

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: 396-027**

**Interviewee: John H. Leuthold with sons Dave Leuthold and John Leuthold, Jr.**

**Interviewer: Bob Brown**

**Date of Interview: June 6, 2005**

**Project: Bob Brown Oral History Collection**

Bob Brown: Okay, we're visiting with John Leuthold in his ranch home in Molt, and John, you were born in 1906?

John Leuthold: Nineteen-oh-seven.

BB: In 1907.

JL: May 26, 1907.

BB: Your father served in the state Senate, I believe, beginning what...in 1918 or 1919?

JL: He served two terms. I think he went in 1917 because I think he must have been elected in '16, '17, '19, '20, '21, '23.

BB: Yes that sounds right. And you served—

JL: Maybe it's too sure to say. He was defeated in '26. He ran for his third term and was defeated in '26.

BB: Then you served in the House from 1950 more or less to 1966.

JL: Yes, '68.

BB: Nineteen sixty-eight. Now, I want to ask you just some questions about your very early involvement. I realize you were just a young man in the 1920s, but a couple of prominent individuals in state history, both of whom served as governor, were involved when your dad was a legislator. Sam Ford who was Attorney General and later went on to be governor, and Joe Dixon—who had been a U.S Senator—and was governor during the time that your dad was a member of the state Senate. I just want to ask you about any thoughts or recollections that you might have, maybe some conversation you might have had with your dad; maybe first about Joe Dixon?

JL: My dad never got along very good with Joe Dixon, although Joe Dixon was a Republican. He had a lot of problems with the legislature and there were lots of battles with the Anaconda Copper Company and all those.

BB: Do you remember your dad ever speaking of Joe Dixon?

JL: Oh yes. They didn't get along. Actually, [John] Erickson followed Joe Dixon. My dad really got along better with Erickson than with Joe Dixon. I don't know whether Dad was right or not, but—

BB: But do you remember anything specific your dad might ever have said about Dixon, any issue or any experience he had with him?

JL: I should, but I just can't recall anything in particular.

BB: Did you ever meet Dixon?

JL: Apparently I was just a little kid then and we made one visit up to the legislature and I may have seen him there. Otherwise I had nothing personal with him or anything. It was the same way with Sam Ford, really.

BB: Of course Sam Ford went on to be governor from 1940 to 1948. You probably—

JL: I explained earlier that when he was elected, there were five candidates and my father was one. He was killed in an auto accident up at Saco.

BB: When he was running for the Republican nomination for governor in 1940?

JL: Yes, for nomination. Sam Ford picked that up and said that, "Leuthold has said that if he didn't have a chance, he would support Sam Ford." That was a nice thing for him to say.

BB: There was no way to prove it.

JL: No. I guess maybe my dad would have supported him too.

BB: Did you resent that remark that Ford made then?

JL: No.

BB: It was probably true, or could have been true?

JL: No, I think it's probably true. We weren't quite that acquainted with the other candidates. Their list is some place, but I can't recall who they were.

BB: Do you remember ever meeting Sam Ford?

JL: Apparently I might have, but not too much, no.

BB: Now, your father of course was important in helping you form your own political philosophy.

JL: Oh, I'm sure he was. My father was more of a politician than any of us boys and even our grandsons. He dearly would have liked to been elected governor. He pushed himself hard. As I look back, I think maybe it was a mistake that he even tried. We were so hard up in those days. That was back in those terrible hard days. We were so hard up and my mother wasn't too well at that time either. I kind of questioned it, but Pa was a politician. See we came in 1912 and by 1916 he was already running for the Senate. He didn't wait very long.

BB: How would you describe his political philosophy?

JL: Well, he was conservative and—

BB: What does that mean to you to be a conservative?

JL: Well, I like to think of it as being down to earth, a sensible approach to things and—

BB: Now during the period that your dad was a legislator, and actually, during the period that you were a legislator, some historians have written that the Anaconda Company had a fair amount of influence in state politics. Did you have any impression of them? How would they have seen government in Montana?

JL: They and Montana Power controlled the politics of the state in those days. They definitely did.

BB: How did they do that?

JL: Well, just being nice, good fellows. They always had a party every afternoon and it influenced some of it. It influenced a lot—

BB: What did they want? What were the policies that they wanted?

JL: Just support of their companies.

John Leuthold Jr.: Bob, this is my brother Dave.

BB: Good to meet you Dave, Bob Brown.

JL (*speaking to his sons*): We're partly waiting for you and partly not. We tried to see if you were on the way. Bob didn't want to start until the politician was here. We're starting a little bit.

BB: We're just talking about the period in state politics when the Anaconda Company had a lot of influence, and you were mentioning that the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power Company basically had a controlling influence during that period of time. I was just curious to know how that influence was manifested. By keeping the tax burden low, I imagine?

JL: For them, anyway. Yes, they looked out for themselves. Have you an opinion on the Anaconda Copper Company and Montana Power?

Dave Leuthold: They sure had a lot of influence.

JL: That's what I said. They sure had a lot of influence. Of course they used to always put these parties on, and just good will parties to influence people.

BB: You know, John, there must have been...If the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power Company and so on, if they had influence, there must have been a way that the influence was exercised, and I imagine hospitality rooms and parties were a part of it. There must have been strategy sessions and there must have been little conversations and things where people tried to make a determination of which bills would pass and which bills wouldn't have passed, and that sort of thing. Do you have any recollection of anything like that?

JL: I think the supporters followed them quite closely. They took their advice, and you became branded. You were either a company man or you weren't. I realized that I was kind of branded as a company man. I was told earlier that one of our earlier representatives said, "You'll listen to the pros and cons, and you'll probably wind up and feel that the Montana Power is right." I recall I had been voting for their proposals quite consistently and when a proposal came up, they had a gas field down by Belfry and they wanted to get gas closer to Helena, Butte, and places like that. It was a dry field by Three Forks. They wanted permission to store gas in that so they could draw out of there to have it closer. I thought, "Well, I don't know what the landowners are going to get out of this. So I think I'll vote against them." I voted against them, but it passed anyway. One thing that I bucked them on, but I lost out. I just recall that particular incident.

BB: Do you remember ever being involved in any kind of strategy sessions or anything in regard to leadership?

JL: I guess I probably wasn't that active. I'm not as influential as a lot of the business people and college professors and all that. I never went to college and I just felt quite fortunate that I was recognized for the abilities that I had.

BB: They are significant, no question about it, and you had major influence during the time that you served in the state legislature.

JL: Well, I hope I contributed.

BB: Now John, do you remember Ory Armstrong?

JL: Yes.

BB: Would you regard Ory Armstrong, perhaps, as one of the key members of the legislature in terms of—

JL: Oh yes, he was our Speaker. He was our Speaker for the first year and he's really down to earth.

BB: Do you suppose he might have worked closely with the Anaconda Company people or the Montana Power Company people?

JL: Well, I wouldn't be surprised if he leaned that way, yes.

BB: I'm not making a judgment about that, you know.

JL: He's from up in your country.

BB: He is, and I conducted a fair number of interviews. There's the point of view that the Anaconda Company was a terrible tyrant, and there's the point of view that the Anaconda Company was a kind of paternalistic uncle figure in the legislature that kind of tried to guide the state in the intelligent direction. The truth is probably somewhere mixed up in all of that.

JL: Yes, they certainly had their influence.

BB: No question that they had a lot of influence. You served with George O'Connor. didn't you?

JL: Yes.

BB: Any thoughts and impressions about him?

JL: He was recognized particularly on parliamentary procedure. He was a whiz on that. Even when the Democrats became in control of the House, when they'd get mixed up on a parliamentary process, they'd call on George O'Connor to come and straighten them out. In a few minutes, he'd have them all straightened out. He was a whiz on that.

BB: He was a legislator from down in this part of the state, I think.

JL: Carbon County. He came from Fromberg.

BB: Then he went on to become an official in the Montana Power Company and I think president of the Montana Power Company.

JL: Yes he did. He fought in his legislative year with...so he, probably even as a legislator, he had (unintelligible). After he retired from politics, he went in and I think he became president of the Montana Power.

DL: Do you remember, Dad, how skillful he was in debate?

JL: Pardon?

DL: Do you remember how skillful George O'Connor was in debate?

JL: Oh yes, he was a whiz.

DL: He could swing votes. He'd get up and speak and the votes would change.

JL: Yes, just by speaking on an issue, he could change enough votes. He had a lot of influence.

BB: Was he, perhaps, the most influential legislator with whom you served?

JL: Well, during that time anyway, yes. He was very capable.

BB: Do you remember Eugene Mahoney? Gene Mahoney?

JL: Yes. Not too well.

BB: Leo Graybill? Graybill was, I think at one time, Floor Leader, and then became a Senator.

JL: Yes, I think he was our Speaker a couple of times. His son was head of the Constitutional Convention.

BB: I'd like to ask you some questions about that too in a few minutes as we get to it. You served in the legislature at the same time, I think, with three different governors. You served with—

JL: Bonner was in to begin with, yes.

BB: What are your recollections of Bonner?

JL: Well, he was picked up down in Louisiana or something for being drunk.

BB: Did you ever meet him when he was governor?

JL: Oh, yes.

BB: How would you describe him?

JL: I guess that being a Democrat we didn't favor him too much. I don't know that he was our best governor. I just don't know what to say about him.

BB: Then you served in the House at the same time that Hugo Aronson was a Senator. Aronson was elected governor in 1952. So you served in the legislature all the time that Aronson—or almost all the time—was governor. What are your impressions of him?

JL: Oh, we knew him personally. He'd come down to the ranch here and we had parties here, I know. He was a good friend of my dad's. We liked him real well and I think he did a wonderful job. I'm half Swede and he was this big Swede.

BB: Do you remember a story connected with him?

JL: Well, he wasn't one of the high flowers. He was a sensible guy, you know. He was a hard working oil man and I think it was all business with him. I think he did a wonderful job as governor.

BB: Did you ever have an experience with him maybe traveling, or did he ever give you any advice or talk with you about...Do you remember a conversation with him or anything like that?

JL: Oh, yes, we visited many times about different things. I remember one time they were drawing blood for the blood bank and he was in one bed and I was in another. I can't give blood. I just run short. As they were drawing it out of me, they got about half of it out and I heard the nurse say, "I think we better give this back to this guy." Then I talked to Aronson afterwards and he said, "Oh, I come every time they have a blood bank and it doesn't bother me at all." He used to come down here and he was a good friend of my dad's. We had family dinners together and things like that.

BB: Now, you served in the legislature with Tim Babcock.

JL: Oh, yes.

BB: Then also you were a legislator when Tim was governor. What are your recollections of Tim?

JL: Oh again, I knew him personally. I worked closely with him, and I served with Betty.

BB: In the Constitutional Convention?



JL: Yes. We worked together lots and I had high regard for him. He was a good businessman besides being a good politician. Some of these guys, I hate to think of them as politicians. They were like I was. They were just serving their people and they were ordinary people just doing their duty.

BB: Do you remember Governor Nutter? He was in the Senate when you were in the House, I think, for a while.

JL: Yes, I knew him personally too.

BB: Any personal stories or anything? How would you describe Governor Nutter?

JL: He wasn't there very long, but—

BB: Do you remember him as a state Senator? He was in the Senate from Richland County when you were in the House. Then he went on to be governor.

JL: Yes, I don't know if I was that close to him.

DL: Remember, Dad, I used to go back and forth from Missoula with him?

JL: You did?

DL: Because he was in law school while I was in graduate school. He was in law school. I was working in the legislature and he was serving, and we used to go back and forth together on weekends.

BB: How would you describe him?

DL: Don Nutter?

BB: Yes.

DL: He was a bright fellow. He was capable, self-confident. He was hard working in the fact that he was trying to serve in the legislature and go to law school at the same time. That was sort of a drain on everybody. He was not as imposing, physically, as Hugo Aronson, but nevertheless somewhat imposing. It was somewhat smaller, but he had a good, strong, physical body and a good, powerful voice that he was perfectly willing to use.

BB: Were terms like "dynamic" and "forceful"?

JLJ: He was aggressive.

BB: Aggressive?

DL: Yes, he was aggressive. I wouldn't think of dynamic as a term, but forceful and aggressive were terms. He was hard working and he was looking forward to being influential at the time.

BB: Did he tell you any stories ever that you remember?

DL: I don't think of any right off the bat. To some extent, he was like all students struggling with law school problems as well as struggling with legislative problems.

JL: Dave had a surprisingly lot of experience for a young guy. When I went to the legislature, our Senator Web [Webster] Keller selected Dave to be Speaker of the Senate. He was the fastest reader they ever had. He just zipped it off there. They never had a Speaker, a reader, as good.

BB: The three readings, at length, under the constitution. So you'd read every fifth line or something like that, as fast as you could?

DL: Oh, I read most of those bills in their entirety. We could get by on two of the readings with reading them entirely.

JL: He was a terrific reader and then following that, we set up the legislative council and you worked on that for months, didn't you?

DL: Yes, in the '59 session. I had just gotten out of the Marine Corps.

BB: So just to clarify this: the 1889 constitution required that all bills considering in the legislature be actually read at length three times. The 1972 constitution doesn't have that same requirement. So there needed to be someone, in order to save time, who could read the bills from the rostrum as rapidly as possible. That's what you did. Then the legislative council was created, I believe, by the 1959 legislature?

JL: Somewhere in there.

DL: The '57, because it was active in 1959.

BB: So the legislative council provided staffing for the legislature that it hadn't had before. I think that in my interviews, I've learned that the Anaconda Company had a bill drafting service, apparently, where they were helpful in drafting bills for legislators for their introduction. The legislative council made it possible for that service to be provided at a public expense.

JL: That's possible. That's probably the change over there.

BB: That was one of the things that changed during that period of time.

DL: An attorney from Shelby was the—

BB: Cedor Aronow

DL: No, Johnson. Jim Johnson was his name, I think. Gene Tidball was first Executive Director of the legislative council. Gene was an attorney. Then Jim Johnson came in during the session to help draft bills with another attorney. Then I served as a researcher for the legislative council.

BB: That would have been when, Dave?

DL: In '59.

BB: Just for about a year in '59, or just during that legislative session?

DL: Right. We started in December and ended soon after the session was over.

BB: Now a young legislator, I think just starting out in 1959, was Ted Schwinden. Do you have any recollections of him?

JL: Oh definitely. Of course he became governor too. When I first went in, I was involved in the Grain Growers Association. We wanted to set up a wheat commission. Ted Schwinden, he was opposed to it. He was a little bit like George O'Connor. He could influence people. He opposed it and finally one year he switched over in favor. With his support and Big Ed Smith, we got our bill through. As long as he opposed us, why, we couldn't get that bill through.

BB: So he was obviously an influential legislator?

JL: Oh yes, he was. He was. He definitely was.

BB: So it probably didn't particularly surprise you when he went on to become Governor?

JL: No, I guess not. He had a lot of ability.

BB: Do you have any specific recollections of him as a legislator? You just mentioned the one, the—

JL: Well, I suppose there were other things that he was still just as capable of on the way. Maybe I wasn't involved in them.

BB: John, I think in the 1959 session, there was a big dispute over public utility districts—PUDs, as they were called. That was kind of a hot issue during that session. Do you remember anything about that?

JL: Public utility, yes. You mean the co-ops?

BB: Well, I'm not exactly sure, but apparently Washington state had a system of public utility districts where electric power was provided more or less through what might amount to cooperatives statewide. So there was an effort in the 1959 session basically, I think, to convert the investor-owned utility companies to public utility districts, maybe to get the state power condemnation to take them over. Of course Montana Power Company and Pacific Power and Light Company and Montana Dakota and Utilities Company fought that hard. There was a vote on that in the 1959 session that didn't carry, and that became an important issue in 1960, whether or not you supported public utility districts. Do you remember that at all? Is that ringing any kind of a bell?

JL: If you think of it as co-ops, why there was always a dispute between the co-ops and the Montana Power. The co-ops; I never was much of a co-op man. We have Montana Power here, but when they came to vote, both of them ran lines out to Molt. Only a half a dozen people here—both ran lines out. Montana Power got their line here before the co-op. Then the co-ops served the rural areas, but as the cities grew, they grew out into rural areas. Now I think they recognize the co-ops in town just as much as they do Montana Power.

BB: There was a bill passed called the Territorial Integrity Bill. That was designed to try and kind of draw the lines so that they wouldn't have conflicting power lines any longer.

JL: Yes.

BB: Ed Smith from up in Dagmar was instrumental in getting that legislation passed.

JL: Perhaps.

BB: He ended that war.

JL: Oh well, he was an awfully good legislator too. He was down to earth. He had a lot of influence too.

JLJ: I remember the PUDs.

BB: The what?

JLJ: The PUDs. It was real controversial. I remember you and mom talking about it.

JL: Yes.

JLJ: Out in Washington, the cities formed their own.

BB: That's probably right. There was a legislator named Cy Tonner from Flathead County who, in 1959, introduced this PUD bill. I know it was a major issue in that part of the state because the Republicans really went after Cy Tonner, Clarence Sheldon, and Dale McGarvey, over their support of that legislation. Then they defeated all three of them in the 1960 election. The Republicans had a big victory in 1960, I think importantly on the strength of that issue. Maybe that wasn't as big of an issue in this part of the state. It may not have been.

JL: Well as I say, I kind of leaned towards Montana Power at that time. I should have been (unintelligible), but the co-ops have done such a wonderful job that I'm glad they're here right now. I really am.

BB: John, what do you remember about a lobbyist by the name of Boo McGilvery?

JL: Oh no, I knew him personally. I just can't recall too much.

BB: Apparently he was a great storyteller and had a great sense of humor?

JL: Yes, he was a very likable guy.

BB: He lobbied for the Montana Power Company in the '50s and '60s.

JL: Yes, I think so.

BB: Al Wilkinson?

JL: I don't quite place him. I don't know him.

BB: He was a lobbyist for the Anaconda Company, I think, during that period of time. Lloyd Crippen?

JL: Oh yes, they were all lobbyists around there. They were good people. They never ruffled anybody's feathers. They knew how to lobby without stirring anybody up.

BB: Do you remember Ty Robinson?

JL: Just the name. I just can't place him.

BB: He was a lobbyist for the railroads during that period of time. Jim Umber? AFL-CIO lobbyist for some of the time that you were there.

JL: The name is familiar.

BB: How about the Farmers Union? I don't know off-hand the name of the lobbyist for the Farmers Union, but do you remember anything about their influence or their involvement in legislation during the time that you were a legislator?

JL: Well, of course they were always in conflict with the Montana Power Company. There again, I wasn't a Farm Union man. I didn't belong to it.

BB: Did you belong to Farm Bureau?

JL: I did for a little while locally. They had an active organization up at Absarokee for a little while to get votes. So I became a member of the Farm Bureau. I kind of lean more to Farm Bureau than I did Farm Union. I don't believe we even have a Farm Bureau in the county anymore. Even Farm Union, they aren't very active. You don't hear of them doing anything anymore, do you?

BB: How about the—

JL: Molt was always a strong Farm Union and co-op.

JLJ: There are some individuals around here that still attend their meetings, Dad.

JL: Yes, the Downs still go to their meetings I guess.

JLJ: Yes, I think Calvin Lane went to the state convention or something.

JL: Oh did he? Yes, there are two or three families like that that were pretty strong Farm Union.

BB: Just for purposes of the historical record here, how would you describe—as you would think of it—the philosophy of the Farmers Union? What were they for? How would you characterize them?

JL: Well, they definitely worked for the interests of the farmers and they were the ones that pushed the local co-ops. They were strong supporters of the co-ops. They kind of felt that they should buy everything through a cooperative—a local elder there was a co-op—and they sold a lot of sideline products and fuel and things like that. There were quite a number of families that were strong supporters. They wouldn't buy anything else except through Farm Union co-ops.

BB: You felt kind of uncomfortable with them from what you told me?

JL: Yes. I never leaned that way very much.

BB: Why?

JL: I don't know just why. I was never a very strong co-op man although I was treated fine, and I got Patrick his dividend because it was the local business here and we did—we traded. We sold our wheat through the elevator and did business there. Eventually, however, they overextended themselves here in Molt; they built some beautiful inns over there and overextended themselves and went broke.

BB: Would you say that the Farmers Union—this may be more in the national level—supported farm programs, price supports, that type of thing? Would they be associated with that sort of thing?

JL: Yes.

BB: Your philosophy might not have been too closely synchronized with that?

JL: Not too strong, yes.

BB: Did you belong to the Stockgrowers Association?

JL: Yes, I belonged there but I wasn't really active. I just belonged because I had cattle and I don't belong now. I don't know, I kind of dropped my due. I belonged to a little local one here they called Beartooth Stock out of Absarokee. That was our county one. Yes, I did belong just to give support. I became more involved in Grain Growers and I was one of the charter members setting up the Grain Growers Association. I was the second chairman that they had.

BB: Governor Schwinden had also been the state chairman of the Grain Growers Association out there.

JL: Yes, he finally came around. He became active in it, yes. He didn't support us to begin with. It was battle to even get anywhere.

BB: Now John, you kind of...I don't want to put words in your mouth here, but when you were a Republican legislator in the 1950s, would you say you were in the mainstream of Republican thinking in Montana in the 1950s in the legislature?

JL: Well, I just followed along because I was kind of a born Republican. I have been a Republican all my life.

BB: So how would you describe the Republican philosophy? If you could, just in a few sentences, describe your philosophy what would it be? How did you see the role of government, or how do you?

JL: It's kind of hard for me to say. The Republican philosophy and then mine personally. I've always believed in paying our way as we go. I'd like to think the Republicans would do that, but they don't always.

BB: But you believe in fiscal responsibility?

JL: They like to claim that, but we haven't always been, and we're not that way right now. I'm concerned about our deficit right now.

BB: But as you think back in the 1950s, the Republicans were the party perhaps to create emphasis on good fiscal management?

JL: I like to think they were. I guess there were Democrats just as concerned as we were. Of course when Clinton—we don't approve of Clinton—but he did a pretty good job of managing the finances. He wound up with a little surplus.

BB: What does the term "conservative" mean to you? How would you describe a conservative?

JL: I think people who are conscientious for what they are doing and—

BB: How would you contrast a conservative with a liberal as you think back as a legislator?

JL: We think of liberals as willing to give more programs away, I guess. I think that's the difference. I don't know whether that was different as you, right down to it.

BB: But that the liberals' point of view might have been to use government to help people solve their problems through government programs, and that conservatives might have placed greater emphasis on individuals solving their own problems? Again, I don't want to put words in your mouth here.

JL: Well, I would like to think that the conservatives try to do a better job at...I guess, if you looked at both of them, maybe there wasn't as much difference as we think.

BB: Any other thoughts or observations about your experience as a legislator from 1950 to 1968? Any people that stand out in your mind? Any incidence, maybe a funny incident or something?

JL: No. I had a high regard for everybody. As I say, I thought we got along good—both Republicans and Democrats—in those days. There were two things that I was interested in. I mentioned the Grain Growers. The last two years I was there, I was Chairman of Education. We didn't have the finance problems like they have today. We had what they call a Foundation Program, and I don't know whatever happened to that. It was sort of a sub-policy of what each department of the government was to pay for education. We didn't have any problems with



finance and I got along good with the MEA because they were getting what they wanted. I just don't know what happened to the foundation. It was set up the year before I went in.

BB: In 1948.

JL: It was established in 1949. I don't know whether it's been dropped. I don't hear anything about it.

BB: How do you remember how the Foundation Program worked?

JL: I even introduced the bill with that. I think it was a division of what the state was to pay, and what the local governments and county was to pay, and what portion they would pay. It seemed like everybody was pretty well satisfied with it. I just don't know what happened to it. I don't hear anything about it.

BB: There is still a funding mechanism. It's a variation of the Foundation Program; the one that went into effect in 1949.

JL: They didn't get the school program solved this time, and they've got to have a special session for it.

BB: It's gotten complicated from the standpoint of litigation, as you know. So you served as Chairman of the House Education Committee in the '67 session?

JL: Yes, the last couple of years, I think. I'd have to check back here.

BB: So education was a priority to you as a legislator?

JL: Oh yes. I was interested in—I don't know what session it was, but one session I was terribly disappointed by the fellow by the name of Chaffin from Bozeman.

BB: Dean Chaffin?

JL: Chaffin, yes, the Speaker.

BB: Yes.

JL: He never gave me a darn thing. I was so disgusted. There were younger guys that came by and he gave them chairmanships, and I thought afterwards that he was trying to build them up because he thought there was prospects of them running for future office. I guess he had no confidence in me. It was a disappointing year for me. Otherwise, I was just treated wonderful all eight sessions I was there. They just treated me wonderful.

BB: Were there issues in terms of agriculture that you were involved in?

JL: Not particularly. The Wheat Commission, and I am pleased with the Grain Growers. It's been a huge success. We worked so darn hard and only had ten or fifteen members. Our dues were ten dollars and we were afraid to raise the dues that we'd lose what few members we had. The minimum due was 75, and it's 250—or if you want to give 1,000 they take it—and they got a big membership. Their annual sessions, they come there by the hundreds. It's been very successful and the Wheat Commission was part of it—the Wheat and Barley Commission. As far as I know that's very successful too. We've got a lot of local people who have been involved in that. The fact is the state president now is from Broadview right over here a few miles.

BB: You mentioned George O'Connor as a big presence in the legislature in terms of being influential, and Ted Schwinden. Any other legislators stand out in your memory; good or bad?

JL: No, but we had a lot of good capable people there. As I say, they worked good together. I think they worked better together than they do nowadays.

BB: Do you remember the mock sessions that would organize the legislative staff and they would do a parody on the legislative session, funny kind of things? Do you remember ever being involved in any of those?

JL: No, I'm just not familiar with that now.

BB: Jerome Anderson, of course was a legislator from Billings—Jerry Anderson.

JL: Oh yes, he was there for years. He's still a lobbyist I think.

BB: Yes, that's right.

DL: Dad had him to come down, and Jim Felt, when Dad was Speaker Pro Tem.

JL: When I was Speaker Pro Tem that was an unusual year. All the years I had served, the speaker would- someday he would ask the Speaker Pro Tem to preside over the legislature for a day or half a day just as a courtesy. Jim Felt was the Speaker the year and that was the year of the sales tax.

BB: Sixty-seven.

JL: He spent a lot of time down in the law office. I never ran for the office. I didn't feel I was capable. I can't think of his first name, but a Pierce—

BB: John Pierce?

JL: John Pierce I guess, yes.

BB: He was a member of the House of Representatives from Billings.

JL: Yes and our caucus. He said, "John Leuthold has been here. It's time we gave him something. I nominate him for Speaker Pro Tem." Somebody else jumped up and seconded it and I was railroad in and I was Speaker Pro Tem. I thought, "I'm not capable. I'll never be able to handle that." I think it was about 17 days- Jim Felt came by and says, "I'll be gone for the day. You take charge." It scared the life out of me. I worked with Bill Mathers and we managed and we opened the session and we had a session. You know that I checked back in the journals and he asked me to preside as Speaker 23 days?

BB: Wow.

JL: That never happened before.

BB: No that's really unusual.

JL: Finally by that time, I was an old man. I was enjoying it. I really was enjoying it.

BB: Were you attempted to run for re-election in 1968 then and run for Speaker yourself?

JL: No I retired in '68. I know it was terribly hard to lose an election. I'm sure you felt terribly. I felt bad for you. I wasn't defeated and so I feel good about it.

BB: So you just decided not to run in '68?

JL: I thought I had been there long enough and I guess I had been there long enough anyway. I had been there eight sessions. As I say, our county; they just treated me wonderful here.

BB: Then John—

DL: Sixty-eight was the year that he was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Miami.

JL: Yes that's true. I was a delegate. I helped nominate Nixon.

BB: Richard Nixon in 1968, yes. Did you ever meet him, Nixon?

JL: Oh yes. I guess we probably just crossed paths, is about all. Then, since I was not a legislator anymore, the Constitutional Convention came up, and if you were not a legislator, you could run for that office.

BB: So you did in 1972?

JL: Dick Nutting and I were both retired and so we ran and we were elected as delegates to the Constitutional Convention. So I served in the Constitutional Convention too.

BB: I'm sure your experiences as a legislator were important in the Constitutional Convention?

JL: Well partially, but we had some awfully capable people. They knew what they were doing.

BB: What committee did you serve on in the Constitutional Convention?

JL: It was a legislative and that wasn't the most important, but since that was where I was familiar with, that's where I was put. There was a guy by the name of Bob Campbell. I don't know if you've met him.

BB: Yes.

JL: He made it real steady and he knew what we were doing. Graybill knew what we were doing. He was chairman and he managed...He did a wonderful managing. There were more Democrats than there were Republicans. They kind of controlled it. We were set up kind of alphabetically, different than the legislature. I liked that part too. There wasn't a Democrat on one side and another Democrat on the other side, and alternate. It was quite an experience. From what I hear, it's one of the best constitutions in the United States, our state constitution.

BB: I believe it's the newest.

JL: It probably is the newest.

BB: Now were there any particular members of the Constitutional Convention that stand out in your memory?

JL: Well I just mentioned Bob Campbell and Graybill, and there were some women.

BB: Mae Nan Robinson?

JL: Oh yes, she was our youngest one and very active. I guess she'd made quite a study of it too. Then there was a lady from down at Glendive.

BB: Louise Cross?

JL: Yes. She was head of environmental, or something like that. She did an awfully good job on it. There were a number of outstanding, and most of them were chairman of some committee.

BB: Sterling Rygg?

JL: Oh yes. He was up from in your country too. A lawyer from Butte—

BB: Wade Dahood?

JL: Yes. Gee whiz, it would just roll out of him.

DL: Katie Payne was a delegate too, wasn't she?

JL: Yes. She was a delegate and then she passed away afterwards. There were some of them that ran that had made a study of it, and they knew what they wanted to do. I guess I didn't think about it that way. I just ran for the office and—

BB: When you ran as a delegate, you weren't persuaded that Montana necessarily needed the new constitution, but since there was an election, you wanted to be involved in the process?

JL: I guess that was part of it, yes.

BB: Do you feel that 1972 constitution was an improvement than the 1889 constitution?

JL: Oh, definitely. It is much shorter and easier to understand, I guess. Some of those that were re-writing it did an awfully good job explaining what they were doing.

BB: Now the education part of the constitution, John, I can't paraphrase it directly, but it guarantees all Montana citizens an equal opportunity to a basic, "quality" education. That language, of course, has been the focal point of a lot of litigation. We talked about the School Foundation Program before and the idea that a "quality" education requires a certain level of funding according to the courts, and equal opportunity means that funding has got to come on an equalized basis. So you can't have rich school districts and poor school districts. Of course, bringing that into effect without a sales tax has been kind of a problem because the property tax base is sometimes difficult to equalize. The value of property varies greatly between and among school districts in Montana.

JL: I haven't followed up as closely as I should. It's been about four years since I was in the legislature, 35 anyway, and I haven't followed up as close as I should have all the way.

BB: Our 1972 constitution makes environmental quality a constitutional right. It guarantees that Montanans are entitled to a clean and healthful environment. Ours is the only constitution in any state that does that.

JL: It is? That's another thing. There's a lot of details that I don't...I'd have to go back and re-read our constitution and see just what we did put in there.

BB: Let me think, I guess the clean and healthful environment provision is unique. It's been controversial to some extent. A fellow might have a feed lot as an example and the feed lot might cause pollution to a stream and so—

JL: Yes, and there's problems with that right now.

BB: But it gets past the point of just water quality because in Montana, our clean and healthful environment is a constitutional right.

JL: I think it's being enforced too. I think we've cleaned up an awful lot of things.

BB: Oh, we have.

JL: I think it's a good thing too.

BB: So you're very proud obviously of your involvement as a Constitutional Convention delegate.

JL: Yes. I really am proud that I was part of it even though I don't feel that I contributed as much as some of them. I did vote for it and I supported it as we went through. We voted on each issue as we went along. There was a chance to review. Dick Nutting questioned some of them. In the end, he voted for the thing.

BB: He also supported the constitution when it was under ballot?

JL: Yes.

BB: John, we're nearing the end of our interview here and I want to give you an opportunity to say anything you may want to say in conclusion. I want to reflect back because you're 98 years old, and there aren't very many people who were involved in politics even though you were, I guess, through your father—in fact very early on—but a couple of more names I want to mention. I've already asked you about Joe Dixon and Sam Ford. Do you have any recollection at all of Frank B. Linderman?

JL: I've heard the name, but I don't quite place him.

BB: Jeannette Rankin?

JL: Oh yes.

BB: She served, of course, two widely-separated terms in Congress. The first time was when your dad was a state Senator, and the second time was when your dad was running for governor.

JL: She came and spoke to our Constitutional Convention, too.

BB: Did you ever meet her, visit with her, have any impressions of her?

JL: No, but she did speak at the Constitutional Convention so I've seen her personally, yes.

BB: Any impressions of her as you think back?

JL: Oh, I certainly admire her in the stand that she took. I don't know whether she was right or not, but I guess we just can't say no on these issues. We have to face them and she had the guts to say no.

BB: To the declaration of war?

JL: Yes, to the declarations of war.

BB: How about Wellington D. Rankin? He was kind of a colorful character in Montana history.

JL: He definitely was. Not only was he a terrific attorney, but he was the biggest landowner in the state.

BB: Did you ever meet him?

JL: I guess I met him, but not too close. He was a big stockman and had a terrible reputation of taking care of cattle. He got a lot of criminals out of the penitentiary I guess. If they worked for him for nothing, he'd get them out of the penitentiary. He was kind of scrupulous in a way. He backed his sister even though he didn't always favor her. He backed his sister real well. It was always a wonderful family. It really was.

BB: Now, he was the Republican National Committeeman in the 1950s.

JL: Somewhere in there, yes.

BB: Then he was replaced by Jim Murphy at the Republican State Convention in about 1960 or '62, I think. Do you remember anything about that?

JL: No.

BB: There was a guy that shows up in politics and he's got kind of an unusual name. I wouldn't have the slightest idea whether you've ever heard of him or not, Oliver Hazard Perry Shelley; O.H.P. Shelley.

JL: I've heard the name.

BB: That would be back in the '20s and '30s if you...but you don't have any recollection of knowing him?

JL: No. It seemed though, that he had something to do with helping to get the Beartooth Highway in. I don't know. I don't know what—

BB: I'm sure that's true. That would have been—

JL: —the connection he had there. I'm kind of sashaying with that. Whether I'm right or not, I don't know.

BB: Yellowtail Dam, do you remember anything about that—surrounding the Yellowtail Dam? Robert Yellowtail—

JL: Not particularly, no.

BB: Orvin Fjare? He was a congressman in the '50s.

JL: Oh yes. I knew him personally.

BB: What do you remember about him?

JL: Well I guess we were just surprised if we got a Republican elected. We never could get any Republicans elected. I don't know what he...He served well. I think he was only in there one term.

BB: Yes, just one term. How about Percy DeWolfe?

JL: Yes.

BB: He was a congressman in the '40s and '50s.

JL: Yes he was a rancher up at Wilsall. We were getting involved in politics at that time. He used to meet people at conventions just like I met you. I never served with you, but I met you at a convention and things. That was through Wes Dougherton (?) and Farry (?) and those.

BB: Did you ever know Senator Mike Mansfield?

JL: I met him, yes. In fact, as we were flying home on an airplane one time and I found out he was on the plane. We visited some. He was first class but I wasn't. He was really outstanding, yes.



BB: Any impressions of him at all? How would you describe him?

JL: Well, he certainly was capable and he certainly established a terrific record for the Senate in every way. Then he went on to be Ambassador.

BB: Yes, to Japan. What about Senator Lee Metcalf?

JL: I don't know if I knew him. Because I knew him, but not quite as well as Mansfield.

BB: Did you ever have a conversation with him or anything?

JL: I don't think so.

BB: Any impressions of him?

JL: No, not necessarily.

BB: Congressman Jim Battin?

JL: Yes, I knew Jim Battin quite well. We used to meet at the meetings and in fact, I think I served one term in the legislature with him.

BB: Nineteen fifty-nine.

JL: Yes.

BB: How would you describe him?

JL: I was kind of surprise that he was appointed as judge, but I guess he was just as capable as anybody else.

BB: You say you knew him well. Did you have visits with him and things?

JL: Not too much, no.

DL: How was he as a debater in the House?

JL: I don't know. He could take care of himself easy enough.

BB: You also served in the legislature with John Melcher, who went on to be a congressman and Senator. Melcher was a representative, or maybe a Senator, from Rosebud County. Any recollections of him?

JL: Yes, I met him. In a small way I met most of those people along those years. It was awfully hard to get a Republican elected for anything in those days.

BB: You served also with Pat Williams, who went on to be a congressman.

JL: I don't know whether he was in—

BB: I think Pat was in the House in '67.

JL: Oh, he was. I guess I served with him then. I guess I never thought of him as being a congressman, but he went on. Some of them got their start in the legislature and went on for higher offices.

BB: It's a pretty common thing I think.

JL: Yes, they get started there. Now, I never felt I had the background to go for anything any higher. I felt I did pretty good for what I was capable of doing.

BB: No question about that.

DL: What about Francis Bardanouve, Dad?

BB: You served in the House with Francis from about '59 to about '67. Representative Francis Bardanouve, from up in the Hi-Line.

JL: Oh, yes. He was a terrific legislator; steady and conscientious, and head of appropriation all of the time. I was pleased one year. He asked me to be on Appropriations Committee, and it was quite an experience for me. It was the governor's Queen airplane, and we flew around all the institutions of the state. It was really quite an experience for me.

BB: I bet that was.

JL: So I really appreciated Francis inviting me to be on the committee with him.

BB: Norris Nichols would have been on the committee at the same time I think.

JL: George Nichols?

BB: Norris Nichols—Nick Nichols?

JL: Oh Norris Nichols, yes.

BB: He and Francis traded off the chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee depending on whether the Republicans or the Democrats had the majority.

JL: Yes, that's right. Yes, he was capable too.

BB: This would kind of be an old memory again, John. Do you remember a guy named Steve Arnold?

JL: Steve Arnold?

BB: Yes.

JL: He's our neighbor down here.

BB: Steve Arnold was a legislator, wasn't he, during the '20s and '30s and '40s?

JL: Yes. He followed my dad, I think.

BB: What can you tell me about Steve Arnold?

JL: He was down to earth and capable, and he just lives over ten miles or so. We were neighbors all this time. We had a close relationship with the Arnolds, and his son is still over here. We see him every so often. He was in there quite a while.

BB: Did he defeat your dad?

JL: No, they never ran against one another.

BB: That's what I would be thinking, yes.

JL: He followed my dad sometime. I don't think he was in when Pa was there. He followed him and he was...I don't know whether he was in as long as I was, but almost as long.

DL: Dad, he ran for lieutenant governor, didn't he, in 1932? So he must have served in the legislature in 1930?

JL: He could have, yes. He probably was elected Senator after Campbell. We talked about Campbell. A fellow by the name of Campbell, Democrat, beat my father in '26. Then I would guess that Steve Arnold probably followed.

DL: I think so. He must have been elected in '30 as Senator and then he ran—wasn't it Ernest Eaton who was the candidate for governor in '32?

BB: Frank Hazelbaker was the Republican candidate for Governor in '32. Ernest Eaton was, I think, lieutenant governor one time. He was a legislator from Billings and he was lieutenant governor somewhere along the line. Maybe for one term; '28 to '32.

DL: Erickson got elected in '32. You used to tell me a story years ago somehow Steve Arnold got onto a committee that was investigating irregularities in the 1932 election. As I remember the story that you told me, you said that they investigated and they found that the governor's father—Erickson's father—had been dead for 12 years but had never missed an election.

JL: I don't recall that.

DL: Maybe I made it up.

JL: Erickson was a Democrat, but Pa thought a lot of him. On his campaign, he even visited us when we were going to school in Columbus there.

BB: Erickson did?

JL: Erickson did, yes.

DL: That would have been in the '20s.

BB: Erickson was governor from 1924 to 1932.

JL: Yes, that's when I was in high school. My brother and I, we were out of school for a couple of years and then my father bought a house in Columbus and we got started back in school again. It was during the '20s then, and I graduated in '27.

BB: What do you remember about Erickson? How would you describe him?

JL: My father thought he was pretty good even though he was a Democrat.

BB: Was he an impressive public speaker? What do you remember him about speaking?

JL: I don't think he was as good as some of them by any means.

BB: He was kind of an impressive looking guy with white hair and probably looked like a Governor.

JL: Yes. He was kind of down to earth and I don't know what part of the state he came from either.

BB: From Kalispell. He was a district judge in Kalispell before he was elected governor.

JL: A lot of people come out of Kalispell.

BB: We've got just a couple of three minutes left in the tape. Anything that anybody would like to say?

DL: Would you like to comment on your effort to increase the grazing rentals on state-owned land?

JL: That was one of the big mistakes, I guess. Even though I was a rancher, I never had any state land. I never thought that the people who had state land was paying enough.

BB: You felt they weren't paying the state enough for their grazing?

JL: Yes. So I introduced a bill to raise the rates on grazing. Most of my Republican supporters all had a piece of state land. I was in a corner. I still introduced it. Then when I got to speaking on it, Dave was up at the legislature at that time. He prepared a little talk for me and said that I had received a lot of letters in favor of it. A guy from Thompson Falls said, "Produce some of those letters." So I didn't have them. It was terribly embarrassing for me. I blame it on Dave. Of course it was defeated because I don't know.

BB: Who was the guy from Thompson Falls? Would that have been Mahoney?

JL: It could have been. I don't know.

BB: Anyway, the bill was defeated?

JL: Yes. I couldn't prove...I may have had one letter and that was about all. I couldn't prove it. Actually the people who had state land didn't want it to raise, but my Republican supporters here, they were polite. They didn't jump on me and they didn't take it out on me either. To me, state lands have always been kind of cheap. We weren't getting as much out of it as we should.

BB: Anything you want to say in conclusion?

JL: No. I appreciate you coming back down through here and start refreshing my mind on old politics. I've been out so long that I'm kind of losing contact with everybody. Going back from my own personal experiences, I really enjoyed what I participated in and I appreciate the backing that the people have given me. Hopefully there in the terms that I was there, I made some good contribution to better government. It's got to be improved on every year I guess. When I first went to the legislature, I thought there were too many laws being passed. I just decided that I wasn't going to introduce any more legislation. I found out that I had nothing to talk about. So one year then, and my brother, you know, he was appointed superintendent of banks. He served under Nutter and Babcock. He had a number of bills.

BB: Your brother was also a legislator, or he as the superintendent, he requested legislation?

JL: Yes. So he had some bills and he asked me to introduce them. I had some other bills I introduced. I introduced 17 bills that year. I got ten of them passed. I came back and I had a good talking point. I was an active legislator. To begin with, I thought there were too many. The fact is the legislator before me was a fellow by the name of Blenkner. He was an attorney. He wanted to clean up a lot of the old laws. I think he introduced about 50 bills just wiping off bills that he didn't think ought to be on the books at all. So there was kind of a mutual interest between us there.

BB: He was the fellow who preceded you in the House of Representatives?

JL: Yes.

BB: Did you defeat him?

JL: No he ran for the Senate and Webb Keller beat him.

BB: What motivated you to run for the House in 1950?

JL: I said we took our kids to Billings to school, and we'd been down there for four or five years I guess. I didn't move in. I've always been on the ranch. We went back and forth. My wife would take the kids in. I even bought a house in Billings. My wife would take them in. They'd go to school and they'd come out here on weekends. I was down there one evening, and four or five businesspeople from Columbus called me up and said that they wanted me to be a candidate for representative. I said, "Oh, you know I have an awful weak point. They'll be picking on me for taking my kids to Billings."

"We don't think it will be bad." So they talked me into running. It didn't affect me until Jake Frank out-walked me.

BB: Do you remember who any of those fellows were, any of the businessmen in Columbus?

JL: Yes. Swanson, the dentist; Bill Boston (?) and Jim Annin. Jim Annin was always a good supporter of me. I don't know—

BB: Jim Annin?

JL: You never met him?

BB: No. What was his business? What did he do?

JL: He was editor of the local paper [Columbus News] besides he did a lot of other things. He was very active in American Legion and things like that. He was very capable and always a good backer of mine.

BB: You got some interest in politics because of your dad.

JL: That's the reason they asked me, is because they thought I came from a political family.

DL: You had been County Chairman of the Republican Party.

JL: Oh yes, I was always part of the party. I attended all the local meetings and was County Chairman and things like that.

BB: So you were a natural?

JL: Well they thought so, anyway. I had a strong opponent that year, too. It was during the war years and Stillwater County had one soldier that was injured in the war. He lived out in Park City and he got the Democratic nomination. I felt that he'd be awfully hard to defeat. For some reason or another, I got about 400 more votes than he did.

BB: Who was that? What was his name?

JL: Ed Hedges. Being a Democrat, since he didn't get elected, the Republicans backed him for...The parties used to nominate candidates for the post office back in those days. So the Republicans did nominate him for the Park City post office. So he was postmaster there for a good many years afterwards.

BB: So it worked out for him anyway.

JL: Yes.

BB: John, I think we're near the end of our tape here. In fact, I'm not sure if the last couple of minutes were recorded. I hope they were. I appreciate very much your contributing to the state historical archives and also participating in this interview were John's sons—Jim Leuthold and Bud Leuthold—

DL: David.

BB: David, excuse me. David Leuthold and Bud. Is it William, Bud?

JLJ: It's John Jr.

BB: John Jr. I goofed that up. John—Bud Leuthold. John Jr., and David Leuthold. So thank you so much, John.

[End of Interview]