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Interview of James Flaherty by Don Spritzer, conducted August 17, 1978.

DS Where were you born?

JF Minneapolis, Minnesota. March 23, 1890.

DS You lived in Butte for some time, didn't you?

JF No, I traveled in and out of Butte. I stayed sat the Fallon Hotel in Butte.

DS Where did you live when you first came to Montana?

JF Great Falls, right here.

DS Oh, you have lived here most of your life then?

JF All my life. Sixty-five years here.

DS You've been here the last sixty-five years?

JF Since March of 1913.

DS Have you always worked at the place here, the Great Falls Paper Company?

JF The only business that I know.

DS Were you the founder of this firm?

JF Yes.

DS Do you recall when you first met Senator Murray?

JF When my wife had to go to Boulder Hot Springs Hotel while Mrs. Murray, Mrs. James E. Murray, was there. She saw to it that my wife was given care and consideration because my wife had arthritis. So then the Senator came... he wasn't a senator then... then Attorney James E. Murray came down on a Friday night to stay over the weekend until some time Monday. Well, that's when I first got acquainted with him. I can't tell you the year but it was five or six years before he ran for senator.

DS Sometime during the early 1900's. Were you involved with the Irish Independence movement?

JF No. I wasn't involved.

DS You weren't involved with it at all? You never met Eamon de Valera or any of those people?
JF No, I didn't meet those men.

DS Do you happen to remember why Senator Murray decided to run for the senate?

JF He was inspired by by people in Montana that he was young and able and had the ability to direct things. That he untangled his father's estate, which was a big one, he decided from that. That was the inspiration that got him to go.

DS Did you do much campaigning with him?

JF Yes. Did considerable in Great Falls and northern Montana and down when they were putting in the Fort Peck dam, I traveled with them down there. I traveled with them up into Northeastern Montana...Plentywood and Scobey and so forth.

DS I have talked to a number of acquaintances of the Senator and also both his sons and from what I have been able to gather from what I have read, he wasn't that great of a public speaker. Did you think he was?

JF No. He wasn't a stemwinder in public speakers. He was better with small groups of people. He would sit down with them, you know, and have a cup of coffee or a sandwich or something. If he didn't know what he was talking about, he didn't go into the subject. He was prepared.

DS So he wasn't that great a stump speaker?

JF He wasn't the one to get up on a platform and rouse a lot of people and so forth...he was more for a small group...like where he would meet a group of stockmen, say eight or ten stockmen and he could help them. He would meet maybe at half a dozen graineries or meet the railroad boys, you see.

DS He always did have strong support of the laboring men?

JF He had strong support of labor because he was not anti-labor and wasn't pro-labor. He was independent -- in between. He had weighed every act that he would do. He wouldn't jump to conclusions. He'd weigh them out.

DS He also, I know, had quite a bit of support among small businessmen?

JF Yes, because he answered their mail and assisted small businessmen in every way that he could. He put confidence in himself that he wasn't just for the great big Broadway Avenue fellow, he was for the guy out in the sticks that needed help.
He was a law man, you know. He believed in what was on the books was to be followed.

DS Did you ever meet Burton K. Wheeler?

JF Yes, intimately with Burton K. Wheeler.

DS He and Murray didn't get along too well, did they?

JF Well, they weren't love mates. Let me give you this. I had taken a message down to Murray, or whatever I was doing, then walked down the hall into Wheeler's office. Wheeler's sister was sitting there (I forget her name now, she was a married woman and evidently her husband had died - I'm not sure of that). I go there and I would like to see Senator Wheeler. She was sitting at his desk taking dictation. She said, "Come in, Mr. Flaherty". So I came in and Wheeler got up and says, "No, don't come in here Jim! You just got through with Murray and you will carry all the damn tales from Murray to me and from me to Murray." So I says, "Well, Mrs.____(I forget her name), Well, Mrs. will you please step outside and close the door?". She went out I said, "Senator, the first Goddamn time you find me carrying a message from Murray to you, you will know damn well that I am going the other way! I don't carry tales." "Sit down", he said and from that time on, Murray's name was never mentioned and I got on one hundred percent with him right up until he died. Just anything I would write and ask him...and I never asked him for anything that wasn't on the level... Both Wheeler and Murray were outstanding men of honesty and integrity.

DS Wheeler was quite a stump speaker himself?

JF Wheeler could get up anywhere and stump and make a good speech. He had these things in the back of his mind and when something would occur, he would jump up and take the issue and go with it. He knew what he was talking about.

DS Do

JF Ye

DS Did you know him very well'

JF I

DS He was involved with this Irish Independence?

JF Yes, he was involved with that movement but his involvement was on the square. It was more for you see back eighty or ninety years ago, they would have in eastern papers "no Irish
need apply". Dailey didn't eat that, he didn't like that. He fought that kind of a movement. Dailey was for giving the Irish a fair deal, that's all. They came over here and they could read and write some of the language but they could speak it all. They had a decided advantage over the Germans and Swiss and the Spaniards and the Polish people that couldn't handle the language. The Irish had the ability to speak out.

DS Did you know a man named Joseph Parker?

JF Oh, very well, yes.

DS How was he involved with Murray? Do you know?

JF He supported Senator Murray all the way through. He was a man of outstanding character and integrity. Murray didn't fool with anybody that wasn't. So they got along very well. Everything about Joe Parker was up above board and high class and so forth. He got some important post.

DS The W.P.A.? Works Progress Administration?

JF The Works Progress Administration. He got on the Works Progress Administration. He did a fine job on it. I think Murray helped him very much to get it and I don't think Wheeler bucked it. I think Wheeler approved it.

DS I know there was some difference of opinion between the two.

JF Between the two but they both got together.

DS What about Wellington Rankin. Did you ever meet him?

JF Wellington Rankin and I became very close. Wellington was a beautiful trial lawyer...very able trial lawyer. When I would go through Helena, I would always drop in at his office and he would stop everything he was doing and we would have a chat for five or ten minutes. He didn't like to take divorce cases but he would them...big ones. Because he felt that he wasn't getting both sides of the question, you see fairly above board -- he ducked them but he was outstanding on contracts and outstanding in everything he did. He was a man of outstanding integrity.

DS I know he ran for the Senate against Murray in 1942.

JF That's right. What we did there, we never mentioned Rankin's name. We just talked about Jim Murray, James E. Murray. Like here we don't talk about our competitors, we talk about the Great Falls Paper Company, Great, etc. etc. We don't talk about other people, either good or bad, we leave them alone.
DS Did Rankin get a lot of support from Wheeler's people when he ran against Murray, do you remember?

JF No, he got some but he didn't get the big support he thought he was going to get.

DS I know he and Wheeler were quite close friends.

JF They were close friends and they got together but, in my opinion, he didn't get the support from Wheeler that he had dreamed he would get. I think Wheeler's deal was just kind of, "Okay, Wellington, I'll vote for you, we're friends..." etc. There was nothing wrong with Wellington Rankin, he was a man of integrity.

DS I know in that 1942 election Murray lost Butte which was his home town to Wellington Rankin.

JF Well, I never could figure that one out. He did everything that was possible for Butte. I don't think the Company was against him. They never appeared to me to be against him. I can't explain that to you, I don't know why he lost Butte.

DS Do you think it might have had something to do with the Lend Lease to Great Britain and the Irish vote?

JF It may have had. The Covenant Jacks or the Scotch element or... It may have been that they didn't like something he did, because he had the Catholics, not the Catholics, he had the Irish, he had that group with him but now how Rankin got that vote is beyond me. I don't know.

DS I guess Murray wanted Helena which, I suppose, was Rankin's home town? Kind of balanced itself out. You said you knew Murray when he was attorney, right?

JF Yes, an attorney in Butte.

DS Do you know who his main clients were, any of the people he represented or his clients were groups?

JF Well, it was a small miner in mining, small lumber people, small people. He never fought the Anaconda Company. The Anaconda Company, to my knowledge, never fought him. They left him alone, as near as I could always figure out. But Murray had in his law practice, he had smaller people. He was excellent on contracts.

DS He didn't get along too well with Montana Power though, did he?
JF Well, no. That was personalities in that deal. Whether Con Kelly or John Devine (they were the head of the Montana Power Company) whether there was a clash of personalities or not, I don't know. That was Butte, I never bothered any with that.

DS Do you remember much about Missouri Valley Authority? Why do you think it didn't pass?

JF I can't give you the answer to that. I don't know why that didn't pass. I can't answer that.

DS Was there a lot of support for it around Great Falls, would you say?

JF It was pretty much neutral. Pretty much even.

DS I know the Montana Power Company probably fought it pretty hard.

JF I don't know why they fought it. I can't answer that.

DS Just a couple of personalities here. Did you know Jerry O'Connell at all?

JF Yes. Now with Jerry...I left Jerry alone. I kept Jerry at arm's length. I never had anything bad to say about Jerry and nothing good. I just forgot that Jerry was in the state of Montana.

DS Why was that?

JF Well, because he was a questionable character. In other words, you didn't know what he was going to do next. You couldn't depend that he was going to Avenue 87 or Route 15 to go to Butte, don't you see, so I just kept him at arm's length. Never threw any rocks at him.

DS He was a big opponent of Burton K. Wheelers?

JF That's right.

DS They say that Wheeler was probably responsible for securing his defeat when he ran against Thorkelson.

JF Well, I think Wheeler just got fed up with him, see, what Jerry was doing. Like I say, I just left him alone.

DS Did Murray have much to do with him?

JF No, Murray didn't. Murray was courteous and polite but he wasn't thick with him.
DS Do you remember a man named Joseph Montahan?

JF Yes, Joseph Montahan was another character. He was decent and honorable and so forth, and very capable but I never got close with him. Not good or bad. I don't have anything to say good definitely, but I couldn't say anything bad.

DS In 1954 you might recall Murray ran against Wesley D'Ewart. Do you remember much about that election?

JF Well, I don't know the details about the election. D'Ewart was from where? Down in ... north of Billings....

DS Some small town.

JF Some small town while he was there. He was a man of integrity. Good capable man but I don't know why he ran against Murray because Murray had completed all his contracts and done everything proper and right and above board. He stood well in Washington and I think D'Ewart just took a chance and ran and spent his money. Never could understand why he ran. Couldn't figure out who was backing him.

DS I know there was a lot of charges hurled in that election, especially by the Republican side of it, that Murray had Communist connections.

JF Oh, hell, that was just hot air. (Chuckel) He had no more Communist connections than I had.

DS I agree with you. Did Murray ever speak to you much about his parents? I haven't been able to find much about them.

JF No, he didn't talk much about his father or his parents. He would mention once in a while they were, they came from back east and so forth. His mind was always on his own family out here, on affairs that concerned Montana, and what he could do in this Senate for Montana. As to his background or his family, that was never emphasized in my presence.

DS Never talked too much about it at all?

JF No, very seldom.

DS Did he ever talk to you about his financial investments? I have read that he lost quite a bit of money in the 1929 stock market crash.

JF He never talked about his stock market things to me. He never talked about that, of course, there was a crash. I know he
had a lot of money in the market. He never discussed the market. I never knew how much he lost. I know he lost some. That I can't answer because he never discussed it with me and I never asked him. I kept out of it.

DS It was kind of understood?

JF There was kind of a little understanding that he had lost some money in the stock market. Like everybody else did at that time who was in the market. There was no one that escaped that if they were in the market.

DS Did Murray smoke at all?

JF If he did, I never saw him.

DS Most people that I have talked to seemed to recall that he smoked cigars.

JF He may have smoked cigars. He bought some cigars that he would hand out. I never saw him light a cigar.

DS I also understand he was a social drinker.

JF Yes. For instance, he went up to Wheeler, Montana, that's south of Glasgow. The crew there, there were two Great Northern freight crews in there, one getting ready to haul empties out, the other to back in to dump the loads of gravel for the dam. He says, "There are about ten or twelve of these fellows, what will I do, Jim?" "Buy them all a drink". Murray says "What about me?" But one, that's all he took...one drink with the men. They all had a drink that wanted it. They would all get up and belly the saloon bar. I never saw Jim Murray drink over one, a social drink. I can't recall if he took a second one.

DS This incident up in Wheeler was during the campaign when probably he was campaigning?

JF Something like that. He would get there...he was up in another place in Scobey...I forget the name of the place. He says there are five or six of these oldtime ranchers going in here. I think one of them was a relative of the father of... (What in hell is the name of the editor of the Billings Gazette?) Wayne Buller, the present editor of the Billings Gazette...his father, I forget was in Scobey or Plentywood, he ran a newspaper. So they went to call on him, visit with him, nothing - just a visit. I wasn't in there with him. He would go in there and call on him. Oh, he made about five trips like that. He would generally have a driver of his own and he would call on, oh, he would get out of the car, go in and shake hands with men and stuff but when he was drinking, it was very, very moderate.
DS But he did a lot of his informal visiting with that kind of drinking.

JF He did a hell of a lot of informal visiting as he would go along the line. He would see somebody he would know and he would stop, get out of the car. He was partial to railroad men. He said they have got a rough job out there in all this cold weather fixing frozen journal boxes and all that. He liked them. Fascinated him, when they're out in the cold bucking the weather and so forth. Where most men, don't you see, like carpenters and brick layers and cement people, it is all inside in the cold weather. He had a kind of knack of particularly liking those railroad men.

DS I guess he did work in the mines for a short time in Butte?

JF If he did, I didn't know about it.

DS It was just a very, very short time. He mentioned it sometimes when he was campaigning. You mentioned about Boulder Hot Springs area, did Murray own that?

JF He owned it at one time. I don't know how he acquired it. Then he sold it out. I forget who he sold it to. I would take my...wife...down...there...for...her arthritis of the-hip. I only met them ... I believe twice at the springs. they owned it way back in the beginning. I would say '28, '29 and '30 or somewhere along in there.

DS I guess Mrs. Murray used to spend a good deal of time there?

JF She spent considerable time there.

DS She was in fairly bad health for a lot of the time, wasn't she?

JF She wasn't in the best of health. She went there for rest and then to take the warm water like my wife did. My wife went there to take the warm water. It helped her some.

DS I understand Murray went there sometimes to rest while he was campaigning too.

JF He would go in there and get out of sight and have Friday night, Saturday and Sunday...two or three days of rest. Then he wouldn't see anybody.

DS Especially in his later campaigns?
JF Later campaigning years he would hide out there. There was no booze sold in the Boulder Hot Springs Hotel.

DS Is that right?

JF No booze, no bar, no saloon. If you had any liquor, you brought it yourself. He didn't bring anything there.

DS I guess Charlie Murray ran most of his campaigns in the state, didn't he?

JF Probably the last two campaigns. Charlie Murray had a great deal to do with it if he didn't run it all.

DS I guess he pretty well ran a lot of the office duties.

JF He ran a lot of the office duties and so forth. In Washington he did a lot of that. Yes, he did.

DS Did you visit the Senator in Washington very often?

JF Every other year I would drop in. You see the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad ran from Chicago through Washington to New York. You could use that line and get off and spend a day or two in Washington without any extra fare going into New York. So every other year I would see him for two or three hours or for dinner or something of that kind. Like when my wife and I were returning from Italy and Greece and so forth. We were on a trip, we had been in Pompeii. Herculaneum was a small town that we had to come through the Xray to take all the ashes off and so forth. I came back, I evidently had a white statue of a full size horse that had been dug out of this. The Romans got so indifferent that they elected this horse to the Roman Senate. That was history so I told that at dinner at Murray's apartment. I forget the name of the place where it was, a very lovely apartment. I told that to Murray and he put down his knife and fork and looked at my wife and he looked at me and said, "Jim, at least they elected a whole horse". So he had a sense of humor. (Laughter).

DS Obviously, Charlie had quite a sense of humor. I talked to him.

JF Yes, he did.

DS Well, I want to thank you for the time you spent with me today.

The End