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Pert, Edwin H. oral history interview

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Interview with Edwin H. Pert by Stuart O'Brien and Rob Chavira

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Pert, Edwin H.

Interviewer

O'Brien, Stuart

Chavira, Rob

Date

July 24, 1998

Place

Bath, Maine

ID Number

MOH 036

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Biographical Note

Edwin H. Pert was an integral part of the Maine Democratic Party from the 1950s to the 1990s. Graduating from the University of Maine at Orono in 1954, Pert got involved with the gubernatorial campaign of Ed Muskie while still in college. Between 1955 and 1957, Pert served in the Army. He was involved in giving soldiers an opportunity to vote in the 1956 Presidential campaign. Upon his return to Maine in 1957, Pert became more involved with organizing the Maine Democratic Party. He became chair of the Sagadahoc County Democratic Committee, and also became Executive Director of the Maine Democratic Party. He ran for legislature from Bath in 1958. He made an unsuccessful attempt at the Maine Senate in 1960. In 1964, he became Secretary of the Senate in Maine, and in 1974, he became Clerk of the House. He remained in that capacity until 1991.

Scope and Content Note

The interview covers such topics as Maine politics in the 1940's and 1950's; big box on the ballots; Bath, Maine; young Democrats; political unrest in Maine in the early 1950s; Muskie's support from Republicans; the plan to make Frank Coffin Governor in 1956; 1954 Democratic state convention; 1954 Democratic platform; Muskie shifting party politics in Maine; registering

soldiers in the 1956 election; the Executive Council; serving in the legislature in 1958; losing a seat in 1960; serving as Secretary of the Senate; health of the Maine Democratic party in the 1960s; and serving as Clerk of the House.

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Edwin Pert: ... she worked in a mailing house preparing mailings and things of that nature. I'm the youngest of five children and the only one in my family who developed a deep political interest.

RC: So what were your parents' political affiliations?

EP: My father was a Republican and my mother was a nonvoter. She was naturalized, became an American citizen but she chose for a number of years not to vote.

RC: Did your father try to instill in you his Republican values?

EP: Actually I think my father was probably more understanding than I might have been had I been in his shoes. I think he was kind of dumbfounded by the intensity of my political interest at an early age. And I became politically interested in my, in high school, in the 1948 election in the Truman - Dewey election when I led the Truman forces among my classmates and others here at Morse High School in Bath. I also, my first political recollections were of the 1946 gubernatorial election when the Democratic candidate for governor was F. Davis Clark of Milo, who was a bit of an anomaly, because he was a WWII artillery captain. And he was, as it turned out to be, one of the few veterans of WWII along with Ed Muskie who came back and decided to get involved politically and try to make some significant changes here in Maine. Maine state government was very conservative. Maine's Democratic party was very weak. I think that in the 1944 election that maybe the Democratic candidate for governor got fifty-five thousand votes. He was soundly trounced. F. Davis Clark, in 1946, had some real difficulty getting his message out. The Maine Democratic party was weak and factionalized and had little or no money.

TOB: Who was the Republican? Was that Fred Payne?

EP: That was prior to Fred Payne. That was Horace Hildreth. Horace Hildreth was elected governor in 1944 and reelected, gubernatorial terms were two years then, reelected in 1946 when F. Davis Clark ran against him. And then in 1948 Fred Payne won a spirited five way Republican primary for the governorship, that was his second try; he had run in a Republican primary in 1940 against Sumner Sewall of Bath and some others. And Sumner Sewall of Bath who was president of the senate in 1940 won the Republican nomination and was handily elected governor in 1940. So Fred Payne came back and won that Republican primary in 1948. The Democrats ran Louis "Papa" Lausier, the long time mayor of Biddeford who was one of, well, he was the closest thing that we had in Maine to a political boss. He ran the town of, the city of Biddeford rather firmly. He had his own political machine and he was mayor for twenty, twenty-five years before he finally retired.

TOB: What was Louis, a Democrat?

EP: He was a Democrat, right, he was a Democrat and he ran against Fred Payne. There was a Portland skin specialist by the name of Adrian Scolton who ran for the U.S. Senate against Margaret Chase Smith and she trounced him badly, badly. He was a weak and ineffective campaigner. Papa Lausier was trying to do something. I can remember that campaign because I carried on a correspondence with him. And he, in one of his letters he said he was nauseated by the lack of organization or the unwillingness of those people who were Democrats to step forward and to give him a hand in his race for the governorship.

The [Democratic] Party was weak and it was weak because there were a number of things that worked against the party gaining any great strength. One of those things was straight ticket voting. And in Maine up until sometime in the '60s I guess, late '60s, our ballots were formed with all the Republican candidates in a row, all of the Democratic candidates in a row, and a big box up above. There were also little boxes beside each of the candidates for governor and each of the candidates for U.S. Senate, Congress, and all the way down the line. If you wished, you could just make one check mark at the top and vote, quote, "straight Republican" or "straight Democratic" and your vote counted for all of the candidates under the party label. This was very helpful to the Republicans because they, all they had to do was instruct people to make one check mark. And in later years they would emphasize the fact that you run the risk of spoiling your ballot if you vote a split ticket. In other words, if you jump back and forth. And that worked effectively for them for a number of elections. And it wasn't until 1964 when Barry Goldwater ran against Lyndon Johnson, and Maine as you know has a preponderance of elderly people, or it did at that time. And there were so many people who were, who for years had been afraid to split their ticket that they just moved over and voted a straight Democratic ticket rather than voting for Barry Goldwater.

And we had the unique situation of There was not a gubernatorial election that year, but we had the unique situation of in the legislature, of where, on the day before the election in 1964, there were twenty-nine Republican state senators and five Democratic state senators. And on the day after election there were twenty-nine Democratic senators and five Republican senators. And this was attributable to the significant number of straight Democratic ballots cast by people who traditionally were voting straight Republican.

TOB: Why were people afraid to split their tickets?

EP: That they would spoil their ballot.

STU: I don't understand exactly why that would spoil the ballot.

EP: Well, you run the risk of perhaps voting for candidates, voting for two candidates for the same office. That would invalidate . . .

TOB: Oh, I see what you're saying.

EP: ... those votes. And therefore, this is what they said, don't, because people were just accustomed to voting the straight Republican ticket.

RC: While growing up, you mentioned that Maine was overwhelmingly conservative, and also it was overwhelmingly Protestant. Was that what Bath was like also when you were growing up?

EP: Bath is an interesting town. Probably, I would say that it might be, that the religious makeup of Bath might mirror that of the State. And that, there are maybe what, thirty-five percent of the people in Maine back in those days I think were Catholic, and maybe sixty-five percent were Protestant.

RC: Was there a Franco American contingency or a Polish contingency in Bath at the time?

EP: Not, there were some, there were some Franco Americans in Bath. Not many Polish. And Bath was a, kind of a typical city. Back in those days you probably had more people who lived in Bath and worked at the Bath Iron Works.

RC: When did the Iron Works open?

EP: Well, it reopened I think in 1925. It was open during the First World War and then it came upon hard times, and then William S. "Pete" Newell kind of got things together right around 1925 and the Iron Works reopened. They got themselves some work and they started building ships in the private sector, then they got some good government work in the '30s. And then in the '40s they were launching a ship here every three weeks. They had full shifts going, three full shifts going every twenty-four hours. Money, lots of money around. Folks were making lots of money but there were not that many opportunities I guess to spend it on commodities because of the war effort. But Bath was a booming place.

RC: Given how conservative Maine was, what influenced you to become Democratic?

EP: Well, conservative Maine was. I guess Maine's legislature was conservative, and Maine state government was pretty conservative as well. I just kind of thought that there might be some real benefits to Maine from having a healthy two party system. I mean, that's one of the major concerns that I had. In other words, that the Republicans were free to do whatever they wanted to do.

RC: And you felt this way from the inception of your interest in politics?

EP: I think so, yeah, I think that's a . . .

RC: Even in high school?

EP: In high school, yeah, in high school I can remember writing letters to the editor and complaining about how the Republican majority in Augusta was just not aware of the fact that the minority party had some rights, too. For example, in the '40s there was one time when there was not a single Democrat on the appropriations committee of the legislature. And granted, the Maine Democratic party had some problems; we had elected a Democratic governor in 1932 and reelected the governor in 1934. But after 1938 things truly fell apart within the Maine Democratic Party and there were times in the 1940s where if we'd elected every Democrat who was running for the legislature, we still wouldn't have had a majority. We were down to having twenty-three members of a hundred and fifty-one member body as Democrats and the rest were Republicans. And there were perhaps slightly more than that when Ed Muskie came back in 1946 and ran for the legislature and was elected from Waterville, and then of course reelected in '48 and reelected in '50. But they were a small and loyal band and many of them were from the cities, Westbrook and Biddeford and Lewiston and Old Town and the St. John Valley. And

many of them from pockets of Franco American strength, and those folks tended to be Democrats.

Occasionally a city like Bath would elect a Democrat to office, maybe like once every twenty years. Dom Tardiff from Lewiston was elected to the legislature from Bath, a Democrat, in 1938, but it almost had to happen when the Republicans were fighting among themselves and when the Democrats put someone forward that Republicans felt comfortable in supporting. Democrats in the '40s and '50s and even today, both political parties in Maine face a challenge in getting qualified people to seek office. It's very difficult to recruit candidates for the legislature in many areas of the state, but this has traditionally been difficult.

RC: So you became a Democrat specifically because you thought it was democratically healthy to have a two party system. You didn't feel particularly inclined to agree with certain issues the Democratic Party put forward?

EP: Well, the Democratic Party in those days, it wasn't until the mid fifties that the Democrats were able to articulate issues. Back in the '40s many of the Democrats in the legislature felt that maybe the thing to do was to be even more conservative than the Republicans in hopes of gaining public support by keeping taxes down. I mean, tax and spend is something that you folks hear about as young people, but tax and spend issues were involved in elections in previous decades all the way back. But the thing was that it was apparent that Maine had some serious problems, infrastructure problems. Maine had some serious problems because we weren't retaining young people. Young people, as soon as they got out of school, would go off somewhere else because we didn't have the kind of economic development that would provide jobs, challenging jobs for young people. So you had the brain drain, and many of the people who might have voted to make changes in Maine just left Maine, left Maine to make their life somewhere else. There were many people who stayed here because Maine is a beautiful state, it's a great state in which to live, lots and lots of people.

RC: Back in high school, how did your political interest begin? Were you involved in a lot of extracurricular activities?

EP: I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities, and the political thing during election year was a part of it. And a couple of years after the 1948 election I had decided that I would like to know more about what was going on and be a part of what was going on. So I knew that there were, prior to the state conventions of the political parties in March, there were in February local caucuses. So I decided, I got myself all excited to go to the Democratic caucus which was noticeable, it was posted in the newspapers. So I went to the city hall, I walked in, and there were two Democrats there and I was the third one. And that was the extent of the existence of a political organization at that time. Pretty humble beginnings. And this was duplicated all over the state because there just was not the kind of leadership available to help overcome all of the built-in advantages that the Republicans had.

Another advantage they [Republicans] had was that back in those days municipal officials were elected on a partisan basis, including town clerks and city clerks. And in effect, in many of these small towns, the Republican caucus before the town meeting, when they would select the slate of

officials to be voted on, that was in fact the election because that slate was put up at the town meeting. And so you had three Republican selectmen and a Republican town clerk and whatever because there were not Democrats stepping forward to run for office.

The real action for Maine voters came in the primary. And sometimes even misguided Democratic workers suggested to other Democrats that they enroll as Republicans so that they could vote for the weaker Republican candidate in the primary so that the Democratic candidate in the fall might have an opportunity to defeat that candidate. Misguided, yes. But it happened, it just happened.

RC: As a young man how would you character-, oftentimes folks, as they become more mature and more learned, they become more moderate as well. Would you characterize your political ideals as different than now, when you were in high school were you more radical or more conservative or just trying to find stuff out?

EP: I was trying to find stuff out, I think. I was trying to find stuff out.

RC: Do you remember any people who were particularly influential to you in developing a sense of political self?

EP: Oh, yes, yes, yes. After I went to that caucus, I mean I must have been an awful pest because here I was full of vim and vigor and wanting to get things done and let's have rallies and let's do this and let's do that. And these poor downtrodden Democrats who hadn't elected anybody to office from Bath in a decade or more and who hadn't seen statewide candidates that they could get truly excited about in a long time. What happened in 1950 was that Lucia Cormier, who came from Rumford, as did Ed Muskie, who had been serving in the legislature, was convinced to run for Congress from the first district against Bob Hale who was seventy some odd years old. And she waged an aggressive campaign and this got Democrats in this area and other areas in the first district kind of excited for the first time in a number of years. And a fellow by the name of Jackie Maloney from Lewiston, John J. Maloney, Jr., ran for Congress from Maine's second district. And so this was an early indication that some of the people who were traditionally Republican in Maine were willing to take a good look at qualified Democratic candidates.

And so it was, for me as a senior in high school, or I had just graduated from high school, it was a very exciting time and these folks, Lucia Cormier and Earl Grant who ran for governor that year; Earl Grant was a former Republican who had some problems with Fred Payne. He'd been a close Fred Payne supporter. And he renounced his Republican affiliation and became a Democrat. [He] wasn't immediately welcomed by many Democrats, but nevertheless he did wage a . . . He had some money to spend and he was able to get himself a team of people to help him and he made some impact here I think during the pre-Muskie time, a positive impact.

RC: What college did you go to?

EP: University of Maine.

RC: For undergrad?

EP: Yes.

RC: And what did you study?

EP: Political science.

TOB: At Orono?

EP: At Orono.

RC: Were there any people there that, well, what did you do there? Did you get involved also?

EP: Yes, I became, well, with these folks in Bath, as a result of being active in the caucus, or attending the caucus, a fellow by the name of Harry Thibeault who was Mr. Democrat in Sagadahoc county, elderly gentleman, he started taking me to Democratic state committee meetings and this was a real eye opener. They also invited me to go to the Democratic state convention, and that was where I first met Ed Muskie was at the Democratic state convention in 1950.

RC: And how old were you, in what year were you in college?

EP: I was sixteen, maybe seventeen.

RC: What was your impression of him then?

EP: I was impressed. I met a lot of folks at that convention and, you know, it was just, for me it was wicked exciting and it was a great time. I met a lot of men and women whose names I'd seen in the paper and some were members of the legislature and some held positions within the party and so forth.

RC: So this experience going to the Democratic state committee meetings just . . .

(Both speaking at once.)

EP: Yeah, it fueled my interest. I became active and I went to the University of Maine and we organized the first Young Democrats Club in the history of the university. And then I, we tried to organize Young Democratic clubs around the state, so, I didn't have a car so I used to hitchhike around the state to . . . And what I found of course was that you had, through the Democratic state committee, was that there were people all over the state who had some interest in trying to encourage young people to become active in the Democratic party.

RC: Now, were you just trying to get your feet wet anywhere possible, or did you have any personal aspirations?

EP: Not at that time. I was just interested in helping to elect Democratic candidates.

RC: Did you want to teach or anything like that after college (*unintelligible word*)?

EP: Yes, that was one of the things I had in mind. As a matter of fact, after I got my degree I went back for a semester and picked up enough educational credits to teach, but I wound up . . .

RC: At the high school level?

EP: Yes.

TOB: How successful was your campaign to organize young Maine Democrats into clubs?

EP: Moderately successful. But the thing was, I mean, what we really decided was, there were enough positions within the regular Democratic Party that needed people, that you should be putting anybody who's old enough to vote in the regular party organization and not setting up another organization.

RC: Were there any particularly influential professors who brought to light issues for you that helped you develop?

EP: Yes, Professor Gerry Grady, and he wound up, he was a, he had a relationship with Muskie and he joined the ticket in 1958 I think as a candidate for Congress. Or maybe, yeah, I think it was '58 or '60, somewhere around that time.

RC: You graduated college around '52?

EP: Fifty-four.

RC: Fifty-four, so right as the gubernatorial campaign for Muskie was coming up.

EP: Right.

RC: Did you support that campaign, did you have a, in any way as a volunteer or?

EP: Yeah, although I was working in Scarborough at the time, I was chair of the Sagadahoc County Democratic committee. So I ran back and forth between there and here as we tried to get organized.

RC: And what were your responsibilities to the committee?

EP: Well, county committee was, it was the county Democratic organization but we just tried to do the best we could in terms of raising money and whatever, and the Bath Democratic organization as well. I can remember that we raised some money which, one of the . . . Let me just say this, one of the things that worked against Democrats in the '40s and early '50s was that in addition to having significantly more, significantly higher numbers than we did, the

Republicans had the money to do the job. And in the primaries in particular the system was such that a city like Bath, for example, in a Republican primary for governor, if there are two or three candidates, let's take 1952 when the big split in the Republican party came. That several months before the primary election an organizer for Burt Cross, for example, would come into this area and seek out what you'd have to call Republican ward workers. And a Republican ward worker was somebody who liked politics and who had fifty or sixty friends that he or she could influence on behalf of a Republican candidate in the primary. And these folks would be paid, they'd become paid workers, this is back in the days before any significant kind of election expenses reporting. And so these folks would be on the payroll and they would be going out and trying to convince people to vote for their candidate in the Republican primary. So they would process second absentee ballots, they would haul voters to the polls and so forth, and they were paid workers so there was some motivation there for them to help get these Republicans elected. And then in the fall campaigns they would be mobilized as well.

RC: How do you think Muskie brought about the Democratic resurgence in the early '50s?

EP: I think in the early '50s that it was, in the early '50s it was apparent that there was some political unrest here in Maine. And it was a question of whether or not, well there actually was little hope that the Democrats were going to be able to respond to that political unrest. You had a Republican primary in 1952 for governor that was absolutely bruising and went right down to the wire. And then after the election Governor Cross, a Republican, didn't try to patch things up with the supporters of the candidate that he defeated. As a matter of fact, he wasn't interested in seeing them at the governor's office, wasn't interested in seeing them in the governor's mansion. He just was not going to forget that primary and this irritated many, many of the Republicans and they were white hot angry by the time that 1954 came along.

RC: Muskie just simply couldn't have won if he hadn't drawn and persuaded Republicans to vote for him.

EP: That's right.

RC: Was it simply a default situation, as opposed to Cross they voted for Muskie, or what charm or charisma . . . ?

EP: Oh, no, it wasn't just default. I mean, it was a, Muskie was a, Muskie already had a state wide network before he got into the 1954 race, but it was a very informal kind of network.

TOB: What do you mean by network?

EP: Well, he had been, he spent a year as state director of the OPS [Office of Price Stabilization] and so he was traveling all over the state. So people had a chance to be exposed to him, people who were leaders in little spheres of influence, to see that, here was a Democrat who was a Democrat of a different breed. Here was a Democrat who was thoughtful, here was a Democrat who was presentable, here's a Democrat who was bright, here's a Democrat who could communicate. And if you look back at the different Democratic candidates for governor

over the previous fifteen or sixteen or eighteen years before 1954, many of them were lacking in a number of those attributes.

TOB: Back then in those early days of the, we'll call it the revival, it was just a small group of people trying to really make a drastic change in the face of Maine politics. How optimistic were people that they were going to be successful, and how did you, what, tell us a little bit more about how you went about, especially in '54, getting people to vote Democratic?

EP: Well, I'll tell you, we were pretty green because we didn't know how to win elections. We didn't know how to win elections. But we did know that you had to raise money, we did know that candidates had to get out there. We knew that, like here in Bath, we wound up raising a couple hundreds bucks. I don't know how we did it but we were having a Democratic rally up here and we thought, at this level we said, well, gee, if we can raise a couple hundred bucks we can have this rally broadcast over a state wide radio network. And back in those days radio was an important part of campaigning. Well, fortunately Frank Coffin called us and said, that's great but what would even be greater was if we had that two hundred dollars so that we could use it to buy some television time because that two hundred dollars would be much more effectively spent on television. And so we gladly gave up the two hundred dollars. We had our rally and had a wonderful time, but they took the two hundred dollars and used it to buy TV time.

RC: Now, if my research serves me correct, Muskie was not supposed to become governor. It was actually Coffin, or they were vying to get a little bit of leverage so that in '56 Coffin could run for . . .

EP: That's exactly right. Well, when you figure that we had Democratic state convention early in March and the filing deadline I think was April 15th for candidates for the June primary. So going in and coming out of that convention, we didn't have a candidate for governor. And that convention was in Lewiston and I was going back to Orono because I was still in school in Orono. And so I bummed a ride with Ed Muskie from Lewiston to Waterville, and then I was on my own from Waterville. But at that time he talked about how there was the possibility that he might run or there was the possibility that Perry Furbush of Palmyra might run. And I think there was at least one other candidate, prospective candidate, and they were still talking about what to do to make sure that we had a candidate. But things were, because there was so much unrest, and because Burt Cross was doing a wonderful job of permanently fracturing the Maine Republican party, that many Democrats started to step forward, encouraged by Frank Coffin and encouraged by Ed Muskie. So, yeah, you're right, I mean the thinking was 1956. None of us at that state convention in 1954 could ever imagine that we were about to win an election in the fall.

TOB: What do you remember about that '54 convention? Can you tell us a little bit more about it?

RC: The atmosphere, the buzz.

EP: Well, I mean, it was a relatively good convention. Even though we didn't have any candidates for major office, it was a relatively good convention. We still didn't have a full time

state, we didn't have a state headquarters, we didn't have Don Nicoll as an executive secretary or executive director because that all came out of the convention. But the presence of Frank Coffin and some of the others at the convention and the willingness of the warring factions of party workers to back someone like Frank Coffin for state chairman, signaled that there was something in the wind. That was an indicator because, I mean Maine Democrats spent so much time in the '40s and early '50s fighting. They spent much more energy fighting against one another than they did fighting the Republicans. You know, and there were some patronage to be had, there were postmasterships, there were federal positions to be had, and so you had people fighting over those. And you could get an awful lot of Democrats active in a community when there was a postmastership at stake. But as Ed Muskie once said, what you get is, at the end of it once you've made your choice of who the postmaster's going to be through the political selection process, you've got nine people who are bitterly disappointed and drop out and one ingrate.

RC: What do you think was so personally appealing about Muskie to so many people? Because my assumption is that if it hadn't been him, then it probably would have, the campaign of '54 probably would have made an impact and '56 still would have been the goal. But something about Muskie drew everyone . . .

EP: Yes, yeah. Muskie the man, Muskie, what showed through, the sincerity, the depth of conviction, all those things that you may have read about. Stories that Peter Damborg wrote on the campaign trail, about Muskie mesmerizing people, were true. But there was so much political turmoil at that time, that was helpful in terms of getting started, but then the excitement started to grow and he was packing . . . Democratic organizations sprang up in communities that hadn't had Democratic organizations. Sometimes it was just a handful of people but they were able to pack grange halls with people for baked bean suppers and things like that to hear Muskie. And when you figure that in 19-, I think it was in 1954, that Muskie was late in getting into the race but even then there were hundreds of Republicans who wrote his name in in the primary, in the Republican primary, as a protest against Burt Cross.

TOB: Do you remember any specific speeches that stand out in your mind, any specific instances that demonstrate your point about Muskie's charisma or Muskie's stumping ability?

EP: Yeah, the speech that he gave in Rangeley during the campaign, and I think that's mentioned in . . .

TOB: Were you there?

EP: I was not there. That was mentioned in Don Hansen's book.

TOB: Everyone always mentions that speech.

EP: Yeah, that speech, and of course it was well reported and then, and Damborg talked about it after many times. But, I mean, I remember Muskie speaking at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner at the old Samoset Hotel in Rockland, and I remember, it was in 1957 at the J.J. dinner when he eulogized Paul Fullam. Paul Fullam was a Colby College professor that they . . .

TOB: (*Unintelligible phrase*) run for senator, right?

EP: He did run for senator, he ran for senator in 1954, yeah, in the '54 election. You know, he had the ability to get the audience right in the palm of his hand.

RC: Did he speak often of his upbringing and so forth?

EP: He men-, yes, he mentioned his upbringing, yes he did.

RC: I'll tell you, one of the more interesting things to me is that oftentimes, you know, he grew up socio-economically deprived in a lot of ways and his father was an immigrant and a tailor. Oftentimes that seems to me to produce conservative ideals in a lot of ways, the I made it sort of mentality. Muskie didn't have that at all. He wanted to give what he had to other people. Did that shine through in the way he spoke and so forth?

EP: Yes.

TOB: Here's one for you, in that '54 platform that was partially made up from polling, do you remember any of the planks, any of the things that this new Democratic Party put down on paper as being the platform, any of the specific issues?

EP: Yeah, clean water.

TOB: Even, back then even?

EP: Even back then. But, you know, that was unusual back then. That was unusual back then. Actually having the involvement of anyone outside of a handful of party officials on either side of the aisle, it was unusual. And so, I mean those questionnaires were most effective, most effective in terms of the development of the platform. And it was a great stroke because the Democratic Party had not been known in Maine as being the party of ideas and hadn't necessarily been know as a party of responsiveness. And this was a major example if you will.

RC: Tell me about the atmosphere surrounding the party when he actually won.

EP: Well, . . .

RC: Was it nervousness, or . . . ?

EP: Well, of course, you know, there were many people who said, well, what do we do now? But the euphoria lasted for quite awhile, particularly with the hard core Democratic Party workers who had been working for essentially what was a lost cause. I mean, I can remember in 1950 what a wonderful time I had working in Lucia Cormier's campaign and how the local newspaper wrote, the city editor wrote a column and said, too bad, Eddie, you're wasting all that time. I mean, as though the Democrats were just never going to win any elections and it was always going to be Maine, the Republican state, the rock-ribbed Republican state.

RC: Did having a Democrat in the governor's office really immediately shift the color of Maine politics?

EP: Oh yes, oh yes, and also the fact that Muskie from day one as a governor was very accessible to the press. Not only to the print media but also to the TV, and TV was just beginning to come into its own back in those days. And it was difficult with TV because back in those days they were using the Orecon cine-voices and those things so that you didn't have immediate video that you could rush and put on, and they didn't have mobile units where they could transmit stuff. But Muskie from day one as governor was extremely accessible and not only within the State House on a daily basis for press briefings, but also as he traveled around the state did all he could do to accommodate the press.

RC: We're just going to turn over . . .

(Tape stopped.)

Resume on same side.

EP: I mean, I think I probably have one of those questionnaire somewhere, . . .

RC: Really.

EP: But, I'm not sure that I do, but it was, the issues were, you know, the issues were international relations, natural resources, human services, agriculture and forestry. There were some agriculture issues in terms of bulk milk containers and things that had the farmers all over the state steamed up that Maine Democrats took a stand on. There were . . .

TOB: You said international issues, international relations?

EP: International relations, yes. Where do Maine Democrats stand in terms of issues of international importance.

TOB: Really?

EP: Yes, well, because congressional candidates and senatorial candidates run on national issues so there are some.

TOB: What was the milk container issue?

EP: It was, it related to, and I'm, my memory is failing me except that I can, it was related to bulk milk containers, the way that milk is picked up from the farms and trans- . . .

End of Side One

Side Two

EP: I joined the Army in 1955. I went to ROTC summer camp in the summer of 1953, Fort George G. Meade in Maryland, and then was lucky enough to get a two-week assignment as an intern at the Democratic National Committee. And then in 1955, June of 1955, I went on active duty, went to Fort George G. Meade, not to Fort Meade, to Fort Benning, and went through the basic infantry officer's course, came out a second lieutenant, came home for a month, got shipped off to Korea for sixteen months.

RC: Now, was this an obligation that you had already committed to in '53, to join for active service (*unintelligible phrase*)?

EP: Yeah, right, I think I signed on in '52.

RC: Were you still as enthusiastic when '55 came around and you'd already had all this political experience in the '54 campaign and everything?

EP: Was I as enthusiastic about going in the Army or as enthusiastic about . . .

(*Speaking at once.*)

RC: As enthusiastic about going in the Army as you were in '53 or so?

TOB: Were you enthusiastic in '53?

EP: Thank you, Tuck. It's all, it was a commitment, it was a commitment that I made and that I felt appropriate at that time, so.

RC: What was your (*unintelligible word*)?

EP: 5402, infantry unit leader. However, I got lucky when I got to Korea. I'd been there two, three weeks in a heavy mortar company and I got a call one day from the regimental commander's office, and the regimental commander wanted to see me right away. And I went up and he told me he was concerned about the morale of the troops and that the, our regiment was not getting appropriate coverage in the division newspaper, in the Army Times or the Pacific Stars and Stripes. And he had had the unit personnel service review the records of all of the officers under his command. And up popped that Lt. Pert had been publicity director for the Maine Democratic State Committee and he was looking for someone who could help generate coverage. And so I became the public information officer for the 32nd infantry regiment in the shadow of the 38th parallel in Korea. So we did lots of work with the Army Times, Pacific Stars and Stripes, and The Bayonet, the division newspaper. He also made me soldier voting officer and we opened a big voting headquarters in the shadow of the 38th parallel and . . .

TOB: Voting for . . . ?

EP: Getting soldiers to vote in the 1956 presidential election.

RC: You really took your political affiliations with you.

EP: Yes, my political, although, of course, you know, you have to keep them under cover when you're in the service of the Army, but we had to, we did get a tremendous response from the soldiers.

RC: Did it change you at all, politically, being over there?

EP: No, it changed me in some ways, yes, but nothing that I want to talk about really.

RC: Now, when did you come home?

EP: Came home in the spring of 1957.

RC: And what did you do upon returning?

EP: What did I do? I went to work for the Bath Daily Times, which was a forerunner of the Times Record. The Bath Daily Times was a, had a circulation of three thousand, the Brunswick Record had a circulation of about five thousand at that time; in later years they combined.

TOB: Was Brunswick bigger than Bath population-wise?

EP: No, not at that time. But because it was a weekly that served Topsham and Lisbon and Freeport and Harpswell and so forth.

RC: Did you cover politics for the newspaper?

EP: I did some writing, yeah, I did some writing. Somewhere I've got some clippings of political stories.

RC: Was it editorial in nature, or?

EP: Yeah, I was a reporter and they also asked me if I would be the first advertising manager the paper ever had. It was one of those papers where they didn't need an advertising manager because it was the only show in town and folks who wanted to advertise things brought in their ads. But, so, one day in 1957, and of course I came back to continuing to be active in the Maine Democratic party.

RC: What did you do?

EP: Just volunteer stuff, volunteer stuff. And the, Bob Huse, who was the successor to Don Nicoll as executive director of the Maine Democratic party, had the opportunity to go to Augusta to join Ed Muskie's staff at the State House. And I was on the state committee at that time I think, no, I guess I couldn't have been. Anyways, I was going to state committee meetings, but . . . Anyways the opportunity presented itself and I applied for the position of executive director and was chosen.

RC: What year was this?

EP: Nineteen fifty-seven, September.

TOB: How much contact did you have with Ed Muskie?

EP: At that time?

TOB: Yeah.

EP: Not a great deal.

RC: Did you ever see him socially or in a personal atmosphere as opposed to a political one?

EP: Not much, not much.

TOB: No golf or anything? Well I suppose at that time he wasn't really playing golf.
(*Unintelligible phrase.*)

EP: Really? No, I was more of a grassroots activist and, as I look at my political experiences in those days. I did decide to seek public office and in 1958 ran for the House, from Bath.

RC: Skipping back, what were your responsibilities as the executive director?

EP: Oh, well, helping to perfect the organization of the Democratic Party in Maine.

RC: And I imagine you had much more association with Muskie at that point, once you became ...

EP: Some, yes, but he had his staff at the State House. I worked closely with John Donovan who eventually went on to become his long time aide.

RC: And ran against Stan Tupper.

EP: And ran against Stan Tupper. So I was working under John Donovan.

RC: You ran in '58?

EP: '58.

RC: For legislature?

EP: Legislature.

RC: And you won?

EP: And I won.

RC: And what were some of the issues connected, what were your, in campaigning, what issues were you . . . ?

EP: Governmental reform. By the way, that's getting back to, yeah, I'm sure in our platform in 1954 was governmental reform. Such things as, which were pretty far out at that time, but annual sessions of the legislature, elimination of the executive council, combining the two elections. You remember that in 1954 Ed Muskie was elected governor . . .

TOB: In September?

EP: ... in September.

TOB: The executive, let's talk about the executive council. Everyone always says how they wanted to get rid of the executive council and everyone was always against the executive council. When did they actually get rid of the executive council?

EP: We got rid of the executive council in 1965, . . .

TOB: Sixty-five, when . . . ?

EP: ... when we gained control of both branches of the legislature.

TOB: Curtis was governor?

TOB: Reed.

EP: No, Reed.

RC: So on, tell me about some of your responsibilities once you were on the legislature.

EP: In the legislature? Goodness. Well, what do you mean, responsibilities?

RC: Tell us about your day.

EP: My day, my day. Well, that's a long time ago, but that's back in the days when legislators were paid seven hundred dollars a year for their service.

TOB: Was it more of a part time position?

EP: Oh, very much, very, citizen legislature. So I attended sessions, did my committee work. I was still executive director of the Maine Democratic party so that I had my responsibilities there and that meant for longer days because, in order to fulfill my responsibilities there. Sometimes I wasn't at headquarters until one or two or three in the afternoon and then . . .

RC: Was the executive director position a full time position?

EP: It was a full time position, so you had responsibilities in terms of fund raising and fund raising planning and in terms of Jefferson-Jackson dinner and convention planning, and editing The Maine Democrat, and making sure that the caucuses were held on a biennial basis, traveling around the state to service county committees, committees in the metropolitan areas.

RC: You served on the election law committee?

EP: I did.

RC: And the Civil War committee? Tell me a little bit about those two.

EP: The election laws committee, we did a revision of the election laws. The Civil War thing was a Civil War centennial commission and it was the brainchild and baby of one of my constituents. And so I spent a lot of time shepherding the legislation through and then serving on the commission in deference to my constituent.

RC: How long were you in the legislature?

EP: One glorious term. In retrospect, I know something about the impetuosity and the impatience of youth. And the state senate seat covering Sagadahoc County came open and somehow or other I managed to convince myself that if I didn't run for it in 1960 that I probably would never ever have another opportunity in my life to seek the state senate seat from Sagadahoc County. Well, which of course wasn't the case, but anyways, when you're young you sometimes look at things this way. So I decided to seek the senate seat. It was a wonderful campaign.

RC: Who did you run against?

EP: I ran against a fellow by the name of Howard Mayo who was in the House from Bath as well. Back in those days there were two legislators from Bath at large, and in the 1958 election I think I received twenty-one hundred votes and I think Howard received seventeen hundred and a couple of other candidates received lesser amounts. So when Howard announced he was going to run for the senate I said, well, why not. Nineteen sixty election, seventy-two percent of Maine's eligible voters came out to vote . . .

TOB: Seventy-two? Wow.

EP: Seventy-two. That was the year of the Kennedy - Nixon election and there were some concerns out there in the pucker brush about religion, yes, a Catholic president and . . .

RC: Do you feel as though you were part of a backlash maybe?

EP: I think so. I mean, I got more votes than any Democratic candidate for the state senate had ever received and I still got defeated.

RC: Tell me about some of the specific issues that were involved with that campaign?

EP: It's too far back. Too far back for me to remember that.

TOB: Sagadahoc County is mostly Republican?

EP: Traditionally Republican, and yet Carlton Reed, Jr. of Woolwich was subsequently elected to the senate as a Democrat, and by, not, and he won in 1964 as well, and became president of the senate. And that was when I was elected secretary of the senate, I got membership to the senate. So I worked two years with Bud Reed.

RC: When you lost the election, did it turn you away from politics at all?

EP: It, yeah, it tended to. I cooled my ardor for seeking public office, although I ran two years later for county treasurer and was defeated and that's the last time that I sought partisan elective office. I've been selectman in the town of Georgetown both in the early '70s and the early '90s.

RC: Now you say in '64 you were elected by the people in the senate as . . .

EP: Secretary of the senate, which is the chief administrative officer in the senate.

RC: And tell me about your day there.

EP: Very busy days, very busy days there. You are the senate administrator and you put together a staff of people who actually do the operation of the senate. From the pages and sergeants at arms to the document clerk to the folks who put together the daily calendar and actually handle and stamp the bills and deal with the media and deal with the thirty-four members of the senate, deal with the public. Great opportunity to shift gears any number of times in the course of a day, and a very satisfying position.

RC: Never boring?

EP: Never boring, and the nice part of this all was that eight . . . By the way, two years later when there was no presidential election, unfortunately many of the members who had been elected to the senate in 1964 . . . Well, in 1964 in that election, many members who were elected to the senate realized immediately after the election that the reason that they had been elected was the impact of the presidential election and straight ticket voting. However, over a period of months, many of them tended to forget that. And so that two years later they did not organize the kinds of campaigns that would be necessary to get reelected and so, many of them were not reelected.

RC: When you were administrator of the senate, you must, Muskie was already in the senate, so . . .

EP: He was in Washington. He was in Washington, I was in Augusta.

RC: Oh, I see.

EP: Okay.

RC: How did you become involved with the Bath chamber of commerce?

EP: You mean now? Or when?

RC: Now.

EP: Now. Just because I'm retired. I saw a need and I stepped up and here I am, guys.

TOB: Getting back to the late '60s, what was the atmosphere in the Democratic Party? And did you still, and a follow up question, did you still have close ties with people like Frank Coffin and some of the people that were involved, Don Nicoll, early on in that first revival back in '54?

EP: No, no, not in the '60s. In the '60s I was in my own element, if you will, active with the party organization and with statewide party leadership, but the Coffins and the Nicolls had moved on. I mean, I was involved with them as executive director because Coffin was a gubernatorial nominee and Don Nicoll was running that campaign. Muskie had already moved on to Washington, so I was not in close contact with Muskie, but more with Muskie's staff. But then in the '60s, I mean, a whole new generation of leaders and shakers and movers and doers had emerged within the Maine Democratic Party. And so those are the people that I was involved with as secretary of the senate and then on the state committee. I became a member of the Democratic state, I floated in and out of the Democratic state committee in the past forty years . . .

TOB: How would you characterize the health of the Democratic Party in the mid to late '60s?

EP: Got better every day. Got better every day. But, you see, once Muskie was elected governor and proved to Maine people that a Democrat could accept responsibility and that the Democrats in the legislature, even though they were in the minority . . . I mean, they ran circles around the Republicans because the Republicans spent four years while Muskie was governor trying to put roadblocks in his way. Executive council members laid awake nights trying to do that, and Republican leadership in the senate. And it really wasn't until the latter part of, well, it wasn't until Muskie's second term when he and Bob Haskell developed a relationship. Bob Haskell was the president of the senate, that they were able to get some good things down in harmony and working in concert with one another.

And then, I mean the Ken Curtis days, the prologue to the Ken Curtis days were the two years that the Democrats controlled the legislature. And the Democrats, I mean, the headlines, the editorials in the paper, the awesome task of, on the day after the 1964 election, the awesome task of the Democrats is putting together a team of people to operate the legislature. You know, so that the legislature doesn't come to a grinding halt because it's a, I mean, it hadn't happened since at the turn of the century. And all of the political mechanics were Republicans. I mean, if you were a Democrat you didn't get a, there was no way you were going to get a job working for

the legislature. And back in those days they were just beginning to provide staff for legislative leadership. As a matter of fact, the year I served in the house, 1958, was the first time that there was a house Democratic office in the legislature.

RC: When you lost the election in '60, why did you decide to resign from the state committee, the Democratic state committee?

EP: I was burnt out.

RC: Just on politics in general after campaigning?

EP: Yes, I was burnt out, I was ready to move on to other things.

TOB: Did you follow Muskie's career as a senator during the '60s?

EP: Yes.

TOB: You did. Well, how would you, let's see what I want to ask you, how do you judge or how do reflect on his contributions to the state of Maine during that time? The '60s were a pretty turbulent era. And this is more from a secondhand perspective, being involved in Maine politics, the Maine political scene, and looking to Muskie in Washington, did you try, did you seem, did you have much influence as the Democratic Party in Maine on Muskie's decision making processes?

EP: I don't know, I mean, I really don't know whether we did or not. I wasn't in a position to make a judgment.

RC: In '67 you became clerk of the house.

EP: In '74.

RC: In '74. And how does one become clerk of the house?

EP: What I did was I had a Volkswagen and the day after election, when I found out the Democrats gained control of the house, I went to the State House and got the names and addresses of every member. And I hired a lady that I knew and I dictated a letter to her and sent a letter to every Democrat. And told them, every Democratic member elected to the house, and told them that, who I was and what my background was and that I'd been secretary of the senate. And I that I thought I could make a contribution as clerk of the house and I would appreciate their consideration and that I would be in touch with them within the next three weeks. Because the members of the house were going to vote three weeks later, the Democrats, on who the clerk of the house was. Then I got in my Volkswagen with my list and I started driving around the state and when I got close enough to Rumford I stopped and used a pay phone and tried to reach the representative elect from Rumford. And I said, I'm in the area, I'd love to see you, and these people were more than happy to see me, and so I went systematically, one, one, one. I was a babbling idiot at the end of three weeks. I was tired and whatever, but . . .

RC: And how long were you clerk?

EP: Seventeen and a half years.

TOB: The '72 presidential election, did you think Muskie had a chance of winning that election?

EP: Early on I did, early on I did. But I started, I don't know whether it was when McGovern got in the race and made the statement, or was quoted as making the statement that, look, Muskie doesn't have this thing buttoned up, he hasn't done the things that have to be done in order to tie this up.

RC: Tell me about a day in the life of when you were clerk in the house. Is this similar to being administrator of the senate?

EP: Yeah, only much more frantic in that you've got a hundred and fifty-one members of the house. But some great, great days. Exciting. I looked forward to going to work every day. Not every day was a picture perfect day, but I looked forward to going to work every day. Great opportunity to do some things in terms of opening up the legislative process and giving the public a greater opportunity to know and understand what's going on and to work with the media.

RC: What more can you genuinely ask for, to be happy to go to work.

EP: Huh?

RC: I said, what more can you genuinely ask for?

EP: That's right. And also, the opportunity to advise some impetuous and impatient young legislators who wanted to run for the senate after their first term that maybe it won't be the end of the world if you don't run this time around.

TOB: Looking back, what do you think were Muskie's biggest contributions to the state of Maine?

EP: Helping Maine people to understand that change was possible and that Maine people could have a better life. And that Maine could change without being spoiled. You know, orderly change, orderly change.

RC: I just have a couple more questions for you. This is more of a side note, but I wrote it down and I'd like to ask you, how did you become involved with the Pine Tree Society for Crippled Children, on the board?

EP: Oh, I've had another life, and that life has been with voluntary health agencies.

RC: Outside of politics completely.

EP: Outside of politics completely. But I have to say this, because as executive director of the Maine Democratic Party, I networked with people all over the state and knew people literally in every, almost every one of the villages and cities and towns. And the opportunity came, I was approached by the National Foundation of the March of Dimes in 1961 and they asked me if I would be their field representative here in Maine. And so I accepted that position. And we organized twenty-two separate fund-raising drives throughout the state to benefit the March of Dimes, but I also did all kinds of administrative and public health education work and things of that nature. Left here and went to Massachusetts with them.

As a matter of fact, I was with them in Rhode Island in 1964, at the time that the senate went democratic, and it was Ed Schlick who tracked me down and said, have you heard? And I said, yes, Lyndon Johnson carried Maine. And he said, no, have you heard? And I said, heard what? And he said, the legislature went Democratic, the house and the senate. And we're looking for people up here for, we're looking for people who have legislative experience and administrative experience and would you come up and take a look around?

So I came up the next weekend, next two weekends, looked around, and that was when I decided I wanted to run for secretary of the senate. At that time the secretary of the senate's position wasn't full time, it was sessional only. So Dean Fisher who was commissioner of human services asked me if I wanted to be a project director for the Department of Human Services so I did that. And then I left them four years later and became a field representative for the arthritis foundation and helped them develop a truly statewide organization, set up some clinics and things like that. That lasted until 1973 and then I was burnt out at that so I decided to go to Europe so I went to Europe the . . .

RC: Where did you go?

EP: Well, I, initially I went, I flew to Norway and I said, I'll give it three weeks. Never been to Europe before, if I don't like it I'll come back. So I went and I came back six months later.

RC: I just have one final question.

EP: What's that?

RC: If you could just, from your involvement in the Democratic party, but also as a voter and as a citizen of Maine, how, if you had just a few words to characterize Muskie as a political figure for the record, for the tape that's going to go in his archives in his name, how would you, what comes to mind?

EP: He was a man of unusual integrity, a man who helped people to realize that they could achieve their aspirations against odds. He was a man who opened the door for the involvement of so many people, and so many good people, in state government who otherwise would not have had that opportunity. Great legacy.

TOB: Do you remember any specific instances that would help illustrate what you were just saying about Muskie? Specific interactions? Do you remember anything that we might have missed in this interview?

RC: That would be particularly useful.

TOB: A conversation you had with him or anything like that?

RC: Or a few words he said maybe that stands out in your head?

EP: Well, I can remember, two or three times when I would see him and talk with him, in the latter days when I was clerk of the house, when he would ask me if I thought that John Martin might be thinking about moving on?

TOB: Who was John Martin?

EP: John Martin was Speaker of the House for twenty years.

RC & TOB: Okay, thank you very much.

End of Interview

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