Wade, Robert G., Sr. oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu
Interview with Robert G. Wade, Sr. by Andrea L’Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Wade, Robert G., Sr.

Interviewer
L’Hommedieu, Andrea

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Biographical Note
Robert G. Wade, Sr. was born in Rockland, Massachusetts on August 9, 1900. He attended Bates College, graduating in the class of 1923. He worked in a shoe factory for three years after graduation and married Nellie (Milliken) Wade in 1926. He attended Harvard Business School in 1927. He ran for the state legislature with Willis Trafton and served three terms (1945-1951?), serving as assistant Republican floor leader and house chairman of the business legislative committee. He once served as the assistant manager of the Guild of Boston Artists. He retired from the investment business in 1986, after 42 years.

Scope and Content Note
Interview includes discussions of: Bates College; Maine Legislature 1946-1949; 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1956 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1918 flu epidemic; Brooks Quimby; George Coles; Pa Gould; Louis Jalbert; John Martin; term limits; and early automobiles.

Indexed Names
Transcript

Andrea L’Hommedieu: This is an interview with Mr. Robert G. Wade [Sr.] on December 15th, 1999 at his home at Schooner Estates in Auburn, Maine, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu doing the interview. I guess my first question is where and when were you born?

Robert Wade: I was born August 9, 1900 in Rockland, Massachusetts.

AL: And did you grow up there?

RW: Yes.

AL: Okay, and what were your parents’ occupations?
RW: My father was a machinist with the United Shoe Machinery Corporation, and my mother had been a milliner. And, but they were both very smart people but neither of them had been to high school.

AL: And did you have siblings?

RW: Yes. I had, my sister Mary was born about two years after me, but she died at age six of pneumonia. And when I was five, another sister was born, and but she was killed in automobile accident when she was twenty-seven and I was thirty-two. And I have a brother who was about twelve years younger than me, and another sister who’s about fifteen years younger than me. My brother Bill died at aged eighty.

AL: Now did they, when did you move to Maine?

RW: I came up here in the fall of 1918, I became eighteen in August just before the war ended. And that was a wonderful year to graduate from high school because if you had taken the college course, you could go to any college in the country without exams. All you had to do was enlist. And I had a teacher from Bates that I liked very much and a Rockland girl had gone to Bates, I liked her very much, and I had corresponded with her somewhat when she was at Bates, but she was only there one year because her father became ill and she had to go to work.

So I came up to Bates and they didn’t say anything about exams or anything. I just enlisted and I was, I liked the Army. And once we were well inducted they said to us, “Now you men will qualify for officer’s school within a reasonable length of time or we’ll ship you to Devons,” under the draft see. So I was bucking for a commission, and in about six weeks I was selected among others to go to officer’s school. I had the travel papers. I was going to Camp Zachery Taylor down in Kentucky on Thursday, November 14th, but the Armistice came on November 11th. And that was canceled, and everything was canceled, and we were discharged in December, 1918.

I was very, at the time I was very disappointed because I had been bucking for a commission. But I think I was very fortunate that I didn’t get down there because years later I met a man who was, had been a medic down there during that fall of 1918. And he told me that there wasn’t a night went by, but he went on to tell me that all that fall there wasn’t a night went by but when he saw at least one young man die of the flu. That was the year of the big flu epidemic. And as a matter of fact, a man who was in my squad who was discharged about the same time I was went home and died before the first of the year, in three weeks. But I had liked Bates very much. So I went home, went back to Rockland, Massachusetts and worked in shoe factories, a couple of shoe factories in the spring. And then I went back to a job that I had been doing in the summer driving, helping on an ice wagon. And so I, and then I came back to Bates as a freshman in the fall of 1919.

AL: What was your experience like at Bates?

RW: Delightful.
**AL:** In what way?

**RW:** Well, I enjoyed the faculty, there was a group of wonderful men. And I liked the people. And I met a girl that I thought was beyond anything I had ever seen before. As a matter of fact, I knew that she was in my class, but I had no contact with her until just before Christmas. Is this too darn long and -?

**AL:** Oh, no, this is wonderful.

**RW:** This was just before Christmas; someone suggested that we have a freshman Christmas party. And the president of the class appointed a committee which happened to include both me and Nelly Milliken. And that was the first time I’d really seen her and I was very impressed, sufficiently so that I took action. When the committee meeting was over, I asked her if I could walk back to her dormitory with her and she said, “Yes.” So we walked from Chase Hall where the meeting was held to Frye Street House, and that was the beginning.

She, we were together a lot during college. And after graduation I had, before I’d worked in shoe factories, a president of one of the shoe factories here in Auburn was interested in me and offered me a job. And I, because I’d had some shoe factory, shoe manufacturing experience, and I did, I went to work there. But within three years I felt that the shoe business in Auburn was on the way down, and so I left.

**AL:** As early as the 1920s?

**RW:** By 1927, yeah.

**AL:** What were your perceptions of Bates College during the ‘20s and ‘30s? Do you remember some of the professors and what made them special?

**RW:** They were all special. While I was here in 1918, Foxy Jordan, the chemistry professor was still alive, but he died about the same time that President Chase died. President Chase was alive when I came, so I’ve known all the Bates presidents except the first one. That was interesting. One Saturday it was announced that Private Chisholm, he was the assistant, and Private Wade will have Sunday dinner with President Chase, so we did. Neither he nor I nor anybody else in the world would ever imagine that eight years later I would marry his granddaughter.

**AL:** And what was her name?

**RW:** Milliken, her father was Governor Milliken. President Chase’s daughter had married Mr. Milliken and Nellie was the oldest child. They had seven children.

**AL:** Was Brooks Quimby there when you were there?

**RW:** Oh, no.
AL: He came later.

RW: Oh, much later, yeah.

AL: Okay, because I know he was there in ‘32.

RW: Yes, but interestingly enough, after we graduated, when I went to work in the shoe business, Nellie took a job teaching history down in Willamantic, Connecticut high school, and she was there one year. And then she got a job at Deering High School in Portland, and Brooks Quimby was head of the history department. That was his job before he came to Bates.

AL: Right, right. So did you get to know him, or do you have perceptions of him?

RW: Oh, very, very well. We’re going down from one thing to another, we’ll talk for hours if we keep going. . . . At Bates I was interested in public speaking, and they used to have prize divisions, you know, and I made the prize division each year. And years later I was very friendly with the men in the Fish and Game Department. And the chief warden came in one time and said that he would like it if I would give a course in public speaking, because the wardens were often called upon to speak to clubs or schools or groups of various types. And he had not been well pleased with the person he’d had doing it. So, would I do it? And I said, “Yes.” So, but I felt that I should make some preparation, so I got in touch with Brooks Quimby, and he was very helpful and very interested. In fact, one afternoon I took him over when we, the class met at that sort of military, those military buildings up at the Augusta airport. And so he went over with me and he seemed to like what I was doing. In fact he gave me some books to, and put his name in amongst, to his fellow teacher. You know, we were very close.

AL: What was he like as a person, what do you think -?

RW: He was very pleasant. I liked him very much.

AL: Can you remember something about his teaching that made him reach so many people?

RW: Well no, I had no experience with his teaching. But it went on from there. He, they were developing adult education and he taught courses in public speaking in the adult education program, until he felt that he couldn’t do it any longer. And he asked the authorities who, they asked him who he would recommend, and he recommended me. And I had the job for several years and it got so it was a pretty good job. The last year or so that I had it I was paid four hundred dollars for ten evenings. But they changed the rules, and they had to have a person who had a Master’s degree in it, and so I didn’t qualify for the job any longer. But you can see that Brooks Quimby and I had a lot together.

AL: Now, were you politically active in the community once you became an adult?

RW: I hadn’t done anything in particular. But in those days one of the clubs, what’s called the politics club, and I wanted to get into that, and I did. And I was president of it my senior year.
So, yes, I had an interest and in fact both my family and Nellie’s family were so active politically that it was natural.

**AL:** Now your parents were politically active?

**RW:** Not my father. He had some kind of town office, not a, on some board but not, he wasn’t active politically, really politically. But his uncle, George Coles, was three times president of Prince Edward Island and was one of the fathers of Canadian Confederation. And my uncle, John Meserbe, represented Prince Edward Island in the town (unintelligible word) in Ottawa. My uncle Bob served in both houses of the Rhode Island legislature. My uncle Jim was very active in town affairs, I think for many years was treasurer of a town down in Rhode Island. My brother Bill was mayor of Pennington, New Jersey longer than anyone else in the history of the town. But, and for a time, after I left the shoe business, I went back to Massachusetts and lived in Braintree. And I, the town of Braintree, it was getting big so that the town meeting was no longer a good idea because the town employees would quit work, bring their supper and fill the town hall, nobody else could get in. So they developed a plan of representative town meeting, and I ran for that and was in that. But, and I suppose I had a real interest because, in politics, because my, is this too much?

**AL:** This is what we want. This is wonderful.

**RW:** My freshman year, when I, at Bates, the legislature met, and I thought I’d like to see it. So one afternoon I went over to Augusta and went up in the gallery above the house and was very, very interested in the proceedings, and I’ll go into some detail on that. You might be interested to know what they were debating, they were debating the proposed Bath-Woolwich Bridge. There was some opposition because there was a good ferry. And another thing that I remember about that afternoon, the speaker recognized a man who stood up, a tall handsome man. And the speaker recognized him as the gentleman from Gardiner, Mr. Gardiner, William Tudor Gardiner, who was afterwards governor of Maine.

**AL:** What year was this?

**RW:** Nineteen twenty [1920]. But then after I was back here, some people asked me to run for the legislature, and I was eager to do it. And you can’t imagine how simple it was. Before I thought about doing that I had been thinking about buying a canoe, and a canoe cost around a hundred dollars, so I decided to run for the legislature instead.

**AL:** As a Democrat or a Republican.

**RW:** A Republican.

**AL:** Now was all of your family background Republican?

**RW:** Yes. And my father-in-law was a Republican governor of this state. So I spent less than a hundred dollars. And, of course, Auburn was strongly Republican. And if you got the nomination, why that’s all, you didn’t bother with the elections. And the year I ran, I thought I
did a smart promotion. I, I urged peo-, and I realized, as a lot of people don’t, that the way to get votes is to ask people to vote for you. So I did that, but I also first urged them to vote for Bill Trafton because he would probably be speaker and would be far, nice for Auburn to have the speakership in Auburn. So I did, and it worked out well. He and I ran one-two in the primary and there were eight candidates.

**AL:** What do you remember of Willis Trafton?

**RW:** Oh, a great deal. He and I were very close.

**AL:** So did you go to the legislature together, at the same time?

**RW:** Yeah, he went, he had been in the term, but the year I went was his second term when he was ready for the speakership. And, no, he was a wonderful man.

**AL:** Were you supportive of him or active when he ran against Muskie in ‘56?

**RW:** Yes, yes.

**AL:** What was that campaign like?

**RW:** He was a very poor candidate for governor.

**AL:** In what way?

**RW:** He, well he didn’t have a common touch in a way, and he didn’t work as hard as he should have. *(Unintelligible phrase).* Well he, it was too bad.

**AL:** Did they have any debates, Muskie and -?

**RW:** I don’t remember. I don’t think, I don’t re-, I think I’d remember if they had formal debates, but there weren’t so many debates, formal debates in those days.

**AL:** So how many terms did you serve in the legislature?

**RW:** Three.

**AL:** Three terms?

**RW:** I, see I, and well, an illustration of how good Bill was to me, that first term he, of course the speaker appoints the committee, and when the committees came out . . . . Who was the man, a man named *(unintelligible phrase)*, the political writer from the Portland paper?

**AL:** I don’t recall.

**RW:** But he was quite surprised that Bill Trafton had named a first term man as House
Chairman of the Business Legislation Committee. He named me. And he went to see Bill about the committee appointments and talked about that. And after talking with Bill he decided it was a very good appointment and that didn’t do me any harm.

**AL:** Can you tell me what years it was that you were in -?

**RW:** That was in ’45. I was there ’45, ’47, and ’49. And the next year, the man who was appointed assistant majority floor leader was transferred or something, he had to leave, and I became the assistant majority floor, Republican floor leader. And as, of course, Mr. Muskie’s contact with the legislature was largely with the leadership, so I, we were quite close on that.

**AL:** So you were in the legislature when Muskie was.

**RW:** Both his terms, my first term was his first term.

**AL:** How, what were your impressions of him?

**RW:** Well, I liked him very much. I’ll state one criticism of him before we’re through. No, I thought he was a very able man or one of the ablest men, obviously one of the ablest men, but there were a lot of able men in the legislature in those days. Bob Haskell was, the president of the senate, was a very able man.

**AL:** Did, when you saw Muskie, because the legislature was overwhelmingly Republican and he was a Democrat coming in, what, how did you, did you feel you could work easily with him on issues?

**RW:** An interesting thing that I did in that connection, oh, what was the man from, the previous Democratic governor here in Maine?

**AL:** Brann.

**RW:** Brann, Brann, I’ve been trying to think of that name. Before the legis-, after the election and before the start, I thought it would be interesting to study up a little on that situation of a Republican legislature and a Democratic governor, so I read the legislative record for Brann’s term.

**AL:** What did you find?

**RW:** Oddly enough, there didn’t seem to be much of anything that gave me much information about that. The thing that colored all of the discussion was the Depression.

**AL:** Yeah, I imagine it did because of the situation at the time.

**RW:** I wouldn’t have thought of it, I don’t think, if I hadn’t read it, but it seemed to me that the Depression colored all, everything.
AL: When Muskie was governor, were you still, you weren’t in office anymore, but were you still an observer?

RW: No, I was, no, my, he was governor, his first term as governor was my first term in the house.

AL: Oh, okay, so that was in the ‘50s.

RW: Yeah.

AL: Oh, okay, I thought you said the ‘40s.

RW: Oh yeah, I said, I’m sorry, ‘50s, yeah, I’m sorry.

AL: Okay, okay, all right, I understand more, yeah, okay. So you observed him when he was governor.

RW: Oh, yes.

AL: Did he have, did he, was he, do you feel he was at all effective?

RW: Oh, yes, he was an excellent governor. I thought he did well. But I’m going to give you one criticism of him.

AL: Go ahead.

RW: As you probably know, at the end of the session, or during the session, you find the things that have to be done, the money that is committed. Then there is what is called a supplemental budget, was, the other money bills that might or might not pass, and you try to pick the most worthy ones and divide up whatever money is in the supplemental budget to use that, which is what we did, as I was assistant Republican floor leader. And we did it. And Muskie, as I remember, said he thought we’d done a good job. But he went out and called a press conference and expressed his regret at the failure of the Republican legislature to provide so many things that the people of the state of Maine needed. But he hadn’t done anything about taxation legislation to provide the money. So he apparently was satisfied with what we had done with the money available, but I thought that was a little much.

AL: Did you observe him later when he went on to the senate?

RW: I never, I seldom met him in a political contest, context, but where he was an active Bates man in alumni things, I saw him a lot.

AL: And you were friendly?

RW: Oh, yes. When he was in college, my wife and I had a very unusual relationship to Bates College. My brother was a senior, her brother was a junior, her sister was a sophomore, and my
sister was a freshman. Muskie was in her sister’s class, ‘36.

AL: And her last name was Milliken?

RW: Edith Milliken. Interestingly enough, she afterwards married my brother. They are both dead now.

AL: So you really had a strong, strong connection to Bates still in those years. Did you hear from your brothers and sisters about Ed Muskie, did he ever stick out as sort of a person that was talked about?

RW: I don’t remember anything. They were fairly young, and they were young people.

AL: Tell me about Frank Coffin. When did you meet him? In what ways did you know him over the years?

RW: I knew his mother, I think, before I knew him. She was an active Bates person. But as I said he was after my time, of course, but the thing that struck me most about him was he was a great one for getting people to do things. He, the Community Chest, I forget what they called it in those days, you know, the fund that they raise. What do they call it now?

AL: I don’t know.

RW: Oh, that provides money for the YMC, YWCA and things like that. Well one day he decided that I should head up that. I didn’t want to, but he insisted. And I did.

AL: And you did it?

RW: Yeah.

AL: He talked you into it, then.

RW: But he was good at that, at getting people to do things.

AL: How do you think he did that? Was it just his friendly personality?

RW: Yes, a friendly kind of insistence.

AL: Or, yeah, he had a way with words?

RW: Yeah, oh, he certainly had a way with words.

AL: And so at what other times did you know Frank Coffin throughout the years?

RW: Oh well, it’s hard to be specific, but we were always friendly.
AL: Were there, besides working for him and then . . . .

RW: There was no partisan feeling anyway, ever.

AL: Really?

RW: I think that was a very nice thing about politics in those days.

AL: Was it different, was it a whole different feeling?

RW: Very, very different, very different. For example, the next year when I was Republican floor leader and, oh, what was the name of the woman from Rumford?

AL: Oh, Lucia Cormier.

RW: Lucia Cormier. When Lucia Cormier was the Democratic floor leader, she and I got along wonderfully. Sometimes the little thing would happen that partisanship would raise its ugly head, we would. Oddly enough I sat down at the corner seat down in the, it seemed to be where the majority leader sat; it was the corner seat down on the left hand side, and she preferred to be up in the back row. But if some little thing like that would come up, we’d glance at each other and go out to the corridor and talk it over, we’d smooth it out. It shows that we were very close. Another interesting thing about it is I ran for the legislature three times, and no one ever asked me my position on anything. In those days, if the people thought you should go to the legislature, they voted for you.

AL: Do you think that was a good thing? It was more of the person rather than what they stood for?

RW: Yes. Because, and it made it much easier to do what was best for the state.

AL: Not so much red tape?

RW: You know, and you had no obligations.

AL: What did you do for, what businesses were you running during all this time period?

RW: I’ve had a very strange kind of career. As I said, after I graduated I decided that, where I’d had some experience in the shoe, in shoe manufacturing I was going to do that. And some executives of Lunn and Sweet [Shoe Company], which was a big shoe factory in those days, were interested in me. And one of them said to me, “If you’d be interested in,” I said, the Walkover Shoe Company, George E. Heath Company, had said that there would be a job for me when I got out of college, but he said “If you’d be interested in staying in Maine, we’d be interested.” And I liked Maine so well that I did it.

But when you entered into a business then in banking, or whatever, you started at the bottom to prove yourself. So I had graduated from Bates with double honors, but in the fall of 1923 I went
to work at London Suites. I was room boy and cobbler in the number two making room, for seventeen dollars and twenty-three cents a week. And they put me through (unintelligible phrase), it worked out pretty well.

In 1926 I left them to go to another shoe factory, Dingley Fox Shoe Company in charge of their order department. And at that time I was making fifty-five dollars a week, so I had progressed some. But I was beginning to be concerned about the shoe business in Maine and decided that I, my future wasn’t there. So although I had, was married and had a son, my family took Nelly and Robert, and I went one year to the Harvard Business School. But by that time it was getting on toward 1929, and you couldn’t buy a job. But through a peculiar set of circumstances I was offered the job, of assistant manager of the Guild of Boston Artists down on Free Street. And I had that, and that was a wonderful job and I had that until the Depression got so bad they couldn’t afford an assistant manager.

Then I wondered how I could use my experience in the art world. And I decided that I would go into the insurance business, specializing in the arena of fine arts coverage. And things of that sort, all risk coverage, and I did, I did that until some years later a man who, from Maine, who had gone down to Massachusetts and opened an investment firm down there offered me a job. And I took it, and he had a lot of business, quite a lot of business in Maine and urged me to cover it. And I did and eventually moved back to here. So I was in the investment business here in Maine from then until I was eighty-six years old.

**AL:** Oh, really?

**RW:** And I would have continued then, but Mrs. Wade’s health was failing, so I was retired and looked after her for several years. And then the last year of her life she was largely in the hospital or nursing home. She died in 1990, almost ten years ago.

**AL:** She was the same age as you?

**RW:** Two years younger.

**AL:** Two years younger.

**RW:** Yes, when she died, she was eighty-seven, I was eighty-nine.

**AL:** That’s a long, wonderful life together.

**RW:** Yes, and we were married sixty-three years, and then we were in same class in college, so we were together in a way for about seventy years.

**AL:** How do you think Bates College has changed from the time you went there until now?

**RW:** It’s hard for me to have much of any idea of what Bates College is now.

**AL:** Yeah, okay.
RW: It’s so big, it’s so varied. No, see in my time, everybody, among men, I think you knew everybody, all the men on campus. You knew where they came from, where they’d gone to school, probably what job they had in the summer, everything about them. You can’t do that in a class of, a freshman class of four hundred. You know, we were, I think there were about ninety-eight in my graduating class.

AL: Yeah, I wonder because at that time I’ve been told by people that Bates College was called the poor man’s college, where it wasn’t as selective, and it didn’t cost, you know, an outrageous amount.

RW: No.

AL: And I always wondered how they happened to get all these such wonderful professors that have been talked about.

RW: Well, it wasn’t a question of money. I think that President Chase attracted them.

AL: What was he like?

RW: He was a short man, a very determined man, wonderful, able to do a great deal with small amounts of money. And money was so different. In 1922 Bates decided to have a fund drive, a real capital drive, and they wanted to raise a million dollars. Nowadays, they get, President Phillips gave nine. But then to raise a million dollars was a big chore. We, the graduating class was asked to pledge, which we did. Sometime later while I was in the shoe business in Auburn, someone asked me about joining the Masons. I said I’d like to, but I guess I won’t now, Harry Rowe wouldn’t like it if I did that before paying off, finishing paying for my pledge.

AL: So you knew Harry Rowe as well.

RW: Oh, very well. And he was extremely good to me. Of course in those days the men did an awful lot of work with the janitors and all sorts of things. And my senior year he was very good to me. He gave me the job of clerking the commons, selling meal tickets and so forth. That paid my board.

AL: You know, Ed Muskie was a waiter in commons one year. Did you know Ruth Rowe Wilson as well? Do you know her, Harry Rowe’s daughter?

RW: Oh, yes, I knew her very well.

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

End of Side A

Side B

AL: We are now on side two of the interview with Mr. Bob Wade. We were talking about Ruth
Rowe Wilson, she was in Muskie’s class.

**RW:** Was she? I’d forgotten that.

**AL:** Yeah, and she, how have you known her over the years, because she was quite a bit younger?

**RW:** Well, she used to go down to Ocean Park a good deal and my son has a place down there. I’ve been down there a great deal. Not now, but over the years.

**AL:** Did your son go to Bates, too?

**RW:** Robert went to Bates, yeah.

**AL:** He did.

**RW:** Yes, he graduated in ’50. And he was on the board of trustees for a great many years until he became seventy. He’s seventy-two, you know.

**AL:** And he’s retired now?

**RW:** Yes. But he has a very nice place on Ocean Park and a, really an estate, in Darien, Connecticut, and a beautiful place in Florida in one of those gated communities. He’s in Florida now, called me last night. Our other son Charles was admitted to Bates, but he took the exams for a Navy scholarship and got it and went to Harvard with it. Very successful there, was a catcher on the ball season. But he’s retired now, he’s sixty-, he is sixty-eight today.

**AL:** Sixty-eight today. Did you have additional recollections of encounters that you had with Muskie over the years that I haven’t brought out in my questions?

**RW:** No, I don’t think so. It’s been mostly just casual things at alumni affairs. No, we never did anything together.

**AL:** Right. What do you think it is that was most important that Muskie did for the state of Maine through all his years of public service?

**RW:** Oh, I wouldn’t attempt that, but I just think that just being Muskie was the great, perhaps his great contribution.

**AL:** What do you think Senator Muskie and Frank Coffin’s roles were in getting the Democratic party sort of recreated in Maine?

**RW:** Well, -

**AL:** Did you see any of that in progress?
RW: Oh, yes, I’d recognize that. As I say Frank Coffin was great at getting people to do things, and perhaps if he’d been as tall as Muskie, things would have been different. But Muskie was a wonderful front man. Both, it was a, really a wonderful combination.

AL: Did you see Muskie when he first did his television campaign ads?

RW: When he had that trouble in New Hampshire?

AL: No, actually, when he ran for governor? I was wondering if you remembered TV having an effect on him winning the election, his presence on TV, in -

RW: When he was elected governor?

AL: Yes, in ‘54. It was the first time they’d ever done television ads for a campaign.

RW: No, I, no, I haven’t thought about that.

AL: Was Pa Gould at Bates?

RW: Yes.

AL: Tell me about Pa Gould.

RW: Oh, Pa Gould. He was a tough marker, and an awful lot of people avoided him because he was tough. As a matter of fact, I was the only man in our class who got a major with him. People avoided him.

AL: Oh really, and what was the major?

RW: History, he was, his field was . . . . I remember the first time, during the war he taught a course called War Aims, the aims of war. And one day I was in the class, and we’d been having trouble getting uniforms. We hadn’t had overcoats, and it was getting cold. And the express wagon drove up to Parker Hall and I saw them unloading overcoats into Parker Hall, and I was watching it, and Pa Gould caught me. And another time, afterwards, when I was taking his course, he, I was talking with him after class, and he, I asked him how I was getting along in his course, and he says, “Ho, ho, ho, Mr. Wade, you’re not doing very famously.” And I thought, it made me kind of mad and I said to myself, he’s not going to ho, ho, ho me. So I worked hard. And my wife was a history major. In fact, he once said that he thought Nelly was the best history teacher he ever turned out.

AL: That’s wonderful. Was he also involved politically in the community?

RW: Seems to me he was. I’ve forgotten in what way, but he was involved in, he was involved in the college in many ways. He stopped me, my sophomore, I guess the end of my freshman year, and he said, “As you probably know I take quite an interest in athletics here, and I think it is very important that we have the right type of man as manager of the various sports.” And he
kind of laid it out on the line: what sport are you going out for managing? Well, without thinking I said football, but boy, you had to do everything. Line the field, they had no help with working on the turf. I thought, this is too much, I’m going to get out of it. Well, I wondered how to do it, but I decided that I would tell him I had to have a job.

So I proceeded to get a job working at the Mohican Market downtown, fruit and vegetable counter. And it worked out great. They liked me and the manager said he’d like to have me all the time I could spare. So I was making twelve, thirteen dollars a week working, put in a lot of time, but so I said I’m giving up on the managership. The next, sometime in the winter, or the next spring I had become involved in other things so that I couldn’t spare the time to, for that job. And I didn’t really need the money, and so I quit. He noticed that I quit. He said, “There are still openings in track or baseball, which one are you going to pick?” So I said baseball, but, and I wound up managing baseball.

**AL:** He felt you should be involved in a little bit of everything?

**RW:** No, he was, he felt that I was a man who should be one of the managers. And Willie Whitehorn in physics and [William Henry] Mony Hartshorn in English and George [Edwin] Ramsdell in math, and Carl Woodcock. He, Carl Woodcock was both in, in both physics and math departments, and he was a wonderful teacher. My sophomore year, the fall math in the sophomore year then was surveying, which is a good practical application of geometry, and I took the course and liked it. And my junior year he asked me to be an assistant in mathematics to, and to teach the field work in, for a group of, in surveying. I did and when we were going over the exams afterwards. Look, can we suspend for a minute?

**AL:** Sure.

*Pause.*

**AL:** Do you remember Professor Robinson?

**RW:** Grosvenor May Robinson, public speaking, yeah.

**AL:** What was he like? Or what did he -?

**RW:** Turn off the machine.

*Pause*

**AL:** So he was a fairly decent professor.

**RW:** Oh, yeah.

**AL:** And you had a class with him? The public speaking [class].

**RW:** You, everybody had a class every year with him. You had freshman declamations I think
they called it, sophomore year was debating, junior year was orations, and on. I guess everybody didn’t take, but if you wanted to make the, and they had a competition at the end of the year and then the graduation parts, so (unintelligible word).

**AL:** So public speaking was a fairly prominent part of the curriculum.

**RW:** Yes, because the bulk of the people were going to be ministers or school teachers and superintendents and lawyers.

**AL:** Right. Was there, what was it about him that made him very effective? Was there a certain something that he taught you to do that made you a good public speaker? Or just how he approached it?

**RW:** No, I think it was the assignments that he, that you, and then he tried all kinds of things that were fun. Made up things. I remember one class, it was, he picked out a man and a girl, and this was to be a, like an engagement party or a wedding party. And he made the bride and groom speak as the main speaker, and he did other kind of funny things like that.

**AL:** Right, he made it real, he put it into a real context. Were there any others that I haven’t mentioned?

**RW:** Yes, well, the one man that I want to talk about at some length was J. Murray Carroll.

**AL:** Who was he?

**RW:** He taught economics, and I liked him very much. And he liked me. I was, my junior year, in those days they used to put the name of the assistants on the letterheads of the departments. My junior year, my name was on the letterhead of the mathematics department and the economics department as I was assistant for two years with him.

**AL:** And what was it about him that you liked?

**RW:** Everything I guess. He, and he was willing to do things, he debated Norman Thomas, Norman Thomas, the Socialist. He, well, the fact that he would do things like that, yeah, he.

**AL:** Do you know Norm Ross?

**RW:** Oh, do I know Norm Ross. He and I have been close friends since 1919, he is two years and two days older than I am.

**AL:** He is? Did you both go to Bates?

**RW:** Yes, he was in one class ahead of me. But his wife and my wife and I were in the next year, so we’ve been very close all. And he was on the board with the Androscoggin Bank a way back, and I went on the board of the bank in 1954 and, I think it’s worthwhile, I’ll show you a picture of us.
AL: Sure, I’m just going to pause.

(Pause.)

AL: Well, that was a lovely picture. So you have been close, both living in this area for most of your life, both around a hundred years old.

RW: Yeah, he’ll be a hundred and two next August.

AL: That’s amazing that two people who’ve known each other for so long have lived so long. What do you and he say the secret is?

RW: We don’t know. Just one day, go along one day at a time.

AL: That’s great. What other people in the Lewiston or Auburn community do you remember being politically active or close with through the years that were, that stuck in your mind as important people, or political figures, whether or not you like them or not? Did you ever, oh, let me give you an example. Louis Jalbert, is he somebody you ever had to deal with, because you were in the legislature at the same time?

RW: I’m glad you mentioned Louis, we can talk about Louis for. Louis had absolutely no conscience; he was a real crook. But, and he did sort of foolish things. At the close of a session, anybody could ask for unanimous consent to address the house just before we adjourned. So one day Louis asked for unanimous consent to address the house, got up, and attacked the Republican leadership: broken their word and couldn’t depend on them and all this, that, and the other.

And my assistant, a lawyer from Kennebunk, wanted to get up and argue with him. I said, sit down. So the speaker, Joe Edgar, the speaker looked at me and I said, and so he said the gentleman from Auburn, Mr. Wade, moves the house now adjourn. So we did. And I phoned Louis up, I said, “Louis, what was all that about?” “Oh,” he said, “things have been kind of dull, I thought I’d start something.” I said, “You don’t give me much credit.” I said, “Things have come to a pretty pass when I’ll debate integrity with Louis Jalbert.” He was so crooked. There was a man from Bath in the legislature who, I’ll tell you some stories, but I don’t know, perhaps it ought not to be on this thing.

AL: Oh, it’s okay, unless you feel you don’t want to. We sort of -

RW: You can edit some, you can edit this out.

AL: We actually don’t take out what you say, we just make sure everything is accurate.

RW: Well, maybe I ought not to tell this. Shut it off for a minute.

AL: Sure.
Pause.

RW: I don’t like to tell bad stories about people. Let’s shut it off and I’ll tell -

(Pause. Story told with tape off and discussed. The following story was agreed to be recorded)

AL: You said Louis didn’t drive?

RW: Right, and at times he would get into a row with, he rode over with other Lewiston legislators, and he would get into an argument with them, so he wouldn’t want to ride with them. So he would call me. You know, he lived down in School Street there.

AL: Okay, I didn’t know.

RW: And I, he said, “I want to ride over with you today, Bob.” Okay. And he’d be up to the corner of School and Main Street, I’d pick him up, fine. One day he called up and said he’d like to have a ride, and it was snowy or icy or something and, this illustrates that nerve that he has, had. He said, “Well what car are you going to use?” I said, the Volkswagon. “Oh, God, no!” he said, Louis said, “Take the Buick, it’s awful bad driving.”

AL: Yeah, tell you what car to drive, and -

RW: Yeah. And, but one of the last times I saw him, Nellie and I went down to the shore, one of those shore dinner places. And I guess Louis was failing a little because I hadn’t noticed him, but suddenly he appeared at our table. And he said, “Boy, you look exactly like a very close friend of mine, Bob Wade from Auburn.” I said, “Louis, I am Bob Wade from Auburn.” He hadn’t expected to see me out of town.

AL: Right, out of place. So you were on friendly terms with him, but you also knew what he was all about and watched your back.

RW: Oh yeah, yeah, you know. No, the whole legislature was so friendly, and they weren’t. Of course where I was a stock and bond peddler, people would ask me about securities, and I did quite a little business. And interestingly enough, I think I did more business with Democrats than with the Republicans.

AL: Oh, really.

RW: And so there wasn’t partisan feeling then.

AL: That’s good. Do you feel the legislature worked better when it was less partisan?

RW: Oh, yes.

AL: Today you see a lot of sort of locked one against the other and -
RW: Yes, that guy who was speaker for so long I think developed that.

AL: John Martin?

RW: Hmm.

AL: What do you think of term limits?

RW: I’m of two minds of it, on it. I’m sorry that perhaps people don’t, the old rule of “turn the rascals out” should work, but it doesn’t. But, there again, now it’s become a career. It used to be a sacrifice. The first time I ran for the legislature, the first time I was elected to the legislature, I was surprised. I thought the pay was seven hundred dollars for the two years. I was pleasantly surprised it was eight hundred dollars.

AL: It’s a big change.

RW: Yeah, I think that problem, it seems as though every problem goes back to money. So, you didn’t have problems of term limits then, except someone like Jalbert who made it a career. But most people were making a sacrifice, and it was a sacrifice. I lost a lot of money one day over there. Well, I didn’t lose it because I, in those days there was a firm who underwrote bonds for hospitals and, but it was largely, well, if I was, underwrote bonds for Catholic hospitals. And Lewiston, being a Catholic town, I could sell the bonds. And there was an issue, and they sold out quickly, they’d come at noon and be gone. But there was an issue coming one day, and I was very busy I guess, although I was speaker assistant, I was a floor leader or assistant floor leader, and I couldn’t devote any time to it. Somebody said to me, “Where do you stand on this pay raise?” I says, I don’t care about it, I said, I’m losing more money today than the pay raise.

AL: You, probably more than most everybody in the world, have seen more happen with your own eyes over the last hundred years.

RW: Yes, well, everybody who was around at that time saw it, yeah. Automobiles.

AL: What was that like?

RW: One of the first ones, the first ones, a lot of them looked like a wagon. There was a man in my town, he was a shoe factory superintendent and quite a pompous guy, but he had an adopted son who was quite a good mechanic. And he had, was the, this man had bought an early automobile. Well, it was like a two-seated wagon, and the, in steering it, the man who did the steering sat on the back seat with a stick like a tiller controlled the front wheels. And this man, named Babcock, Hornet Babcock he was called -

AL: What was his first name?

RW: They called him Hornet; he was kind of a, like a hornet.
AL: Oh, okay.

RW: On a nice Sunday morning he liked to be driven up town to get his Sunday paper, and of course they went very slow. They would come back down the street, he would be sitting up reading the paper and his adopted son in the back running, on the back seat running the automobile. But of course the speeds were slower then, very slow then. As a matter of fact, my father bought a 1915 Ford in 1916. And he and I talked an awful lot about, I got my license in August, 1916, and we talked about the problem of speed to drive. We thought, we did a little, gave it some thought, and we concluded that fifteen miles an hour was rather slow, but that twenty miles an hour was rather fast, but about eighteen miles an hour was not an extreme.

AL: Isn’t that funny when you look back on it now.

RW: But they were dirt roads.

AL: Were cars, were automobiles common in 1916, or was your family sort of ahead of the times?

RW: Oh, no, they had become quite common by then. I mean, you could buy, a man could buy a Ford if he had a fairly good job. And my father, at around that time he was promoted from the office machinist to a management job, he could afford a car.

AL: Is there anything else that I haven’t asked you that you feel is important to talk about before we end today?

RW: I don’t think so. We’ve really covered quite a lot of ground.

AL: We have. No secrets to your living so long?

RW: Oh, no, it just happened. My mother lived to be ninety, my father lived to be seventy-eight. But my brother died at eighty, and Edith, his wife, died at about, she did not live for very long.

AL: Well, I thank you so much for your time. Did you have something else?

RW: Interestingly enough, Millie’s youngest sister, Dorothy, is, will be eighty next month, and they’re planning quite a family birthday party. And she was born in the Blaine House, and they’re going to have the party in the Blaine House. Governor King doesn’t live there you know, he lives down in Brunswick. And, but the Blaine House said they could put on a luncheon for up to twenty-two people, but for more than that they’d want to do a buffet.

AL: Oh, wonderful.

RW: I’m looking forward to that

AL: Do you still drive?
RW: No. I did up until last January or February. I apparently became quite anemic and, but I think I’m better now. The doctor thinks I’m better now.

AL: Well, thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

*End of Interview*