

Maureen and Mike

# Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

## **Archives and Special Collections**

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: [library.archives@umontana.edu](mailto:library.archives@umontana.edu)

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 283-001**  
**Interviewee: Thomas Payne**  
**Interviewer: Scott Ward**  
**Date of Interview: May 21, 1992**

Scott Ward: How much do you think the Red Scare was a political move to get the Republicans back in power in the 1952 election of Senator Mike Mansfield?

Thomas Payne: Well, I think it was probably a factor in 1952 although General Eisenhower was running for president that year and was expected to win fairly easily which of course he did, defeating Adlai Stevenson. The Truman administration ended in 1953 on a very unpopular note and Harry Truman, now generally regarded as one of the most successful of our presidents, was very unpopular in 1952, so you can never tell how you're going to come out in history.

TP: In 1948 he had won with the opposition both from the left and the right, Henry Wallace on his left opposed his candidacy in the general election and on his right was Strom Thurmond of the Dixiecrat Party. Thurmond, who later, of course, became a republican and is still a senator from South Carolina.

The serious red scare began, I think, about 1948 with the Alger Hiss case, the Whittaker Chambers pumpkin papers, and Richard Nixon's campaign against Helen Gahagan Douglas, which was successful in 1950 in California and demonstrated that a republican who used this issue effectively had a chance of winning. I think the most outrageous aspect of the whole period was Sen. Joe McCarthy's use of red scare tactics in the 50's. He made his first reference to the subject in his famous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia in, I believe, February or March of 1950 when he said, "I hold in my hand the names of (I've forgotten; I think he may have said as many as 100) card-carrying communists from the State Department. Nobody ever saw the list. He probably never had that many names; probably never had any names except he may have had some suspects. But this began a process which culminated, I think, effectively in 1954 with the defeat of Wesley D'Ewart for the US Senate in Montana and the vote to censure McCarthy in the Senate, which came after the election of 1954. So the period, really, from about 1948 to about 1954 is the highlight of this period in American politics.

I'd say it was politically motivated to some extent on the assumption that it was an issue on which one could win but I think there may have been some people who really believed that there was a serious threat. Congress had responded, after all, by passing the Loyalty and Security Act requiring a special oath by all public employees that they were loyal to the Constitution.

SW: Do you remember what year it was? Loyalty and Security, was that '51 they passed that?

TP: It was while Truman was still president. It established a special board to investigate. I think this may have been something of a response to McCarthy in an attempt to provide an outlet

and more of a bipartisan effort to head off extreme McCarthyism. But this too created quite a negative feeling in the minds of many liberals and many people who basically were very loyal citizens but felt that it was unfair in this particular light.

I remember that the editor of the *Washington Post* was a person named Alan Barth and he came from the University of Montana, and lectured in the Journalism School and, as a matter of fact, spoke in one of my classes in a seminar on the loyalty oath situation and expressed a strong disagreement. His book I think on that period was titled, "The Loyalty of Free Men" so there was early on an effective demurrer or rejoinder to extreme McCarthy-ite smear tactics. But McCarthy then of course was introduced by a new term in American Politics, "McCarthyism," which no longer has the clear meaning it once did as simply a way of smearing one's opponent by calling him a communist or something to that effect, so that there was almost a neo-Nazi or neo-Fascist tactic, as it were, for that period.

SW: To have so many accusations that one can't just try to answer one of them. From some of the things I've read, he keeps on making more and more accusations and more and more accusations that his tactic was just to cover you with a whole bunch of slanderous remarks and so on; it was difficult for those to defend themselves against that type of thing.

TP: Fairly late in this period, later in the 1950's, my late first wife, Katie Payne, had discovered, as a member of the City Council, that Missoula desperately needed a sewage treatment plant which the Council eventually got around to authorizing in the early 1960's. One thing that she discovered was that it would be easier to finance it if the City owned the water system, and at a Republican gathering, she suggested that maybe the City of Missoula should consider buying the water system and the reason it was desirable. One of her Republican friends, a conservative Republican friend said, "But that would be Socialism!" In other words, the mentality of the Fifties was calling a lot of things Socialistic or Communistic.

I remember very vividly that this attitude prevailed during the period. There were a lot of people who were very sensitive. Of course, later on, other issues arose to eclipse this but in the Fifties we were just discovering that not only was the Soviet Union a major military adversary, which seemed to be, in the words of Churchill's Iron Curtain speech of 1946, intent on expanding its ideology around the world, but also, I think, there was a general need for some kind of "enemy" at this time to replace the end of WWII, and the need to find some foreign devil. While Communism certainly was a factor in the Korean War of 1950, in which the North Koreans invaded South Korea and President Truman, with the United Nations in support made a strong stand, with General MacArthur handling the situation, which unfortunately came to naught because he [MacArthur] overreached himself in 1951 and had to be recalled.

I think the recall of MacArthur after the Chinese Communists crossed the Yalu River and the Chinese Communists entered the war may have, in the minds of some conservatives, heightened this particular feeling. The whole question was exacerbated or augmented by the question of who lost China because in 1949 the Chiang Kai-Shek (?) government (the nationalist

government in China) collapsed and the Maoist/Marxist government, the Chinese Communist party, came to power late in September/October of 1949, so we had that issue too. Who lost China? There was a feeling, a growing feeling, that there were several people in the State Department at that period who had given improper advice and who had been closet Marxists, as it were, in China. John Stuart (?) Service, for example, is one who later came and spoke at the Mansfield Lectures in Missoula. Of course, we realize now that their assessment of the situation was extremely accurate at the time, that they were telling it like it was, but the bad news that the Communists had the support of the people in China because of a corrupt Nationalist Party Regime, something that a lot of people couldn't understand in this country. So all of those things, I think, were part of this mood of this period, as it were.

SW: That's a very good answer to that question. Thank you. Do you think that the people in Montana at that time, when Sen. Murray was going up for reelection in 1954 and he had the Red Web, which you were speaking of earlier, do you feel that the people in Montana were a fairly accurate group to judge or represented the national populace's belief of Communism?

TP: Well, I think that Montana was a little more remote than it is today. Remember, we did not have network television in 1954. We had (obviously) network radio. The newspapers in the state, except for the *Great Falls Tribune*, *The People's Voice* and maybe one or two others like the *Western News* in Hamilton, were controlled by the Anaconda Company. The Anaconda Company generally tried to avoid serious political reporting during that period so that the issue of D'Ewart versus Murray was not one that clearly surfaced. It has been said that the company was actually pro Jim Murray because he had generally supported *sub rosa* their views on the tariffs for Chilean copper and things of that sort, but this really wasn't so much of an issue in 1954 except in the sense that the press generally did not do a good job of reporting.

I remember one thing about the election that I observed personally, and that was that former senator Wheeler boasted when he was first elected to the Senate in the 1920's, he said, "If you ever see my picture on the front page of a company paper, you'll know I've sold out." And yet he decided in 1954, because he intensely disliked -- Jim Murray. I had an interview with him before his death in Washington in 1971 and he still (this was much later, seventeen years later) expressed an intense dislike for Sen. Murray. They simply didn't get along at all. But he decided to endorse D'Ewart, the Republican opponent of Murray, in '54.

Wheeler was probably not motivated by the Red Scare situation so much as a personal hatred for Murray, but his picture did appear on the front page of the *Missoulian*.

SW: Which was an Anaconda paper.

TP: Which was, in '54, an Anaconda paper.

SW: That's funny. The *Great Falls Tribune* was the only one that wasn't owned by the Anaconda Company?

TP: Yes. *The Great Falls Tribune* was then owned by the Warden Brothers. The family no longer owns the newspaper, of course, but it for many years was a family newspaper and did have the reputation of being fair and independent and also potent - a pro Democratic paper, but a very good newspaper in that period.

SW: Do you know of any type of devices -- there was obviously that device that was used by the D'Ewart campaign against Murray on the publishing of the Red Web?

TP: I want to talk a little bit about that particularly.

SW: Oh. Sure. Go ahead.

TP: Because actually, as you probably know, the 1954 Senate election was very close, I think. Senator Murray won it by about 2,000 votes.

SW: Exactly.

TP: Actually, it really wasn't by any means clear --won apparently without D'Ewart's blessing, although we have no way really of knowing for sure. An independent group of right-wing conservative Republicans decided that they wanted to finance this publication called, "The Red Web Over Congress" and this booklet (I still have a copy in my files somewhere at home; I moved my files around when I retired, but I still have a copy of it) shows the capitol dome and a black spider weaving a web. You have that. Sen. Murray's enmeshed in this red web.

The only good strategy, I think, that Murray was able to employ to respond this, which was rather effective, was to show some pictures of him being endorsed by President Eisenhower in 1952 or earlier in the Fifties, saying "to a great American," or "Distinguished American" Jim Murray, so that the average Montanan could look at these political advertisements and say, "If our Republican president led the Allied Forces to victory in Europe in WWII likes Jim Murray, he can't possibly be a Communist." So I thought this was very effective.

I started out later to find out what really brought this about and who was responsible. Incidentally, one of the people involved in this whose name has escaped the memory of most people was a fellow in Billings who was not a prime mover, by the name of Ralph Studer. Ironically, Studer was elected a delegate to the Montana Constitutional Convention in 1972 and I'm sure there wasn't anybody there by then -- and I certainly wasn't going to go around making any waves about it -- this is ancient history now. I hope. We're looking back twenty years to the Constitutional Convention and nearly 40 years to the campaign of 1954. But Studer was involved in some aspect of the publication of that. The chairman of the committee was a person by the name of Al Schlaht. I actually interviewed him in Billings in the early 1960's when I was doing research for this. I asked him about this whole episode and he really was a little bit inconclusive about it. He felt that there were some other people behind it who were sort of

invisible, as it were, and I talked to the state chairman at the time, the state Republican chairman, who did not authorize this, and he said that both he -- well Schlaht said, in effect, there were a lot of things I didn't want to know about this. In other words, kind of washing MY hands of the whole business. This kind of got out of hand.

The state chairman said, in effect, while I was interviewing him with a tape recorder nearly ten years after this happened, he said, "It's too early to tell." He said, "If you come back in ten years I might tell you more. I've got to wait till some people die." (Laughter) I think this is the way it is in politics to some extent.

At the time it's very difficult to know the whole truth about a situation, who really was behind this. So I never really did find out where the money came from or who funded it, but it was obvious that it was prompted by some wealthy people who were obsessed with the communist smear, and the fact was that D'Ewart and the party permitted this thing to go forward and to be distributed. My basic assessment of the impact of the situation was that it was an example of negative campaigning of the highest sort because it was too big a lie for people to believe. Adolph Hitler used to say in Germany, "If you tell a little lie, nobody will believe you, but if you tell a big enough lie, everybody will believe you." Well, this was maybe even too big a lie to be believable. It out-Hitlered Hitler, and I think it backfired. I'm convinced that in 1954, given the way things were going, that Murray was somewhat vulnerable. D'Ewart relied or permitted others to rely too much on this red scare tactic.

Eisenhower, after all, had won in 1952 on three big issues: Korea, corruption and communism. Those were the three things that were talked about a great deal and of course Eisenhower stressed more the corruption and Korea than the communist aspect. But one of his favorite lines was, "I shall go to Korea and settle the Korean war," which was still lingering in 1952 and indeed he did in 1953 bring about an end to the Korean War so (he) was successful in that respect. I think that by 1954 Eisenhower and the Republican Party had had their fill of McCarthyism and Edward R. Murrow had a famous radio program blasting the methods of McCarthy and McCarthy had taken on, unsuccessfully, the Defense Department and tried to find communist connections there. This, of course, was unsuccessful, so hovering over the vote in November, the Murray-D'Ewart elections was the question of the voting of censure on McCarthy. Of course D'Ewart had pressed Murray on how he was going to vote on censure of McCarthy, pointing out that the vote was going to be taken after the election of 1954 and D'Ewart in 1951 would not be a senator until 1955, so the inference being obvious, everybody could guess that he would not vote for censure. But he wanted Murray to say that he was going to vote for censure, which Murray actually did not say during the campaign because he was trying to soft-pedal the issue, I think, to some extent and ran the campaign more on the old New Deal liberal issues.

SW: That's interesting because it's in the Mike Mansfield papers. He [Mansfield] obviously voted for censuring McCarthy and some of the letters from folks in Montana were very adamant about how un-American that was, almost as un-American as Truman pointing out

MacArthur in the Korean War which was quite interesting.

TP: You know, you were asking how well Montana reflected national feelings earlier. One thing that I'm sure you're aware of is that at least until this time and indeed until 1960, Montana had voted for the winning presidential candidate in every presidential election since Montana had been a state, so that Montana was kind of a political weather vane. In 1960 Nixon carried Montana but lost a close election to Jack Kennedy for president, so Montana was kind of a reflection of what was going on nationally, I think.

Of course, on this campus, which was a very liberal campus in the 1950's, there was a strong feeling against McCarthyism, a strong feeling against the loyalty review process and a strong feeling against any requirement of the state loyalty oath or anything of that sort. This is as best as I can remember. But my basic conclusion after researching the Red Web story in the 1954 campaign was that it was a counterproductive device and that D'Ewart could have probably won the election had he not resorted to this, but this backfired so completely that it tossed the Republicans in among a lot of, shall we say "enlightened independent voters" who might have gone for D'Ewart otherwise. It's, of course, very difficult to say, but it was a very close election.

SW: That's an interesting point, for sure. Do you know of any type of devices of smear tactics that were used against Mike Mansfield in his 1952 senate election?

TP: I think Mansfield was always more popular and less controversial than Murray. Mansfield is seen as being closer to the political center than Murray, and Murray was an uncompromising New Deal liberal. Mansfield probably had as liberal a voting record as Murray's but did not come across in Montana as that kind of person. He was more the kind of person who had a lot of friends on both sides to take care of the problems of Montana and stress that aspect of foreign policy. I think he was (inaudible). Just the other night, it was remarked by, I believe, one of the speakers of the Mansfield Conference that when Metcalf was in the Senate later, (of course Metcalf was, in effect, Murray's successor in the Senate), the idea was that Metcalf took care of the domestic agenda for the state and Mansfield took care of foreign policy, so they involved in foreign policy in generally supporting Eisenhower on things like the North Atlantic and Truman on things like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (sic) and stressing the President's hand in foreign affairs and following the United Nations were generally effective strategies. They were not as controversial as things that Murray had to address.

Murray may have gotten into some trouble because, in 1946, he endorsed a proposal for a Missouri Valley Authority comparable to the Tennessee Valley Authority, and this may have engendered a strong opposition to public/private utility companies. I have a feeling that Montana Power and the Anaconda Company, which were called the "twins" in Montana politics, and they [Murray and Mansfield] often parted company over this issue because Montana Power could not have survived had Murray's Missouri Valley Authority been accepted to provide something comparable to the Tennessee Valley Authority -- just taking over all the electric utility business in everything east of the Rocky Mountains, so that could have been

another factor that went into it and may well have neutralized Anaconda in 1954 as far as the -- certainly Anaconda did not openly (as far as I could tell) support D'Ewart in 1954.

SW: Do you know anything about the pro-Communist group called the Birchers? Is that how you pronounce it?

TP: Yes. The John Birch Society. They came into being a little later in the late 1950's and helped revive in the early 60's the radical right in American politics. This whole period of the late '50's seemed to be a period of quietude as far as radicalism is concerned, but late in 1958 Robert Welch, the head of a candy company in Belmont, Massachusetts (whose name escapes me) called together a group of his friends and expressed a strong feeling that it was time for all conservatives to unite to end the threat of communism in this country. Among other charges that he made was one that President Dwight Eisenhower himself was a communist. That's almost like saying that George Bush is a closet communist too, or something. Eisenhower was a moderate Republican. Welch called him a communist and revised some of the McCarthy tactics and began publishing a Birch publication called "Public Opinion", the Blue Book of the John Birch Society, things of this sort.

This began to have an impact by the early 1960's so that the party, which had been within the Republican Party, mainly because the Republican Party in the 1950's had been controlled by the so-called "Eastern Establishment" which was basically moderately public. As a matter of fact, George Bush's father was one of the moderate Republicans of the Eastern establishment -- they were essentially business people who did not like the New Deal but thought that government should have a positive role, especially in international affairs. They were people like Sen. Vandenberg who in 1946 joined President Truman in supporting the United Nations and some Eastern Republican leaders were people like Dewey and Rockefeller later, were internationally oriented Republicans.

The Birch Society, in effect, was the challenge to the moderate Republican element in the party, which probably had its last really significant heyday at the 1960 Republican Convention, but the Birchers were already beginning to move in. Richard Nixon won—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

TP: —what we saw in the Birch Society was its systematic effort to capture a lot of the vulnerable institutions in American life, including the Republican Party organization at the grass roots level. In Montana they were successful in, in effect, taking over a lot of the Republican Party mechanism through the state which was relatively weak in any event and I think the movement culminated in the nomination of Barry Goldwater, who was seen as a very conservative Republican, in 1964. Though he was not a Bircher himself, he welcomed John Birch Society support.

He was disastrously defeated by Lyndon Johnson that year. The party taken an extreme position on the support of Goldwater -- a lot of Republicans and independents deserted the Republican Party and supported Johnson in '64. I remember very vividly being involved in the effort by moderate Republicans to regain control of the local Republican Party in 1966, a move that was successful by a very close vote, but it took an all-out effort to do so. But unfortunately, the Party was too hopelessly splintered and divided (so) that the right wing never totally surrendered; they just retreated into the woodwork, as it were, periodically resurfaced and remained around thereafter to haunt the cause.

The early 1960's, especially the period around the time of John F. Kennedy's assassination and up through the election of 1964, was a period that basically saw the resurgence of the Radical Right and built around the idea of Robert Welch and the Birch Society that there was a Communist conspiracy. It's a wonder that Oliver Stone in making [the movie] "JFK" never discovered that particular conspiracy because they could have very well have been a candidate for the assassination charges as well as some other people. As a matter of fact, Adlai Stevenson in 1963, strongly urged Kennedy not to go to Dallas because of the extremism that was surfacing in Dallas at that time.

I read a paper in 1962 dealing with radicalism in American politics. "The Radical Right in American Politics" was the title of it. I basically concluded that, while they were letting off a lot of steam, they were eventually going to prove to be unsuccessful. I think that after the defeat of Goldwater, we moved to a period of some time of moderation and we didn't hear a great deal more of the extreme nature about the communist threat to this country.

We got involved in Viet Nam, the civil rights movement and a whole bunch of other issues arose to replace this. But I'd say the thing really came to the surface with probably the Red Scare to some extent of 1948, with the Alger Hiss period, the Rosenberg conviction, and ended with the defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964. During this period we saw the Birch Society, we saw the Red Web over Montana and we saw things like the Loyalty Oath, the emphasis on the (inaudible) boards and the Civil Service and a great many able people who had flirted with controversial ideas not necessarily were Communist or had ever been directly associated with the extreme ism but who may have expressed some sentiments.

I had a very good Methodist minister friend who is still living and is now over 90 years old but he practically got driven out of Missoula in the early 1950's because he had gone to a luncheon at the Methodist National Conference for the Methodist Federation of Social Action which, it turned out, had one communist connection and because he went to that luncheon, and gave them a dollar or whatever it was, and all of a sudden was to be found a member of the association, which—

SW: There he was, a communist.

TP: I remember one of the ultraconservative members of the church coming to my house the first year I was in Missoula in 1951-52 with a pamphlet entitled, "Is There A Pink Branch of Methodism?" I happened to be a Methodist at that time. After a nice social visit, as he was about to leave, he furtively pulled out of his coat pocket this pamphlet. He just handed it to me and expected me to see that our pastor was a communist whom the FBI came around to investigate. It was an extremely unpleasant situation, but he fortunately survived, not in Missoula but eventually moved elsewhere. But that was a direct encounter I had with this in Missoula.

SW: Wow. That's a pretty intense accusation. Mike Mansfield had an anticommunist bill in 1954, I believe, where he attempted to outlaw the Communist Party (inaudible).

TP: Well, several liberal Democrats -- Hubert Humphrey was supporting that too simply as a countermeasure to—

SW: That's what I was wondering. Do you believe it was a countermeasure to Communism?

TP: I think it was just a gesture because it was just a measure to keep the Communist Party off the election ballot and to outlaw it as a political force. But it probably would have had very little effect on communism because the Communist cause essentially was an effective, disciplined minority that functioned just as well underground. Probably outlawing the Party was a countermeasure that tended to backfire because the Communists could get along very well. They were getting over 100,000 votes in elections anyway. They weren't any big deal as far as American politics was concerned.

SW: Okay, because I was thinking that he might have been doing it in reaction to -- because he had voted in 1952 against McCarthyism or against censoring McCarthy -- or is that '54?

TP: The vote on McCarthy's censure was in November of 1954. Do you remember when McCarthy came to Missoula in 1952?

TP: Yes, and I heard him speak and he spoke very strongly against Mansfield.

SW: Do you remember what the date and all on that was?

TP: I think it was in October of 1952, but Mansfield was running against a Republican incumbent by the name of Zales Ecton who was the Republican senator and Ecton had won sort of by accident in 1946 because the Democratic Party deserted [Burton K.] Wheeler and Wheeler lost the nomination of the Party. He'd been the senator for four terms, and he lost in '46 to Leif Ericson, who was a more liberal Democrat and more reflective of what the Montana Democratic Party wanted. But the dumping of Wheeler played into Ecton's hands and made it possible for this relatively obscure Montana Republican, who'd been a state senator from Gallatin County, to be elected. He was actually, until Conrad Burns was elected in 1988, Ecton was the only Republican who had ever been elected to the US Senate since the popular election of senators beginning in 1917. Ecton was the only one until Burns and he only served one term.

So Mansfield defeated him in 1952 but Sen. McCarthy did come to Missoula in 1952 and did speak very strongly against Mike Mansfield. He spoke at the Loyola Auditorium. I don't know whether it's still called Loyola Auditorium. It's the Catholic church public school auditorium on West Pine, or West Spruce, in that area. It may have another name. I think the church has a new auditorium now, but in 1952 it was the Loyola Auditorium (inaudible). I can't remember too much of what McCarthy said, but he exhibited a general style associated with McCarthy, being a very simplistic kind of person, grossly oversimplified, short on facts and long on harangues and long on smear tactics and long on emotionalism, which is associated with McCarthyism.

SW: In Montana we had the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the House Un-American Activities Committees and Montanans for Americanism: those were all very anti-communist groups. Can you think of any others that were sort of maybe only renowned in Montana?

TP: Well, I'm sure that at the time I knew a lot of others but I've sort of lost, shall we say, my computer disk on that. My mind doesn't pull up any more of those.

SW: Fair enough. Excellent. Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

TP: Glad to do it.

[End of Interview]