?

JB: Yeah, I was, in fact Ed Muskie as governor, after he was elected of course, it was wild around here because nobody expected this to happen and everybody got in their cars and went to his headquarters. I wasn't one of them at the time because obviously it was in '54, I was just in high school, but this is what I had heard through others. And of course the impact was tremendous because not only did he win but- this was a lot like the Johnson landslide that impacted Maine and all of the Democratic Party. But the Democrats really as a result of his election established themselves in Maine pretty permanently. And he came to a function, that's when I first met him. He was governor at that time and he came to a Key Club convention, we had hosted the New England Key Club convention, and I was a member of the Key Club, which is the Kiwanis high school group. And he came there, and attended the banquet and spoke.

AL: And what were your first impressions of him?

JB: Very, very good. He had a bow tie and was very, very young looking, tall of course, you know, articulate, and everybody loved him.

AL: Tell me about your experiences growing up in school. Did you go to school here in Lewiston?

JB: Yes, I went to St. Patrick's elementary school from grade one to eight, and then I went to Lewiston High School, '51 to '55.

AL: Were there any teachers that particularly stick out in your mind as having influenced you in some way?

JB: Oh, Connolly, Mr. Connolly who was my senior English teacher, Miss Dumais in my, in Latin, Miss, anyway, significant. Georgette LePage, you know, there were a lot of people that have influenced, have influenced me.

AL: Was there a common thread about them that made them stand out for you, was it the way that they approached teaching or approached you as a student?

JB: Well I, you know, when I was in high school, still there were a lot of single teachers. They were single, they didn't have families, they devoted themselves pretty much-like, you know,

Kirk, Miss Kirk, Geneva Kirk was one. She's living in my neighborhood now. Miss Dumais, they were all single. They just devoted themselves to teaching. Miss Walsh, Mr. Connolly too, single. I mean there was a lot more, you know, very, very devoted high school teachers then.

AL: And where did you go to college?

JB: I went to Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

AL: And then on to law school?

JB: No, I got my masters in business at New York University, and then I went to law school at Georgetown.

AL: And what was that experience like?

JB: Fabulous.

AL: In what way?

JB: And Wash-, I loved Washington because that was, of course I was there during the Kennedy years, and it was very exciting. And, I don't know, there was a real feeling then, you know, up. Everybody, I mean I used to watch all his news conferences and it was just a different world.

AL: Did it continue to shape your political attitudes?

JB: Absolutely.

AL: In what ways?

JB: Well, I became, I kind of adopted Kennedy's approach. I liked what he was and what he represented, you know, and the social ethic and let's look to the people. You know, there was a lot of stuff, we don't have to get into all the details, but I mean I just liked what he was doing and his programs and how effective and articulate he was.

AL: Were you still in Washington when he was assassinated?

JB: Yes.

AL: What was the feeling like at that time?

JB: I was playing handball at the YMCA with a classmate and we heard, that's how I heard. After we played, some of the people there were saying, "Did you just hear?" They had it on the radio. And I remember some African-Americans that were there that were really upset because they felt, "It's over for us." And they articulated that right in front of us. And then we walked from the Y back to the law school and it took us by the White House, and I remember seeing newspapers strewn all over the place with the headline, "Kennedy Killed," you know? It's

unbelievable, and I walked right by the White House at that time, just moments. And I was present at the funeral, I mean when the funeral parade went from the White House to Arlington Cemetery, I was right at the White House. So, so it was a tremendous experience, I mean a sad experience.

AL: I'd like to talk a little bit about Lewiston, the community, what it was like then and how it's changed.

JB: Well, okay. When I first came, (*aside:* there's no privacy, it's just district court, it's crazy, it's stupid), when I first got here in '64, you know about the Democratic Party in Lewiston and how it operated and all. Simply stated, we used to have straight ticket ballots. You know what I mean by that? And that's one reason Muskie got in, because every time I took ballots to the elderly or to the various nursing homes and all it was, "*Est tu Democrat,?*" you know, and it was, check off for me Democrat so that, boom, you know. And then you had the bullet vote, remember the bullet vote stuff, did anybody talk about that?

AL: A little bit.

JB: You know, where you had let's say seven representatives, I don't remember the number, but it was like you'd vote for seven representatives from Lewiston and you'd have eleven to twelve names, or fifteen names, and you'd select five. This is before they created districts. And so if you were a clever politician, like Louis Jalbert was, he would ask everybody to give him a bullet, the bullet vote, quote, un-. You know what the bullet vote is? You just vote for one of the eight and it's like eight votes. So if you get a hundred and fifty, two hundred people to do that, you've multiplied your vote. So that was a big deal. The mayor's position was very political then. When I first came into town as a lawyer to practice, in the law firm I practiced with for twenty years, the politics was interesting because they. . . . There was a mayor's race and I remember my father getting a phone call from one of the candidates saying, "If you contribute three or four hundred dollars to my campaign, I'll appoint John as corporate counsel." which was being, it's the way politics worked then. Corporate counsel was being the attorney for the city on a part-time basis. It still is now, they do it differently. Everything's different now. The city was textile and shoes when I got here; heavily at that time. This was just before we had the European situation, the Asian situation and the south was the big thing then, getting away from unions. So that's when I kind of saw the fall of textile and the shoe industry in the community, and it was a difficult situation.

AL: What time period was that?

JB: Sixty-four, five and seven. And when I was mayor the mill, the mill here was still going but some of it had shut down. Bates was still going, because a great friend of mine and supporter, Hal Gosselin, was actually president down here. And Denny Blais, that's another name you've probably heard of, who's a very articulate guy, I don't know if you've interviewed him but he knows more about Muskie than I. But, Hal was a Republican. Denny was a Democrat and a strong Democrat who headed the union, textile union. And they often battled a contract and all, but they were great supporters of me when I ran for mayor, so. The city was still kind of the same when I was mayor. Then we were under the old charter, so. . . .

AL: Give me a description of Louis Jalbert.

JB: Um. . . .

AL: What, if you had to. . . .?

JB: . . . he was a very self-absorbed individual. I, he just was. And he was an overbearing person who tried to scare you, a lot, into agreeing with him. He had to dominate meetings, he had to dominate people, and was very successful at it. Because even though he had no formal education, if he had had a formal education I don't know if it would make a difference or not, but he was very good at psyching out one's personality or figuring a person out, coming at you, threatening you. You know, he was one of these, let's compare him to some of the big city politicians of the past, the ward heelers and the whatnot that you had in New York and Chicago and those other areas, he was very typical. And he'd try to dominate, and *did* dominate the entire Lewiston delegation at, in Augusta, at the legislature. He got them to vote his way most all the time until we started running other candidates who started to compete with him, who started to argue with him, who voted probably against his position. He was your typical old politician: you don't vote for me, I'll find a way to screw you.

AL: Did you ever have any run-ins with Louis?

JB: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I did.

AL: Could you give me an example?

JB: Oh, I've hung up on him several times because when I. . . . See, what happened, when I ran for mayor, Andrea, it could have been me or anybody else outside of the political, how do you describe it, it was a very small group of political people in Lewiston. And political in the sense that dirty political, that if you were going to run for mayor you had to get these people to support you or else you were screwed. Or they'd find a way to screw you. And there was never anybody probably strong enough to look to that and say, "Screw *you!*" you know, and this was the days of Jalbert.

So when I announced, I never told anybody I was running for mayor. I announced it almost six months before the actual election. And I remember getting, after I announced, I started getting calls and one was from Louis. "I have to meet with you. Now." So I took a couple of friends with me and we went to this meeting, and he had all the old pols with him, I'll never forget this, on the porch. There were some union leaders, local union leaders, and some legislators, you know, and some of the old timers. And he started dominating the meeting saying, "If I'm going to support you," or "If we are going to support you, we are going to tell you who to appoint to the various boards." This was my first real political run-in with him. And I said, "No, you're not. It's not going to happen." And he started saying, you know that the only way you're going to get elected is if I support you and all of us here support you." And at that time I had nobody opposing me, so I just held my ground. I was young and kind of naive, too, and strong-headed and, you know, one of those, and didn't give in. And at the end of the meeting he said, "Well,"

because he knew I think that there wasn't anybody that was going to oppose me, and he said, "Well how about if I just advise you and give you some suggestions." I says, "Fine." So that's how that meeting ended, and that was quite a meeting. That was my first exposure to the political machine here, the Democratic machine. And anyway, I was unopposed for election and it was only a one-year term, and the second time I was unopposed. And I'd hear through rumor or the grapevine that every person I appointed he had approached and said, I got you the job. Anyway, okay, "that's the kind of person," that's Louis Jalbert.

AL: Who were some of the people that were close to him, some of his cronies?

JB: Well, Denny Blais was fairly close. Cote, Al Cote, you remember representative Cote. Billy Jacques - I'm trying to rattle them all off to you - but, I mean that's some of the group.

AL: Was Roland Landry in that group?

JB: Roland Landry was a big individual in that group, he was at that meeting. And, see these guys were always looking for something if they supported you. It was never, "Well I'm going to support you because I think you're a good candidate and maybe you can bring some fresh ideas to Lewiston." It was, "What can you get for me?" If I support you and call all my friends, and it was like, you know, the way they always told you this, it was like they had contacts and a Website of hundreds of people that they just press a button and the people would support Beliveau or Jim Handy or some of these other individuals, right? And it was wild, it was wild, it was crazy. I said, "This is crazy! This is nuts!" You know, after the initial call about, "You want to be corporation counsel?" and, "if your dad contributes four hundred dollars to my campaign." We said "no," of course. I mean, I wasn't interested. And then this meeting. But that changed a lot of things, you know, because after me came others kind of like myself, you know. Bob Clifford.

AL: Did the charter change in 1980? Did that improve things regarding the political machine, sort of?

JB: Yeah, I think what happened, Andrea, I think more what I would call young enthusiastic people got involved in local politics. You know, like Bob Clifford ran. I ran. You know, John Orestis got involved, corporation counsel. There were a lot of, some of the younger attorneys and younger business people got involved in politics. Jim Handy became, you know, Curt Webber even in Auburn. I mean people started to challenge Jalbert at the county Democratic meetings when we'd go to the convention, local, you know what I mean. So, the charter, the mayor's term as you know was for one year only, and you could only serve two terms, which meant you were in for two years. The power of appointment, you could appoint somebody for five years to various boards like the Police Commission and the Fire Commission, and the Board of Finance is an example. They were made up of five people. You had to have I think it was two Democrats, three Republicans and then three Democrats, two Republicans, whatever, it was weird. But that was the only political aspect of board appointments, they had to be a certain party at a certain time, whoever you were replacing. So you appointed them for five years, right, but you never could take over a board so to speak. I could never appoint three because I only had two terms, so I could only appoint two out of five to a board. So the whole idea was nobody

ever was able to control things, and I mean, let's say control in a good way, that you'd want your people on there because that commission was screwing up, like the old days. Buying jobs, for example, selling jobs, things like that. And then we had a controller, the mayor was just a figurehead, he could break a tie and that was it. But you had the power of appointment. And then when the charter came around, I liked it because it created a two year term for two terms so that you could be in for four years.

AL: Was the finance board very powerful under the old charter?

JB: Very much so, and I was a member of the finance board along with four others. And it was powerful because you pulled the strings of, as to budgeting, you had to pass the budget before it went to the council and it came back to us for final approval. It was a weird assortment of politics.

AL: So in some sense the finance board was more powerful than the mayor.

JB: Yeah, and we'd have to approve of all the changes of all going, what, I don't remember the name any more. Anyway, when you went from one, it was all itemized budgeting where you couldn't stray from the stamp account and take money from the letter account, the paper account to supplement the stamp account. If you were out of stamps, you had to come back to the Board of Finance and the council to get money, to transfer, that was it, transferring from one account to another. You had to get full approval of council and Board of Finance, you know, I mean it's crazy, so. It's nuts!

AL: Do you recall the election, it was in the early '80s when Louis Jalbert finally lost? Can you describe that election, what was the feeling in town? Did you have a sense of it?

JB: I was happy it happened. I think Louis saw it happening. In fact, previous to that event, we were starting to challenge Louis as far as him being chair of the county Democratic committee. He was getting challenges from a lot of people: Curt Webber, Jim Handy, those people that just come to mind quickly, John Orestis, myself, you know. There were a lot of us that were opposed and he saw that coming and therefore didn't run one year. I remember, it was all of a sudden, boom, not a candidate. He didn't want to put himself, see it was always a unanimous vote for Louis, he had all the Demo-, in one shoot go to Augusta or wherever the convention was held, it was always, we'd all meet, yup, Louis Jalbert, I nominate Louis Jalbert, and seconded, da-da-da boom. Then all of a sudden it started to get, he could feel it, and then he withdrew, he just didn't want to be challenged. And then that gradually ran into his position when he lost the election.

AL: Do you remember what year that was?

JB: I'm trying to remember, Andrea, and I can't.

AL: It was with Aliberti?

JB: John Aliberti, and that's, yeah but you know the only reason he was defeated was because of the change in the districting. I don't think Louis would have lost if we had had the usual

method of election, which was pick, pick seven out of fifteen.

AL: So that had changed. . . .

JB: Once they set up districts in Lewiston, that's how John beat him. He ran against him in a district and there were no other candidates to deal with, there was no bullet vote, there was no straight ticket, it was tough times and he had to really work. And he was getting a little sick then, too, I think that's when Louis started to, he was ill. I don't remember what he had, but whatever, he was slowing down.

AL: I interviewed Paul Gosselin two weeks ago.

JB: Oh Paul, yes, Hal's son.

AL: Tell me a little bit about Hal.

JB: Well, Hal was bright, articulate, a great supporter. I mean, forget party lines, he and I got along very well, he helped me a lot in the election. Hal was the one I turned to instead of turning to even my partner, Larry Raymond, because he was kind of close to all the old, you know, I mean it's not, I'm not trying to be negative in saying this, but you know when you create attachments, you're there. And even Larry tried to influence me about this when I ran for mayor, about, you know, you better support (*unintelligible word*), anyway. Hal, for some reason we clicked, he liked me, I liked him. And he was kind of my advisor who was like, he was almost deputy mayor. And he's the one that came to that political meeting with me, supported me, stayed right with me, and he was a tremendous help to me and I owe him a lot. He's really like, you know, my mentor as far as politics in Lewiston is concerned, believe me. And he was an R, and always had been a Republican and a strong supporter of Margaret Chase Smith and. . . . But he was so politically educated and a former reporter with the *Sun-Journal* of course, you know, and knew, this was a guy who you would call. . . . Like if I'd get blasted in the paper, I'd call him up, "Hal what am I going to do?" "You do nothing." It was his greatest advice. He says, "Don't say anything, don't call the press because it will die." And it's true, he's right, he says why create an issue, you know, why keep it in the press, why continue on. So that's just some basic advice on how to handle people. And we talked a lot and he helped me draft my inaugural addresses, both the first and the second. So he was a tremendous help to me, and well liked in the community. And his son ended up going to Notre Dame because, after knowing me, we talked a lot and so Paul went to Notre Dame too, so. I, did you have a chance to interview Hal before he passed away, or? Oh, that's too bad because there's a lot of history.

AL: I have spoken to him.

JB: Objective too, you know, he could have. . . . Oh had you? As to Hal Gosselin, and of course Hal knew Muskie also and in the young days, too. And if I had ever run for Congress which I almost did, against Bill Cohen by the way, and, but I didn't, and Hal Gosselin would have been my immediate aide. The first person I would ever have appointed if I had been elected to the Senate or Congress, to be my legislative top aide, he was that great. Articulate, and could write, but above all knew the pulse, knew the pulse, knew the pulse, what was the

pulse on this issue or that issue. So he was a tremendous help to me. I could not have relied on anybody else because I didn't trust anybody else, that's what it was like in politics. It was always, "No, you can't do that," because you're going to hurt this politician or that politician.

AL: Did he ever give you his impressions of Ed Muskie, or recollect with you his times, about early days when he was at the paper and following Muskie in the early years?

JB: I think he saw in Ed Muskie a tremendous, a lot of, I mean a lot of tremendous potential. I think he saw the rise of the Democratic Party through Ed Muskie, in Maine, I'm just talking about Maine. And obviously when Ed Muskie was elected, there was a dramatic change in the amount of people who began to run for office as Democrats against Republicans because there was support from his office. And one of Ed Muskie's goals I'm sure, I was not on the, am not a, I wasn't on the inner loop, you know, or whatnot, but you could tell that it was, let's promote this party in Maine, let's get this party off its ass and let this party be competitive, statewide. Not Lewiston and, you know, Lewiston and Biddeford as you know were, to an extent Augusta but it was mostly Lewiston and Biddeford were the big Democratic centers because of the Franco-American population and the textiles and the workers in the factories or whatnot, so. And Roosevelt, let's re- resurrect these people, let's resurrect these people, make them better Democrats, spread the Democratic Party across the state and into the rural areas and whatnot, and it worked. Then Andrea, I kind of lost touch with Ed, because he got involved tremendously, obviously nationally. And, you know, I was never on any of his election committees because I was mayor two years and then D.A., and that was kind of it. That's when I was called to run against Bill Cohen. When Bill Cohen was mayor of Bangor, I had just been mayor of Lewiston and was D.A. for one term, two years. It used to be county attorney, we called it, then. And I remember Severin calling me and saying, Severin Beliveau, "You've got to run and you'll get the support of Muskie, you'll get the support of Hathaway," you know. But I just said, "No, I don't want to do it full time." I had young kids. But who knows what would have happened there. And Billy went on to, well, right? There he is, Secretary of Defense. It's weird.

AL: Were you involved in model cities, the model cities program at all?

JB: Yeah.

AL: Can you tell me just generally what that was about and did you have any contact with Ed Muskie through that program?

JB: Not directly, directly, but in support of the program. That was like, you know, the block grant, a lot like the urban renewal but differently. And I remember setting up the committee. I remember selecting the director of the model cities program. When I was mayor we were in the planning stages where we set up the plan as to what we were going to do with the money. But it was primarily a great program because that got us Longley School, it got us the Franklin pasture, you know, a lot of wonderful projects, education and whatnot. So it was a very valuable program.

AL: Who were some of the other people that you worked with in that program?

JB: Dick Carbonneau was first director, he was pretty much in on the stage, and we had, I mean everybody, we had big committees, little committees, you know, subcommittees and this and that and everybody worked hard on that program.

AL: Lucien Gosselin?

JB: Yeah, Lucien was, well Larry Raymond, Sr. was controller when I was mayor first year, then Lucien became the controller after that. And that was, you know, it was almost like a, it wasn't really a city manager because that's what the charter later obviously created the position of city manager, should have had that a long time ago. But the controller was really kind of the purse string purser. In other words, that office was the one that decided on the budgets for the various departments and then came and worked with the finance board, and the council. And that was, and Lucien was instrumental back then, a very hard worker and a very bright person who always supported me as mayor in all the projects after that. He was just a very good person. Still is.

AL: There was something called the Beliveau Beautification Program, what was that?

JB: Well that's something I just don't remember all the details, Andrea, but it was just something that I thought about in trying to improve. There was a certain area, you know, it was on Main Street somewhere I think it was, just to kind of get rid of some junk and set up some flowers or something, and we just worked through public works to do it.

AL: And there was something, you created something called the Central Drug Committee?

JB: Yeah, I, well, when I was mayor I resurrected the, and I think anybody my age would have done the same thing, so it's not me, but it's just that I was in the right place at the right time. I resurrected the Youth Commission. This had been something set up a while before but it was kind of dead. And it was just a group where you take some of the kids from the high schools and a teacher and meet and discuss issues. And one of the issues we discussed was the drug situation, which got worse. And when I was county attorney, of course, it was really bad and we had raids and search warrants and, but we focused on that. I also did get Lewiston to pass, after the Kennedy, Robert Kennedy's assassination, a gun ordinance, which I don't think has ever been enforced. I don't even know if it's still on the books. That was back in '60-, 1970, '69 or '70, and we did pass a gun ordinance believe it or not back then. I don't know if it's still on the books. So there were a lot of things that happened. Model cities was the big deal, and we had had urban renewal just before that.

AL: When you were involved in city planning as mayor and on the boards, was there, were there local meeting places, was there a sense that you went to your meeting, and then you went. . . ?

JB: Some of our council or aldermen were members of certain social clubs down town. One in particular, Paul Couture, who's now deceased, was the alderman of ward six for years, and also ran in the legislature, and was a union head, carpenter's union. And he'd frequent the 20M Club

down on Lincoln Street, and that's where a lot of political decisions were made.

Judge Paul A. Cote: Flying Saucer Club, don't forget that one.

JB: Yeah, oh the other one.

PC: Marois' group?

JB: Yup, and the 20M Club was where Paul would call after being a little, you know, thinking, after meetings he'd call the press, and that's where a lot of press releases, you'd read about it in the morning. He wouldn't say anything at the meeting, called the press after, anyway. A couple of them did that, quite frequently.

AL: Was there a bigger sense that if you were within that particular group politically that you frequented to a certain club? And were there several clubs with different sort of cliques?

JB: I didn't see that, not, it was kind of dying out. I think you had the Club Literary which was one, and the Montagnard Club, Roland Tanguay and his group. This could have been pretty much a lot of legislators met and discussed things, like Bill Jacques, Al Cote, Roland Tanguay, Louis Jalbert to name a few, Paul Couture. They'd all meet at the Montagnard, the 20M and those things, and make decisions about who they were going to support for alderman or mayor, yeah. And then there was this intellectual group that Judge Cote's alluded to. . . .

Judge Cote: I wouldn't know anything about that.

JB: It was a group that would meet at Marois' at lunch, and still does to this day. Bill Hathaway was a member of that group, and they just talk politics and things like that. And there was a time before I ran when they tried to form, the business people in the community tried to get a ticket going to run to have a mayor and all of the alderman positions, and they tried it and they were defeated. Romeo Boisvert defeated them. Gauvreau, Norm Gauvreau, Paul Gauvreau's father ran for mayor with the backing of the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis. . . .

Judge Cote: He was a doctor, wasn't he?

JB: Yeah, and he was defeated. So. . . .

Judge Cote: Be back at one.

JB: So those were attempts before I even ran to try to get some thinkers and whatnot into the city scene as aldermen. We used to call them aldermen, alderwomen. I don't think we had a, we didn't have an alderwoman, but anyway now they're called council, councilman, council ladies, but anyway. So, that was attempted, that's a group thing. All of the local clubs now are drinking clubs, they're not what they used, you know, were originally formed to do, except to be able to sell liquor on Sundays and holidays because private clubs (*unintelligible word*). Oh yeah, there were a lot of political meetings but I never attended them so I didn't know. And there was very, I mean that I know of, it probably happened, but I remember after council meetings I'd go

home because they were long, sometimes.

AL: Do you remember Ernest Malenfant?

JB: Very briefly. I never met him. I do remember how Alton Lessard, who was a lawyer in town, ran, was going to run for mayor and Malenfant defeated him, and that was another big blow. It was like, here's a lawyer who was going to be mayor and defeated by Malenfant the gatekeeper, but anyway. I don't remember him and I, too much, Andrea, at all.

AL: Just what you heard later?

JB: Yeah. Lewiston politics, wild. But you know, I think we kind of over, we exaggerate a lot. It was nothing but these cronies who wanted to get together and be in control. I mean, other people could have done the same thing, you know, it wasn't a big deal. But, anyway.

AL: I'm going to stop here and turn the tape over.

End of Side A
Side B

JB: He [Tom Delahanty] was a judge when I became a lawyer, and he was a very tough judge, very dedicated judge, very honest judge, and he always used to tell us a story about his involvement with politics. And this was back when Muskie I believe was in office, Tom ran for Congress in this district, and if I remember this district included some of the coastal areas, some of the more Yankee downeast areas? And he always told this story about being at a meeting in a small town on the coast. And when the questions, people started asking questions, someone got up and said, (*spoken with downeast accent*) "You be Catholic?" He paused and he said, "I be." It was quite a story back then, and of course he was defeated. But this was another attempt by the Democrats and Muskie's forces to get people moving, get some good candidates. I mean, there were some sacrifices, right? But Frank Coffin made it, one term I think, but Tom was defeated. Then he was appointed Superior Court judge. We always used to say that if you ran for Congress, I'm talking about years ago, you'd be appointed to the Superior Court, if there was a Democratic governor of course.

AL: Now, Tom Delahanty's son is also a judge?

JB: Yeah.

AL: And you work with him (*unintelligible word*)?

JB: I worked with Tom. He was in our old law firm and I appointed Tom assistant county attorney when I was county attorney, then he became county attorney. And then when the district attorney system was established, which was full time with districts, he was the first D.A.. He ran and won.

AL: Now what was your original law firm before you became. . . ?

JB: Marshall, Raymond and Beliveau, right next door. Started in '64, and ended in '84, same month, September.

AL: You mentioned Frank Coffin a couple of times, could you give me. . . .?

JB: Have you spoken to him?

AL: Yes.

JB: Oh, okay, good, because, jeez, there's another source. Did you talk to him about Louis Jalbert?

AL: I didn't interview him personally. But he is just finishing a memoir of, I believe, the '54 election. But give me your impressions of him, at what times have you met him and what circumstances?

JB: I just met him recently as a matter of fact. Frank was always held in the highest esteem in this community. Frank was a very bright, young Lewiston native and, you know, went to Harvard Law and did it all, began to practice here, and he got involved in the local scene. I mean, I know he and Louis went at it a couple times at meetings. See, he was another very bright, young, ambitious and politically astute, because he wanted changes too, a person in the community. And trying to stand up to Louis back then and the old cronies and the old crowd, you know, keep Lewiston like it is and let's not change it. And anyway, he of course went on to bigger and greater things, but I think he was assistant county attorney at one time. And when he ran for Congress he won I believe, you probably know the chronology better than I do, because when I was at Notre Dame he was in Congress. And at Notre Dame he spoke at a group in support of Senator [*sic* Representative] Brademas, remember the name Brademas from Indiana? He was a very, very excellent, good Democrat and a solid person. And then I think was then appointed to some monetary fund or international, you know, got a federal appointment and went on from there, and went on the court, federal court. And he's a good writer. He's very alert to this day. So I'm glad you interviewed, someone interviewed him because he'd know a lot about Muskie, I'm sure, because I think Muskie helped him a lot too, getting into Congress and all.

AL: Phil Isaacson.

JB: Now you're acting like Barbara Walters. Say, Phil Isaacson. It's been, (*laughing*), that's very good. All right, Phil Isaacson, Phil I have known never really personally. Phil has always been a very competent lawyer, very bright person, had a good law firm, has now merged with my old firm as a matter of fact. I could always depend on Phil for political advice. It's very good, legal advice beyond his duties as corporational counsel, because we had in my terms some very critical issues, very critical situations, crisis situations. A new municipal labor relations act had been enacted when I first became mayor, and when I became mayor there was a strike, this was on my first day as mayor, public works department, boom, right away. So anyway, all that got resolved but Phil Isaacson was a big help in that because we had to go to court and he helped with the pleadings, you know. He went beyond what corporation counsel was paid, so he was

very good.

AL: You mentioned Bobby Clifford, or Judge Clifford.

JB: (*Whispered*) Justice Clifford.

AL: Justice. . . .

JB: Justice, now they call them justices of the Supreme Court.

AL: And his brother Jere, and. . . .

JB: Jere, Jere was corporation counsel for a few years.

AL: What role did they play in the Lewiston community and in politics? Have you sort of been around them?

JB: Oh, Bob was a big supporter of mine. He and I graduated from high school the same year. He went to Bowdoin and I went to Notre Dame, and we ended up practicing, he practiced with Clifford and Clifford, I practiced with my firm. Make a long story short, Bob ran for alderman before I ran for mayor. And I think when I announced I was running for mayor, I think he was planning to also. But we never communicated, but anyway, that's the feeling I got. So he ran for alderman again, and he was a great supporter. It's a good thing I had Bob Clifford on the council at that time because we had some critical stuff going on like the union contracts and urban renewal, model cities, you know, housing. I was a big promoter of, we had a very big crisis with the housing authority and I asked all the members of the housing authority to resign when I was mayor because I felt that they were favoring the landlords. In other words, they were using the federal money to give to landlords, lords, too, very few ladies, who owned apartment buildings then. In other words, it was a federal program, you had two options: you could build new housing or take the money and subsidize renovations to older housing, as well as the rents. I had a great planning director then, and God I don't remember his name, but he ended up going back, going to Minnesota, but we investigated the situation. To make a long story short, we came up with certain conclusions and said that you are going to establish federally subsidized new housing or else. They refused to do it so I asked them all to resign publicly. And they ended up, some resigned and I put new members on and we got the housing. Single, you know, for the single parents and whatnot. And they were living in these holes and I had to convince the council, so we took pictures of some of the conditions, and they were horrendous. Single mothers living in these, and families.

Anyway, I mean I'm not saying that was the answer to the problem but at least it was a hell of a lot better than what they had. Pleasant View Acres, you know, we've got a lot of them now. So, so those are some of the big fights we had, Andrea. Because another big fight was the federal concept versus the local concept, it's when funds started coming in, you know, through, when the Kennedy years started. You know, had the National Health Institute, you had all those funds creating tri-county and mental health centers and all this stuff was going on. And then all of a sudden we started getting funds for housing through the Department of Housing. And the

council was like, “We don’t want this federal money. We don’t want to deal with the feds. We don’t want,” because there a lot of strings attached. But I mean, we had a real fight, and I’m glad you, I’m reminded of that because that was another big fight. And Muskie was instrumental, too, because he was the sponsor of some of these programs, when he was in the Senate. And it was like, you know, we had a brother, so to speak, who was in support of this, and a sister who was Margaret Chase Smith was too, I mean it was. So that was a big fight trying to get these political people, local, to accept federal funding, or the concept. And then when Nixon came in of course, then you had the block grants and it got better and better, you know, in the sense that, so.

AL: What do you think the late Senator Muskie’s biggest influence was on Maine?

JB: Well, I think his biggest inf-, from my perspective, from my perspective, (I’m not eyeballing because I’m trying to think here), was establishing the Democratic party in Maine again, resurrecting it, and getting others to go along with him, run for office. I’m talking about local and I’m talking about county, running for judge of probate and running for register of probate, the local legislature, you know, all this stuff, county commission, you know? He was instrumental in this I think because, because of his election he proved to all of us that you can do it. That, I think he was a good example that personality, not party necessarily, can win an election. But his personality, he got a lot of votes out of Lewiston, a lot of votes out of Biddeford. The Democratic Party out in, like in the Augusta, Kennebec County and all those other areas started to, Penobscot County, Washington County, Aroos-, people started coming out, you know? It was big. As far as his influence otherwise, I think once he got to the Senate he became more interested in national issues.

AL: What do you think that his influence was specifically on Lewiston, and I’m thinking of that question because Lewiston. . . .

JB: Well give me a specific, I, I. . . .

AL: Lewiston has always been heavily Democratic, yet at the state level you wouldn’t probably a lot of times get the funds because it was Republican controlled. Did you see a change in that way after Muskie’s terms as governor?

JB: Yeah, I think I did, I guess I don’t have any example of maybe what exactly you mean. I do remember they used to have a council, governor’s council, where I believe one person from each county was a member of the governor’s council. And, yeah, that’s right, that was a big change, too, and they approved or disapproved of nominations and whatnot. And that was big time politics there, because usually the person would be a Republican until that started to change. Yeah, the governor’s council, I’d forgotten about that.

AL: You must have had some interactions with Bill Rocheleau?

JB: Oh, a lot, yeah. Bill and I used to go at it all the time. I mean we’re very, we’re friends now, but during the political years, oh yeah, we were at it.

AL: Where you had difference of opinions on issues?

JB: Big time, yeah.

AL: Different philosophies or, in what way?

JB: Yeah, it was his approach versus my approach. He and I were opponents a lot. Urban renewal was a sticky point, pretty much on appointments, that type of thing, but nothing overly serious. Did you interview Billy?

AL: Yes, I didn't personally, but . . .

JB: (*Whispers - unintelligible.*) All right.

AL: How about Robert Couturier?

JB: Yeah, Robert was the youngest mayor, I thought I was but I guess I, Robert outdid me. He ran for mayor. . . .

AL: He was just out of Bates wasn't he when he ran?

JB: Yeah, just started, he was teaching at St. Peter's school, and he ran. Robert and Bill, I think, Bob Couturier, Bill Rocheleau and even myself I'd include, we were kind of independent types. We were never really, Bill Rocheleau was never really attached to that group that I was referring to that I got, that I experienced when I ran for mayor. And Bob Couturier never was connected, either. So, they were independent individuals with independent minds, you know. They did a lot too, Bill did a lot when he was there, he was very into federal funding. He tried hard to get a lot of federal funds, too, for a new library, which we never were able to accomplish, but we had the fire station, we had the park, you know, there was a lot of things that we would vote on.

AL: Are there some people I haven't mentioned that kind of pop into your mind as important people to talk about in the Lewiston community and politics?

JB: I think we've pretty well covered it, Andrea. If you've talked to those that, you know, some of them have passed away unfortunately. Hal, the big one, and Louis Jalbert, that would have been an interesting interview. I would have attended that interview. Have you talked to John Orestis?

AL: Yes.

JB: Okay. Bob Clifford has been interviewed, Bill Rocheleau's been interviewed, Robert Couturier's been interviewed.

AL: No.

JB: I think you'd get a good perspective from Robert. He was kind of also politically independent, he never committed to, much to either party.

AL: Are there any of the quote, unquote, old timers that. . . .

JB: That's what I'm trying to, to go through my head, Roland Landry, have you talked to him?

AL: And Bill Jacques.

JB: Billy. Connie Cote? Connie Cote, she was in the legislature, is I think on the county commission. She'll give you some insight, she was involved with a lot of politics back then too. Jim Handy, you haven't talked to Jim Handy?

AL: No.

JB: Oh, God, yeah talk to Jim Handy, he's on the board of education I believe, and he teaches. But Jim was a big Carter supporter and that was a big conflict with Louis Jalbert. And I can't remember where Muskie stood on that, when Carter was running, I think he su-, yeah. He supported Carter, didn't he? I think, I can't, anyway. Big, I mean, Jim is very bright, very articulate, can give you, in fact he was involved more deeply than I was because he went to the legislature, the state legislature and worked in the party and all. He's good. Who else? Curt Webber? That would be an interesting experience. Curt was another one that was involved with breaking the silence, the political silence at Democratic meetings. Georgette Berube? I, oh God, that was a, I remember Georgette was supporting a Republican for governor and Louis Jalbert tried to chastise her in front of all of the Democratic, county Democratic committee. It was quite a scene. Anyway. That was the last, his finale, that, after that a lot of us sat back and said this guy's got to go. Georgette Berube, very good. Connie Cote. And I think Georgette can give you a lot of insight. She's aged but, you know, she was a very independent minded type too that lived through all those years. And I think knew Muskie, too. See, you've got to understand, Ed was very successful. Locally he didn't, I, when I was mayor and county attorney and all, you know, he was involved in national office, involved with the, was an innovator in getting legislation of pollution and, you know, the anti, whatever it, environmental law and all.

AL: Clean Air and Clean Water.

JB: Clean Air, Clean Water, thank you, and he was really, became very involved and many of us would say, well he's more interested in California than he is Maine. And this is not- I'm not trying to be negative about it.

AL: But you got a sense of that?

JB: I think his focus absolutely, we felt he had kind of lost touch with us, and would come back to us when he wanted to be reelected. But, isn't that politics? See, the higher up he got, you don't need us as much any more so, because he's going for bigger and better things, which he did go for. I mean, let's face it, right? Vice presidential candidate, you know, (*unintelligible word*), so.

AL: Did you have any friends or close associates that worked with Ed Muskie on any of his campaigns?

JB: Oh, have you talked to Lee?

AL: Shep Lee?

JB: Yeah.

AL: Yes.

JB: Okay, because he worked very closely with Ed Muskie and his temper. Did you interview. . . .?

AL: Do you have any anecdotes?

JB: No, because all I did was hear stories about Muskie throwing ketchup in Shep Lee's lap because he was mad, I don't know, just grapevine stuff, okay, rumors.

AL: Hear say. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

JB: No, I think this has been very interesting, Andrea. I'm getting exhausted out, but I appreciated you concentrating on the Lewiston political scene because I think the Lewiston Democrats were critical in getting Muskie elected during that tough time, during, you know. A lot of votes here, a lot of people came out to support Ed, including Biddeford and Portland and other areas, you know, heavily. The French-Canadian population was all for him, good candidate and a young candidate, you know, big, so, and Polish ancestry, I mean you know, this really touched a lot of French people too. You know, we have always wanted to see a Franco-American candidate as governor, but you know, haven't. Elmer Violette, have you talked to Elmer Violette? Oh, okay. See how names are popping? There's a great guy, such a soft spoken young, then, but he was a Muskie, very fam-, see you need that generation be-, after, well, that was before me. You know what I mean. Be in their seventies now.

AL: And eighties.

JB: And eighties, so.

AL: Thank you very much.

JB: You're most welcome, Andrea, I really enjoyed your chat, Barbara Walters.

(Taping stopped - then resumed.)

AL: end of this tape.

JB: Okay, when I was mayor of Lewiston, I was a little disappointed in my communications with Senator, then Senator Muskie. I would write to him, I'd send him copies of my two inaugural address for each of my years in office, he never responded. I remember once I think I got a letter from him, I was photographed with him at a meeting once, I still have that picture. But anyway, I heard more from Margaret Chase Smith who really sent me notes and would respond to my questions more than Senator Muskie. And I don't think it was just me, I think this goes back to what I said earlier about the feeling in this locality, in this town or city, we, that I believe Senator Muskie kind of lost touch with us and the Democratic Party in some of these local areas, except when he was running again for office. I mean he, the only stiff opposition he ever encountered, but it didn't last, was an individual in Portland, the one who developed the waterfront. Monks?

AL: Monks.

JB: Monks, okay, gave him a little run for his money. He always succeeded. He never had strong opposition and maybe that was one of the reasons why over the years he, you know, never really developed as much of a local attachment, as for example Bill Hathaway. Now Bill was always in touch with us, always here, always at meetings, came to my inauguration twice, both times, spoke, and even as senator he never lost it, he always was in touch. There's something when you become a senator, I think, I don't know what it is. I do agree, in defense to my com-, in explaining my comments, when you're a senator, there are a hundred senators, they deal with running the United States of America as well, they deal with national issues more than local issues. However, the Congress representatives, I think those are, those are the ones, those are the individuals who deal more with local issues and local problems.

AL: Now when you, when you weren't getting responses, was this in the '60s or into the '70s even?

JB: Oh, I'd say late '60s and early '70s. I mean, when I was mayor, '69 and '70 for example. You know, and it was kind of, it was kind of persistent, I thought. I mean, I was mayor of the second largest city in Maine and one of the biggest Democratic at that time population was here, but, you know? He went on to bigger, you know, you just think about bigger and better things and you go on. I think that's one of the problems with individuals who get into politics, get higher and higher in office. And now, you've got to understand my criticism, okay? It wasn't probably that important to me or to him that he communicate with me, but maybe it would have been better if he had.

AL: He'd have more of a pulse, finger on the pulse.

JB: Yeah, precisely. See, I could have been at least a contact for him to say, "How are things going down in Lewiston?" I was never called or asked that. Oh, Governor Curtis, you talk to him? Okay. So anyway, that's my. . . .

AL: What do you think from seeing him over the years and being in the Senate his strengths were? What did he have in. . . .?

JB: Well I think he became a very strong Democrat and well liked by the entire Democratic Party nationally, and I think by Republicans, they just liked him. And of course his moment was when he was with Humphrey as the vice-presidential choice. He became extremely famous and then tried to run and didn't make it, but, I just think he was, he's just an example of what a personality can do in politics, a positive personality, a personality that people like, that the party lines, there are no party lines if you have a decent candidate. And he was that until, I guess he had reached his peak.

AL: Thank you very much.

JB: Okay.

End of Interview