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York, Robert oral history interview

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Interview with Robert York by Stuart O'Brien and Rob Chavira

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

York, Robert

Interviewer

O'Brien, Stuart

Chavira, Rob

Date

August 13, 1998

Place

Orr's Island, Maine

ID Number

MOH 040

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Biographical Note

Robert Maurice York was born on June 10, 1915 in Wilton, Maine. His parents were Josephine Myra (Brown) and Maurice Asa York. His father owned a meat market in Wilton, and his mother was a homemaker. York went to Bates College, graduating in the class of 1937. He then went on to Clark University to get his Masters and Ph.D. in History. After graduating, he enlisted in the Navy, and saw active duty in the Pacific. Japanese Kamikaze planes sunk the boat he originally served on, so he returned stateside and worked for the Office of Naval History. In 1946, he returned to Maine and taught History at the University of Maine at Orono, becoming an expert on the state's history. In 1956, he was appointed Maine State Historian by then Governor Ed Muskie. He remained in that position for forty years, playing an active role in the creation of the Maine State Archives. Upon leaving the Orono campus in 1962, he took a position as Dean of Academic Affairs at Gorham State College, now known as the University of Southern Maine. From 1970 to 1978, he served as Dean of Graduate Study at the University of Maine at Portland, now also part of the University of Southern Maine. In 1984, he retired as Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Southern Maine.

Scope and Content Note

The interview includes discussions of: Wilton, Maine during the Depression; Ed Muskie debating in high school; Republican party history; Bates in the 1930s; Ed Muskie at Bates; Pa Gould; town-gown relations at Bates in the 1930s; social life at Bates in the 1930s; York's appointment and career as a Historian of Maine; his service in the Pacific Fleet, including discussions of Kamikaze planes and surviving a ship sinking; and his work at the Office of Naval History.

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RC: ... Bob York in Orr's Island, Maine. Mr. York, will you start by stating your full name and spelling it?

Robert York: Spelling it, huh?

RC: It's for the transcripts.

RY: Robert Maurice York, R-O-B-E-R-T, M-A-U-R-I-C-E, Y-O-R-K.

RC: And where and when were you born?

RY: I was born on the 10th of June, 1915 in my parents' home in Wilton, Maine.

RC: Were you raised in Wilton?

RY: I was raised in Wilton. My dad had a meat market there. I went through the local schools, graduated from Wilton Academy in 1933.

RC: And what were your parents' names?

RY: My dad's name was Maurice Asa York, and my mother's name was Josephine Myra Brown York.

RC: And your mother, did she help your father at the meat market?

RY: No, she stayed home. I had two younger sisters, I had an older sister who died before I was born, but I had two younger sisters and my mother was a full time housewife. She was a very, she was a former school teacher, elementary school teacher, and she did, she worked a lot with us kids when we were growing up. She was also an excellent seamstress so she made most of the clothes for my sisters and some for me, but I'd rather have mine come out of the store.

RC: And growing up, did you grow up in a Republican household, Democrat?

RY: Yes, my parents were registered Republicans, they were not rabid Republicans but they were Republicans.

RC: And growing up, did they try to instill in you Republican values?

RY: Well, I suppose they did because when I chose to declare myself, I became a Republican. But, and I've always considered myself a moderate Republican, and in fact an independent Republican. And when Ed Muskie came along I became a Muskie Republican. In fact, when I was teaching at the University of Maine, teaching American history, basic American history, I praised when I felt praise was due, and I criticized when I felt criticism was the right way to go. And in fact I must have said a lot of good things about Democratic presidents and their programs and so on and so forth. So much so that one of my students, an older man who was from the coast of Maine, Boothbay area, he went down to check my registration to find out if I could possibly be a Republican saying such nice things about Democrats. Which really amazed me because here was a, here was a student checking on my registration because I was saying nice things about Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt and so on, you know, I called a spade a spade. That was from my college days. Pa Gould --Ed Muskie and I both had the same American history and American government professor-- and I think he instilled in both of us liberal views and a certain amount of independence as far as thinking was concerned. Call a spade a spade as you saw it.

RC: Given that he instilled in you liberal views, and you seem to be generally talking about yourself as a somewhat liberal Republican, where does the Republican come in then?

RY: Yes, well, I'm afraid both my wife and I have really made up our minds that we shouldn't be registered Republicans any more. We're really independents, because we don't go along with much of the Republican, national Republican philosophy at the present time. But I still have my registration. I vote in the primaries, but I always vote in the regular elections and I vote my conscience.

RC: As a young person, what was your attachment to the Republicans?

RY: What was my attachment?

RC: Yeah, you were a liberal Republican when you were young.

RY: Yes, all the way through.

RC: What was the Republican side of you when you were young, if now you feel you shouldn't be registered?

RY: Well, I don't go for this religious right stuff in particular. I think their agenda is much too narrow and it's not, it doesn't fill me with either admiration and it doesn't enlist my support very much. I'm solidly behind both of our senators, I think Olympia Snowe and the other one, that they're... they're liberal Republicans. I can go along with them. But I don't go along with the right, the extreme right.

RC: Given that you disagree somewhat with the religious right, were you raised religiously at all?

RY: Yes, yes, we were. My dad was a deacon in the Congregational Church, which was the most important church in town, but my dad was not a religious fanatic or anything like that. But we went to church and Sunday school and I've been active in Congregational churches all my life all over the country. When I went to graduate school in Worcester, Massachusetts, Pilgrim Church; when I was in the service in Waukegan, Illinois, Washington, D.C., First Church; then up to Orono, Universal Fellowship Church; then Gorham, and when I came to Brunswick I, we naturally transferred to the First Parish Church in Brunswick, which again is a liberal church. It's a liberal church. In fact, it's a part of the United Church of Christ, and the United Church of Christ is the only mainline Protestant denomination that does not frown officially on unions between gays.

TOB: Interesting.

RY: And we've taken, when, I've been active in the move to make a public statement to the effect that we are a free and open church to everybody. So that's, you can see I'm on the liberal side of things.

TOB: What high school did you attend?

RY: Wilton Academy. And that, I was always a good student. I graduated as a valedictorian of my class. And I only applied to one college. I applied to Bates College and was accepted. Of course times have changed. In those days it wasn't as difficult to get into college because there weren't as many people going to college, but my principal and my history teacher, who influenced my life a great deal, he ...

RC: What was his name?

RY: His name was Maurice Earl, and he said to me, he said, "You're going to go to college." (Nobody in my family had gone to, well, my mother had gone to teacher's college, become a teacher.) "You're going to go to college and I think you should go to Bates. You like history. They've got a good history and government department down there." So I applied to Bates and was accepted and that was that. And in those days I could afford to go to... I don't say I could afford to go to Bates, because I earned more than half of my way through scholarship and work programs and things like that. But of course, it was only seven hundred dollars a year, which to you seems like nothing. But that was quite a lot because, ah... I remember as a freshman I stayed one week of my Christmas to wash walls in Hathorn Hall and I got thirty five cents an hour. And I worked a forty hour week and got about fourteen dollars or something like that. That wasn't bad. Of course at that time, bread was eight cents a loaf, milk was about eight cents a quart, and things were in proportion. But, still, it was a struggle, it was a struggle.

RC: What was Wilton like?

RY: Wilton probably was a town of about three thousand. It's about twenty five miles from Rumford where Ed Muskie grew up. And we had, we were a fortunate town. All during the Depression there were jobs in Wilton. And the Wilton woolen company was flourishing in those days, and the Bass Shoe Company. You've probably heard of Bass shoes, the one they're just closing now. They were busy and so it was a nice little town. Wilton Academy was a fine little secondary school, had a nice faculty, classes were small, and it... the town has changed so much. The woolen mill closed probably thirty years ago at least, and the Bass Shoe factory is closing at the present time. And the main street, which was a busy street when I was growing up... my dad's meat market was right on the main street... it's a sad looking place at the present time. But it was a nice little town to grow up in and I had a lot of friends. In fact, I'm going back this Sunday for my sixty fifth reunion, high school class.

RC: How would you characterize the population when you were growing up? Was it mostly Republican or Democrat or (*unintelligible word*)?

RY: It was pretty much a Republican town. Of course at that time Maine was very strongly Republican. The first fifty years of the nineteenth century, Maine was a Democratic state, and when the Democratic party broke up in the 1850s (*sic*)[1850's] over the response to slavery and the problem of temperance and prohibition, the Republican party emerged as the number one party, and held that monopoly really for the next century. It wasn't until Ed Muskie came along and won what I say was not a party victory at all but a personal victory in 1954, that we have the

beginning of the modern Democratic party in the state of Maine. And coming into existence, slowly at first, of a true two-party system. It's gotten to the point now where nobody can predict what an election's going to be like in the state of Maine, because we've got an independent governor, we've got two Republican senators, two Democratic congressmen, and both houses of the legislature are Democratic, but by a very narrow margin; two, three seats would change the complexion. We're a, we're not a rock ribbed anything at the present time. In fact there are more independents who don't vote in the primaries because they are independent, than there are Republicans or Democrats.

TOB: Tell us about Bates during the Depression, when you, tell us about your arrival at Bates. Where did you live your first year?

RY: I was assigned to a room on the fourth floor of Roger Bill Hall, Roger Williams. What is it now?

TOB: Still the Bill. It's called the Bill, it's an all female dorm.

RY: Oh yeah, oh, well, of course in those days the administration was on the first floor, everything was on the first floor, the dean's office, the president's office, the bursar's office.

TOB: Of the Bill?

RY: Of Roger Bill, yeah. I was up in the top floor in the end room, the fire escape was the windows in my room. I had a roommate who was a star track man by the name of Bucky Gore, and unfortunately Bucky was a better track man than he was a student and he didn't make it eventually, he dropped out. But I was up there and on that fourth floor were all freshmen, we were all freshmen. The proctor's office or proctor's rooms were on the second floor; second, third and fourth floors were for students, but the freshmen were almost all on the fourth floor and the other two floors were upper classmen, with a few freshmen mixed in here and there, but we were all freshmen up on the top floor. And you'll be interested in this, Ed Muskie was my sophomore proctor.

RC: Interesting. So he must have been a junior then, is that right?

RY: Sure. I first met Ed Muskie in 1929, my freshman year at Wilton Academy. Both Wilton and Stephens High School, which was the Rumford high school, were members of the Bates debating league. And I was a pretty fair public speaker and debater and we were members of the Bates league and we had a practice debate, Wilton Academy, with Rumford. And Ed Muskie was their star speaker and I was a star speaker for Wilton Academy. But he was a much better speaker than I was, he was excellent in rebuttal. And one of the things that always stood him in good stead was his ability to think on his feet and to say the right thing. And so my acquaintance with him goes back to that experience in 1929. Then I renewed it when I was a sophomore, when he was a sophomore and I was a freshman. And every time I saw Ed Muskie for years he used to remind me, he said, Bob, you were the noisiest freshman on the top floor of Roger Williams Hall. I had a loud voice and I did my studying early, and then I'd visit and I guess perhaps I did become a little bit noisy. But he more than once came up and told us to pipe down,

that people wanted to study or sleep.

TOB: Was Muskie a friendly guy in college?

RY: Yes. Oh yeah, he was a nice guy, very nice.

TOB: Was he strict as a proctor?

RY: Well, he was reasonably strict I would say, yes, he, I mean if he, when he told me to quiet down, I did.

TOB: Now, sophomore year you lived in the Bill also?

RY: No, I moved over to, let's see... East Parker is toward Hathorn Hall, right?

TOB: Right.

RY: Well, I moved over to East Parker. And my junior year I became a junior proctor in West Parker, and my senior year I was senior proctor in Parker Hall, West Parker.

TOB: So Ed Muskie was your proctor sophomore year when you were living in Parker?

RY: Sophomore year, yes.

TOB: Did you have a social relationship with him, did you hang out with him?

RY: No, not really, not really, no. We freshmen hung together pretty well and, but I knew him pretty well and we were always friendly with each other and so on and so forth.

RC: Going back to Wilton, when you debated with Rumford, what was your impression of him then?

RY: Of Ed Muskie?

RC: Yeah, when you were in high school.

RY: Oh, very fine speaker. As I said, I had to admire him, his ability to rebut right off the top of his head.

TOB: Do you remember what the debate was about?

RY: I think it had to do with unemployment insurance, should there be compulsory unemployment. Of course the Depression was on at that time. That's the way I remember it, I'm sure that's what it was. But of course, you know, he went on to, he was a brilliant debater at Bates College.

TOB: Did you debate at Bates also?

RY: My freshman year I debated some, but I didn't after that year. I could have, I should have, but I didn't. I was concentrating, I wanted to be football manager. In those days to be football manager meant something on the campus. And what you did as a, I was a freshman manager competing, and a sophomore manager competing, and what you did in your sophomore year determined who would be the manager, and I was determined that I was going to be the manager. And I didn't, I didn't go out... And I was, by that time, let's see, my sophomore year, I was working on campus full time. I got a job that paid my board, of course board was only eight dollars a week at that time, believe it or not. But I swept, I was the caretaker, the janitor if you please, for Hathorn Hall, all of the classrooms on the first floor and on the second floor. I did not have the little theater, there was a little theater there; I don't know what they've got now, I haven't been into it in years. Are there classrooms in Hathorn these days?

TOB: Yes.

RY: What is there now?

TOB: Math and foreign languages.

RY: Is that, you know, foreign languages, that's where I studied German. And downstairs was the, that's where the history and government classes were held, they were all held on that first floor back in the back.

TOB: They're going to be in the new building now.

RY: Oh yeah, they're going to be in the new building. It'll be the first time they really had a good home.

TOB: Yeah, that's true.

RY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RC: What other sort of extra curricular activities did you involve yourself in?

RY: Well, I was in the politics club, I was president of the politics club my senior year. I was active in the, what did they call it, I think they called it the Bates Christian Association. And I was quite a pacifist in those days and I was chairman of the Peace Commission, and I remember traveling... We had a linkage with Bates, Bowdoin, Colby and the University of Maine, and I remember going to Bowdoin and to Colby and to the University of Maine and participating in panel discussions on, well, the rise of Hitler and how... I was an isolationist at that time, pretty strongly isolationist and kept the idea pretty much that we should keep out of Europe's affairs and it shouldn't be our business and so on and so forth, so I was active there. And I was president of the College Fellowship Group that was identified with the Universalist and Congregational youth on campus. So I kept busy.

TOB: What was the political club like?

RY: What was the politics club?

TOB: The politics club.

RY: Well, we did programs, we had speakers and so on on current political problems and things like that. I remember we had Ralph Lancaster who was a very prominent attorney, Lewiston Democratic attorney, very well respected. But we, I can't remember, I know that's the kind of program we had but I don't remember the details.

TOB: Now was Muskie in the politics club?

RY: Oh yes.

TOB: He was.

RY: I'm not sure but what I followed him as president. But he was active in it, he was very active in it.

TOB: So what was Ed Muskie like in college?

RY: Nice guy, very popular, very well regarded as a, well, he was a fine scholar, Phi Beta Kappa. And I don't remember if he graduated *cum laude* or not, but he was a good student, he was very popular, he spoke to people, he had charisma. And he seemed then, and this carried over into his political life, he seemed to be a very friendly, cordial person.

TOB: Do you recall any stories or any, does anything stick out that's helped you, that you remember that helped you form these opinions of Ed Muskie, any interactions or anything with you?

RY: No, I don't in particular. I think, I don't, we were always friendly on campus, we weren't intimate in the sense that we were bosom pals or anything like that, but we always conversed and I think we had mutual respect for each other.

TOB: Now, were students at that time interested in politics, the outside politics that were going on in the world?

RY: Well, a lot of them were. I think probably the majority were not particularly politically oriented. But Pa Gould, R.R.N. Gould, Railroad Gould they called him in Lewiston, we called him Pa, he was our American government teacher, our American history teacher, and he inculcated into us I think a lot of this independence. He was, and he was one who kept emphasizing to us, you should get involved in the affairs of your community, you should take a stand on issues of justice and right and things like that, and don't be just a passive onlooker but get yourselves involved. And he also was a very strong partisan of the view that one of the things that Maine needed very badly was an effective two-party system.

Because at that time the Democratic Party, well, the Democratic Party was very strong in Lewiston and in Biddeford and in Brunswick, but the vast majority of the state of Maine was strongly Republican. See, as you know I'm sure from all the other conversations that from the 1850s to 1964, there was only one Democratic legislature and that was 1910, as a result of the 1910 election. And that wasn't because the Democrats were so popular or so numerous, but it was because of the big split in the Republican Party between the regular Republicans and the progressive Republicans. And so most of the state of Maine really was a one-party state. We were as much a one party Republican state as the solid south was solidly Democratic. Now there's been this big switch and the south is the backbone of the Republican Party and a lot of the rest of the nation has done a flip flop in the other direction.

Well, Pa Gould was active in city affairs to the point that he was the only Republican member of the city council, the only Republican member of the city council. He was a good example of what he was preaching. See, you best govern people, the people, when you have effective opposition. When you have one party that's in control all the time, you're likely to get a stagnant, sterile situation. There's not much push for change. The Republican party after WWII did have a rising insurgency but it was, the young Turks, so to speak, found it very difficult to change things very much. But yet that growing progressive element that was in the Republican Party in the 1950s helped Ed Muskie get elected in the first place. The election in 1954 was not a Democratic victory, it was a victory for Ed Muskie. He and Frank Coffin really did that job almost single-handed.

I remember their coming up to the University of Maine, of course I was a professor at that time, at Orono. And they literally, they were operating on a shoestring financially. They had a broken down old car that, well, finally died on them as I remember it and they had to get somebody else's car, not on that particular trip, but I mean they just, they were without the financial backing of a solid organization. They rebuilt it from scratch. Frank Coffin is another, well, he's one of Bates' most illustrious graduates, no question about it. He was just positively brilliant and I'm sure you've got him on tape ten times. But, I see Frank quite frequently. He's been a real credit to the State of Maine, to the college, and to everybody else. Now, how did I get onto that?

RC: Well, going back to, you said Pa Gould was a perfect example of his own philosophy in terms of getting involved in the community. You were from Wilton, which was a very small town comparably to Lewiston, and coming to Lewiston, which was a much bigger place, was predominantly Democratic and was predominantly Catholic. How was that different for you, at a young age, coming to college to a very different place?

RY: Well, didn't bother me a bit because I went to the, as I say, I went to the Pine Street Congregational Church my freshman and it closed I think by the time of my sophomore year, and then I started going over the High Street Congregational Church. So, and I rubbed elbows with Catholics, Catholicism. I used to get awfully disgusted with my Protestant friends because they didn't support their church and I admired the Catholics who faithfully went to church every Sunday and observed the religious festivals and things like that, that didn't bother me. And Lewiston had always been our shopping mecca; we used to come down on the train with my

mother to shop in Lewiston. At that time Lisbon Street, which is a sad street at the present time And that big store that's at the head of Lisbon Street on Main Street, which was Peck's, that was the leading department store for our whole area in that section of the State of Maine. We used to come down regularly. And when we got an automobile we used to come down, so I knew Lewiston. And my, in fact, my sisters both had dental work done regularly in Lewiston, so we were down in Lewiston a lot. And Bates College, actually Bates College was an island unto itself really. You know what I mean? It didn't

TOB: How so?

RY: Well, it was really apart from the town.

TOB: Even then?

RY: It was, there wasn't much interplay between the college and, I don't know now. I think students, don't they get involved in community work and things like that, or am I crazy? They don't.

RC: I don't think they do.

RY: You don't think they do.

TOB: Well, I mean, there's a small percentage that do.

RY: I see, okay.

TOB: But all in all, I think Bates is fairly removed from the community (*unintelligible phrase*).

RY: It's still removed from Bates, well it was very removed at that time.

TOB: It was, really?

RY: Yes, it really was removed. It was an island unto itself.

RC: Would you say town and Bates relations were bad, or were they just indifferent to one another?

RY: It was as if they didn't care much about each other or worry about each other. One of the things that I remember, every now and then some of the people would say, well, you should, the college should have better relations with Lewiston and Auburn. But not much happened. Not much happened. So I always, it wasn't as it is at Brunswick. Bowdoin College is very much involved in Brunswick affairs and Bates College was never like that in Lewiston, in those days. And you say it isn't too changed much.

TOB: No, I mean, I don't think there's very many professors like Pa Gould who get active in local politics or anything like that. Now, tell us a little about Pa Gould's teaching style. What

was he like in the classroom? What was it like taking a class with Pa Gould?

RY: Well, we had regular assignments. We had a textbook, regular assignments. There was a lot of discussion in class. We were expected to have done the reading and then we would discuss the lessons of the day. And he called on people regularly, you better have done your homework because he'd just start right out, "Mr. York, what do you think about this?" And so on and so forth. I liked his style, and in fact I used his style a great deal in my own teaching.

RC: How large were the classes back then?

RY: Oh, there were about thirty five or forty in most of those classes.

RC: And he would still single people out?

RY: Yes, oh yes. In fact, we had assigned seats and York was either always in the front or in the back. But he'd find me in the back seat. I was short and slight in those days, but he knew where I was.

RC: So you strategically sat in the back (*unintelligible phrase*).

RY: There wasn't anybody shorter than I was except a couple of girls, and there wasn't anybody, we didn't have any Zs, so I was either right in the front, right where he could pick on me or he could see me where I was in the back. But it was a, he was a, he always had a twinkle in his eye and he liked to put students on the spot, but in a friendly fashion, you know. And if you didn't know the answer he'd chide you on it, he'd say, do your homework.

TOB: How much say did students have in the running of the college in (*unintelligible phrase*)?

RY: How much say?

TOB: Yeah, how important were the student organizations?

RY: I would say that it was minimal, minimal. Not, it existed, there were all kinds of student bodies. There was student government. And I think women's student government was probably more active than men's student government. The women, the lives of the women were pretty severely controlled at that particular time. I mean, we didn't even have coed dining, you know. If we had once or twice a semester coed dining, we thought we were in seventh heaven. But the women at in Rand Hall and all of us from freshmen to seniors went over to John Bertram, the dining room was in the first floor of John Bertram. Like the politics club, there was no interference, we ran the politics club the way we wanted to. But as far as really, I think you students have much more freedom than we had, and I know certainly the girls do because their lives was pretty controlled.

RC: Now, you mention that women's lives were pretty controlled. Give me an example of how they were controlled more so than, say, the men.

RY: The doors were locked at night. Are they locked now?

TOB: Yes, oh yeah.

RC: Locked where you can't leave, or just locked in general?

RY: Oh, they were locked, the doors were locked, you, after I don't know what time it was, can't remember what time it was now, but ...

TOB: Well now everyone has a key.

RY: Everyone has a key?

TOB: Yeah, sure.

RY: Oh, they didn't have a key in those days. You couldn't, you got out, you didn't come in, you couldn't get in. Somebody had, you had to wake somebody up or sneak in a window or something like that, sure.

TOB: What did you do socially? What was social life back then?

RY: Well, I wasn't a dancer unfortunately. I didn't learn to dance until I went to graduate school and fell in love with a student there and that took care of that. She taught me to dance. But I went to... I was active in the outing club, went on the things, mountain climbing and things like that. We used to, I don't even know if they've got it any more, there was a cabin at Thorncrag, we used to have lots of cookouts there, a gang of us would get together. Some of us guys who weren't dating regularly... I had a girlfriend back home, subsequently we married, though we, after thirty years of marriage we were divorced. I married Jan twenty three years ago. But we'd go on hikes and picnics and things.

Of course, I followed the football team in the fall. We went, I went to all the games. Even though I was a freshman manager, or aspiring to be a manager, I got along fine with most of the football players and, in fact, they were going up to the University of Maine and I wasn't supposed to be there but they, I got on the bus with them. We got up to the Lancey House in Pittsfield to have our lunch, and of course I pulled out, I walked out of the bus and Dave Morey was the coach, he said, where did you come from? I said, oh, I've been on the bus. He said, well, come along, and he took me and I don't know if he paid for my meal or not. But anyway I got to go on trips even as a freshman, and I think perhaps, I won't say it was foreordained that I would become a football manager but I got along fine with the senior manager and the junior manager and the sophomore manager. And I also, I was friendly with the hockey team because I was, I decided if I didn't make football manager, I'd become hockey manager. We had a hockey team in those days.

TOB: Where did the hockey team play?

RY: Down at St. Dom's arena. Yeah. And we had to walk down, that's a long walk from Bates

College on a cold night. Even colder walking back. But, so I, and we had lots of bull sessions in the dorms and things like that. I had a good time.

RC: College is notorious, I've never asked this question before, but it just occurred to me. College is notorious for being a huge party scene, you know, it's all over the television and certainly experience it at Bates.

RY: No alcohol at Bates, you know.

RC: That's what I was curious about, was there ...?

RY: No alcohol, oh no. And were very strict on that.

RC: So if you got caught with alcohol you were in big trouble.

RY: You got caught with alcohol, out you went. There wasn't any question about that.

RC: Did people still do it, did you ever see (*unintelligible phrase*)?

RY: Well, I know there was a, I was a proctor for two years. I know there was a little bit, but ...

RC: Were you pretty lenient with them?

RY: ... they were very discreet about it, they were very discreet about it. If you really wanted to have a party, you did it off campus. You didn't do it on campus because... Well in those days we still had, we had of course, no, Prohibition was gone by the time I became a student, but beer, even beer was out. You weren't supposed to drink beer.

RC: Now, even though prohibition had ended, what were the drinking ages back then?

RY: Twenty-one.

RC: Was it twenty-one?

RY: You see, almost all of us were, well, twenty, until we got to be seniors we were under age. That was one thing they were very strict on, the alcohol. And drugs were not a problem. Nobody ever thought about drugs in those days. Now you have to think, it's so universal.

RC: So drugs wasn't a prevalent issue at all?

RY: No, not a, didn't even, the word drug wasn't thought of, I mean as far as campus was concerned.

TOB: Did you maintain a relationship with Muskie after you graduated?

RY: We didn't correspond. We always, whenever we were at the same place we always greeted

each other and exchanged pleasantries and so on and so forth. When he became governor and the position as state historian became vacant, he's the one who appointed me state historian. And in those days the state historian had lots of responsibilities because we had no historic preservation commission, we had no state archivist. We had a museum; the only thing at the museum was stuffed animals and live fish. And there wasn't anybody pushing for historic preservation, either of records or of buildings and sites, and so on and so forth. And when the position became vacant, a Colby College professor had been serving for many years and he was over age at that particular time. And Ed called me up and said, would I be interested in being appointed state historian. And by that time I had developed a specialty in Maine history.

When I went to the University of Maine, I did not have a specialty in Maine history, I only had four weeks in the eighth grade, and that doesn't qualify you as an expert. And Bates didn't have any Maine history, and Clark University certainly had no Maine history. But of course I had grown up in Maine and I had graduated from Bates College, and when I did my doctoral dissertation it turned out that the person whose biography I wrote was a native of Maine. He was a native of Hallowell, Maine at a time when Hallowell was a very important cultural center. And he went to Bowdoin College, he went to Andover Theological Seminary, and he became an eminent Congregational preacher who was very much involved in the temperance movement and the anti slavery movement, and the improvement in jails and prisons and things like that. And I had come to Augusta to check some records, materials, for background about Hallowell. But I had no preparation.

And I was hired at University of Maine as a, initially, to teach international relations, the Far East, and American History. Well, thankfully, by the time I got there, they had found a person whose major was Far East and Japanese and Chinese history, and I was relieved of that and I picked up three divisions of American history. But that very first year the chairman of the department, which was, like at Bates, a combined history and government department, he called me in one day and said he had a job for me. And he told me, you're going to be... I want you to be the advisor to the graduate students, Masters candidates, who were mostly school teachers and were coming to the University of Maine in the summer time each year to get credits for a masters degree, and they had to write a thesis. And every single one of them was writing something in Maine history. And he said, I want you to be the advisor to these students, and I want you to help them in their research and so on and so forth. And I objected very strenuously, I said I'm not an expert, I only had four weeks. He said, well you grew up in Maine, you graduated from Bates College and so on and so forth, and nobody else in American history, there were five of us, nobody else remotely resembles you as far as you have connection with Maine as I said. So I, under duress, I agreed to do it, and as I said, subsequently it was the best decision I ever made in my life, but I didn't make it, it was forced on me. But I started to read on the various topics and they were writing about things, the Cumberland-Oxford canal which ran from Sebago Lake to Portland. I didn't even know there was a Cumberland-Oxford canal at that time.

TOB: I didn't either.

RY: And somebody else was doing the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad, another person was doing the history of Foxcroft Academy up in Dover Foxcroft, somebody else was doing a history on Maine Central Institute in Pittsfield. And I did know a little bit about that because

Bates and Pittsfield, U... Maine Central Institute had a very close relationship. Harry Rowe, who was the dean at Bates College, was the president of the board of trustees of Maine Central Institute for years. But I started reading up and so on and so forth, and the more I read, the more I liked what I was doing. And so the next year Dr. Dow¹ was the chairman of the department and President Hauck approached me and asked me if I would take the summer off and get paid as if I taught a summer session, two courses, and develop the broad outline of a history of Maine course.

TOB: What year was this?

RY: This was about 1947, 1947, which I did... And that fall I started a Maine history course. Well, I can tell you now that I made a lot of mistakes because I had to depend on what was written, you know, to get together a framework and I learned an awful lot. Well, I went from that until I had developed a full fledged course. And I also developed a Maine history and travel course in the summer time, a three week course which went from Kittery to Fort Kent, and we went by Maine Central Bus and then by Bangor and Aroostook bus. And I got to be a, really an authority on Maine history. In fact, they call me Mr. Maine hist- ...

End of Side One
Side Two

RC: What year did you go into the service?

RY: I went into the service in 1942.

RC: And were you drafted or did you ...?

RY: No, I joined the Navy. I would have been drafted. I had a low number. I got deferred so I could finish graduate school and got my Ph.D. in 1941, but unfortunately my dad had passed away in 1938 and he had, he was not a well man. He was one of the first people in the state of Maine to be diagnosed and treated with insulin for diabetes, came out as the flu epidemic. All of us in our family had severe cases of the flu in 1919 or '18, whatever it was. I just remember that the beds that were set up in the living room. And as an aftermath of that, he developed diabetes, at least that's the way they figured it. He was one of the first people to be treated with insulin and he, that was at that time, he died in 1938. But he, as he came into the 1930s his health deteriorated and the doctors recommended that he get outdoors as much as possible and so on and so forth.

And because we had a big barn and because we had cattle, there were always cattle around because he was, they were for meat. I mean, he had cattle. And he purchased a milk route and we had, in town, we were in town, but we had a herd of about twenty cattle, and we had hired men after dad died in '38. I had to leave graduate school for part of '38, '39 to come home and run things, but then I went back to graduate school. We got a cousin of mine to be the chief

¹ Edward F. Dow (Professor of History and Government, University of Maine, Orono, 1920's-1969).

person in charge, but he got drafted and because he wasn't a son or something like that, he had to go in the service. They said they would let me have a deferment, at least for awhile, and so when I got out of graduate, when I got my Ph.D., instead of teaching I came home and ran the operation until into 1942. I had no intention of staying with it forever, but after all my mother was a widow and she didn't have, she hadn't taught school for so many years, so I did that. But I realized that I wasn't going to do that, that wasn't going to be my life work. And we had an opportunity to sell out and we sold out and I went into the Navy on the second of December, 1942.

And I went to Great Lakes and I was in ship's, I was honor man of my company and I had my choice of service schools and I thought I'd like to be a clerk. I had applied, I applied for a direct commission, but they were very strict at that time about height and I was under height, five feet three. I asked for a waiver, they didn't give it to me. But I had made a job for myself at Great Lakes and I became a ship's company there, and became a, worked up to be a yeoman second class. But we went to sea in the latter part of 1944, and I joined the crew of the U.S.S. Morrison DD560 in San Francisco in late 1944. It had been damaged in the Battle of the Philippine Sea and it was back in San Francisco for repairs and so on. Well, I went aboard and we left then to join the fleet, we joined the fleet and we got to the forward areas in time to participate in the Okinawa campaign. Is that what you asked, that's what you asked me, right?

TOB: Right.

RY: Yes, and we, you know, the destroyers are sleek little instruments; they go I think, they go like this and like this, but they were fast and we had the very latest in equipment as far as radar detection was concerned. We were called a fighter director ship and we were intended for picket duty, but during the early stages of the invasion of Okinawa, we... By the daytime we bombarded the beach with our five inch guns to help the troops on shore, and at night we retired for what they called night cruising. And actually we formed, the destroyers, a whole group of them, would form a picket line around the battle wagons and the aircraft carriers and we'd cruise back and forth the night long, then go back, the day we'd go back to bombing. But because we were really supposed to be a fighter director ship, we were, after the initial attack on Okinawa, we were detached for picket duty. What that meant was that on the East China Sea, from Okinawa up to Japan to the south island of Kyushu, they had designated spots which were picket stations.

The job of the ships that were on those picket stations was to pick up the Japanese planes coming down to bomb Okinawa, you know. The Japanese fought like tigers on Okinawa, well, they did everywhere. But anyway, we were out there dodging kamikaze planes for about three weeks. And on the fourth of May, early in the morning around twelve thirty or one o'clock, we got orders to proceed to radar picket station number one, which had been the hottest spot because it was the closest one to Kyushu. And we got there early on and we were sunk at seven o'clock in the morning. The Japanese sent out about eighty planes and many of them were kamikaze planes. They were old planes loaded with bombs, whose job was to crash on any American ship they could find. And I say, we'd been dodging those kamikazes for all the time we were on picket duty. But at this time in the morning, early in the morning, about eighty planes came over our position. And the captain was steering the ship from, visually, he was right out in front of the pilot house, the bridge and I was his talker, I was his talker. I was a privileged yeoman on

the ship because I, my background, I had become confidential yeoman so I had access to all of the documents, top secret documents that came aboard the ship. And I knew the plans to invade south Japan and the estimated casualties and so on and so forth, and the figures weren't good. Well, here were these eighty planes and we were there in front of the bridge, he was steering from the front of the bridge, giving the orders. And when he would say hard right or hard left or stop firing gun two or something like that, I would relay all the messages to all the stations on board the ship. And we were out in front of the bridge and I looked up and ...

TOB: Just by yelling or by, did you have a ...?

RY: I had a microphone, I had the intercom. He'd say something and I'd repeat it. He'd say it to me and then I'd repeat it to the ship. Well, I looked out and right in front of us were planes coming in like this, coming in from the port, coming in from the starboard. Now on a destroyer, you can't, you couldn't then, I don't know if you can now, I doubt it, but anyway, you could not divide your fire. We had five five-inch guns and they were all shooting at the same targets. And the ones they were shooting at were the Japanese planes that were up above that were diving down onto us. Well, the ones that hit us were not these over here or here or here or up there, but they came in aft and they were old WWI or post WWI planes loaded with bombs and they crashed into the ship. The first one hit the back of the bridge and it wiped out the bridge and everybody on the bridge ...

RC: A bomb or the plane itself?

RY: The plane, the plane, it was a suicide, they're just like these suicide bombers that may have blown up the embassy, you know, in Nairobi, yeah. Well, that first one hits the back of the bridge and I remember that I was here with the captain, right in front of the bridge, over here was the sighting for the 40mm gun which was down here, and over here was the sighting for the 40mm gun that was down there, down on the, little bit lower deck. This guy over here literally exploded in front of my eyes, I mean, just like this. The guy over here just crumpled, they were both killed instantly; the captain and I were not scratched. But right after that first plane hit, three other kamikazes crashed us, gun three, gun four and gun five were hit. And one of those planes, I don't know now which one it was, although I had to write this up afterwards. One of those planes crashed into the powder magazine where all of our ammunition was stored and blew up the back end and the center portion of the ship. So that whole two thirds of the ship was bombed to smithereens. Well, the captain ordered abandon ship. About the only people that heard it were the people in guns one and two down in the forward part of the ship, and they were the ones that got out. Well, he said, save yourself if you can, and I remember asking the captain, "Well, what are you going to do?" He said, "Well, I'm going over here." And he went just a little bit and started to get off there, and I said, "Well, I'm going off this way." And I jumped down onto the, from the, from where I was down to the 40mm gun and started climbing to get out, wanting to get off the ship. Well the ship turned over so doggone fast, that I sat on the bottom of the ship when it went under. And I had my kapok life jacket on and I swam away. There was no suction, or very little suction.

TOB: Yeah, I was just going to ask you ...

RY: There was a pharmacist's mate who survived, he started down with the ship and he was able to fight his way to the surface and survived. But there were only about sixty of us that got off the ship and I, some of those didn't make it, I know, because they were so badly wounded, but that was out of a complement of about three hundred and forty. Well we, I got into the water and when I got into the water, I was in the bottom of a wave and there wasn't, and I couldn't see another person in that Pacific and I said, am I the only survivor? But they were strung out over a period, over an area and so on and so forth. Well, that didn't end our troubles because the Japanese, the planes strafed us in the water. But fortunately for us, the black oil from the ship came up and we got into the black oil because we were afraid of the sharks. The sharks were, tailed us day and night; because all the garbage went over the fantail, they ate the garbage and so on and so forth. They also ...

RC: They wouldn't come near the oil?

RY: They came, they also ate human beings. We sank a Japanese submarine at the end of March which was one of the biggest Japanese submarines they had; it was bigger than we were as a matter of fact. We brought it up to the surface with depth charges, you know, they called the ash cans, they dropped down and they exploded. They brought that ship up and then we finished it off, we destroyed it with gunfire from our five inch guns. Well, there were a lot, quite a few survivors that got off the ship. But, and we tried to rescue them, but they would not be rescued. And I saw that crew, the survivors to the very last one eaten by the sharks right in the water. The sharks were everywhere. And so we'd had that experience behind us and so we got into the black oil. And it was a pretty bad day because the other destroyer, they were on the station, station number one, there were two destroyers, the other destroyer was badly damaged and was saved and was towed back eventually to Okinawa. There were two LSMRs, Landing Ship Median Rocket Firing, one of them was sunk and the other one was not damaged, and it hung around and finally rescued us. But, they couldn't rescue us for hours because of the Japanese planes still there. But after about five hours we were rescued.

TOB: So for five hours you sat in a slick of black oil.

RY: Swam in the black oil, yeah. But the thing that saved my life was that kapok life jacket and for days I never took it off my back. And I didn't go, my billet, my bunk, was in the after portion, that's where the crew was located, I never went down there. I had, my little office as a yeoman was directly under the bridge and I slept on the desk with that kapok on my back all the time, day and night, day and night. Saved my life, it really did.

TOB: Now, you say the destroyers would form a wall around the aircraft carrier at night and go back and forth. When the Japanese kamikazes attacked, was the aircraft carrier there as well?

RY: Well, most of these attacks were daylight attacks, most of, on the, the fleet was pretty doggone well protected. And, see, the radar picket ships were off over here and the fleet would be retiring over here maybe on this side of the island, we were on the other side. And they would know, everybody would be ready for them, but of course there were Japanese planes that did get through. The Franklin was hit, badly crippled, and some others. But it was relatively safe, that is, it would be, it wouldn't be like all those ships coming, all those planes coming after

a group of destroyers out on the picket duties.

TOB: Now, you managed to survive numerous other attacks. How did you survive the other attacks and this one you got hit so badly, what do you think happened?

RY: I didn't hear, would you ...?

TOB: You survived the other, the previous, on picket duty, the previous kamikaze attacks. What do you think happened (*unintelligible phrase*)?

RY: There was just too many of them, that was all. There were too many of them. And we were the very first target, we were the closest one. And, of course, we called in planes, our planes to fight them and so on and so forth. But when you get eighty planes against four little ships in a very exposed position, the odds are pretty bad for you.

TOB: So day in and day out, you would be out there just dodging kamikazes all day?

RY: Yes.

TOB: The planes, the sky would just be filled with planes just raining ...

RY: Down, down, yeah. I saw one, I was on the fantail once when out of the blue came a kamikaze and somehow or other the bridge was alerted. I didn't even have time to get to the bridge, and it crashed right off our fantail but not more than thirty feet away from where I was standing.

TOB: Was it difficult to keep morale up during these attacks?

RY: No, morale was high, morale was high. We were a determined group of people. It wasn't a picnic but survival, you know it's, well, survival was what it was.

RC: Just surviving gives your morale (*unintelligible word*).

RY: Survival, that's right, yeah, yeah.

TOB: And I suppose after an experience like that, you were shipped back to the states?

RY: Yes, you were given a thirty day survivor's leave. The rescue ship brought us back to Karamareta (*sounds like*) which was the Naval anchorage off Okinawa. We were put on a ship that was a kind of a receiving ship for survivors of crashes and things like that. Of course I didn't have any, the only thing I saved was what was on my back and that wasn't any good. But, and they gave us clean clothes and so on and so forth, new issue, and it was days before you could get that oil out of your system. And I saved a towel that I used, and I still have it, it's, well my wife washed it just a couple of weeks ago again, it's got the black oil still on it. Because you, getting it out of your hair was almost impossible. Yeah, so ...

TOB: Is it hard to swim in oil? Do you just float?

RC: He had a life jacket on.

RY: I had a life jacket on, that's what, the life jacket's what saved me, I wasn't that good a swimmer. But I don't think, I wouldn't have made it for five hours if I hadn't had that life jacket on. I don't think, I doubt if any of us would have been, would have lasted. But you know, the strange thing is, I don't think the water was cold. People have asked me, I couldn't remember. And I think if it had been cold I would have known it; hypothermia would have set in somewhere along the line.

TOB: After five hours I think (*unintelligible phrase*).

RY: Yeah, that's right, that's right.

RC: Do you think perhaps the oil kept you warm?

RY: Well, I don't know, it could have.

RC: Because it would have insulated ...

(*Speaking at once.*)

RY: It kind of insulated us a little bit I suppose. I suppose, yup.

RC: I have a, earlier you were talking about back in your debating days in high school and college, I don't remember specifically, you were saying that in one debate you were talking about how it was your personal opinion at the time that the United States just simply not get involved with the affairs of Germany and Asia and WWII. Then you got your Ph.D. and you enlisted. I'm curious, in graduate school, what changed your mind about this?

RY: Well, as the crisis developed from, let's see, it was 1939 that Hitler invaded Poland, that was my second year at graduate school. And right away I became a strong advocate of all possible aid to England and initially France, of course France fell and (I remember June 10, 1940, that was my birthday) and then England was left alone. All possible aid, but not the first American. But my mind began to change and I began to agree with Roosevelt that, well... Of course he kept saying no American soldiers will go overseas again. But it began to be apparent that if we didn't want to live in a world that was dominated by Hitler, we would have to come in and do something about it. So I followed very closely the steps that came as we moved towards particular involvement, the destroyers firing on the German submarines in the Atlantic, the Wolf Packs and so on and so forth. But the thing that really changed everybody's mind was Pearl Harbor. When the Japanese attacked us, there wasn't any more question about it. We had been attacked, we had to defend our country. But isolationist sentiment was, the argument was still pretty strong. Roosevelt had to go very slowly. Then of course one of the theories was that he actually provoked Pearl Harbor. I don't really think that's true, but certainly Pearl Harbor, bad as it was, was the thing that united the country and really changed the course of the war

eventually.

RC: Didn't Japan and the United States sign a treaty the day before, or shortly before that, before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

RY: They were, the Japanese had two people, Namura and who was the other one? But they were in Washington negotiating when Pearl Harbor occurred. And it sounded as though, from what we read in the newspaper, that there was some kind of an accord was going to be entered into. But, boom, that was it.

TOB: Now, so you had your thirty day leave, survivor's leave.

RY: Yes, what happened then, yes.

TOB: And then you were back in the service?

RY: Yes, I came back to Maine, had my survivor's leave. And by that time I had decided that I had enough of the Pacific and maybe I would see if I had any friends who could help me get a, really get a commission or a different assignment. And I contacted Dr. Blakesly who had been the head of the department and he was with the Far Eastern Commission. And he said to me right off the bat, "Well why didn't you contact me before?" And I said, well, I was determined I was going to join the Navy and work my way up, but I said, that's not really the way it goes. I said, I've heard there's an office of naval history and they're writing the history, and I think I'm qualified to join that if I could get the right entrance. Well, he said, I'll be honest with you, he said, Admiral Kalbfus who was the head of the naval history is a personal friend of mine, I'll talk to him, see if I can help you in any way. And obviously he did because after my leave was over, I reported to Boston for reassignment. And in the meantime I had, they'd given me all kinds of tests and they had come to the conclusion that I was not being used as I should be used. But at the same time they said, you've got a good assignment, you're going to go back to Great Lakes. You're going to, they're going to train you to work in the program to release servicemen at the end of the war. I didn't realize the end of the war was that close. But anyway Dr. Blakesly and Admiral Kalbfus, they changed my orders, I was assigned to the Office of Naval History in Washington, D.C. I got down there and immediately they said, well, you would qualify for a lieutenant senior grade, but if you take this, you will have to agree to serve two years after the war is over. And they were very confident that the end of the war... They knew a few things that we didn't know. But anyway, they, I said, no, I'll stay the way I am. And they immediately promoted me to yeoman first class and gave me an assignment which was just the same as if I had a, were an officer.

And then the end of the war came and I, you'd be interested in this. One of my very close friends was a Dr. Russell Fifield. He'd gotten his degree at Clark the year after me, he was a Bates College graduate also, and subsequently professor of political science, a very successful one at the University of Michigan, especially with southeast Asia. And he called me at, my wife was in Maine at that particular time, and he called me and said, "I think it would be great if we could have an early supper." Or, you know, whatever it was, and then be at the White House at seven o'clock tonight. Now, there had been rumors, of course by this time the bomb had been

dropped. And there were rumors that peace was coming and the Japanese were going to surrender. And for two, three days there'd been huge crowds in front of the White House in Lafayette Square.

Well, they had proved to be false rumors and at seven o'clock that night there were hardly a handful of people in Lafayette Square, across from the White House. At seven o'clock Harry Truman came out on the steps of the White House to announce the end of the war. Before Harry could get the words out of his mouth, I heard over the television, radio, which, there was a radio truck right there, but there were hardly any people because it was seven o'clock and it was the dinner hour and there'd been all these false rumors. I heard over British broadcasting that the end, the war was over. And Harry came out, he said the very same thing. Well, within minutes, almost seconds, that place became a raging sea of humanity, servicemen, everybody, and for the next two or three hours the crowd just surged back and forth. Pennsylvania Avenue, F Street, G Street. And as I said, I've never had so many people offer me a drink in my life and I've never been kissed by so many people that I didn't know as I was that night. Because I was wearing my uniform, you know, and everybody was just hilariously happy. That was quite an experience, I never forgot it.

TOB: Wow. So then after the war was over ...

RY: I stayed on, yeah, I stayed on as, I stayed in uniform until the 25th of March, 1946 and in 1946 I became a civilian with a classification that gave me the same pay that I would have if I'd taken a commission and agreed to stay two years. Because I really wanted to teach, see, I didn't have a chance to teach ...

RC: Because you went in right after you (*unintelligible phrase*).

RY: Yeah, right after I got my Ph.D. And so that spring, Dr. Dow, the chairman of the history and government department, he, the University of Maine was gearing up for the return of the veterans. And they were hiring history professors and people who had Ph.D.s were pretty scarce, so I was a pretty good commodity. And I remember going up to Philadelphia, he came down from Maine to Philadelphia and interviewed me in Philadelphia. And I tried to get a civilian suit but they didn't have any small enough for me, so I had to wear my Navy uniform anyway up for the interview. By that time, you know, they were all making, the suits, they weren't making a lot of suits and I had a devil of a time to finally get a suit that would fit me. At that time I took thirty seven short and... But I signed up, I stayed there until the end of August and then I came right up to Orono. And Orono wasn't quite ready for us because they had, they were moving what had been barracks buildings onto the campus to provide student housing and faculty housing. And so classes didn't open until late in October sometime instead of September, which was good for me because that gave me a chance to write some American history lectures that I had. Because all of my preparation between the spring and September was in international relations and the Far East, especially the Far East, and I hadn't written a single American history lecture. And when I got there I found out I was going to be teaching four sections of American history and one of international relations. In those days you taught three courses and you taught five times a week, you know what I mean, five courses, five sections three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Tuesday, Thursday. Do they still have

Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday classes?

TOB: No, just Tuesday, Thursday. They're a little longer.

RY: We had Tuesday and Thursday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and we used to have 7:40s, you don't have that. What time do you ...?

TOB: Eight o'clocks.

RY: Eight o'clocks. You see in those days, in my day we had compulsory chapel at twenty minutes of nine. And we, our first class would be at 7:40 to 8:40 and then we'd go to chapel and then the classes would be on the hour, nine o'clock. I always like eight o'clock, 7:40s, get them over with.

TOB: Sure, sure.

RY: Well, I went, yeah, what was I talking about?

TOB: All right, well, I want to, so you set up your teaching in Orono, tell us how you became, so tell us how you reestablished your relationship with Ed Muskie.

RC: Was it an out of the blue call for you to be Maine state historian, or ...?

RY: No, we had bumped into each other. He was always very pleasant, of course not being a member of the Democratic Party I didn't rub elbows with him regularly with him like you might have. But we always, whenever we were in the same place we would stop short, stop and talk and so on and so forth. It's, how did you ask that question? How did I reestablish ...?

TOB: Yeah, your relationship with Muskie.

RY: Well, when he ran, first ran for governor in 1954, he and Frank came to the University and I went to hear them speak and I knew I would be impressed, I was. And so we saw each other socially, I mean, that is, when we'd be at a, maybe some kind of a meeting that we would exchange pleasantries, but I... And I congratulated him and so on and so forth on his victories, I wished him well in 1954. I, as I told you, I was a nominal Republican. My first father-in-law was a very staunch Republican; he'd been in the legislature, house of representatives, senator, governor's council and so on, but he had been in the senate when Ed Muskie was in the legislature.

TOB: What's his name?

RY: His name was John Blanchard from Wilton. And he was a, well, he was a staunch Republican, there's no doubt about that. But he always felt that Ed Muskie was a very promising young man, because he was in the house when John was either in the senate or on the governor's council. And I heard him say more than once, it's a pity that Ed Muskie isn't a Republican, because he could go far if he were a Republican. This is when we were a one party

state, you see. Well, of course, as I remember it Ed served a couple of years in the house and then he got married and he had to earn a living and he went back to practicing law in Waterville.

At, I, one of the place... times I remember him, well it was that very year, let's see now it was, it was in the 1950s, I've forgotten just which year it was, but I used to be a counselor at Boy's State, have you ever heard of Boy's State?

TOB: I went to Boy's State.

RY: You went to Boy's State.

TOB: In Massachusetts, though.

RY: In Massachusetts. Well, I was a counselor, Gerry Grady, have you heard that name? Gerald Grady from University of Massachusetts. I think he's still active. He was hired as a political professor at Orono and he was a very good friend of mine, very fine colleague, [I am] very fond of Jerry. And he was a very ardent Democrat, and subsequently he ran for the senate on the Democratic ticket in the state of Maine. Well, Jerry was for several years the head of Boy's State, he ran it and I was one along with, he could get a lot of his friends to be counselors and so on. And I remember, I don't remember just which year it was, whether it was '54 after the, in '54 or not, but it was the year that Paul Fullam, have you heard that name?

TOB: Professor at Colby?

RY: Professor at Colby had passed away that day, that very day. And Ed came to Boy's State to be the principal speaker in the graduation exercises or whatever, the final big ceremony, whatever it was. And Ed came and he was very, very upset about the death of Paul Fullam because Paul Fullam, well see, he ran for the senate and he was one of the key people who helped the Democratic renaissance. And Ed was very, very up tight. Ed could be emotional at times, you know about that incident in Manchester and so on and so forth. Well, he, I stayed outside with him and we talked a great deal before he made his speech. But he was so upset that he really couldn't go in and sit through the first part of the program until it was time for him to speak. He waited until it was time for him to speak, then he went in and gave a wonderful address to those young people and paid nice tribute to Paul Fullam and so on.

I would bump into him in situations like that. And I know I wrote letters of congratulation and repeated some of what I've said to you that we both had the same political professor, Pa Gould. And that what he was doing was the kind of thing that Pa Gould was urging young people to do, to get involved and to push the two party system. So, and, let's see, what else. Well, I can't think right now.

RC: Well, I have a question.

RY: You have a question, yeah.

RC: Despite the fact that you were a liberal Republican and you've gotten to the point now where you almost wish you weren't a registered Republican. But back in that time I imagine you

were a, you were readily a Republican, however liberal you were. Muskie was an ardent Democrat. One of the things that we come in, we interview a lot of Democrats at that time and they were just in complete agreement with everything he said. I'm curious, what were some of the things that you disagreed with that Muskie represented?

RY: Oh boy, I don't think, let's see, I agreed with him on his support for education, both elementary and secondary, and higher education. Getting the tax burden off the property tax and onto a sales tax and an income tax. He took a defeat initially on getting an income tax. I agreed with him that while we were doing well in the number, the percentage of our young people who graduated from high school, we were doing terribly in the percentage who went on to college and got a college degree; that there should be more support for the University of Maine in particular; that the teachers colleges were training almost all of the elementary school teachers, that they deserved a lot better treatment than they were getting. If I had known how bad things were with the teachers colleges as far as finance and flexibility of management was concerned, if I had really understood all of that, I probably never would have accepted the job as dean at Gorham in 1962. I agreed with him that we needed to broaden the tax base; that the property tax was too much of a bad thing, that is, we relied too heavily on it; that, yes, our highways needed to be improved because of course as you know we're a big state and so on and so forth and we have lots of roads. But I also agreed with him heartily, coming from Wilton and he coming from Rumford, that rivers like the Androscoggin and the Kennebec needed to be cleaned up. I do the Androscoggin in the summer time and you won't believe it was the stinking Androscoggin, that's what we called it. Professor Lawrance, head of the chemistry department, he monitored the waters of it. And you know that they were almost black in the summer time, in the middle of the summer, and the stench was awful. Because you think of all the paper mills from Berlin, New Hampshire through Rumford, Jay, Livermore and on down to Lisbon Falls, well, Lewiston and Auburn, the textile mills, and Lisbon Falls, Rumford, I mean not Rumford, Brunswick. Oh, it was terrible. And the rivers were running open sewers, there was, the sewage wasn't treated, it was dumped right into the river. The theory was that the rushing water would purify things. Of course it didn't, there was so much of it. The meat packing plants dumped all of their waste material, blood and all, into the rivers.

And of course, Ed living in Rumford and then in Waterville, he was in a good position to see that firsthand on a long term basis. But in those days, well earlier we used to say the state of Maine was run by Maine Central and Central Maine; that meant the railroad, the transportation industry, and the power industry. But by this time, when he was a governor and before he was governor, the power companies and the textile mills and the paper mills were the big three as far as influencing the legislation that was enacted in Augusta. And he came out strongly for better management of our rivers and for in fact a clean up of the environment, and initially he didn't get very far. And then he also kept pushing, and this was a good thing because since 1816 and froze to death", one of the annual phenomena in the state was people, young people particularly, leaving the state of Maine for the greener pastures elsewhere. And in fact it got to the point where in the twentieth century our most important export was young people; they left the state because the opportunities did not exist here, and he kept pushing economic development. And as I recall, I don't remember what the names were now, but he reorganized the development process in Augusta to promote more, better jobs, more jobs, better paying jobs for state people. And I couldn't disagree with that. In fact, I applauded him very strongly, after his reelection, I

applauded him very strongly. I knew Bob Haskell who was the chairman, or was the president of the senate, he was a staunch Republican and the Bangor Hydro Electric mogul in Bangor. He and Ed Muskie really got along quite well. Because Ed had a tough row to hoe, I mean, he won a personal victory but the Democrats were a feeble influence in the legislature in both of his terms. And the only way he got anything done was really by effecting a compromise with Bob Haskell and the other Republicans. But he pushed all of those things. Another thing that I agreed with very strongly, you'll be, I think you'll be interested in this; in the second term he, I think he had, he knew what I was doing as far as promoting interest in Maine history ...

RC: Actually, you know what? Don't let it cut him off.

RY: Is it the end?

TOB: Yeah.

End of Interview.

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