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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Maine Supreme Court Justice Raymond Fellows on His Retirement

Date: September 23, 1956

Recording number: Reel-to-reel Tape 5, part 6

Length of recording: 7:06

[transcript begins]

Announcer: The following material was recorded by telephone on September 23rd 1956 after Chief Justice Raymond Fellows of the Maine Supreme Court had been retired for just a week. He retired on September 17, 1956. This is a telephone conversation in answer to a questionnaire we sent him.

Interviewer: How is the first week been going, sir?

Fellows: Well, the first week of retirement, after 20 years of service as a judge, I'm like a man on a cliff that has been suddenly dropped off. I landed, but have not yet obtained my bearings. It's only been a week. I have no plans, definite plans, I have returned to the practice of law, although I shall not go into court. At present, I occupy a chair in my son's law office in Bangor where I am acting as a sort of observer of the active practice of the law, just an observer. I chose the legal profession because I was born into it and grew up to it. My maternal grandfather practiced in New Hampshire for more than 60 years. He died in 1917 at 93. My father studied law with my mother's father, and my father was admitted to practice in Maine in 1880 and practiced in Hancock and Penobscot Counties until 1920. I was my father's partner in Bangor for ten years and the partner of my brother, Frank, for 20 years thereafter until he went to Congress. At the same time that he went to Congress, I was appointed to the bench.

You asked about the high points of my life. Well, there's high points of four years as Attorney General of Maine, 1925-1929. During that period I had 24 murder cases to conduct in the state. Murders were so plentiful that I was frightened to look at the daily papers because every case made extra work.

You ask about some of my cases, the [?] case in Androscoggin was one of the cases attracted much public attention. Now after I was appointed the Superior Court I presided at the trial of [?] in Sagadahoc County. That was the case that drew national attention.

You asked about some humorous things. Well, one of the most humorous things that I remember, there was a witness in the murder case who was asked, when did you last see the deceased, and this witness testified, I seen him in the window and he wove his hands. He knew few words in the English language, I seen him in the window, and he wove his hands. And that proved, of course, to his satisfaction, that he was alive at that time, because he wove his hands.

When you ask about my 20 years on the bench, well, I've learned that the best government and the best laws, with its many imperfections, are right here in the state of Maine. Human beings are imperfect, but I believe that the world grows better because each generation knows more than the preceding generation. Humanity looks up and is doing its best to improve laws in these United States, relating to liberty. In my observations over 20 years on the bench is that liberty is a relative term. As you know, the liberty of each individual depends on the liberty of all other individuals, without complicated economic and social conditions. It is difficult to write laws so that each person can have the fullest liberty without infringing on the liberty of his neighbors. I don't know what I can say about a career of 20 years on the bench, but that is what I have learned, principally, on the question of liberty, is that the liberty of each individual is hemmed in by the liberty of others.

Interviewer: You have gained quite a widespread reputation as a speaker, sir. I wonder if you have any ideas about speaking or writing, that is, lecturing, perhaps, travel throughout the state?

Fellows: Well, I'm not interested in travel. I've done some writing, probably will do some more. But I'm still studying law and always will be. Law is something that no one can ever learn because it's a question of men's minds and we can't read another person's mind. We can only tell what that person is thinking of by what he says and by what he does. Primarily by what he does.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Justice Fellows, and the best of luck to you.

Fellows: All right, thank you.

[transcript ends]

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Fogler Library Special Collections
5729 Raymond H. Fogler Library
Orono, ME 04469-5729
207.581.1686
um.library.spc @ maine.edu

