

**Oral History Interview of
Dwight Pitcaithley**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
June 26, 2018
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Dwight Pitcaithley as he discusses his interest in history and how it lead him to a career with the National Park Services. In this interview, Dwight describes working at Carlsbad Caverns, his education, and the road that lead him to be a historian with NPS.

Length of Interview: 02:07:45

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Background information; how his parents met	05	00:00:00
How Dwight became a historian; working at Carlsbad Caverns	12	00:09:57
Preparing for a PhD at Texas Tech	18	00:21:09
Project over the Buffalo River	24	00:30:58
How Dwight ended up in Santa Fe	31	00:42:55
Other projects that Dwight has worked on	36	00:52:26
Transferring to Boston	40	00:59:48
Working on the statue of liberty	46	01:11:19
National parks fire research	53	01:29:24
Working on Federal projects	61	01:42:19
The biggest controversy that Dwight has faced	65	01:48:00
Teaching part-time after retirement	69	01:57:23

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is June 26, 2018. This is David Marshall interviewing Dwight Pitcaithley at the Southwest Collection of Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. Let's begin with some general biographical information. So when and where were you born?

Dwight Pitcaithley (DP):

I was born in Carlsbad, New Mexico on October 23, 1944.

DM:

Okay.

DP:

In St. Francis Hospital, which was a Catholic hospital then, which was directly across the street from our house.

DM:

Oh wow.

DP:

So the trip back and forth was easy on my mother and then easy on both of us when she came back.

DM:

That's wonderful. I knew you had grown up in Carlsbad? I didn't realize you were born there.

DP:

Yep. Born there. Raised there.

DM:

Can you tell me your parents' names?

DP:

My father's name was Alexander Sydenham Pitcaithley. He was born in Nebraska—Beatrice, Nebraska—in 1904. He was fifteen years older than my mother. He—and my mother's name was Carolyn—what was her—Carolyn Lewis was her stage name. Carolyn Townsend. Her father was George Townsend, an actor. Both my parents were actors. My father grew up in Beatrice, Nebraska, left when he graduated from high school, literally joined a circus. He was a contortionist.

DM:

Really?

DP:

And did that for about a year and then moved into theatre, tent shows, rep shows, that sort of thing. I think you have an interview of him on campus somewhere. He came over when I was a student here in the seventies. There was an active theatre program then, maybe now as well, and I think he was interviewed.

DM:

Would it be under Pitcaithley or did he use another name?

DP:

It'd be under Pitcaithley. It would be under Pitcaithley. Yeah. And then my mother was born in 1919. Just died last September. So she lived to ninety-eight and a half. Amazing. Both her parents were in show business in the east coast. She was born in Connecticut, and—

DM:

What happened to you, Dwight?

DP:

I didn't get any of those genes. None of those genes. I don't mind getting up in front of an audience, but I cannot—my mother was—taught for fifty years and then she was involved in animal shelter, animal care stuff in Carlsbad for a long time. Very active in the community theatre there. People would ask her to give a talk of some sort. She would write it out—this could be a forty-five minute talk—then she would memorize it. So she would stand up there for forty-five minutes sentence perfect, paragraph perfect, down—I didn't get any of that. I need notes or something to do it. I just can't do it.

DM:

Yes. That is so rare, though.

DP:

She could memorize things. And when she was done—from the time she was five until she married my father at about twenty-three she was on the road with her parents. Rep shows, I guess, did a different play a night for five nights in a row. So you'd memorize five plays, right? And then get them. I didn't get any of that. None of that. And he died in 1983 in Carlsbad. And as I said, she died last September in Carlsbad at age ninety-eight and a half.

DM:

Are there any old photographs, old film footage of them performing?

DP:

No film of either one. A lot of photographs of them. And again, I think when he died there may be something in the—I don't know if the theatre collection is separate from the Southwest Collection, but I think he gave some stuff to Texas Tech.

DM:

I'll take a look. See if we have it. You know, we don't know what all we have.

DP:

Right. Right.

DM:

Individually, we don't. We have to look.

DP:

There's some Harley Sadler stuff here, I know it.

DM:

Yes, that's right.

DP:

I don't know if that's your stuff or somebody else's.

DM:

That's ours.

DP:

I think—so my dad's stuff and oral interview may be here as well.

DM:

It probably is, actually. It's the place things have gone on campus for a long time.

DP:

He also had what I don't have—an incredible memory. Would just pull these things out. Almost a photographic memory of things.

DM:

Well, the big question then: how did they come together in Carlsbad?

DP:

Well, they met on a show. Right, they're both moving around the country. They met on a show and courted. Actually, they met when—fifteen year difference—I think they first met when my mother was about eight and he was then—what—twenty-three or twenty-four or something? He was this older man. And then later they ended up on the show and acted together. He was the leading man, I guess, and she was the whatever. They decided to get married and about that time—I'm not sure exactly the chronology—he was drafted. It was 1943. So they got married in Omaha. I think at that time he was already in Carlsbad. So he was drafted and sent to the Army air base there. I think—and then she followed. She really liked it. For him it was somewhere where you were in the Army Air Force, he was going to leave as soon as he could. Probably would have gone to Hollywood, is my guess. He was a brilliant character actor. Absolutely brilliant. She—because she had traveled all her life she wanted roots. She wanted a home, she wanted a fence, she wanted a dog, she wanted two kids, boy older, girl younger. She got everything she wanted.

DM:

Really? Wow. So you have a younger—

DP:

I have a younger sister. Three years. They lived in that little house for—from about '43 until '76. So about, what, thirty some odd years? And then they moved to a different house in Carlsbad. But she got everything she wanted. Went to school. Had a kindergarten for a couple of years—for a number of years. About ten years while she went to the New Mexico State University branch in Carlsbad to get her degree.

DM:

She ran a kindergarten?

DP:

She ran a—you could do—you could have a private kindergarten at that point in Carlsbad—in New Mexico—without a license. It was very successful. It funded her education. As soon as she got her degree—that would have been in '64, I think—then the public school system hired her and she taught for another forty years or something.

DM:

Okay, and was she contented in that after having this flamboyant earlier life?

DP:

It's a form of acting.

DM:

Yeah.

DP:

Right?

DM:

Yeah, okay, right.

DP:

She would get her kids to do a play or two or three every year at school. Kids would come from neighboring schools to see this play. She taught in the elementary school. She was an excellent teacher.

DM:

Oh I'll bet.

DP:

She was a born teacher. She had her bachelor's degree and then she got a master's degree in something. She didn't need either one of them. She was just a natural born teacher. Empathetic with the kids. Everything. She loved it. She was born to teach.

DM:

Did she have any aspirations for you? Or did they allow you to develop as you would?

DP:

My father wanted me to do something in the show business realm. Right?

DM:

Okay.

DP:

I was kicked off the senior play because I was so terrible. So that disappointed him. So acting wasn't. But I was a pretty good drummer. And so he liked that. In fact, I started college as a music major.

DM:

Well, you were in the what? US High School—

DP:

I was in the United States High School Band of America. In 1962.

DM:

How do you get into that?

DP:

Well, you audition. I don't know where I heard about it, but I sent in a tape. A friend had a very sophisticated tape machine in '62—'61 it would be at that point. I thought, Why not? Sent in an audition tape and they picked me. Only person from New Mexico that year.

DM:

Wow. This was a snare—you were a snare drum?

DP:

I was a snare drummer. I ended up doing all sorts of things in college, but I was brought into the United States High School Band of America sponsored by the Lion's Club. I think they still do it. I don't know.

DM:

Oh really?

DP:

Somewhere whenever they have their international convention. They may not. Anyway. This band would go and play.

DM:

Which was Nice, France, right?

DP:

It was Nice, France. Little kid from Carlsbad.

DM:

You're lucky.

DP:

Seventeen years old ending up in Nice, France.

DM:

That's amazing.

DP:

It was amazing. Was a first airplane flight. Took the train. Took the train from Carlsbad to Chicago and then to New York. Found the hotel. I don't know how I did that. And then flew Pan Am to—I guess directly to Nice. I'm not sure about that.

DM:

Not Paris to Nice or?

DP:

Yeah, maybe to Paris and then—at some point we took a train, but I think that was to Rome from—anyway, it was quite a tour. It was three weeks.

DM:

You said two-three?

DP:

Two or three weeks. I can't remember.

DM:

That's got to have an impact.

DP:

Oh it was—yeah. It was a real eye-opener. Travel is an education. However you do it. Whenever it occurs. It is an education.

DM:

It is a learning experience.

DP:

It's a learning experience.

DM:

Makes the world smaller.

DP:

It does. It does. Even then. Even then.

DM:

You had to come back with a different perspective?

DP:

So I had to come back with a different—it didn't make me any smarter, unfortunately. But I did come back and I decided to major in music at Eastern New Mexico University, which had a terrific music program then. Perhaps still now. I don't know. But I wasn't born to be a musician, and in spite of my father's aspirations flunked out after two years. They asked me to politely leave and come back when I could keep my grades up. Devastated him. Devastated him. He just didn't—he didn't—

DM:

That's such a common thing though.

DP:

It's very regular. Very common.

DM:

Were there any—I know you eventually went to history—were there any things in your childhood experience that would suggest that you would become a historian?

DP:

I don't think so.

DM:

Okay.

DP:

I don't think so. I made poor grades in high school. I wrote in a piece, which I may have given you.

DM:

I read it.

DP:

Yeah. It's in there. It was a D or an F, I can't remember, in high school history. My grandfather was very interested in history. My father's father from Scotland—from England—his father was from Scotland. Ended up in Beatrice, Nebraska. Was a sign painter. He was very interested in history and had written some stuff on ancient history. My father told the story that when I was born I was two or three or something my grandfather said, "You should get him Gibbon's *Rise*

and Fall of the Roman Empire. He'll enjoy that." But I don't think there's any—I can't think of anything that led me in this direction.

DM:

At some point though—I remember the story you wrote—that you were searching for a major and you looked at your bookshelf and there were a lot of history books?

DP:

That's right. Bookshelf. It was a singular shelf. Yeah, it was back at Portales, because none of the grades would transfer, right? And I had to declare a major. I was a third semester sophomore, I suppose. And had no idea. Absolutely no idea what I wanted to do. And looked at this bookshelf and there were books on Kennedy assassination, there were books on Vietnam where I had just returned from, maybe some other stuff—I thought, Well, maybe that's a sign. And then the next semester—the spring semester—took two history 101 and 102—US 101 and 102—and did very well in them. I enjoyed it. And because there weren't any other options or no other interests I just kept going. Ended up here in 1976.

DM:

I wonder if something about the—I know you were studying Vietnam War—the Vietnam War—so at least to a degree, I think you wrote that.

DP:

Yeah. Well, I was curious about it.

DM:

That must have sparked something.

DP:

I think I wanted—it did. And when I was—I was wounded in Vietnam. Shrapnel from a sixty millimeter mortar. And spent a couple of months in Japan for an operation and then ended up in the hospital—Navy hospital—in San Diego. The big US Navy hospital.

DM:

Yeah, I think you said for a year, right?

DP:

For almost a year. Almost a year. In and out. In and out.

DM:

Serious injury.

DP:

Well, it was nerve damage. And so they would send me out to the Marine Corps recruit depot—the other big Marine base there in San Diego for a couple months, and then they put me back in the hospital and check me over and see if everything was developing. But that gives you lots of time to read. And the base had a pretty good library. And so no shortage of book stores in San Diego. So I was curious about what I had just done—what this was all about. So read fairly widely, and I think in that article I list a number of things that I had read and found interesting. And so that was a dive into what that Vietnam thing was all about.

DM:

Okay. By the way, I'll mention for the record here that we'll have a copy of your CD here, if that's okay, and reference file.

DP:

Okay. Absolutely.

DM:

And so people can look up and see this article that you're referring to. Was written in—

DP:

It was published by the University of Chicago Press—University Press of Chicago—in '06, maybe '07? Something like that in a collection of books—the book is titled *Becoming Historians*.

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

I think there are eleven of us World War II babies, essentially.

DM:

Okay. Oh that's it. That's the deal. I wanted to back up just a little bit and ask you another couple things about your ENMU years, because you worked at Carlsbad National Park during that time, is that correct? During those two years?

DP:

Before I went in the Marine Corps I was a summer seasonal at Carlsbad Caverns. The summer of '63 and '64.

DM:
Okay.

DP:
And then I spent three years in the Marine Corps and then was—the first two years was as a laborer, doing whatever hard labor they wanted. And then after I came back I was a guide for the summer of '68, in uniform, leading the tours, flashlight and all that stuff.

DM:
Was Jim White still around in those years?

DP:
Jim White, Jr. was.

DM:
Oh okay.

DP:
I don't know when Jim White, Sr.—I don't think he was around. I'm pretty sure he wasn't around.

DM:
I understand that he used to sit at a little guard table and try to sell his books and try to sell his books as people came—

DP:
I've heard that. I've heard that story, yeah. And why not? Probably sold them—they were selling the book when I worked there, clearly, in the bookstores or the gift shops. Whatever they call them. Yeah.

DM:
Well, so here you were. It's kind of interesting, isn't it? That you were working at a national park early on. Is there any connection there to an interest later on?

DP:
I don't think so. Well, only in the fact that I really enjoyed those three summers. I enjoyed being a laborer there. I did jackhammer work. I did whatever they wanted to. I picked up trash. I cleaned toilets. We resurfaced the trails with roofing tar and whatever they wanted. I really enjoyed it. And I was getting two dollars an hour, so what's not to complain about? That was great. [laughter] And then I came—I got out in '67, went to school a year, and then the summer

of '68 needed a job and went back and they gave me a job as a guide, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Then I got married in August to the lovely Sabette Stephens from Lamesa, Texas.

DM:

Okay. That was August of '68?

DP:

August 22 of 1968. So we'll celebrate our fiftieth anniversary this August.

DM:

Wow. Congratulations.

DP:

And went back to school. She had just gotten her degree—her second degree—her master's degree here at Tech, and had a job in Clovis teaching. And so we moved to Clovis and I started going to school year-round, just because she was a couple years ahead of me in terms of education. She's younger than me, technically. She would want me to mention that, I think.

[Laughter] But she already had her master's degree. I was still slogging through undergraduate work. So I decided to go full-time, so the summers were dedicated there. So I really never thought about a parks service career. And then I got my bachelor's and then got a master's at Eastern New Mexico and then came here.

DM:

In rapid succession.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I got my bachelor's in '70. Got my master's in '71. Non-thesis, so you could get out quickly. And then applied here and was accepted. And then here of course we were trained to teach in small—

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

--colleges in Texas. And so I never thought about parks service.

DM:

You mentioned that at ENMU you had some really good faculty that encouraged you. That made history worthwhile to you.

DP:

Yeah. That's right. That's right. There were a number of really good professors who I enjoyed working with and for. They made history fun and interesting and thought that I was somewhat good at it or good enough at it, I guess.

DM:

Do you want to name some names or?

DP:

You know, I was thinking about that driving over here. Forrest Walker was chair of the department. Bob Matheny had just come in about that time from—I think he got his degree at the University of Arizona. Went on to become the president of Eastern New Mexico for a good stretch in the eighties, I think. The other names are in that article, but they don't come to mind. But I remember thinking at the time and later, that I was getting a good education. They pushed me, they encouraged me, they worked on my writing, and then I remember there was an—in my master's degree—an extended master's paper. Not a thesis—that I did for Bob Matheny on New Mexico's coastal artillery unit during World War II that got trapped on Betan. Coastal artillery unit in New Mexico—there's another story there, I think, but I didn't—anyways. I remember asking him, after he graded it and turned it back, did he think I could do PhD work. And he did. He said, "Go for it." So I applied here and we moved to Lubbock in '71, August of '71, I guess.

DM:

So that transition from ENMU to Texas Tech—was it a smooth transition?

DP:

It was a bit of culture shock.

DM:

Was it?

DP:

It was a bit of culture shock. Eastern at that time I think was about three thousand students. Tech was maybe twenty-four, twenty-five thousand students? Portales is—I don't know—ten thousand population? Lubbock at that time isn't what it is today, but it was a city. It was a big city. So it took a little bit of—yeah. I'm not sure I was quite ready for it. But—

DM:

Climatically though it was about the same?

DP:

It was about the same. It was about the same. Same amount of dust in the air, generally.

DM:

How about Sabette? Where did she—did she grow up in—

DP:

She was born in Colorado Springs. Her father was a colonel in the Air Force, and he was stationed up there at one time when she was born. And then they went to Germany for about two years. And then her mother decided that she wasn't going to travel with him as he continued his career, and they went back to Lamesa, where her grandmother was from. Where my Sabette's mother's mother was from. The Cleveland side of the family. It's part of the papers we brought today. And so she grew up there. And then—

DM:

In Lamesa?

DP:

In Lamesa? Yep. And she thinks she got a good education there as well. I think she did. Spent her freshman year of college at Trinity University in San Antonio. And then decided that was a little too far from home and came here.

DM:

Well, you coming to Texas Tech was great, then.

DP:

It was like coming home for her.

DM:

We'll talk later about that transition from here to Boston.

DP:

Okay. [laughter] That's a—yes. Yes. That was real culture shock, I'd say. But we'll cover that in due time.

DM:

Yeah, we'll save that. Okay. But as far as preparation, did you get to Tech and say, "You guys are behind." Or did you get to Tech and say, "I'm not quite ready for this." Or were you just about right?

DP:

I think it was just about right. Obviously, PhD level work is different from master's level work—or should be, wherever you are. So I was pushed. A lot more reading. But I think that Eastern—and I've thought a fair amount about this since then—I think they prepared me fairly well to move in. I didn't—I think—falter for the first year trying to get my feet on the ground. I think I moved in—very lucky that I was a full-time student. My wife now is teaching at—is Matthews Junior High School here?

DM:

I think it is.

DP:

Okay. Sort of north of Tech, maybe.

DM:

Can't remember exactly where it is, but the name sounds right.

DP:

So she got a job there right off the bat, and so she was teaching full time. And I had my veteran's assistance from the VA, so we actually bought a house out on west of town. I can't tell you. 34th street, maybe. Near that area. Off of Slide and 34th.

DM:

Which isn't very far west anymore.

DP:

That's right. Exactly. Exactly. So I was lucky enough to go full-time. She was totally supportive of it. So I didn't have to worry about—and I was a teaching assistant. So the financial thing we had the VA income, the teaching assistant income, and her teaching income.

DM:

Very helpful.

DP:

Very helpful. I didn't have to worry about—we didn't have any kids. I didn't have to worry about things that a lot of students at that level have to worry about. So I think the transition was fairly smooth.

DM:

Okay, you mentioned some of the faculty members that stood out in your mind apparently, because you mentioned them in the paper. Of course Ike Connor, he was your professor?

DP:

He was my major professor. I remember misspelling his first name the first time I went in. E-r. He didn't correct me. One of the other graduate students said, "You better fix that." I was a western historian, so Wallace. What's his first name?

DM:

Ernest.

DP:

Ernest. Ernest Wallace. There was a fellow named Hayes, who was a South American.

DM:

Yeah, Robert Hayes.

DP:

Robert Hayes. Took some courses from him.

DM:

David Vignes.

DP:

David Vignes, of course. Harper—can't remember his first name.

DM:

Jim Harper.

DP:

Jim Harper.

DM:

From University of Virginia.

DP:

Did he stay here?

DM:

Yeah, he was here, oh, into the eighties, I would think.

DP:

Was he? Okay.

DM:

Yeah, definitely into the eighties. Late eighties, I would say. And Hayes also.

DP:

And—don't think I can remember any—I may have mentioned some in the article. I'd have to go back.

DM:

Can you give me kind of a little bit of a personality sketch or academic sketch of maybe Connor and Wallace and Vignes? You know, a couple of them?

DP:

Yeah. Connor was—Connor was a character. He was extremely conservative—politically conservative—which I was not. And I also wasn't aware enough at that point to read people and do that dance. So I stepped in it a couple times with Ike. But he was always—he was very—I may have been his last student. I don't know that.

DM:

Really?

DP:

He retired—so I finished in '76. We came back in '77 for a tribute to him that he had pulled the plug on at the last minute. So a number of us gathered here in Lubbock, and he said, "I'm not going to do that."

DM:

Wow.

DP:

And it didn't happen. So he was a very serious researcher and he taught I think all of us—I can only speak for myself but—the intricacies of research, broadly, reading the materials, reading other things into the material. I mean, reading layers of stuff in the materials. He had a writing course that he had taught up to the time I came, but he didn't teach it in the five years I was here. I sort of regret that. I think I became a good writer later, but it took a while. I think I would have

jump started that. Jerry Rogers took it. I don't know if you know that name. Jerry was another parks service official. Became associate director of cultural resources in Washington and then went to Santa Fe as regional director when Roger Kennedy came in as director. This would be in the—under Clinton. In the Clinton administration. So Jerry ended up in Santa Fe. Still there. Just finished a book on his brother, who died in World War II. University of Oklahoma Press. Jerry is a really fine writer. He attributes that to taking Ike Connor's writing class.

DM:

Oh, I'm sorry you missed that.

DP:

Me too! Me too. It would have been brutal, because I hadn't really developed writing skills then as I think I did later. But it would have been a good leg up to have that. Wallace was sort of the old school western storytelling kind of guy. Took two or three classes, I guess, from him. You probably know what he taught. But I took those. You know, I can't remember—I can't discern, really, nuances among them. They were all very—there were no hard cases. The other graduate student says, "Don't take"—or "Don't take this class." And I took—the other Latin American—Venezuela—was Kuethe. Allan Kuethe. I took a lot of his classes. Enjoyed them all. They were all, I thought, quite good teachers, and encouraged us to read widely and think about history and write. I don't think I have anything I wrote back then except my dissertation, which sometimes I sort of cringe at some of the assertions in there.

DM:

That's a good sign. That means you've progressed far beyond.

DP:

I guess that's right. That's right. That should be the way it goes, maybe. Again, thinking back after I left Tech, I got a really good education here. I was ready, I was eager to suck up whatever information or skills they could give me. I never thought that I got a second rate history education here.

DM:

Speaking of Connor's republican leanings, what about conservative leanings—was Ben Newcomb here? He was the opposite.

DP:

He was here, but I never—he was a British history, maybe?

DM:

He was colonial.

DP:

Colonial. Okay.

DM:

American colonial.

DP:

I never took a class from.

DM:

I was wondering, because then you went off to the northeast.

DP:

That's right. That's right. To Boston.

DM:

How would you know?

DP:

How would I know? How would I know? My book that I just published three months ago was on the Civil War. I never took a Civil War course. Who knew?

DM:

Yeah. Exactly.

DP:

I remember Connor—knowing he was very right-wing—he was a Webb student, I think, at the University of Texas. We'd get off on politics somewhere left and right. He told a story that one day in Webb's class—this would be what? Right after World War II, I guess, in the fifties. Early fifties—Webb was talking about how people when they get older generally start out more liberal, left-leaning, and then as they get older and more property and more wealth they tend to become more right wing. He said—Connor said—and he paused and said, "Poor Ike." Because Ike was already so right wing. [Laughter] I don't know where he's going to go. Ike had a burr cut the five years I was here. When I came back for this event—retirement event—that never happened—he had a long ponytail. [Laughter]

DM:

Oh wow.

DP:

So.

DM:

Who knows?

DP:

Who knows?

DM:

That's funny.

DP:

Ike was a character. Heavy smoker. Heavy smoker. I get my chapters back and you could smell the smoke. [laughter] He also had, I remember, he had a pool table. Which, I eventually ended up with a pool table. We have a pool table in Las Cruces. He was going to write something and I guess I was delivering a chapter or something. He had these papers—Do we need to pause?

DM:

No, no. I was just making sure the volume is okay.

DP:

Okay, okay.

DM:

Occasional check.

DP:

He had these papers spread all over the pool table. I said—I made some comment, respectfully of course, “Sort of an interesting way to do research.” He said, “This is a case of, ‘Do as I say, not do as I do.’” It looked totally disorganized. And of course he was, “You do cards and you get all your stuff down.” Yeah, he was a funny guy.

DM:

But he's the one who got you started on this project on the Buffalo River, correct?

DP:

Indeed. Indeed. The summer—I guess the spring of '74 he and Bill Kitchen who was a professor in park and recreation, maybe, had put in a grant unbeknownst to me to the National Parks

Service in Santa Fe to do an inventory of the—of old buildings in the Arkansas Ozarks, where the—

DM:

Santa Fe putting in for Buffalo River?

DP:

Right.

DM:

So was it all the same region within NPS?

DP:

I think what happened is the Santa Fe office put out a request for proposals nationwide. It's the way it was done after when I became cognizant of this sort of thing. Anybody could put in a proposal. And Kitchen, for some reason, put it in with Ike as sort of his history guy, and they got the contract. So in the spring of '74 I come into his office and he said, "You worked for the Parks Service, right?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." He said, "How'd you like to go to Arkansas and spend a summer? We'll pay you to look at old buildings and take pictures of them and record them."

DM:

[laughter] Who's going to say no?

DP:

Well, here's the kicker. So I go home that night. So I readily agreed. I thought, That's great. I told my wife, Sabette, what Ike had offered and what I accepted, and she said, "Are you nuts?" The movie *Deliverance* had just come out. [Laughter] And that was her image of backcountry Arkansas. It wasn't filmed in Arkansas of course, but that was—so yeah, Ike dragged me into that. Which had I said no, that I want to do something else, my whole career would have been different.

DM:

Absolutely. Yeah.

DP:

But I spent the summer of '74—he and Kitchen—we went up there early in the summer in Ike's—Ike had a Chrysler Imperial, as I recall. A boat of a car. Would drive ninety to nothing. Purposefully never wore his seatbelt. Just a—I don't know. And we went up there, talked to the Parks Service people, find out what kind of resources they had. They had early survey maps from

the 1830s and '40s, which I used. They had fly over maps, which in combination with the others were quite useful. Then we literally flew back in Ike's Chrysler to here, and Kitchen arranged for me to borrow Texas—a Korean War vintage Air Force ambulance for this trip. Seven thousand pounds, I think it was. Six gears, I don't know what it was.

DM:

Was it one the big box ambulances?

DP:

It was a big box. Absolutely. Absolutely. Probably like if you've seen *M*A*S*H*, probably just like that. Had two beds in the back.

DM:

So this was your living quarters?

DP:

Well, it got me up there. We had arranged for me to rent from the Parks Service, so there was a house. A very nice—old, but nice enough. So I drove to Arkansas in this 1951—'48, I have no idea what they—but they used it in the Korean War. You couldn't go over fifty-five miles an hour. It would shake. It just vibrate like crazy. Somewhere out of Ada, Oklahoma I threw—it threw one of the fans on the fan almost through the hood. It dented—then the water pump got out of whack and stopped. Somehow they hauled me into the Dodge dealership there. The fan was still being—it was still in use. Like, twenty years later there was still—they could get that easy. The water pump was a different story. So I had to wait about three days, I think. Sleeping in the back of this thing in Ada, Oklahoma. Finally got the part in and got my way up to Harrison, Arkansas where the headquarters was and spent the summer there. I realized fairly quickly that this was kind of a lumbering way to get around these mountains, so one trip I think I flew back to here and got my Volkswagen. I had a '69 Volkswagen Bug, which was much better.

DM:

Oh yeah. You bet.

DP:

In the hills. And put—I don't know. I kept a log, actually. It's in my papers in the Denver Public Library—of how many miles I put on that Bug. It was quite a few. But there were some instances when I had to have the truck. Just the roads were too bad or there was no road and I would use it. But I spent the summer inventorying. There was an executive order. Richard Nixon had signed an executive order, 11593, requiring all federal agencies to survey their property, and if they had any buildings that would qualify for the National Register of Historic Places the federal agencies—so that's what the National Parks Service was doing. Buffalo National River had just

been created in '72, and they were buying up land and trying to keep ahead. So as they bought a piece of land they'd send me out to look at it.

DM:

So you were documenting these historic sites, historic buildings?

DP:

Well, they weren't all historic. They were just property. You had to determine even if it's new that you looked at it and determined that it wasn't. So I don't know how many buildings I looked at but all up and down the river took pictures, assessed sort of—partly off the top of my head whether they were significant or not. Some were frame buildings, some were brick buildings, some were log buildings. There had been a previous survey the year before by a fellow named Richard Sellars, who ended up being my boss in Santa Fe when I got there. He had identified several and they asked me to relook at them, and I agreed with him. There were a handful of buildings that we thought were nationally registered—National Register quality.

DM:

Where is all this information housed?

DP:

There is—the book that we produced is probably here somewhere. The survey that Kitchen put together.

DM:

What about the originals though?

DP:

The originals he took. He kept all those. The only thing I walked away with was one of the volumes that we had—two ply paper and we press the photograph onto it. No digital stuff then. But it was—I don't know—two inches or so. I have a copy. I'm sure there's a copy floating here. The slides I think I sent to Buffalo River. I can't remember. Kitchen for some reason didn't want them.

DM:

You were also interviewing people, is that correct?

DP:

I was interviewing selectively. Selectively, yeah. If there was a building. And they are here, or that was the idea. I sent the tapes back. Maybe I interviewed three or four people.

DM:
Okay.

DP:
Older women, as I recall, who lived back in the outback. Eva Barnes Henderson was one. I can't remember the others. But I did selective interviewing.

DM:
Okay. Did you come across any animosity? I mean here you were working for the federal government.

DP:
I did. I did indeed. I did indeed. This was Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. They're not like flatlanders, right? A lot of angst toward or animosity toward federal government in general. And so periodically I would get that. I was in a restaurant once talking to the guy next to me, and as soon as he learned I was working—technically I was working for Texas Tech but the contract was with—soon as he learned I had anything to do with the park he turned his back on me talking to him, it was that. The summer before I got there, there were several instances of canoes being shot at. Buffalo River is a great canoeing river.

DM:
Yeah. Oh yeah.

DP:
And at one point somebody had strung up barbed wire at sort of neck level over the canoe. So there was a fair amount of animosity. I didn't run into those. The fellow turning his back on me. Another man I remember said, "You know, you're welcome here. We'll talk about whatever you want about. I'm not going to talk about the river. I'm not going to talk about you buying my land."

DM:
Right.

DP:
Which wasn't my job, but he just—we talk about fishing, we talk about his life there, we're not going to talk about property. But no overt personal threats or anything like that. We developed some close friends up there who had a meat shop. Meat smoking. Pork smoking business just south of—north of Jasper, south of Harrison. Just north of the river there. Became very good friends.

DM:

It seems like Don Abbey, who used to work here. Did you know him?

DP:

He did the next year. He did the next year survey. That's right. Exactly. Where did he end up? Do we know?

DM:

He's still around in Lubbock. I'm not exactly sure what he's doing.

DP:

Is he? Okay. Yeah, he did the next year's survey.

DM:

Okay.

DP:

I don't know. They probably bought for a couple more years, but I don't know how they handled.

DM:

But actually all the land acquisitions were already made. Is that right? Oh. Okay.

DP:

They were still buying.

DM:

Oh okay.

DP:

They were still buying. It was a willing seller kind of thing, although the Parks Service did have eminent domain and did use it in a couple of instances.

DM:

You didn't come across those people though, I guess?

DP:

I remember a guy way back down—the valley is like this, so to get here you had to drive all over the place. Met a fellow way in the outback who had just sold his land and was quite pleased. He said, “I got a good deal. They gave me fair value for this. I'm moving up to”—I forgot where it

was. Outside the watershed, but nearby. He said, "I have no complaints. I got a good deal." So there was a gravel business right on the river that if I remember right they had to use imminent domain on, because he was continuing to mining the gravel on the riverbed after he was told not to, I guess. Something like that. But I was never shot at. You know, it was a great summer.

DM:

No *Deliverance* worries.

DP:

No, absolutely not. Absolutely not. No, it was—yeah, it was very nice.

DM:

Did Sabette go up there with you?

DP:

She flew up once. She flew up once and we canoed the river with these friends who had the smoke meat people. Her father also had a canoe rental business, so we got the provisions and canoed a good stretch of the river one day.

DM:

You can't complain about the landscape, can you?

DP:

Boy, you can't. It's stunning. It's stunning. Buffalo River is just—and the bluffs that are in places are eight hundred feet tall, five hundred feet tall, something like that. You've seen it or been on it?

DM:

Yeah, yeah.

DP:

Yeah, oh it's just magnificent.

DM:

Great place to have an assignment from Texas Tech?

DP:

Indeed. Indeed.

DM:

And also you know it's interesting that this kind of came about because Connor said you worked at—what—Carlsbad Caverns National Park? It's funny how there's that little connection.

DP:

Little connection.

DM:

This led, sounds like, to Santa Fe.

DP:

Much more directly. We finished the project and Richard Sellars was the regional historian there who was overseeing it. In my last couple of—I guess in the year or so after we finished it—I'd go up to Santa Fe and take him out to lunch, or we'd go out to lunch. I'd ask him about jobs. Just kept talking having no idea where it would go. Graduated, had sent out—because of the survey—letters to—I don't know—ten letters, twelve letters, fifteen letters, something—to various National Parks Service offices saying, "Here are my skills." Everyone came back, "Thanks but no thanks. We don't have an opening." And two weeks after I graduated Dick called me up and said, "How'd you like four months in Santa Fe?" Just like that. Said, "We have a temporary position." It's sort of a research historian assistant to the regional historian, essentially. We sold our house and moved to Santa Fe.

DM:

Even though it was just four months?

DP:

Even though it was just four months. Yeah, we knew. Actually, I still didn't know that the Parks Service was going to be my career. But I thought it would be good experience. And if I spent a couple years with the Parks Service the four month position stretched out to a six week thing, and then it couldn't be renewed. But during that time a more permanent—not a permanent—but a more permanent job was advertised. I think they called them, "Subject to furlough." Where they could put you on furlough without any formality up to two or three months a year. Never happened, but that was the deal.

DM:

This was as historian?

DP:

That's right. That's right. Still was sort of assistant to the regional historian. Doing whatever Dick wanted me to do.

DM:

So you were starting to get the idea here that there career possibilities with the National Parks Service.

DP:

That's right. That's right.

DM:

Or something outside of teaching in the small college.

DP:

That's right. I still wanted or thought I wanted to teach. I thought that's where I was destined to go. But the longer I was in Santa Fe and doing the various things that historians in the National Parks Service have to do I thought, This is a pretty good deal. I'm getting paid—I was GS7, I think. Started as GS7. But what was more than—I think it was more than I was getting as a teaching assistant here.

DM:

Sure. [laughter]

DP:

And I thought, This might not be bad. The longer I was there the more convinced I was. And then a job opened up in Boston as regional historian, which was the next logical step, and applied for it and got it. At that point said, "This is what we're going to do. This is a career for me." Public historian—the term public historian—I don't think was coined until about the time I took the job in Boston. So I was a public historian, but didn't think in those terms.

DM:

Right, right. I think you said in the paper it was about 1975 when you—as far as you're aware—that the term was coined.

DP:

I think it was later than that. I may have written that. I think it was late seventies when the National Council on Public History was formed in California outside of University of California, Santa Barbara. But yeah, I mean Dick Sellars was a public historian, but I don't remember ever using the term public historian until later. And then I found I are one. [Laughter]

DM:

I think it was in Santa Fe that you were doing a series of—yeah, Sellars is the one that encouraged you to look at different sites and or different areas in the southwest and write up a proposal for the National Registry. Is that correct?

DP:

That's right. That's right. One of the jobs was to begin this 11593, was still active. There were a lot of buildings in parks that hadn't been evaluated yet. So part of what he wanted me to do was to continue those evaluations, and then decide what should be nominated.

DM:

So you were working out of Santa Fe, but your range was pretty broad, it sounded like?

DP:

It was a big region. There were ten region then, but the southwest region was the eastern part of Arizona. So it included Hubble Trading Post, Walnut Canyon, it was around Phoenix, I guess. All of Texas, all of Oklahoma, all of New Mexico, of course. All of Texas, all of Louisiana.

DM:

Wow.

DP:

And then Oklahoma. Yeah, it was a huge region.

DM:

Did you pretty well go to different areas within that entirety?

DP:

Dick divided it up. He took some parks and areas, I guess, and said, "I want you to,"—how he did that, I don't know. I didn't feel slighted at all. I got the Buffalo River and other parks in Arkansas. He let me have Arkansas because of the dissertation, I think. I did some work at Chalmette in New Orleans. Did some work at Hubble Trading Post in Arizona. Sulfur, Oklahoma.

DM:

That's really far flown.

DP:

Yeah, it was. Went out to Palo Alto trying to find the battlefield, which was not that easy it turns out. He picked some parks, I picked some parks. He picked some parks and delegated me the other ones, so we sort of divvied up the region that way.

DM:

Can you give me an overview of the Palo Alto situation? [Laughter] Because I'm not really aware of that?

DP:

I guess there'd been a study bill passed in Congress to—that if you could find the park—flat as this table—if you could find the park we'd be interested in designating a National Historic Battlefield. So the southwest region initially did a contract with Texas A&M. A couple of professors down there who did it. Came back with a study that said, "This is where it is." And then—

DM:

This was based upon artifacts that they were finding?

DP:

Artifacts, some old maps, I'm not sure. There was enough of an office down there. A ranger I had worked with at the Buffalo River had been transferred to Palo Alto. So when Dick sent me down to sort of proof the A&M study this guy had talked to a lot of people. When I got down there he picked me up at the airport and said, "There's a guy in the hospital who says the Texas A&M study isn't worth the paper it's written on."

DM:

Oh gosh.

DP:

He said, "You've got to talk to him." So I did. Can't remember if it's a nursing home or hospital—doesn't matter—but older guy. He had some maps and we got those maps and he was right. This is not a slam on Texas A&M. Literally it's as flat as a tabletop. But he did have some old maps, and we did some very early GIS overlaying of them out at Denver and we determined with a high degree of certainty that it was here not there. Close, but not quite. There's a park. Palo Alto National Battlefield is now a park down there. I've never been there. I haven't been back. I was down there twice, I guess, walking parts of it and trying to find—there was one elevation that you could easily see and there was an elevation on the map that Texas A&M was using. They presumed it was the same elevation. It wasn't.

DM:

That threw it off. Ah ha. Okay.

DP:

So it was a matter of digging through these maps and luckily the GIS process was in its infancy.

DM:

You know what? That's another interesting aspect of your career. These technological changes that have occurred and have aided this kind of thing.

DP:

Absolutely. Might have ended up doing it, but it was a lot easier. We had maybe ten maps from different periods, right? There was enough of a landmark on each one where they could align them and make the—put them to the same standard.

DM:

Right.

DP:

Essentially. And then voila. They're in—

DM:

Were there artifacts found that kind of verified the locations?

DP:

You know, the problem there was that part of it was used as a shooting range. I can't remember. Either officially by the military or by local kids.

DM:

Oh no.

DP:

So yeah, there was a lot of stuff there. And after I left that may have done some magnetometer work or something. I don't know. Finding—there should be cannon balls and all sorts of stuff, right?

DM:

Right.

DP:

I didn't see any, but I'm presuming that they ground trothed it enough to be pretty confident that congress was willing to go along.

DM:

Right. Right. I'm sure again as technology has improved that they've been able to verify even further.

DP:

I'm sure. Ground penetrating radar. The toys that archeologists have.

DM:

Oh boy, I'll tell you.

DP:

Pretty sophisticated.

DM:

Who would have ever thought back then?

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

DM:

What about other projects? You mentioned Canyon de Chelly, and I don't know, some others.

DP:

Yeah, Canyon de Chelly was a—there was an old motel, as I recall. It sort of lost the details of it now. They wanted to expand it in a way that, if I recall this, would have been detrimental to the original trading post that was there. I thought the trading post was eligible for the national registry, which complicates it. It doesn't mean you can't do it. Complicates it a little bit.

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

That was one. On the Buffalo River I went back to look at a state park that had been built during the Depression era. Log cabins. Wonderful rock foundations and log. The state had donated it to the federal government, and then it was leased out to somebody who ran the cabins who leased out the cabins for weekends and that sort of thing. And he wanted to do some things. And so they

needed to know how much leeway he had. I came back and had determined that those cabins were eligible for the national register. Didn't please some people in the Parks Service who wanted a more liberal hand. But we had a good relationship with the state historic preservation officer in Arkansas. So that eventually I think they got on the register as well. The fun one, and I think I mentioned this in the book, was a cave in the Carlsbad Cavern system, New Cave—they've called it something else now—that was mined for guano before the national monument came in in 1930—1923, 1923. And either the bottom went out of the guano market or the business went out of business. But they left all their shovels, and sivs, and railroad tracks, and pulleys, and tables, and burlap bags and things.

DM:

That's like a museum.

DP:

It was like a museum. So my friend Dick Sellars said, "You worked at Carl"—this Carlsbad Caverns come back to haunt you—"You worked at Caverns. Did you go caving?" "Yeah, I did. I did.", "Did you like that?" I said, "Yes, I did." "Well, I've got a deal for you. There's this new cave and they did some guano mining and we need to go down and see what's left and see if it's eligible for the national register." I said, "Great. I'll do it." He said, "Well, I have to tell you that it's a hundred and eighty foot vertical drop into the cave." It's an L-shaped cave with the top being a hundred and eighty feet and then you wander back. I said, "Sure." I wasn't quite—I was sort of in that interim period when I wasn't hired full time. I wasn't going to screw that up. I had no idea how to rappel. He said, "Don't worry. The chief scientist at the region will teach you." So he taught me and Tom Merlin, the state historic preservation officer, how to rappel. On the night of the thing we rappelled a hundred and eighty feet into the cave and walked around and took photographs and assessed it and somehow climbed back up a hundred and eighty feet.

DM:

That's incredible.

DP:

It's quite amazing. I can't imagine doing it now. Going down is easier than going up, because you're—

DM:

Did you have descenders? Were you using descenders?

DP:

That's right, yeah, descenders. Were they Jumars? I forget that they were—anyway, there was a ratchet thing. There were three points on the rope. The ratchet thing on the shelf. And then there

was a two hand things with ratchets that were connected with ropes to your feet. So you press down and raise it up as high and then do the—but when you're going down, you go down pretty fast. And so you're not on the rope very long and the longer you're on the rope the shorter you have to fall. You're close to the ground. Going up, the longer you're on the rope—this goes through your head, if you're a newbie like me—you think, Oh God. Anyway, it all worked out.

DM:

You just can't forget your ascenders before you rappel.

DP:

That's exactly right. I went with the chief science guy named Milford Fletcher. Actually, he was a scientist. I'm not sure he was chief scientist in the region. And an oil field worker who later became the cave expert at Carlsbad and became world-renowned for his caving—scientific caving stuff. But at that time he was still in the oil field. They were as professional—you have to—this is serious stuff right? You're a hundred and eighty feet. The rope is, what? Half an inch thick? They were really good at checking gear, making sure everything worked. I can't say it was fun. It was fun to be out of it. Once I was done I could look back with a satisfaction, I guess. But it's—

DM:

Your profession could have diverged right there.

DP:

It could have. It could have very easily. It could have very easily. Yeah. It was those sort of things—Canyon de Chelly, Buffalo River, the cave—that gave such a variety out to this public history work that got me to thinking, There're people who do this and they get paid for doing this. Why shouldn't I be one of them?

DM:

Did that—has that always kind of appealed to you? This idea of being off working on this project and then another project and a lot of diversity in what's going on in your profession? Rather than one specific area of study for forty years kind of thing?

DP:

I think—I don't know when sort of that came to focus, but certainly after my Santa Fe years I thought, That's for me. I couldn't think of being an academic, which I've done for the last twelve years. Thoroughly enjoy it. But I think it was that. Literally any position in the Parks Service is like that. The variety of stuff. You never know what you're going to do. Whether you're in your park or the regional office. Even in the Washington office when I was chief historian I never knew what was going to come across the desk.

DM:

Right. That's exciting.

DP:

It was. Every day was a new day, right?

DM:

No regrets.

DP:

I came to embrace it. Came to embrace it. It was a great way to have a career. Thirty years.

DM:

I ask because it's very similar for me. Just going off in different directions all the time. It's so fulfilling.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. But it's not for all people. Some people can't do it. They can't juggle those balls. Somebody early in my career said, "The important thing about juggling all those balls, that you have to do in these jobs is to remember which ones are glass." [laughter] You keep those in the air. The rubber balls can bounce a couple of times. The glass balls have to stay in the air.

DM:

I like that.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah.

DM:

So Santa Fe, all in all, you were there and in that office for how long?

DP:

Three years.

DM:

Three years. And then you went directly—

DP:

To Boston.

DM:

To Boston.

DP:

Culture shock.

DM:

And you were there for ten years, I believe?

DP:

Ten years. Ten years. Job of regional historian opened up and I applied for it after consulting with Sabette. Because we'd never—actually, I'd been to Connecticut once a long time ago. For the Band of America thing. Ended up in New York. My mother had a distant cousin in Connecticut. I visited them and then took the train back to Carlsbad. The only time I'd been in New England. So we thought, Well, why not? Let's do this. That was culture shock. Absolute culture shock.

DM:

Talk about that a little bit, if you don't mind?

DP:

Well, Santa Fe was a town of about fifty thousand then. As I said, I'm from Carlsbad. Small place. Sabette is from Lamesa. Small place. Lived in Lubbock, which is a little bigger, and Clovis. But Santa Fe is fifty thousand or so. Boston is a megalopolis. It's now and was then. With trains and subways and all sorts of things. And different weather patterns and salt on the road and a provincialism that is—I think I can say this. We're in Texas—I thought Texas was provincial until I went to Boston. No candle. Can't hold a candle to it. It's just amazing how ingrained—we loved it. Our daughter was born there. Had a great ten years there. It provided jumping off places to go to Canada. Went to England a couple times. I really enjoyed it. Wonderful people. Friends still from up there. But it's like living in a foreign country in some way. They just do things differently there and you have to get in that rhythm, right? I learned how to shovel snow. I thought I learned how to shovel snow in Santa Fe, but I really didn't. It was in Boston where I did that. But it was—I had, again, great experiences. There was a—Bunker Hill is part of the Boston National Historical Park, I guess it is. A lot of Revolutionary War things.

DM:

So is the USS Constitution out there?

DP:

That's right. That's right.

DM:

Is it all part of one?

DP:

It's all part—managed. The Constitution is still owned by the Navy.

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

The parks Service has a hand in—because it has the Navy yard where it's birthed. But there are, I don't know, ten sites. The Paul Revere House. Separately owned but managed by the Parks Service. Faneuil Hall, same thing. Old South Meeting House, Bunker Hill.

DM:

Is the Freedom Trail a national parks deal?

DP:

It is. It is. It's the trail that links—the yellow brick road—that links all of these sites.

DM:

But the National Park Service kind of maintains the—

DP:

It's the coordinator. Yeah. It owns some of them. Others it has an interest in. In some it's just a cooperative agreement.

DM:

That's pretty complex.

DP:

It's very complex. It's very complex. With lots of moving parts. So actually the site I'm thinking of was not Bunker Hill, but was on the south side of the bay. It was where George Washington had his guns that fired on the British and—

DM:

Dorchester Heights.

DP:

Dorchester Heights. Exactly. Are you from up there?

DM:

No.

DP:

You just know that? You're a historian. You know these things. Dorchester Heights has a big monument on it, and there was a sign—this was way in the weeds of this stuff—but there was a sign that they wanted to replace or move or change in some way. I can't remember what it was. There was a site manager out there. A guy named Vince Lombardi. [Laughter] No relation. Wonderful, wonderful guy. He said—the interest group here is the American Legion, I think. It was one of the veteran's groups. I think it was the American Legion. We need to talk to them to figure out we're going to do here. I said, "Fine.", "They can only do it at night.", "That's fine." So I took the subway out and he met me at the—somewhere. We walked to the American Legion hall, which was empty except for these five guys, vets, who were very possessive about this park and this sign. The details of it are lost on me. But we go in and say, "You want a beer?", "Yeah, that's okay." So we went back into the kitchen area and opened the refrigerator. The refrigerator was top to bottom beer. That's the way they did business, right? In Dorchester Heights. This is not where—who's the gangster who was just caught?—Whitey Bulger. He was a southie, which is not quite Dorchester Heights, but close enough. Close enough. But we had a great time. Great sitting with these old vets talking about the sign and other things. I can't—we were drinking I don't know how many beer. But solved the problem. Got it done some way. I forget what we agreed upon. But the Parks Service work gets you into those kinds of things. I met at the Longfellow House, which is part of the region in Cambridge, the—it wasn't the chief ranger. He was sort of the chief guide, maybe. Knew Longfellow's grandson, who had died in 1953. May have worked for Alice. That would be too far back. She died in the twenties. But Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana was the poet's grandson. He was the last occupant of the house and died in '53, and this guy had worked for him. So it's—worked for a guy—met a guy at the Roosevelt Home in Hyde Park who had worked for Roosevelt in the forties.

DM:

Golly, that is so interesting.

DP:

Yeah. You run a—

DM:

Incredible experiences.

DP:

Incredible experiences. The woman at that point who was the manager—the superintendent—of the Adams Home—four generations of Adams—was the social secretary for Brooks Adams, who was the fourth generation and the last occupant of the house. He died in 1927. She went to Boston from Alabama, I think. Wilhelmina Harris. Buried with her husband in Arlington cemetery. And needed a job. She was going to major in music. Go to school. So a job advertised by the Adams and took it, and spent the rest of Brooks's life—maybe five or ten years there—working for Brooks. Married Colonel Adams, who owned the house directly across the street from the Adams. And then in 1944, when the family gave the home to the government, the family asked Wilhelmina to come back as superintendent, 1944. This is 1982. She's still there. And she was there another ten years.

DM:

Amazing.

DP:

She was an amazing woman. She was at the opening of King Tut's tomb, because Brooks had gotten an invitation and got sick. He said, "You take the tickets." That stuff happens all the time in the Parks Service.

DM:

That's incredible. By the way, you were complaining earlier that your memory isn't what it used to be? Hey, I think you're doing just fine. [laughter]

DP:

So far. So far.

DM:

No worries there. Did you work over at Lexington-Concord?

DP:

I did. Quite a bit. Quite a bit. The Battle Road system both on—a little bit on archeology things, although there was a regional archeologist who handled that. But we tried to coordinate these things as much as possible. Tearing down buildings. Again, survey stuff. Are these buildings eligible for the register or are they not? There was a wonderful old really seedy bar on the road that was great. But it wasn't eligible. I cried when we had to tear it down.

DM:

Oh. Okay. I was about to say, I don't remember it.

DP:

Yeah, it was—I couldn't tell you where it was or the name of it. But it didn't make the cut. And it was a local watering hole. I mean, the Parks Service takes some heat when they tear down these places.

DM:

Right. You bet. You bet.

DP:

Worked a fair amount—not at the Lexington end, but at the Concord end quite a bit because there were a lot of buildings along there that we had to—did a lot survey work. The survey work that I did at Buffalo was happening all over. Cape Cod. There we did a lot of that.

DM:

Were you working at—did you work on these interpretive centers as well? I mean, I remember the Lexington-Concord one in particular how beautiful it was last time I was there. Just amazing the maps and the battle formations.

DP:

The lights sort of—

DM:

LED.

DP:

LED stuff. That was already up. That was a bicentennial thing. That was up in '76. I didn't get to Boston until '79. That's right. Had a major flaw. I don't know if you—you were there in the summer, probably. If you went in the winter you would have noticed it. High ceiling and the heating vents were about eight feet up. So they had trouble heating it in the—

DM:

Yeah, I've been in there mostly in Oct—in the fall.

DP:

Okay. Okay. Do you remember there was a mural sort of thing of the Battle Road along one wall? Showing the British troops and the American troops and all of that?

DM:

I can't remember it.

DP:

Yeah, it was part of the exhibit. And there was a barn that it was kind of—the inside was in shadow. If you looked real closely the artist put a biplane in there. [Laughter] Just for fun. And the Parks Service I guess let him do it.

DM:

Oh gosh. No, I just remember it being a really nice interpretive center.

DP:

Yeah, it worked. It worked. There was none, essentially. There was one at the North Bridge in the old house—I can't remember the name of the house, but the house overlooking the—

DM:

Oh yeah, the Manse.

DP:

The Manse, I guess. There were some exhibits there, but there really was no exhibit center for the road itself. And that did that. Still there, as far as I know.

DM:

What an exciting place to work, though.

DP:

Oh it was—I knew nothing about—I was a western historian, right? Soon as I went to New England, everything was virgin territory.

DM:

A learning experience though. That's what's so wonderful.

DP:

A learning experience. Right and the left. Right and the left. It was great. Was on the planning team for Acadia National Park.

DM:

Yeah, really?

DP:

So we went up there a lot.

DM:

What a great park.

DP:

All seasons. Took our skis. I think about three trips in the winter took our skis and there was no snow every time. Never did get to ski that. The carriage paths that John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had created. Fifty miles of carriage paths.

DM:

In the park?

DP:

In the park. In the park.

DM:

I just don't remember carriage—is it road now?

DP:

It's all roads, yeah. But he developed them as carriage paths as soon as the park came in. Not as soon, but at some point. They were hiking, biking paths. Maybe horse paths as well. But no carriages. But that was a great experience too. And then researching the background of the parks. Good ten years. Good ten years.

DM:

Incredible. Just incredible.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. Worked on the Statue of Liberty. Was run out of the Boston office, because it was in the Boston region.

DM:

Yes, I have that.

DP:

So we worked very closely with the architects and preservation specialist who redid the inside of the Statue of Liberty. Changed it from steel to stainless steel.

DM:

Oh, okay.

DP:

Because steel and copper is not compatible, and the brads would pop. And then water would get in, right? And so the infrastructure of the statute is this incredible network of iron, essentially.

DM:

I think I've seen it in the raw.

DP:

Yeah, it's—and so lots of compliance with that. Lots of working with the state of New York. With the advisory council in historic preservation. And so I made a number of trips. Planning trips and then other trips down there to make sure that—and Ellis Island was going on at the same time, which was—

DM:

Yeah, this made my notes, because you were talking about that in your paper and about how there began to be a marriage between public history and academic. Public historians and academic historians. That really began to happen on a larger scale at this—during this project.

DP:

This was—Ellis Island was the first time the Parks Service had experienced it. There was a woman named Heather Huyck who was very much involved in organization—a woman named Heather Huyck who worked for the National Parks Service. Also very much involved in the organization of American historians. She was—actually I'm not sure what position she was in at the time, but when the planning for Ellis Island started she said, "There are any number of immigration and ethnic historians in the country who would love to be a part of this project. The National Parks Service does not have the expertise to develop this. Let's create a committee of these historians to advise the Parks Service as they develop the interpretative plans for Ellis Island."

DM:

Let's get her name. What's the spelling of her last name?

DP:

Okay, H-u-y-c-k. She's now retired. She may be teaching part time at William and Mary. She retired a number of years ago but then—like I came to New Mexico State—she went to William and Mary and taught a course or two. Dr. Heather Huyck.

DM:

This is critically important, you know? It's quite a step it sounds like to me.

DP:

It is, and it's—let me finish what they did there. So the Ellis Island—there was the foundation, which was the fundraising side of it. Then there was the commission, which initially was headed by Lee Iacocca, that was sort of the organizing piece of it. I'm not sure exactly where that line is. At one time Lee Iacocca was head of both and the government finally had to tell him he couldn't do that. He had to step down. The commission created this historians committee—historians advisory committee, I guess—that brought in literally the best immigration and ethnic historian minds in the country. Maybe a dozen or so. And we—because I was the regional historian in Boston, I was sort of ad—what do you call it?—ex officio member of it. We would meet twice a year and either in New York. We met in New York. We met at the Newberry Library in Chicago. We'd meet in various places. Where the members were, where it's convenient to get together. And the park interpreters would bring their next phase of whatever it was, and the team would look over it and offer comments. Purely advisory. It was interesting—and this is the first time the Parks Service had ever done anything like this—it has since become the norm. In fact, in '94 we signed a cooperative agreement with the Organization of American Historians and it's still going. So it's what? Almost twenty-five years? Next year, I guess, will be twenty-five years.

DM:

That was the other landmark point it seems like in this. The 1983 meetings and the 1994.

DP:

The Parks Service interesting—when I first came in '76, lasting well into the next decade or more—was a pretty insular agency. “We're the National Parks Service.” Right? “We know how to do this.” And actually had a senior historian, who we will not name, said, “We are not academic historians. They do their thing. We do our thing. There's no reason to create a middle ground.” Sort of baffled me at the time. But in fact, what the Parks Service does is interpret the past. Either natural history or cultural history. On my side, it interprets the past. That's what historians do. Why not bring in the best we have to consult with the Parks Service on this? This is in service to the American taxpayer, right? So why not create the best we can instead of winging it, as we used to? So the Ellis Island gathering was a big deal. A big deal. And enough parks realized this made their life easier.

DM:

Um-hm. Sure.

DP:

That they were willing to buy into it. The next big one, I think, would be Gettysburg. That would be under my tenure as chief historian in the nineties. There was a whole new redevelopment of the park, rethinking of the park, a new visitor's center, tearing down the old visitor's center, moving the cyclorama from a separate building into the visitor's center. A big deal. They had a

fundraising branch and a commission. They did exactly the same thing. Brought in a large group—maybe twelve or so—of leading Civil War scholars in the country, and they met periodically. Mostly—but a couple times in Washington—but mostly we met in Gettysburg. Again, I was ex officio because I was chief historian.

DM:

Right. I get the impression there were larger things going on though than just changes of interpretative centers and displays. It was about—it was about, you know, presenting history to the public in a different way?

DP:

Exactly.

DM:

Not the antiquarian approach.

DP:

That's right, That's right. A couple of things came into play there. I think a number of new superintendents were better educated than their predecessors.

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

Also it was very lucky at the time, I was coming through the chief of interpretation in Washington was a fellow named Corky Mayo, who thought there's better ways—in fact, he called it the Interpretative REvolution—with a capital R and that E—so it's "revolution" or "evolution." However you wanted to read it. When I first got to Washington as a chief historian in '95, one of my first visits was with Corky. Because there was a gap between historians and interpretations that I'd witnessed in Santa Fe, I'd witnessed it in Boston, I'd witnessed it in the regional office in Washington, and sort of made my pitch that I wanted historians more involved in how these stories were developed. He said, "That's perfect. I do technique, you do content."

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

And for the next ten years we had this and it worked perfectly. Because there's a skill to developing programs, to getting up and talking in front of a group. He said, "That's my thing. You work on the content and we'll meet in the middle."

DM:

It makes perfect sense.

DP:

It makes perfect sense.

DM:

But I do see where it probably is this older generation was coming from of saying, “We don’t want you stepping on our toes.”

DP:

Indeed. Indeed. In fact, I remember a gathering in Boston—which the regional interpretive office there was very welcoming of me. But there were these pockets of resistance. I made the pitch at one of these interpretive gatherings that we ought to use more academically based research. The comment from—a response—from one of the fellows was, “We don’t have enough time to give a semester’s worth of information.” It was just pushback. It was resistance. And I very quickly made the, “That’s not my point.” But the Parks Service has moved a long way for a number of reasons. Because of Corky, because of a new breed of interpreters. New thinking about what interpretation is and how meaningful it can be to us individually. I just happen to be at the right time at the right place—in the right place at the right time.

DM:

When you look back to—I’ll call them the old guard—of chief historians in the National Parks Service. Were they PhD’s from major universities?

DP:

Some. Some. Some. Yeah. Actually, the arch of the work of the chief historian is sort of like this. It’s not a steady progression. The historians who came—the first chief historian was a guy named Verne Chatelain, who came in about 1932-1933. The Parks Service realized it had enough cultural places it needed a chief historian. He was a master’s student at University of Minnesota. Went back and got his PhD after he stopped being chief historian. But the important point there; they knew because they were historians their job was to interpret these parks. So whether they were regional historians or park historians, they were up to their elbows in developing booklets, programs, researching the history of the park for the interpretation, and that continued pretty much until 1966 with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Which emphasized—well, it—let me see. I haven’t thought about this in a long time. It made compliance a bigger deal. That is, Parks Service couldn’t do what it wanted to old buildings, right? It needed to go through a dance. It needed to talk to the state historic preservation officer. It created the office, actually—the ’66 act—of the state historic preservation offices. It created the president’s advisory council on historic preservation. It created a system of looking at old buildings and thinking how it

wanted to do it. Nixon's 11593 is a product of that. It came in response to that. He said, "This is the way we're going to do it. So after—'66 seems to be kind of the dividing line where the Washington History Office decided that regional historians would get much more involved in these compliance projects—these surveys—of historic buildings.

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

And not get involved in the interpretive side.

DM:

I see.

DP:

And in fact I don't know how to fit in the federal standard for historians, which is one standard for all federal history jobs, is essentially a research position. It's not an education position. It's a research position. And so after '66—and I came in in '72 and then '76 officially—the regional offices of the Parks Service—and in fact almost all historians—were doing compliance work in service to these surveys. Once it's eligible then there's hoops you have to go through to make sure you're treating the building appropriately, right? And that deal is working with state historic preservation office. But the work was all in that side, none on the education side. And when I came in Santa Fe Dick Sellars and I had many conversations. "What's wrong with this picture?" I mean, I like doing it but I was very aware that I wasn't involved in any way. And Dick tried to make overtures to the chief of interpretation in that region. "That's not what you do. That's what we do. You do this other stuff." And that was pretty much the norm. That was not the norm in Boston. I was very well received. We worked with the interpreters up there quite a bit, pushing back on that old guard. And then some time in there Corky Mayo at the national level came in and revolutionized it quite a bit, to the point that—and I think now it's if you're redoing your interpretive program somebody is going to ask you, "Who are the academics? Who are the scholars involved? Who are you consulting?"

DM:

Right. Okay. This really came full circle then.

DP:

Yeah. And nobody answers, "None." Right? That's not the answer. [laughter] "We're doing it ourselves." Which lasted until—I think I may have written in that article about the Liberty Bell exhibit, and this was—I was chief historian, so this was early—late nineties, I guess.

Independence Park was moving the Liberty Bell pavilion from the center of the mall off to the

side, so you could have a perfect sight line from the National Constitutional Center right down the middle of the mall to Independence Hall. So they put the Liberty Bell off on the side. Developed a whole interpretative program for it totally in house. This is late nineties. Didn't consult with anybody.

DM:

Wow.

DP:

Didn't consult with anybody.

DM:

What were the repercussions of that?

DP:

Well, the chief of interpretation in the park left and his deputy left. The incoming superintendent said, "You can either work with me on this or I'll help you find another job." And the two of them retired. There was a whistleblower named Gary Nash who—UCLA professor, very distinguished professor. Former president of the OAH—got wind of this exhibit, because he does colonial stuff in Pennsylvania. That's his shtick. And the park said, "We've already sent that up to contract and you can't look at it." And Gary Nash is the kind of guy—he's a very dear friend—you don't do that. It's like waving the red cape in front of the bull. And so he called a newspaper reporter first to get that going, and then he called me. He said, "Dwight, what do you know about this?" And I said, "I don't know anything about it." Because that wasn't chief historian's job. We don't do it. But I said, "I'll look into it." And so they did send me the interpretive plan, and it was a perfect plan for about 1955. Cold War history stuff. Totally inappropriate. I called up the regional director first and it was a good friend I had known in Boston years. I said, "Marie, you can't do this. You will embarrass the park. You will embarrass yourself. You will embarrass the National Parks Service. You cannot do this." She was a good enough friend—and she was very much aware of all of these as well—so she created a subgroup that didn't involve the chief of interpretation. Shortening a long story, but we had a charrette for about two and a half, three days, in Philadelphia and totally—not totally, but redid the most egregious parts of the exhibit. And what you see now—I think it's still up—is much better. For example, they had three images of the Liberty Bell. It travelled at different times. Jefferson Davis looking at it in New Orleans just before he died, an plains Indian chief with a headdress looking at it—I think it was in Omaha—and then another image, I think also in New Orleans, of a black man, maybe a grandfather, with two kids—black kids—looking at it. And the original text had it something like, "Isn't it great how we all look at the Liberty Bell the same way?" And we immediately said, "I don't think so. I don't think so." And so we developed captions for each one of those that problematizes the idea of liberty in this country and that we all don't think about it

the same way. I'm very pleased. I wish we could have gone back to square one and totally redid it—redone it—but we didn't have the time. There was expense. But I'm very pleased with what we did. And Gary Nash has an article in a book called—losing track of it. I have another article on the Parks Service and Civil War history—but Gary wrote one specifically on this Liberty Bell thing to vent a little bit. He felt better when he finished.

DM:

You know that's got to be another real perplexing aspect of working for the National Parks Service, though. The time and the money limitations. I mean, how much can you possibly do? There's so much to do.

DP:

There's so much to do.

DM:

Four hundred and thirteen parks, I think?

DP:

I think that's about right.

DM:

Oh my goodness. How do you—

DP:

Today. I didn't check this morning's paper. Congress—they don't like to fund them but they love to create them. [laughter]

DM:

I don't know if we can count Kilauea anymore or not and Hawaii volcanos.

DP:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Something will remain. I was there a couple years ago and it was smoking but not blowing.

DM:

I was supposed to be there when that happened, but I had to cancel that trip two weeks before. I kind of wish I had gotten to witness that and get out.

DP:

Well, it's not all over the island. It's just on the portion of the island. Nevertheless, that's serious stuff. It's the nature of public history, right? Whether you're working at a museum or a historic site, whether it's privately owned, state owned, locally owned. There's money and there's time and there's limitations on all of that, which I like. Because you have to think faster and smarter and that's why these networks make it a lot easier. We created this cooperative agreement so money comes in—a perfect example: the summer of the fires. Whenever that was. 2000-2001. The west was so dry. There were fires all over the place. It might have begun at Los Alamos when the Parks Service did a control burn at Bandelier that got out of control. Burned down half of Los Alamos. But that was just the beginning. The whole summer it was just a disaster. I got to thinking that the Parks Service has done a lot of preventive fires. They do these fire burns. We never had a history of fire in the Parks Service. So I went to the fire boss and he was getting lots of money because the office is in Idaho. Somewhere in Boise, maybe, Idaho. Fire center for the Parks Service. Maybe for the Forest Service as well. I'm not sure. Anyway, so I said, "Parks Service has never done a history of fire and how we manage that, how we responded to it." From the Smokey the Bear beginnings to now when it's much more sophisticated. And I said, "I could use some of that money." He said, "Dwight, I've got my hands full. I can't do it." I don't know what time of the year that was. Well, about August I get a call from this guy. He was running out of time, end of fiscal year in October, and had money to spend.

DM:

Too much money.

DP:

He said, "Dwight, could you use a quarter of a million dollars?" [Laughter] But then you get a contract for it, right? There's a dance to be done. But we had done this cooperative agreement, which allows us to pick a partner—a scholar, essentially—and transfer the money. So there were two scholars. One at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas], Hal Rothman, who'd done a lot of work for us, and Stephen Pyne at the University of Arizona—Arizona State, I think, in Phoenix. I think Stephen is at—he was the fire—written a book, a wonderful book on fire in this country. Got them together and spent the money and got a publication that was published by a very well respected academic press and I can't give you the name of it.

DM:

Great topic.

DP:

But it was a matter of having those connections ready to go. Had we had to contract for it, couldn't have done it. But we had this relationship with the Organization of American Historians. We had this structure in place with the cooperative agreement. We could do it.

DM:

Wow, that's incredible. That's another great thing that's come out of this then.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. It's a good book. We have a number of books. The other thing that I tried to—maybe I'm jumping ahead—is the Parks Service did a lot of research when I came in. All of it published by the Government Printing Office. Actually, it's not published at all. It's printed by the government printing. They'll print whatever you give them and you hope the pages are right side up, and sometimes they're not. But I thought, We're spending a lot of money—some hundred thousand dollars sometimes—on a report of some kind. A history of a park. We should make this more accessible. And so we started publishing as much as we could with academic presses. When I was in the regional office I wrote into the contract that when this is all approved by the National Parks Service the author has—it was fairly strongly worded. More than an obligation, but will seek academic publication. And she did, through Penn State Press.

DM:

Okay. Were there specific academic presses that you went to?

DP:

Only by the press's own definition of what they published, right?

DM:

Right. Right.

DP:

We worked with Texas A&M on a thing at LBJ, for example. And we left that mostly to the author to figure out what would be the logical press to do that.

DM:

Right. Because they should know.

DP:

Because they should know. That's right. So there's a lot more of that going on as well.

DM:

You know what that's actually something I was going to touch on. I wanted to ask you about in the 1970s when this concept of public history was emerging. What perspective of academic academicians was. Academic historians was toward public history and vice versa? And then the publication thing plays into that because the Government Printing Office was cranking out these things and they probably didn't look quite as good on your resume as an academic.

DP:

It's great material. Right?

DM:

Yeah. Great material, but just published different and I'm sure that there were some academicians that looked askance at that.

DP:

Well, it doesn't go through peer review. I mean, we're jumping ahead to your last point. But it's not peer review, as I said. They'll print whatever you give them. So it could be a great report, but if you're a serious scholar you couldn't claim it on your resume because it wasn't peer reviewed, which is a legitimate—so back to the seventies. Public history was so new that I think two things were going on. One was that, "Well, it's not real history." I mean, if you're being paid to do a history of a corporation, how critical can you be, right? That was a big discussion. And the academics fear—they said, "How do we weigh this for tenure and promotion?" You do an exhibit. Well, it's not a book. It's not an article. Ignoring the fact that a lot of research—

DM:

Right.

DP:

--original research went into the exhibit, and the exhibit's going to be seen by many more people that's going to read the article and the book.

DM:

It's true.

DP:

Right? But it isn't—it's sort of that traditional, "We publish," kind of thing. That hasn't gone away, unfortunately. It's still there. But so I think there was that aspect of it. The other side was that public historians are those who work in public—historians who work in public history are those who couldn't get a job in academia. So they're kind of a lesser perspective. And that persisted—maybe still does persist, I think. One of my first, maybe five, six, seven, eight years with going to meetings of the National Council on Public History, which is *the* gathering point of public historians, major topic was, "How do we get credit?" Because a lot of public historians were teaching public history. The organization came out of UC Santa Barbara. These guys were teaching public history. How do you get credit and how do they get their students credit for doing? I mean it was a major topic. I have no idea where it stands now, but it was a major issue because it just wasn't respected. It's other. It's sort of like the fellow in the parks service. "Academics do this work, public historians do this work. There's no middle ground." I think part

of it persists now. I remember when I chief historian late nineties, early 2000s, drawn into a meeting at American University, which wanted to start a public history—wasn't even a program. I think it was an emphasis or something—and a lot of resistance. A lot of resistance from—interestingly enough—younger scholars. Because they thought any resources the university might have that would go to the public side would mean less going to the academic side. And so we wanted—we don't—they eventually did found it. It's a very strong program. Alan Kraut was very much involved in that. I think he's just retired. But a lot of resistance and a lot of just not understanding what it is. It wasn't traditional history.

DM:
Right.

DP:
Right. And I remember when I was in Santa Fe Dick and I made a list of research needs. Thinking of my experience here. Doing this work at the Buffalo River, which turned in my dissertation. *History of the Buffalo River*. And thinking, Wouldn't it be great if other graduate students had a list of research needs from the Parks Service? That if you're floating around, you don't know but you—maybe you're from Fort Smith and you find out that Fort Smith, Arkansas needs a study of Judge—"Hanging Judge"—whatever his name was—

DM:
Right, right. Yeah. Parker.

DP:
Parker. Judge Parker. That's right. So we made this list of—

DM:
Good idea.

DP:
--of research needs. Floated it out to—

DM:
Possible funding?

DP:
No funding. That was the kicker. That was the pushback we got. The only—I think the only response we got—and I can't remember—maybe it's best I don't remember what university this is—"You guys are from the federal government. You're wanting us to do your research for you for free? We're not going to do this." That's changed a lot, but there was that kind of, "If you're

with the government, you know, you need to do it.” Now there is a lot of subventions, there’s a lot of ways that parks come up with money to cover travel for scholars and a range of things. So I think that’s changed a bit. But I think that it was rough going. You can ask any public historian who went through that. Rough going across the board, because—

DM:

I think one of the interesting things you pointed out was early on in your career with National Parks was that you were not only using, I mean, your resources exploded. Not only were you using the typical archives and libraries for your research, but you were using those sites—historic sites were important.

DP:

Buildings.

DM:

Historic buildings.

DP:

Artifacts.

DM:

Yeah, material culture.

DP:

Caves. Guano shovels.

DM:

It’s incredible, I mean—

DP:

That’s right.

DM:

Who could not listen to that argument? That all of the sudden you’re bringing in all the resources available?

DP:

That’s right. That’s right.

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DM:

Use everything at your disposal.

DP:

Yeah. And as sort of—other disciplines have sort of gotten to that point, but historians are pretty traditional sort.

DM:

Yeah. Right.

DP:

And certainly in the years I was here. '71-'76. Nobody ever mentioned public history. Ike Connor had done a book for the Parks Service. *Explorers and Settlers*, or something like that. It was a series they had done to look at buildings. Part of this surveying. National surveying before '66. And he had written a context statement for this one publication that then somebody else came in and said, "And here are sites that might be eligible under exploration and settlement," or if that was the one to do. So he had—I remember at one time he said, "Here's what I want you to do." This was during the contract with Buffalo River. "Want you to go to work for the Parks Service. Become chief historian. Hire me to do research." [Laughter]

DM:

He said that, really? Wow. That was prophetic.

DP:

Wasn't it? Bizarre.

DM:

That's amazing.

DP:

Bizarre. Think he died—

DM:

But you never hired him? [Laughter]

DP:

He was dead by the time I became chief historian. Do you know when he died? Late eighties. I think I was—you know, I don't remember. It was—

DM:

I know he's on a plaque down in our hallway since he was head of the Southwest Collection.

DP:

Oh is he really?

DM:

Yeah.

DP:

Oh we'll check it. I think he died before I became chief historian. Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

DP:

But I never hired him.

DM:

But you know what? It was still largely prophetic.

DP:

It sticks with me a lot. It's amazing that he would have thought I would have wanted to work for the Parks Service after this, because that wasn't—even when I was doing survey it wasn't part of it—but he sort of popped that one.

DM:

And then became chief historian.

DP:

I certainly had no goals of becoming chief historian. That was not—

DM:

But he did. [laughter]

DP:

Or—

DM:

Of you.

DP:

Or he—I don't know. Who knows? Who knows what he was thinking?

DM:

It's just incredible.

DP:

Yeah.

DM:

It's at least an incredible coincidence, huh? Wow. So he was working on—he was working on these public history projects, but he didn't talk about public history as—

DP:

That's right. That's right. Or think of himself, I think, as a public historian. He was being a historian whose product was used by a federal agency. That was probably as close as he got to—I don't think he ever—in those years I never heard the word “public” history.

DM:

You know, I remember Ernest Wallace working on some federal projects. I don't remember exactly what they were.

DP:

Oh really?

DM:

This would have been in the eighties and he was a professor emeritus at that time. I don't think he was teaching any classes, but he was researching at the Southwest Collection at the old building. I remember I was a young student, but he would come in and he would log in his research time because he was being paid. He was paid by the federal government. He would log in his time. If he got up to go get a drink at the water fountain he logged out his time. Came back three minutes later and logged his time.

DP:

Logged back in. [laughter]

DM:

But yeah, he was working on some project—

DP:

I didn't know that.

DM:

--Related to the Comanche. I cannot remember. You know, his Comanche research. I just cannot remember what that was, but there might be some people around who would—that know.

DP:

The other conflict—getting back to this public history/academic history/popular history—another rub came from a lot of museums and small historic sites who had developed their interpretive programs over the years that were very comforting to the local community, and they didn't want a new interpretation.

DM:

Right.

DP:

Right? They don't want this young whippersnapper, new PhD from Texas Tech, coming in and saying, "Well, there's another way of looking at this."

DM:

Oh yeah.

DP:

So there was a lot of—that was another aspect of this dance that was being done at that time.

DM:

That seems to have been a major aspect of your career, especially as chief historian. To say, "You know, we need to do more than look at the—take the antiquarian approach."

DP:

"The book that was written in 1930."

DM:

Exactly.

DP:

That's right. Exactly.

DM:

And, “Whether it’s controversial or not, we need to look at it.”

DP:

Yeah.

DM:

So that’s—I think that’s an interesting part of what came out of your—

DP:

Yeah, part of that I remember there’s a public historian named Bob Weyeneth at the University of South Carolina who took a trip to New York for some reason—I didn’t meet him at that point. He wrote me a letter afterwards. But he went to the Vanderbilt Mansion and he wrote me this letter and said that he went through the whole thing and only heard about the Vanderbilts. He didn’t hear anything about the majority population on the plantation. The cooks, the cleaners, the gardeners—of which there had to be many—all these things. That was around the first—about the point what I was thinking differently about how all these pieces fit together. And it made a big impact on me.

DM:

Oh I’ll bet.

DP:

That whole story here—and it’s very similar to a plantation, right? You could talk about the big house, but you need to talk about the houses behind. But that was the time. That was the early eighties. History was—history was finding—academic history was changing quite a bit during that period, and the Parks Service was obviously affected by that change to the good.

DM:

I know this was not always an easy growing process. A lot of controversy.

DP:

Absolutely. Controversy.

DM:

And there you were.

DP:

I love it. [Laughter] The only nut I haven’t been able to crack—and this is still on, right?

DM:

Yeah, it is.

DP:

Is the interpretive program at Andrew Johnson National Historic Site in east Tennessee. They are still using 1940s/1950s history. He's still a god. The defender of the constitution.

DM:

This is a national park, right?

DP:

It's a national park. It's a national park.

DM:

Why is that not changed from above?

DP:

That's a very good question. The regional office could do that instantly. They do have a brand new superintendent. "Brand new" meaning the last couple—last month, maybe—and we'll see what he does. We'll see. We'll give him a break. Yeah, it should be something that the region should say, "Change. This is unacceptable." And it should essentially be changed after 2016 because congress—I don't know if congress knew it was doing this—but passed the Centennial Act. The National Parks Service was a hundred years old, 2016, right? August twenty-fifth, I think.

DM:

I was at Acadia when that happened?

DP:

Is that right?

DM:

All of the sudden it was a busy, busy park.

DP:

Yeah, indeed. Part of the Centennial Act is a requirement that all the interpretive programs is based on the most current and best research.

DM:

Right.

DP:

So they're obligated by law to look at Johnson the way historians look at him today, rather than the way they looked at him fifty years ago. And if they don't do that—in my way of thinking—they're breaking the law. So it's a continuing dialogue I have with that park.

DM:

I know you'll be interested to see what happens, then.

DP:

I am sitting on the edge of my chair.

DM:

Can you tell me about some of the important events that occurred in this transition? I mean some of the controversy that you've faced?

DP:

Well, the biggest controversy that I faced—which was the greatest period of my career, actually—was when the Civil War superintendents in '98 gathered in Nashville to talk—gathered in Nashville—to talk about a range of common problems. Parks Service has around thirty Civil War battlefields, more related sites, like Lincoln sites and that sort of thing. Andrew Johnson sites—to talk about common—one of the issues they talked about was interpreting the causes of the war. The Parks Service, after it inherited these places in the thirties from the War Department, had an unwritten policy, “We don't talk about causes, because if we talk about causes we're going to have to talk about the slavery and that will upset our clientele. We don't want people upset with the Parks Service.” And so from 1933 till 1998 there was this unwritten policy, “We don't talk about causes.” Superintendents, because there were a couple of PhD historians as superintendents and other bright people who weren't, they said, “It's time. The sesquicentennial of the Parks Service is coming up. We can't avoid this. We need to embrace this.”

DM:

It's hard to be a historian and not talk about causal relationships.

DP:

Right? Exactly. Exactly. So it wasn't a private meeting. The Tennessee State History Office was involved and anyway word got out. As I think I relay in that article, I came in my office one day and there were about twenty-two hundred cards and letters on my desk protesting this act of political correctness. On two fronts. There were two tracks. On is it's not the job of the Parks Service to talk about why something happened, only what happened at that particular place. The other one was, you're probably going to talk about slavery and anybody who knows anything

about the Civil War knows that slavery wasn't a factor in the coming of the war. It didn't come out until Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation half way through the war. So we got a lot from the Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of Confederate—these were organized things. And we had to answer those. I didn't know much about the Civil War at that point, and I knew a lot more than I would have because of these meetings of the Gettysburg Committee, and they would talk about these issues and I had a chance to—we ate dinner together and breakfast together. And so I got a sense of it. I had to answer those and in a way that was polite, of course. Their tax dollars were going to this. In a sense, I worked for those letter writers. And so we developed about three or four different letters, depending on what they were protesting. Kind of form letters. We jigger them around just to make them a little more precise. I loved that. We got pilloried, we got national news, James Buchanan, who was the conservative columnist—not James Buchanan. He was the president. I can't remember—anyway, national article in this magazine, newspapers. Parks Service really got beat up on. Most of because people thought—had been told—we were doing something we weren't doing. "They're not doing military history at Gettysburg anymore. They're only talking about slavery." That kind of thing. So it was pretty easy to respond. But I remember those days were great. I'd come in the morning, had something to look forward to, go through my mail first thing. Find out those horrible letters. "Dwight Pitcaithley ought to be fired!" And so I'd write him a nice note.

DM:

Wear your thick skin. It's good to be thick skinned.

DP:

You have to be. You can't take this personally. We got a rant—an email rant that's one of my favorites—from a guy, a farmer in New Mexico, east of Albuquerque. Heard about it, sent a long rant—it was a rant. Literally just horrible things. And because it was from New Mexico I thought, I got it. I can't pass this up. Somebody wen to the main publication office or something—publicity office—they brought it to me. Instantly responded telling him—thanking him for his interest, and this is what we were doing, we know you've been told something different, but this—in thirty minutes I got a response from this guy apologizing for his rant. He called it a rant. He said, "I apologize. It just hit me at the wrong moment." And I had told him that I was from New Mexico. I was thinking about retiring back to the state. And then he went off on how good the chili crop was that year. [Laughter] And, "It'd be great to have you back in the state of New Mexico." Just totally turned it around because some no-name suit in Washington took the time to respond to his rant. It was easy at that.

DM:

Tells you how important it is to do that.

DP:

To respond to those things. Yeah. I love that. That whole—I gave a lot of talks to—not a lot of talks, some talks—to Sons of Confederate Veterans who really didn't want to hear what I had to say.

DM:

Did those go off well, typically? Or?

DP:

Define "well." [Laughter] Yeah, sure. Sure. I mean, I gave a talk in Hammond, Louisiana to a Civil War gathering was mostly Sons of Confederate Veterans. I found out later when I agreed to do it that the person who had invited me was then circulating a letter to his inner group, I guess. "He's coming. Now we get our chance to beat him up," essentially. Not physically, of course. And it was not a friendly crowd at all, but we had a good exchange and worked out well. And I hope that—my whole purpose to speaking was not to convince anybody of a different way of doing things. Just to let them know what the Parks Service was doing and why it was doing it with their tax dollars.

DM:

Right.

DP:

Being very clear that, "We are very aware that your dollars are funding this and you need to know why." And so at that point I really learned the power of primary sources.

DM:

Oh yeah.

DP:

They can argue with James McPherson, they can argue with Alwyn Barr, they can argue with all these other people. How can you argue with Jefferson Davis or Alexander Stephens or Texas's Declaration of Secession?

DM:

Right.

DP:

"Don't shoot the messenger. This is what they said about white supremacy or whatever." So it took me a while to get there, because I thought, Well everybody likes Jim McPherson, right? He

was on the Gettysburg Committee. He became a very good friend. Everybody admires his work. "He's a damn Yankee historian. He doesn't know our history down here."

DM:

So in the exhibits themselves was there an emphasis on primary sources?

DP:

It's different. Each park can develop what they want to do. Every park to some degree or another—some are better than others—but all of them, I think, have something on causality and to the degree they can use local primary sources. I mean, every state did the dance a little differently. But there is an emphasis as much as they could do that, yeah.

DM:

Right. Okay. It's interesting to look at your list of publications, because as you approach recent years you start going in the direction of all of this work you've done in interpreting regarding the Civil War and secession and slavery.

DP:

Right, yeah. Yeah.

DM:

The kind of patterns—

DP:

Well, who knew?

DM:

--it evolves and follows your career.

DP:

You just fall into these things, and I guess maybe this happens to academics too. They do something here and then this whole new trajectory occurs.

DM:

Exactly. Yeah.

DP:

I'd never heard of the Lemmon Slave Case until—I guess it was at the end of my career, yeah. Parks Service career. This is too good not to be told, and it's in bits but Marie Tyler-McGraw and I put together a lengthy article for the American Antiquarian Society and Common-place?

Common-place, yeah—that turned out quite well. And very telling. It's very—it's a great—we even visited their graves in Virginia.

DM:

You know, it's great to have a profession that is always a learning experience. A new learning experience.

DP:

That's true. That's so true.

DM:

You're gathering no moss.

DP:

So what is it? Old soldiers never die, they just fade away? Old historians never die, they keep sharpening their pencil, or something. [Laughter] I don't know. It is great. It is great. I've written—I had something passed by the University Press of Virginia. Bill Freehling maybe. He has some position with the—I think with the Virginia Humanities. But he came across this thing I'd written and we got into a little correspondence. He said, "You've been very active in retirement. You've written a lot of stuff since you retired." "It's what historians do, I think."

DM:

You're still teaching though, aren't you?

DP:

I teach very part-time. I'm scheduled to teach the Civil War course at New Mexico State in the fall.

DM:

Okay. That was quite a transition for you, 2005 you leave National Parks Service and start—

DP:

And start teaching. I had been teaching at George Mason in Virginia. A night course. A graduate course on preservation, historic preservation for about ten years. Not every year, but they had a four-part rotating thing, so every other—every fourth semester, maybe, I would teach this. Found out I really enjoyed that. It was not far from where I lived, so I'd go home and drive to George Mason, teach the night course, come back, and was often so jazzed when I got back I'd have to go in and watch some television at ten o'clock at night or eleven o'clock at night just to calm down. Really enjoyed it, so when I retired and decided I was going to retire then I looked around a place I could teach. Because I was only sixty when I retired. And yeah, I like it.

DM:

Why did you retire at sixty? I mean was that enough years with NPS?

DP:

Well, no. Those years in the military—years added up to about thirty-four years, which is not bad. I'd been chief historian for ten years, and it's a hard job. Travel is constant. If you're going to do it right—you could sit at your desk all the time and not do anything and get paid, and that was fine. But I was fairly active and I'd sort of exhausted myself. And where do you go after that? Where do you go in the Parks Service? The job as rewarding? I could go into higher management, but that's totally different. That's not nearly as much fun as being chief historian. Our daughter was graduating from high school that year and was going away somewhere. So I thought, Well, let's go back to New Mexico or somewhere. We looked in Texas, looked in Arizona, thought about California—

DM:

Since the chili crop was good, let's go back to Las Cruces.

DP:

The chili crop was good. [Laughter] And there were two public historians there I had known from the profession.

DM:

Oh wow.

DP:

And they essentially said, "When you retire come to Las Cruces. We'll put you to work."

DM:

Wow. They were there at New Mexico State?

DP:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh wow.

DP:

Yeah. Jeff Brown and John Hunter.

DM:

When you landed there were you at first teaching full-time or?

DP:

It was always part-time.

DM:

Always part-time?

DP:

Teaching part-time is hard work. I didn't want to do that. I taught—

DM:

You mean full-time?

DP:

Full-time.

DM:

Teaching full-time.

DP:

Teaching full-time.

DM:

Oh yes it is.

DP:

Yeah. So I taught—I was teaching one class a semester. Started with the Civil War. Taught a course on interpreting historic places to get the interpretive thing. Later developed a freshman level introduction to history called Making History. A new course. Simply an introduction to history. What is history? What are historians? What's a primary source? What's a secondary source? What's family history? What's social history?

DM:

That sounds like great fun after your career.

DP:

I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

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DM:

Because you're reflecting. Reflecting on the whole thing.

DP:

That's right. Exactly. And in the interpreting historic places class—don't tell my students that. I don't teach it anymore so that's okay—I didn't have to prepare very much. They had a reading and a lot of readings. So we'd go in and talk about the reading and then I could—was able to pull from—

DM:

Oh yeah, it's right here. What experiences.

DP:

--all these other stuff. There was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. And I got pretty good remarks. The students liked it, yeah. And the Civil War is—didn't make last semester. I'm not sure why. But it's made this semester easily. So I'll teach in the fall. May do it one or two more semesters. I'm not sure.

DM:

Okay.

DP:

May want to write another book. I'm not sure.

DM:

How nice.

DP:

Yeah.

DM:

Now as far as your National Parks Service career, is there anything—big pieces—that we missed?

DP:

I don't think so.

DM:

Okay.

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DP:

I don't think so. We didn't talk too much about my cleaning toilets at the Caverns.

DM:

Well, we can talk about that if you like.

DP:

It's character building. It's character building. You can do anything after that.

DM:

How many feet down? Seven hundred?

DP:

Seven hundred and fifty feet. Seven hundred and fifty feet, that's right. No, I think we've pretty much covered the—it was a career that turned out to be very logical. I never thought of it that way, but I went from being an assistant regional historian to a regional historian, to a chief of cultural resources in Washington in the regional office where those people worked for me. And then a very logical step from there was the chief historian's job. So it was really a—and it was a progression that each of my former positions prepared me well for the next position. It wasn't a gap in there. I didn't feel really uncomfortable moving into the next position, which was lucky. Also, I have to say that at every step I had wonderful supervisors, which is not always the case. There are a lot of people in the Parks Service who got in and their first job was with a horrible super. People are people, and not everybody in the Parks Service is great or loves nature, birds, or deer. But I was lucky. At every point—every point—my immediate supervisor was someone who I respected and they respected me and sort of allowed me to do my thing.

DM:

And that actually went all the way back to—trying to remember his name now.

DP:

Dick Sellars.

DM:

Dick Sellars.

DP:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

DM:

That's incredible.

DP:

Dick died last September—October—but he said, “When you go into these parks, you’ve got a job to do. But the park is big, so take some time off. Take an afternoon, take a day, and tour the park.”

DM:

Absolutely.

DP:

“If it’s a natural park, get out in the backcountry.”

DM:

You bet.

DP:

“See what it is. If you’re at Guadalupe’s,”—our work was down with the farm—the ranches down below. “Climb the—get up in the mountains. See what they’re like.” So he said, “Very few people here in the regional office do that. And so the parks bring these problems and half the people here haven’t a clue what they’re talking about because they’ve been there. Take the time.”

DM:

Plus, it’s inspiration.

DP:

Oh it’s—get paid to work in these places? What’s not to like? And he also said—Dick was great—he said, “Take a couple hours a day,”—or I forget what he said. Some time—“ and just read.”

DM:

Oh yeah.

DP:

“Get a book on Big Bend or whatever it is, and just read.”

DM:

You know what? That just seems so smart.

DP:

And it was smart.

DM:

And it's productive, you know? It's productive to take time out to do things that are going to make you more productive later.

DP:

Yeah. That's right. That's right. Yeah, he was also—and I'm going to talk about it a little bit, because he was such a great person—he had come into the Parks Service in '72, I think. PhD from Missouri. Environmental history. Parks Service has this book of laws called Management Policies. It's evolved over the years, but it's not terribly thick. Every aspect: wilderness parks, concessions, the whole thing. It's all there. A chapter for each. So Dick thought that if we were going to be players in the Parks Service that the people either who worked for him—who weren't many—or people who were interested in this sort of thing should start reading those management policies. So we have this brown bag luncheons. We take a chapter a week or every two weeks. I don't know how often we met. And read that chapter and discuss it. It was a wonderful—and he was learning along the way we were learning. But you learned what the Parks Service ideal was, and that helped you then when you go out in the park and maybe it didn't quite match the idea, but it gave you a framework for having a conversation about whatever was going on.

DM:

You know, he was really savvy.

DP:

He was very smart. He published—

DM:

Yeah, he was really preparing y'all for a career.

DP:

He was. And himself. And himself. He ended up writing *the* book on how the Parks Service manages its natural resources. Published by Yale.

DM:

What's it called?

DP:

Managing History in the National Parks. It's not quite right. It's a Yale publication. It only came out with one book, so Richard Sellars—Richard West Sellars—

DM:

Yeah, there you go.

DP:

--they published in '97. Reprinted it in about 2007 in a paperback with an epilogue, which is worth the price of admission, because he talks about many things I've talked about. About the Parks Service political influences and one thing another. I'll say *Managing Nature in the National Parks*. That's not quite right.

DM:

Close enough to find.

DP:

Richards Sellars. He only wrote one—L-l-a-r-s.

DM:

Yeah.

DP:

And it's still a good read. And it's—I better get—somebody's talking. [knocking at the door]
Okay, I'll—

DM:

Keep talking.

DP:

--keep talking to your empty chair. The managing—the book by Dick Sellars led to the Parks Service embracing his criticism [door closes] of the Parks Service. There it is. And they said, "We'll fix this." And they went to congress, after two years of meetings with superintendents, regional directors, Dick Sellars. The director at the time was the first black director, a guy named Bob Stanton. He said, "We're going to fix this." And after two years developed this package, and went to congress of certain amount of funding every year to address the criticisms that Dick had. And that—Bob and I were at Dick's service last fall and we estimated that over the years that's brought in I think a little over a billion dollars, or close to a billion dollars, into the Parks Service. Cumulative. Focused on monitoring natural resources throughout the parks. So I think it's the most significant book ever written about the National Parks Service by a guy named Dick Sellars who was my first boss in the Parks Service.

DM:

We need to get a copy.

DP:

Yeah. Yeah. Get the second one. Get the second one. It's got the epilogue, which is good.

DM:

Right. Right. Okay. Anything else you wanted to add?

DP:

I think that's—you're a good interviewer. I think you covered—

DM:

Well, I think you did it pretty much on your own.

DP:

--most of the stuff.

DM:

Monte, I'm sorry. We're only halfway through. No, I'm kidding. [Laughter]

Monte:

That's what I figured. I figured y'all could talk for days.

DM:

It's actually great, great timing. I'll go ahead and turn this off.

Monte:

But we've got to—

[End of Recording]

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