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Violette, Dennis oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with Dennis Violette by Andrea L’Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Violette, Dennis

Interviewer
L’Hommedieu, Andrea

Date
February 17, 2004

Place
Bangor, Maine

ID Number
MOH 425

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Biographical Note

Dennis Violette was born on May 22, 1947 and raised in Van Buren, Maine in a bilingual family. His parent’s were Elmer Hector Violette and Marcella (Belanger) Violette. He has a brother, Paul. He attended the seminary for 2 years of college, then decided to switch his course of study and graduated from Boston College with a B.A. in Political Science. He works for a land management company in Bangor, Maine.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Van Buren, Maine community; Elmer Violette; Glen H. Manuel; Allagash Wilderness Waterway; Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC); and the World War II generation.

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Transcript

Andrea L’Hommedieu: This is an interview with Dennis Violette at his office at the Seven Islands Land Company in Bangor, Maine on February 17th, the year 2004, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu. Could you just start by giving me your full name and spelling it?


AL: And where and when were you born?

DV: I was born in Van Buren, Maine on May 22nd, 1947.

AL: And is that where you grew up, in Aroostook County?

DV: Most definitely, yeah. No question about it.
AL: What was it like living there? What kind of community was it, and did you have lots of family?

DV: Back then in, well, I was born in ’47 but, of course, a lot of what I remember basically goes back to the 1950s and 60s. It was a community of about five thousand people. It's more, closer to three thousand now. But yes, I had a lot of family in Van Buren, a lot of extended family, and in fact it's probably one of the points that I guess I truly cherish now that I'm away from there. My father had a lot of brothers and a sister, and they mostly all lived in Van Buren so I had a lot of aunts and uncles, a lot of cousins, somewheres in the neighborhood of, I think, thirty-six cousins, and so there was just a lot of interaction between this extended family. I didn't particularly realize it then, but now as I look back it's something that I really, really, it's close to my heart because it seems now families of course aren't as big, but also they tend to move away so the extended family isn't usually close by like I experienced. So it's something that I keep thinking back on really. I was fortunate to grow up in that kind of environment. (Aside).

AL: What were your parents' names?

DV: My father's name was Elmer Hector Violette; my mother's name, prior to marriage, was Marcella Belanger, and of course she took the Violette last name when she married my father, as was customary then but is not so much today.

AL: Did she grow up in that area as well?

DV: Yes, she did, same locality, Van Buren, Maine, that's where she was born and that's where she grew up. In fact my parents are of the same age, so through the grades they were basically in the same class. However, at high school it split up; the boys went to what was known as Van Buren Boy’s High, which was primarily taught by a religious order of priests called the Marist Fathers, and the girls stayed at the same school where they had been in the grades, but they moved from the lower floor to the second floor. This school was called Sacred Heart School, and there they did their high school. And when they grew up, and actually, also when I went to school the order of sisters that taught there along with lay teachers, they were commonly known as the Good Shepherd Sisters. And in any event, as I say for high school, the boys and the girls split off. I mean, they would do a lot of things in common, but basically they were educated separately.

AL: And what was Van Buren like ethnically and religiously?

DV: Ethnically it was predominantly Franco-American; I'd say at least ninety-five percent Franco-American, the balance being Irish. There were also some Lebanese families in Van Buren, believe it or not, that ended up there, but it was primarily French speaking, primarily Franco-American, French speaking. We know it in this state primarily being Acadians, with also some French speaking people that came in from Quebec along with that. But that was primarily the socio-ethnic make up of Van Buren.
I remember primarily growing up bilingual. I was fortunate from the point of view that my parents both had higher education beyond high school, they had their high school but they both went on beyond high school. In fact, my mother went on to actually get her doctorate in history and my father went on to get two years of continuing college education at Ricker College in Houlton, Maine, and after the war he then went to law school at Boston University where he got his law degree.

So I was fortunate to grow up bilingual. We primarily spoke French in the home and basically everywhere I went, as I remember, we spoke French. But I had absolutely no difficulty speaking English, because that's how I was brought up. So I was fortunate that way, because when myself and my siblings went out beyond Van Buren we had no difficulty with the English. I mean, needless to say we had our accents which you never lose if you grow up speaking French, but it was not a situation where it held us back because we couldn't verbalize ourselves in English or conduct business or anything else in English. But it was primarily a French speaking community, as was the entire St. John Valley.

AL: And in school did they actually have different times of the day when you spoke French and English, or how did that work?

DV: In actuality, and I don't know if I've said that previous here, but also, I mean, it was like ninety-five percent Roman Catholic, the religion. But going back to how class was conducted, no, at that point in time in fact they really did not like the students to speak French. They really preferred them to speak English, and the thinking behind that was if you spoke more English you would become, it would be easier for you to learn English, because you have to remember that a lot of the students coming into the lower grades spoke predominantly French. So the thinking was that if you conducted most everything in English then the students would more readily pick up the English. And it's been since discovered and realized that really if you combine the two, if you use French also along with the English, the student will pick up the English just as fast and actually faster, because they can use their native language to kind of learn the other. But if they're not really allowed to speak their native language then you've got a real problem because that student, first of all, probably thinks that there's something intuitively wrong with the language he grew up with, and then secondly he can't use the language that he knows to express himself if he's trying to ask something about the second language, in this case English, but he's attempting, or she's attempting to acquire. So that was always a problem and it's since become different, but when I was growing up you really, outside of the actual French class that you took, they preferred for you and they really stressed it that you use the English language. And in our case it was really our second language, because our primary native language was French.

AL: So your parents spoke both English and French.

DV: Fluently.

AL: But they, in the home, spoke mostly French?

DV: Both.
AL: Oh, they did both.

DV: They did both. That way there we, I'm not so much fluent in speaking it as I was, because I've been away so long from the valley, St. John Valley, but back then when I was using both back and forth all the time it was no problem, I really didn't think of it at the time, you just went back and forth. For example, obviously if I associated with older people who basically couldn't speak English, or very sparingly, everything was in French. I mean, when I went to my grandparents or uncles, I mean basically we all, you spoke French, because that was our native language.

AL: And how far back did your family go in Van Buren, was it your grandparents that came?

DV: Actually it's before that, we go back to at least the 1790s. And I'd have to check my dates, I'm not good with dates, but it was a Francois Violette actually, who came to that area of the valley and settled in Van Buren. In fact at one time, before it was named Van Buren, it was more prominently known actually as, in a sense, the Violette settlement, because it was Francois Violette who first came there, along with other Acadians, but settled in that area. Because there's a Violette Brook that dumps into the St. John River at that point. And, of course, needless to say it was named Violette Brook because of the Violettes, but in time as that area grew it became Van Buren after the president of the United States, Martin Van Buren. That's where the name comes from.

But, the Violettes go back a long time, as a lot of the settlers of that area, of the St. John Valley, they came up the St. John River from like Fredericton and points lower, and then eventually settled along the river. It's got to be remembered that the modes of transportation at that time was via rivers, you know, streams, lakes, rivers, any waterway was the highway then, it's how you traveled, it's how commerce was conducted in large part was via the waterways, and needless to say rivers and streams. And Maine has always been blessed with a lot of streams and rivers. For example, you look back at all your mill towns in this state, such as Rumford, such as Old Town, such as Waterville and any of your mill towns, they're all water based. The Pejepscot River, Topsham and Brunswick, and Biddeford and Saco, they're all based on rivers, because not only did they, in this case a lot of them were wood manufacturing, they brought the wood via river to these areas, but, and also as I said was a way of traveling. So anyway, that's basically how all areas in the state were settled, not only Van Buren and the St. John Valley but every area of the state.

AL: Now, did Van Buren continue to use the wood manufacturing industry as its base for economic stability, or what, what was it that drove the economy of Van Buren?

DV: Well needless to say, to begin with, as really all parts of Maine, it was, it started, they were subsistence farmers. They lived off the land by a little bit of farming and, of course, with the wood, with the area being forested like most of Maine is; they used that resource as well. So they farmed some, they sold a little bit of wood or they, in any event they used it, I mean they had to heat, what did they use, they used wood. Many of their items were manufactured from
wood, I mean, their sleds, their sleighs, their, I mean they used what was there and it was forested so they used the wood, the trees. Then in time, of course, as commerce began to come into that area, yes. I mean, you had sawmills develop both in Van Buren and really in all surrounding towns and hamlets. Any little place that had rivers, streams, you had mills develop. You had, of course you had your sawmills and so forth, but you also needless to say there had grist mills where water driven mills could grind your grain and so forth into flour and that sort of thing. So yes, you had some, in fact some large sawmills in Van Buren in the twenties, twenties and thirties and teens.

**AL:** Now, Van Buren, what was it like politically?

**DV:** I really can't go back beyond my childhood because in actuality, and I can't remember why, but believe it or not . . . . Well let me just start by saying of course that in this day and age when people think of the St. John Valley they think of it as a Democratic stronghold, and to a large extent it still is. And when I was growing up that's what it was, predominantly Democratic. For example, if you ran in Van Buren, you didn't stand much of a chance if you weren't a Democrat. And it was particularly so, of course, after FDR; he galvanized, meaning Franklin Delano Roosevelt, he galvanized that even more. I mean, it had started by then but when FDR came and all his programs he galvanized that valley even more and it became almost, you know, a hundred percent Democratic. I mean, there were Republicans, and in fact, you know, as always happens now and then one would win, but it was more probably a factor of who that individual was than probably party. So it was, to a large extent, predominantly heavily Roman Catholic and Democratic.

**AL:** So would you say it was more on the conservative Democrat side of it than liberal?

**DV:** I don't even know if you could peg it that way. All I would say is it was a party that the people in that area felt would respond to them, and it was, they saw it as the party of the little person, of the person that really wasn't empowered so to speak, as they saw the Republicans, particularly in that time. It's changed a lot of course, but back then the power in the state was Republican, you know, your forest manufacturing industry, your power industry, your railroads, all your huge predominant industries in the state was in large part Republican. And so I think our people saw the Democratic Party more as a vehicle for hopefully seeing their needs. You probably could, but I don't see it that way as either a conservative Democrat or a conservative [sic liberal] Democrat, it was more so they felt that that was a party that they could align themselves with, that they thought understood them to a certain extent.

**AL:** Now after high school what did you go on to do?

**DV:** After high school, well actually even in high school, after my freshman year of high school in Van Buren I then left to pursue what I thought at that time was a vocation in the priesthood. So I did three years of high school and two years of college being educated by the religious order of fathers known as the Marist Fathers. And so I did three years of high school in Bedford, Massachusetts in the minor preparatory seminary, and then two years of college in Framingham, Massachusetts. And then at that point decided that the priesthood was not the
vocation that I wanted to pursue, so I left and finished college in Boston College, I got a degree, a B.A. degree in political science. I then came back to Maine, started on a masters program in political science at University of Maine at Orono, and subsequently didn't finish that but got drafted into the Army. At that time the Vietnam War was going on, so I got drafted and did my military service. And then when I got out I subsequently finished a master’s in public administration.

**AL:** So like your father you've had interest in public service and politics?

**DV:** To a certain extent, although I really don't have the political bug like my father did. But you probably can't grow up in that household and not have a fair understanding and knowledge that somehow to some degree anyway you have to involve yourself in the political process or in any case understand how the political process works and what's involved and the whole, anyway, the whole nine yards that goes with that whole, you know, process and endeavor. I've got another brother actually, Paul, who actually got more of that political end of it than I do, but yeah, that's where I come in on it.

**AL:** When you were growing up, were there political discussions around the table or with family informally?

**DV:** Yeah, I mean it was always around you, because first of all my father was heavily involved in the municipality of Van Buren. And but, what I'm going to say, I don't mean here to say that he started every endeavor that I'm going to mention, but he was instrumental in a lot of goings on in Van Buren. They, for example, they developed a private power utility, in other words the power in Van Buren is actually under Van Buren Light and Power, and that's how it's purchased, I think it's still that way to this day. For example, they don't purchase their power directly from Maine Public Service that's based out of Presque Isle, but it's actually Van Buren Light and Power that buys the power, so they were always able to get their power a little cheaper.

But in any event, because my father had this education he was always looking for ways, in a sense, to better his community. So, as I say, there was always that going on. For example he was also instrumental in beginning a hospital in Van Buren, which is no longer, but in any event my father and a group of other professionals in town brought a hospital into Van Buren, and found an order of sisters to staff it, and any number of other things that I can't off the top of my head think of now, but that he was instrumental in beginning in that town.

And that's the other thing I guess I'd like to say in regards to my parents. They realized in a sense that education was a gateway to being able to achieve and do certain things, and I don't mean achieve certain material possessions that would make you rich, but they knew that it opened the doors to being able to particularly help other people. And in their case it was very much so, because really they were the first generation in a sense, meaning my parents, who any of them actually were able to get some college education. It certainly was not the case for, for example, my mother's and my father's parents. But it became possible for my parents' generation to go on to higher education and in fact, because of their grade school and high school education,
realize that that was out there for them.

But it was still very few that had the means, meaning the financial means, and also, in a sense, of the desire to go on to higher education. But in this case both of my parents were able to do that largely because of their upbringing. They had parents who also realized that that was the way to get ahead, and so they both were very fortunate that they in fact did do that. But as I say, they saw education as a way to get ahead. Yes, to get ahead financially, but also to be able to make their way into the world with the educated in the business sector, which is where the Francos in this state always lagged, because they didn't have the education to be able to go out there and be articulate in the ways of the world and how business was conducted, and to express themselves and to be able to get ahead that way.

So because of their education, my parents were able to do a lot of things in their lifetime to enable those that were less fortunate to still get ahead, because they had that foresight and overall the desire to bring about a better little community in their Van Buren. And of course, in time, because of my father's involvement in politics, throughout the state as well. But that's what education did for them, and that's how they saw education. In actuality, that's still how higher education probably ought to be looked at today. In any event, I've said too much about it.

Anyway, so anyway, yes, I grew up in a household that continually talked about the topics of the day, about what was going on in the world, about what was going on in the state of Maine, you know. And not necessarily what was bad or what was good, but how things work and why probably this would be better if it were changed or, the whole ball of wax anyway, so we had an idea of what was out there in the world.

I mean, we don't travel like children do today, but we still traveled a fair amount, you know. My parents would, although my parents were educated they were still not wealthy by any means, because I can remember when my parents bought their first car, I was probably, I don't know, let's just say seven or eight at the time. And prior to that time, now mind you, you know, if they needed a car they'd use, in this case, my mother's parents' car. So, early on in their lives my parents, like really most people growing up in Van Buren, didn't have a whole heck of a lot of money. It was not really until their later years that they were comfortably set, financially, but nevertheless there was always enough there to take care of us. And as I say, as my father got on in building his law practice and that part of it, there was always conversation about what was going on locally, statewide, regionally in Aroostook County, and in the nation and in the world.

I mean, we had that kind of education that we're blessed to have. And in fact all, myself and all of my siblings have all graduated from college, and some of us have gone on to get higher degrees. And so we've been fortunate to have that as a backdrop to our lives, and hopefully we've been able to enrich certainly members of our family and people around us, and what an education brings you primarily, you know. It's an enlightenment, it's an ability to grasp ideas, to discuss ideas, to be able to disagree or agree with someone on certain topics but to do it intelligently, and to hopefully get on with making the society that we live in a better place in which people that follow us can live.

I mean, I might go on from that and just basically state that myself and my siblings were
extremely fortunate in having the parents that we did, because it made us aware of a lot of what's
important in just living one's life. And with the religious background that we had, of course we
were brought up Roman Catholic, strongly so, particularly, my father was very religious. But
really my mother is the one that, as was the case quite a bit in that generation, the mother of the
family is quite often the one that really inculcated those religious virtues that a lot of us children
grew up with. The fathers were basically away earning a living and a lot of times weren't even at
home, even when I was growing up, or if they were they were extremely busy just making a
living possible for their families.

So in any event, as I say, myself and my siblings were fortunate that we had this as a background
in which to later on live our lives. A background that was rich in religious culture, and then rich
with that educational culture that we grew up around. And we grew up with an ability to
understand that there are generally always two sides to an issue and it's very difficult to get
ahead if you can't listen to an opposing point of view and at least be able to rationally discuss its
merits, argue it, and then wherever it ends up it ends up, but it's rare that things are black and
white. In any event, we grew up with an ability to see ourselves and the world that way, so we
were blessed from that point of view.

**AL:** It's interesting you say that. It brings up a recollection I've heard others say in talking
about Senator Muskie, that he saw, they used to say he saw eight sides to every issue and that
there was always a lot of gray with just a little black and white at each end.

**DV:** Particularly, yeah, particularly with him where he, of course his whole life was, at least as
I can remember, one devoted to public life, to serving the people in this state both, if I can recall
now, he served in the Maine legislature, right?

**AL:** Yeah, in his forties.

**DV:** Right, and then, and I think that's where my father first met him actually, because my
father had served in the legislature back then, either right after he was married or just a bit
before. It's kind of vague there, but in that period. But yes, I think if one serves in the public
sector as much as Ed Muskie did throughout all his life, really that was his life, serving the
public, and it was the same thing actually for my father in all the work he did, you realize that
rarely does an issue just, you know, as I say, one-sided. There's, you start looking into it and you
start discussing it, you see the pros and cons, and sometimes it's really actually difficult to settle
on probably what is the best course of action. You finally do, but sometimes actually, it's not all
that clear. In addition to later on that you realize that, yeah, you probably did the right decision,
or you might even say ten years down the road, >I should have gone the other way’, but the fact
of the matter is that the point in time you made the decision that's the way you thought you ought
to go, and of course that's what you do. But you ought not to do it without due diligence, you
know, without looking at all the aspects.

And I think in large part, needless to say, I mean, you know, Ed was a hell of a Democrat as we
all know actually, you know, we kind of call him the founding father of the modern Democratic
era in the state of Maine anyway. But, and sometimes you're just going to out and out do
something that probably is quite party, but overall Ed was the type of individual, and my father was that way. And really a lot, their peers were quite that way. I looked at, you know, Floyd Harding up in the County and a lot of these other people, and I think it's how they grew up. They had an ability when they needed to, to step back and look at these issues and be able to kind of chart a course as to what really was best. They were pragmatists in a way, actually, they, you know, they were of the Democratic persuasion, there was no doubt about it, but they were actually very practical in how they looked at things. And I think that's why, to a large extent, Ed certainly in his public service nationally in the Senate, and my father in this state, he never did reach one of his goals to go to Washington, but they were practical in how they looked at things. They were able to compromise and go beyond certain things, and they were able to achieve a lot because they had a way with people that they could understand the other point of view and listen to it, and at times probably even go in that direction. But they had an ability to be practical about the things that they worked on.

And they were also exceedingly good at working with other people. I mean, I never really knew Ed Muskie personally, I mean I've met him, but in terms of my father certainly anyway, I can say without question that my father had a tremendous ability to be able to listen to people, to work with people, to coalesce ideas, to bring ideas together, to compromise on a course of action, which needless to say if you're in a political process that's what you have to do, and then go on from there and achieve certain things. Because you have to remember that in the early years, certainly when Ed Muskie was governor of this state and when my father was first involved in politics in the state, it was predominantly Republican and you were never in power. And so in order to achieve anything you damn well had to compromise and you had to work subtly behind the scenes, and you just had to learn that art, that process, if you were ever going to get anywhere. So, you know, that's how I look at it.

AL: What's the earliest recollection do you have of your father; do you have recollections of your father running a campaign?

DV: Yeah, probably, one of the drawbacks I have, okay, is that as I mentioned earlier I left when I was a sophomore in high school to go away to school, and so because of that I missed some of the early goings on of my father being involved locally in politics because I was away, all right? I mean, I left the house, I was fourteen, meaning I left my parents when I was fourteen years of age to go to high school, pursue this seminary education. But yes, I can still remember it. Although I was away, I think I was even away when finally, and I should remember the year but it was when Lyndon Johnson ran for president, and that was right around 1960 anyway, somewheres in there, he won anyway.

But my father and two other individuals, and I've mentioned one already, Floyd Harding from Presque Isle and Glenn Manuel from Littleton who, God bless is soul, Glenn has passed away, but back then you had to run county wide to serve in the senate in the state of Maine. And any of you who have any idea of how Republican that Houlton area is, that Mars Hill area is. We call it the Bible Belt, because they were Protestant, and I'm not saying that in a bad, in a negative way at all because I've grown up to be tolerant of all religions, because there's probably only one God anyway. But in any event, it was very Republican. And Presque Isle was very Republican; even Caribou was very Republican. Once you got outside of the Valley, most of the rest of
Aroostook County was heavily Republican. So needless to say, you didn't have many Democrats get elected to the [state] senate, because you had to run over the entire county. It's not like it is now where it's by district.

In any event, of course history being history, Lyndon [B. Johnson] swept to big victory, and my father, Floyd Harding, Glenn Manuel, who never thought would get elected, got elected to the state senate. So I remember that. In fact, it was a little unusual because they decided that they were going to run kind of as a team rather than each go his own way. And so actually I can remember, I don't know if they use it so much now, but they had a, you know, as you can tell I don't smoke, they had matchbooks, okay, and they had the three names on these matchbooks: Glenn Manuel's name, my father's and Floyd. And, you know, they had other campaign literature that had them as a team. So that was a bit unusual, too, because usually that wasn't done, but they figured that if they pooled their financial resources together and ran as a team at least they might have a heads up. As it turned out, Lyndon and that heavy Democratic vote swept him in, but they won that election, so I do remember that distinctly. I can't remember whether I was home or not; probably not.

But my father and mother, I used to get a letter from them at least every week and I'd write back, so we kept in touch. I certainly remember, and I think it was 1966 at that point, my father ran against Margaret Chase Smith for the U.S. Senate, and that one I remember well, too. I was also away but I'd get, I was always sent clippings and press briefings and, you know, all the campaign stuff that was going on via letters. And in fact, I remember coming to Portland on that one, a few days before the actual vote, and being around when Election Day happened on that one. So in any event, you know . . . .

**AL:** Do you remember your parents' feelings about that race against Margaret Chase Smith, did that come through in the letters, how they were feeling about the campaign and running against her?

**DV:** Yeah, I mean needless to say, it was an uphill battle. And like happens quite often there was no illusion there from their point of view that there was going to be a victory in this one because, you know, we all know Margaret Chase Smith was an institution. And even after her passing away she's basically, she's like Ed Muskie, you know, she's a Republican institution in the state where Ed's the Democratic institution.

But my father, of course, had further political ambitions and you see it as a way of getting your name across, throughout the state politically. Because my father was from northern Maine, he wasn't that well known to other areas of the state. So you know, you kind of get into these campaigns, it's not that you don't work hard, you work your tail off of course, but you probably realize that the end result is not going to be a victory but at least you see it as a way of getting your particular political agenda out there for people to hear and see, and your differences with whoever your political opponent was or is, in this case it was Margaret Chase Smith, and to run these ideas out in the public and for people to vote on them. But that's how this whole thing was seen and was played out, you know.

He actually did quite well considering the odds. I forget what the percentage breakdown was but
my father, of course being the person that he is, never took direct attacks on his political foes or his adversaries, if you want to call them that one. He always really ran a positive campaign. He wanted to talk about issues, but was never one to start taking off generally after candidates, it wasn't his way. My father was an extreme, and probably it cost him politically, but it was his nature, he was an extreme gentleman. Just, it was not in his temperament to degrade, to down little, to just go after someone, you know, it was not his character, whereas some other people it doesn't come hard to them. With my father that kind of approach always came terribly, terribly hard and so basically he never took it. And sometimes it's hard to say which is the best way, but my father was my father and so he campaigned the way he wanted to campaign, which was in a positive way and rarely took on his opponent in a negative fashion. He just went on with his own campaign.

**AL:** Let me stop and flip the tape.

*End of Side A*

**Side B**

**AL:** We are now on side B. And if I could pick up and ask you about someone you mentioned who we were unable to interview, Glenn Manuel? Do you have recollections of him? Who was he and what was he like?

**DV:** I do. Glenn Manuel was a, he was a potato farmer. And I'm going to say Littleton, although it might be a community that is not actually Littleton. But in any event my knowledge tells me, and I know in fact he was from that Littleton, Maine area, which Littleton is not that far from Houlton, Maine, all right? But Glenn Manuel was a farmer in that area, and I have no idea what got him involved with politics but in any event he got involved in this particular senatorial election. And in fact, I can remember my father saying, when they won that darned election, I can remember my father saying about Glenn, Glenn called him and said, “Elmer,” he says, he said, “What are we going to do?” He said, “We won!” Because, see, they never expected to win. And my father said, “Well Glenn, you know, we're going to have to make our arrangements and, you know, we're going to be down in Augusta.” But Glenn certainly, and I can remember my father saying this, I mean they never expected to win. But in any event, Glenn was a farmer, and I don't know really too much else about Glenn.

**AL:** Didn't he invent something?

**DV:** He might of, I don't know. I know he was a successful farmer. I can remember, and it was probably, no doubt it was probably around the time when they were running, but I can remember going with my father to Glenn's farm, and it was a very attractive southern [sic northern] Maine potato farm with a good looking farm house and the outbuildings and so forth. But Glenn of course, he continued to farm but at some point he stopped because Glenn, and I think it was actually under one of Governor Joseph Brennan's terms, Joe [sic Glenn] actually served as, and I believe he was commissioner of Fisheries and Wildlife. I may be wrong, but I think that that was the department that he headed up. So he stayed involved in the public life and as said was actually a department head. He was in Joe Brennan's cabinet actually, and I think it
was as commissioner of Fisheries and Wildlife. I couldn't tell you which of Joe's terms or what the years were.

**AL:** Yeah, I can find that. Do you remember what some of the issues were, at the times when you were around or corresponding with them regularly, that your father dealt with at the state level?

**DV:** Of course, yeah, first, one of the areas that he became involved with, and that was in the late sixties, in that area, he was one of the legislators that, he was one of the prime movers in what is now known as the Land Use Regulation Commission, LURC, so-called, which is the governmental unit in the state which in a sense, not in a sense, they look after the unorganized territories. By that I mean, there's certain zoning now that is in this area, but they kind of look after the whole management scheme of things for the state. And that came about primarily, I think, because my father certainly for one, and other individuals as well, saw a need to have some sort of governing body that would look after the whole forestry end of things in the unorganized territories, because largely that's what happens in the unorganized territory in this state, it's largely townships that are all forested, the great majority of the land is owned by private corporations. In my father's time it was largely the big pulp and paper companies, you know, the Great Northerns of Millinocket which of course is no longer, International Papers, the Scott Papers, the Georgia Pacifics, in any event. And you could see more and more and, a certain number of people anyway, could see more and more happening there, and they felt a need to have some sort of check so to speak on what was happening.

And mind you now, understanding where my father grew up, okay, it's not that my father was not aware of what drove the state financially, okay? In fact, that's one of the things that in all that he did, of course he was one of the prime movers involved in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway when that first became law, and then as I say this Land Use Regulation Commission. It's not that my father did not fully realize the importance that the forest industry brought to the state financially. See, he was well aware of that, because first of all he grew up around it. He knew what drove this state economy, all right, when he was growing up and when he was primarily in the legislature. So these areas that he got involved with, it was not from the point of view of, in a sense doing them in, because they were too powerful. They were extremely powerful; no question about it, the timber industry in the state was extremely powerful. But he also realized that, you know, if people were going to live and work in the state they were going to have to be around.

But he also knew that the use of forest land was becoming more intense as you were having more wood cut; there were certain environmental type areas that probably ought to be looked at more closely and have some governance on. And that is what happened with the Land Use Regulation Commission. It was, it's kind of ironic because I work for a forest land management company now, Seven Islands Land Company, and of course at that point in time they were terribly against any of this, I mean the Land Use Regulation Commission because naturally it kind of restricts in a way what you can do, you just can't go willy-nilly and do whatever you want.

For example, I mean, and I can remember seeing it done when I was young boy, because there
was no Land Use Regulation Commission then. I mean you could put a bulldozer in a stream and then just, you know, do whatever you wanted in it. If you were driving that river for pulp wood or logs, it didn't matter what, I mean, you know, if you wanted to build a bridge. And it wasn't that it was done in a sense with negligence, it just was that it was the way it was always done and you just went ahead and did it. People just didn't think, well, if I do this to the waterway or to this stream, it's going to affect the fisheries, or it's not going to be good, it's going to cause sedimentation and this whole thing. I mean, it was a learning curve for everybody really. But in a sense my father really realized that, you know, if you were going to become more intense in forest management, in cutting more acreage, there had to be some balance, too.

So you came in with the Land Use Regulation Commission in right around 1970. But my father was certainly one of the principals there, and if fact he served as its first chairman when it first got going. And I can remember that quite a bit, for some reason I must have been in Maine, because he'd talk about it a lot. Because you had your enabling legislation but then actually, they actually had to structure how it was actually going to run, you had to come in with your regulations and your zoning and how they were going to do it. It was quite involved; you had public hearings and the whole nine yards as you would with any piece of legislation that you then have to actually have hearings on to see how you're going to structure that. And it was the same thing with the waterway, the Allagash, the Wilderness Waterway at the time, and that was about the same time. But that whole environmental awakening so to speak happened there in the late sixties and early seventies.

Now, in the case with the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, it first started out . . . . Well, there had been talk for a number of years of doing something with that waterway. It was a unique waterway, it had many outstanding characteristics: it was unspoiled, it was wild and flowing. And wild meaning that, of course, anybody that knows any history of logging in this state will realize that going way back to the early 1800s, I mean, these rivers, meaning the Allagash and all the rivers in the state were being utilized, and there were tote roads going into them. So they were wild in a certain sense but it's not like, you know, they had never been utilized. They had already been utilized for a good hundred and fifty years before the waterway even came into being.

But people started to realize this as a real, a gem of a resource, you know, and I think it was the Wild and Scenic River Act or something like that nationally, but they began looking seriously at the Allagash to do something with. And, I believe that they wanted to do something national with it, and my father and some other individuals, and I don't know them all, I hate to be, when I say others I don't mean that in a bad way. But they finally said, look, you know, we'd like to do something but we'd also like to keep the state of Maine primarily involved in doing it. We don't want it to go federal, all right? So that's what they finally were able to do. And Muskie was very much involved with that, and of course you see Don a lot, Don Nicoll, and he was staff then.

And in any event, they fin--, the state finally was the body that, they did it anyway but the state basically kept control over it with federal overview, but it didn't become purely, like for example, a national park. It didn't become the sole privy of the federal government which is what my father and others involved in this whole effort wanted to do. You know, they wanted to
keep it a state type thing, and they did it. They passed the legislation for it and got the funding for it, and along with matching funds from the federal government they were able to actually get the waterway as a protected river, as a, you know, forever. And I don't like to use the word “wild” actually, because it's not wild, it's free flowing, but probably a good word to use, I like to use, it's so pristine, because there is not much development around it.

And the little development that ever occurred primarily on the Allagash Waterway, and for that matter the upper St. John River, was largely one of the forest logging industry, you know, and actually they had to put up dams, they put up buildings, but it was as a way of logging that area. And yes, the rivers were driven, I mean they had logs going in them and that's how they reached the mills, it was the mode of transport. But in a way thanks to that whole area not ever being developed in terms of people and towns, it stayed as a forested entity and so the river stayed pristine, ok? Because had communities, for example, grown up more into these forested areas the same thing would have happened. I mean, you know, where did we dump our waste? I mean, it was the rivers because man at the time just saw it as the easiest way to get rid of waste. We didn't think it was harming the rivers. So anyway, as a result, because there was never any development on the Allagash River or on the upper St. John River, you know, before it dumped, before it kind of flows through Fort Kent, and there it's developed, these rivers stayed pristine.

But as I look at all these things that my father was involved with, and I said it before, he looked at it from a very practical point of view, you know, he realized that you just can't go out and legislate things that would, for example, put some of these forest entities out of business. That's how we live in this state. But he also realized that you had to start doing some positive things to the environment if we were to continue to be able to live in these areas also, you know, we had to change our ways and that was a start. But my father always looked, as I say, at things very practically, you know, what's going to work, what can't work, you know. That was his way.

**AL:** Do you have any recollections of Freddy Vahlsing and the sugar beet project that they tried to develop in the Prestile Stream?

**DV:** Probably not enough to really talk to you intelligently about it. I mean, I have a few recollections but I don't think it would serve you very much.

**AL:** So he wasn't anyone that you knew?

**DV:** No, no, I mean I was well aware of that whole thing but I really wasn't around, I was away to school, and I don't know enough about it to really want to get into it except that it seemed to be a whole mismanaged mess when they got into it. You know, I've heard some comments about it, but I don't know enough, I'll just, it's an unfortunate thing.

**AL:** Who were some of the other people in public service that your father worked with closely or befriended? Do you know Tom Delahanty or, John Martin I know was younger?

**DV:** Well, John Martin of course, my father had a lot of involvement with John, because in a way my father was to some extent John's mentor, along with a few of these older . . . . Well my
father was not terribly old then, but when John first went to the legislature he was like just out of college, I think, or very young. And so, you know, my father kind of helped to break him into the whole process and educate him about that, and so they stayed very close for many, many, many years. And my father thought a lot about John and I know John thought the world about my father, because as I say I think John was able to get going a lot quicker with this whole political thing because he had good mentors there, and I know my father was one of his mentors.

AL: And they say that John Martin really knew everything about running the house.

DV: Yeah, John was extremely astute, you know, probably, he's probably the most astute, or one of the most astute politicians anyway that ever walked the steps of the State House. But I think John and my father differed in ways in terms of their temperament, and that's where sometimes I know my father would kind of get a little perturbed with John. And this was after my father was retired, you know, but my father wasn't, he didn't have an arrogant bone in his, you know, in his body, and sometimes John could be a little, kind of get beyond himself and it would bother my dad quite a bit. But they're different characters, you know, and you kind of work according to, you can't hardly dictate how you're going to go about things, because it's part of your being. But no, they were very close.

And basically they both, they were both champions of the small person, of Aroostook County first and foremost, you know, and they worked their hearts out and John still is, and their over all goals and objectives were the same. And they came from little people, you know, they came from areas that basically had no money and the people they represented had no money, and so they came from the same focal point and so how they looked at things are quite similar. You know, they worked somewhat differently in getting things done because, as I say, they're different temperaments, different characters, but their whole approach to how they saw the legislature and how they saw government helping people is basically, you know, the same, they're on the same wavelength and, you know, just like Floyd Harding.

And you know, my father also served for quite a while with, actually he was a Republican then I think, and I can't remember his name, he was from Madawaska, he was a state senator. I think he changed Democratic after a while. Bothers me, I can't think of his name. Ed Cyr, Senator Ed Cyr. He was a little bit before my father's time. But in any event, I think you'll find that most people from northern Aroostook County in my father's generation in the period of time when my father served in the legislature looked very similar to how they tried to help their people. They had that same outlook, and certainly John did.

But as I say, my father was a mentor to John. And I'd rarely seen John cry, I mean the only time I ever saw John cry was at my father's funeral, afterwards he had tears in his eyes, and John Martin's not one to cry very easily, you know. Well, my father touched a lot of hearts because he was such a good man. As I say, he didn't have a mean body in his soul. And as I say sometimes he was almost too good for his own good, you know, and I heard people say that and it's probably true, you know. He was such a good man. You know, when my father was dying, I mean, he, I don't know as he knew what I was saying where I was telling him that, but I must have said that hundreds of times, you know, I said, “Dad,” I said, “you've been such a good man in your life.”
AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you or touched upon that you think is vital to talk about in this interview today? I know we've talked -

DV: You were just trying to get, see, I don't know actually where you were coming from but I, you know, I just, you know.

AL: Well, it's real important to get background on your father and you know, any connections he might have had with Senator Muskie, and if there's anything like that that we haven't talked about that you recall, but that connection with your father is very, very important to talk about. Is there anything that I missed or don't know to ask, that you think is important?

DV: No, I mean, no, I probably -

AL: Did your father ever talk about Senator Muskie?

DV: Oh yeah, but he campaigned for Ed when, you know, he went out to California and, you know.

AL: Was that in '68 or '72? Vice president or president?

DV: No, actually, it would have been '68 actually.

AL: With Humphrey-Muskie?

DV: Yeah, in '72 he was too busy of course with his own congressional election against [William “Bill”] Cohen, so it would have been in '68. But I remember him going out, for a while anyway, but I do remember he ended up on the west coast and, you know, they were doing, he was with other people, too, but they were doing just plain leg work before Ed would come into a city or wherever he was going to speak, you know. They were out ahead of him, you know, just getting things ready.

I mean, there's quite a few times, I mean Ed stayed any number of times with my folks in Van Buren at their house, and he was always comfortable with my parents, you know, my father was easy to be around anyway. But he always felt at home there and, of course, they went back such a long ways politically, back to Ed's days as governor and then on throughout all of Ed's political career. My father would go to Washington for any number of things, and I can't remember them all, but I know a lot of them involved the potato industry and, you know, they'd end up in Ed's office and they'd go from there, but. And certainly on the phone numerous, numerous, numerous, numerous times, you know, from Van Buren and from Augusta. It was one of those associations, and Ed had a lot of them with a lot of people. But I think Ed was always probably fond of his association with his Maine, his strong Maine supporters, because of course that's where he started from. And so I think probably you hold those almost most dearly as any others you develop over your . . . Of course, Ed's was a national career so after a while of course your associates and your contacts become nationally, and probably to some extent with, as he became
Secretary of State, you know, they're global.

But it was one of those things; I mean there was always mutual respect there, my father for Ed and Ed for my father, because they both worked so hard for Maine. And as I say, there was that mutual respect, and they were the kinds of individual that commanded respect, and they both respected each other. So, I think probably that's a good way to finish off, that there was strong mutual respect and certainly my father for Ed, there was admiration and it was one of those relationships that as they grew older didn't get weaker, but they didn't see a lot of each other. But I think it was the situation of Ed just being so busy and so preoccupied with his own career and life, and my father with his. But there was certainly an excellent political, and it went beyond just a political relationship as I say, they respected each other's character and moral fiber, also.

There were some great people that represented this state nationally and in the legislature, and I think WWII had a way of molding a lot of that, you know. They came out of WWII in the late forties and all these young individuals, you know, Ed and my father and Floyd and Glenn and all of them that in a sense, then they began their careers, you know. They went on to law school and got their law degrees, or they began farming.

But I think the war shaped their outlook on life. They knew what, you know, they'd seen the world so to speak because of WWII, and they'd left their home towns and they'd seen other parts of this country at the very least, and many of them of course, in a harsh way, saw parts of the world. And when they came back, they had this feeling that they could accomplish things, you know, the war gave them that. It was a successful war to begin with. We finally won through a hell of a lot of human attrition, both the Germans and the Japanese. And they just took on life very aggressively, these young men, very positively whether it was in the public sphere which in this case Ed and my father did, or the private sphere in business. But they were young men that just went out there with a vengeance, so to speak. They'd lost, you know, four, five, six, seven years of their early adulthood and then they just took it on with a vigor. But they had this, I think this intuitive, this, and they probably didn't think of it, they were very positive about everything. And I think when you look back you can kind of see that, they just tackled the world, you know, they tackled all these problems. But as I say, it stemmed from WWII I think, you know, it killed a lot of our young men but those that survived; I think they just went out with a vengeance.

**AL:** Thank you very much.

*End of Interview*