

Larry Hampton Interview Log

Location: Historic Preservation Shop in Blowing Rock, NC and in truck driving around Cone Estate and the Parkway

Date: 12/16/03

Interview by Philip (Ted) Coyle

Log by Tonya Teague

Side One, Tape One

001 Introduction; apple barn of the Cone Estate

012 The plant life of the Estate/around the carriage trails

037 Heart Lake Pool

041 hydrangeas

046 Working within the Park Service's mandate for conservation

077 Proper processes of preservation technicalities

119 Larry's acquisition of his knowledge concerning woodworking and construction equipment

145 Larry's father and mother

164 Sheets Cabin

184 Work on the shoulder of the Parkway

222 Chestnut fence restoration

242 Blue Ridge Baptist Church

263 Ken Holloway

273 Jefferies Park picnic ground

287 Cool Springs Baptist Church

324 Natural resource management of the Parkway, Benge Gap

345 Contrasting the visions of resource management on the Parkway (historical, preservation, etc.)

359 Working around endangered species

393 Boone's Trace

417 End of Side One

Side Two, Tape One

B003 Aho Community

B009 Growing up in Bamboo Gap

B022 The "restricted" feel of the Parkway for Larry as a child

B034 Ravens Rocks area

B037 Thunder Hill overlook

B043 Tour of the Historic Preservation shop

B074 The perspective of a native of the area as opposed to that of someone who isn't from the area

B088 Involvement with the General Management plan of the Cone Estate

B097 Involvement with the Timber Management plan

B121 End of Interview

Interview with Larry Hampton

Location: Historic Preservation Shop in Blowing Rock, NC in truck at Parkway locations

Date: 12/16/03

Interview by Philip (Ted) Coyle

Transcribed by Tonya Teague

Checked by: Jamie Patterson

Through Tony Paredes, the Southeast's Regional Ethnographer, I began a correspondence with Larry Van Horn, who was working on the General Management Plan for the BLRI out of the Denver office. We had the idea that I would try to drive along the Parkway with local experts in order to learn about the cultural features along the way. This turned out to not be such a great idea, probably because I was less than clear about what I was looking for. For this interview I drove around the Cone Estate and then along the Parkway from Hwy. 16 back to the Cone Estate with Larry Hampton, a long-time maintenance worker who is now the supervisor of the Historical Reconstruction Shop at the Cone Estate Ranger Station. In retrospect, I should have probably proceeded as I did with Lester Wood at Rocky Knob. I just asked him the names of the local people adjacent to the Parkway who I should talk to. Nonetheless, this interview has some interesting material about Mr. Hampton's job, which is worthy of a great deal of publicity.

(001) Philip Coyle: ...16th, 2003. My name is Philip Coyle, I'm called Ted Coyle, and I'm with Larry...spell your last name?

Larry Hampton: Hampton. H-A-M-P-T-O-N.

PC: And we're driving around the Cone Estate, and we're coming up to the apple barn. What were you saying about that?

LH: This is the only apple barn left in the National Park Service. It was constructed about 1917. Moses Cone, they shipped apples out from this orchard back in the '30's and '40's. They produced forty to fifty thousand bushels of apples a year on the estate and shipped them out [*CB Radio interruption*] to all the different locations.
[*tape paused*]

(012) PC: So we were talking about this mostly white pine-hemlock forest here over by the apple barn on one side of Bass Lake, and you were talking about the sugar maples along the carriage trail.

LH: Yeah, there's Deer Park, the Bays, and Duncan Carriage Trails, they come to set out the sugar maples approximately about every hundred feet apart on both sides of the road and also on Duncan, they set Mountain Ash trees out for their landscape. And also, they set out the white pine to make the White Pine plantation. They also had four apple orchards, the saw mill, the Cone, the (*inaudible*). They had approximately one hundred and forty thousand trees that are somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred different varieties of apples. They also had cherry trees, pear trees, which are no longer in

existence. They had a Rose Arbor vegetable garden. Mrs. Cone had her own personal figure eight trail that went from the house around the top of the mountain. They had dairy barns; they provided milk to the community. They had sheep. There was twenty-four families that lived and worked on the estate. They had lakes, they've got Trout Lake, Bass Lake...

[tape paused]

(037) PC: Now we're at this heart-shaped pool. Talk about that a little bit?

LH: It was restored in '95. The Cone's used it as a hatchery back when they were active. They raised their trout here to put in local streams in the Trout Lake.

[tape paused]

(041) PC: You were talking about a hydrangea area?

LH: Yes. There's two sections of hydrangeas. There's one at the parking area at Bass Lake, which is already restored, and there's one more east of the parking area where the encroaching vegetation needs to be taken out and restore the ones that are still alive and do some transplanting on them.

(046) PC: Well, how do you do that within the Park Service mandate for conservation, and then, I mean, really, you're talking about more of a cultivated garden here than a natural ecosystem. So can you get away with that, or how does it work?

LH: You go through resource planning and all the people involved in the resources coming to look at it and see it, do an archaeological study of the areas to be disturbed... Basically, the trees will just be taken out and chipped to get the sunlight in and the new hydrangeas pruned, and you can take cuttings off of them and get them regenerated, do them in a local greenhouse.

[tape paused]

PC: Well, we're driving from the Cone Estate now up to 16 in order to drive down the Parkway, north to south. (059) And could I ask you where you grew up and your background?

LH: I grew up here in Watauga County. I was born in Boone in '51. I started with the Park Service in 1978. I've worked on the Moses Cone Estate all except for two years. I worked as a maintenance mechanic, worked on all the structures in the district from Highway 16 to Grandfather, which was known as the Cone District. I became Supervisor over the Historic Preservation Shop in '91 and have a crew of four six-month permanent positions and one full-time exhibit specialist. I've worked on the Moses Cone house probably every year as far as restoration, painting, plumbing, electrical, restoring balustrades, working on the carriage trails--restored twenty-six miles of carriage trails since 1991-- rock retaining walls, drainage, as well as working on Mabry Mill, Groundhog Mountain, Caudil Cabin, Brinegar Cabin...

(077) PC: I mean, some of these, talk about the process that you go through when you get one of these jobs like, you know, fixing the Mabry Mill. What's the process that you need to do?

LH: Well, we try to get any drawings of the structure, try to find out what type of materials were used, find sources for materials, and go through the budget process as far as getting the funding and all the 106 clearances to do the work. And once your funding's approved, you do a lot of research on locating your materials for the restoration project.

PC: So talk about that 106 clearance. What happens?

LH: It goes to Al Hess. You write up what's involved with the project, how you're going to do the project, take photos, send it to Al Hess, which is Cultural Resource. He does the additional paperwork and send it to Region, and go through the legal process.

PC: So do you work with, are there historians for the Park Service or do you work with outside historians, or how does that work in terms of getting photos and historical documentation of different structures?

LH: Well, we went to Jackie Holt—she was a historian—to get photos of all the structures.

PC: So it's pretty much internal to the Park Service?

LH: Yes. Uh-huh. Most of the documentation is stored in Asheville in archives.

PC: How are you, you know, she (Jackie Holt) left over a year ago now, and how do you deal with that now with her gone?

LH: Well, I'll go through her supervisor to get any information that I need for future projects.

PC: Who's that?

LH: That'll be Al Hess.

PC: So he's got to go in there to the archives and get those photos and things.

LH: Yes.

PC: But I can see how you'd really need that curator. That's just, I mean, some people might think that a curator just sits inside an archive, but it's really crucial to the historic reconstructions that you're doing as well.

LH: Yes, it is. We've got to have this information to try to historically do the work the way it was originally done.

PC: Well, let me ask you a question, which is, so you must have been about thirty or so when you started working for the Park Service. Is that right? No, twenty, I guess, huh?

LH: Let's see. I was twenty-one.

(119) PC: So it seems to me that you've got all this specialized knowledge about woodworking and construction equipment. How did you learn that?

LH: Well, I started before I got out of high school, I had taken Industrial Cooperative Training, and I went out and I worked at service stations, worked on construction sites, and I got drafted in '71 and I got out in '72. My father in law was in ceramic tile and wallpaper and dry wall and the painting business, and I worked with him about three years and I got my apprenticeship in ceramic tile. And I was working in a new home that was being constructed, and I saw the type of work that a lot of the builders were building, in my opinion, was very poor quality. And, then I went out on my own and started my own painting business and ceramic tile and dry wall, worked at that for several years, and got acquainted with a park ranger. He was talking to me about maintenance jobs in the Parkway, and, being a veteran, I applied for a seasonal position as a painter at the Cone Estate and got on as a painter, and then I was asked to do roof jobs and foundation jobs, and by the end of the year—that was in '77—I got on permanent and I've just been into woodworking and carpentry and just a jack of all trades for years.

(145) PC: What did your father do for a living?

LH: He was a part-time farmer and worked at the furniture factories, and he was in the service station business.

[*tape paused*]

PC: So tell me about your mom.

LH: Well, I probably got a little experience from her. She would take a hammer and a handsaw and remodel a house. She'd tear out walls and extend the house and add kitchen on and utility rooms or something. She'd leave it alone a year or two and didn't like it, and tear it out and redo it again. But she didn't know how to use a level too much. [*both laugh*] I got her a tape measure for Christmas and a steel saw.

PC: [*laughs*] Was she happy about that?

LH: Oh yeah, she was tickled. Showed her what a square was. She just, she's a hard worker, energetic. She just gets in too big a hurry sometimes.

PC: Just never give her one of those Saws-All or else she'll just rip her entire house to pieces.

LH: Oh yeah, that's for sure.

[tape paused]

PC: We're on the Parkway now, and it's still a little snowy and icy. (164) You were talking about Sheets Cabin. What's the story with that?

LH: Basically, it was constructed in the 1800's. I'm not that familiar with the past history of it. The Sheets family, from what I understand, has owned a lot of property adjoining the Parkway. But I'm not that familiar with the past history of it.

PC: And then that, you were mentioning the Raccoon Holler Campground? Has that been there awhile?

LH: Yeah, as far as I know, it's been here probably forty years adjoining the Parkway. It's a private ownership, and I imagine they've got access from the Parkway.

[tape paused]

PC: Now tell me about the Northwest Trading Post.

LH: They had a reconstruction of it two years ago. And I guess that would be the Southern Highland Guild is selling crafts from it. The structure, there was an addition added onto the structure, and a new roof, and made it all handicap accessible. That's all I know.

[tape paused]

(184) PC: You were mentioning that you've done some work on the shoulder of the Parkway, so maybe you could talk about some of the historic culverts and some of the problems that you face with those.

LH: Well, some of the rock head-walls and trail ditches are getting deteriorated, where the soil's getting undermined under the stone and the stone walls are starting to collapse, which will have to be restored.

PC: Now, will you restore those as rockwork, or are you going to just go to asphalt?

LH: It'll go back as rockwork, stonework. Probably, a lot of it will be probably highway projects, federal highway projects.

PC: So they'll bring in other people that'll contract that out then?

LH: Yeah, they'll bring in masons to restore.

PC: Now, do you find that the asphalt culverts or the grass culverts or the stone culverts are best? Which one works best in the sense of being stable over a long period of time?

LH: Well, it depends on how much runoff come in. There's certain areas, you need the stone culverts, and some places where it doesn't have very much grade, the grass line is fine. And in other areas, the asphalt are sufficient.

PC: Do you feel that you're ever kind of forced into a situation where you have to put in asphalt but a stone culvert would be better just because you don't have the funding to do the stone?

LH: No. Most of the time, that's included in the federal highway-funding project.

PC: Uh-huh.

LH: *[tape paused]* . . . pretty much takes care of the motor road, and we're doing just basically minor repairs.

PC: So that shoulder work you were talking about would be classified as a minor repair then, that wouldn't be...

LH: Yeah. It's actually, we are repairing hazard areas where vehicles drop off the shoulder of the road and can cause vehicle accidents, motorcycle accidents. We're restoring the shoulders to get proper drainage and to get the grass reestablished.
[tape paused]

PC: Here we are at The Lump, which is milepost...

LH: About 263.

(222) PC: Yeah, and the fences here have been reconstructed here. These are old chestnut fences, looks like, and some of the posts have been renewed. What was the story with that?

LH: The Parkway furnished the posts and the lessee took care of the rehab of the fence.

PC: So do you ever deal with these historic fences in your work?

LH: Yeah, some around the estate, we restore some of them. But most of the time maintenance takes care of that.

PC: So what's the, are you able to ever get chestnut wood for these fences anymore, or how do you deal with the deteriorating fences in the maintenance shop, or in general, the maintenance shop?

LH: Well, you have to basically check out your sources and see if there are any more rails available, and then you can check with other districts. If they take out fences and if they have extra rails, you can borrow them from them. And it looks like we're going to

have to go to a possibly pressure treated rails to replace the chestnut because they're getting extinct.

[*tape paused*]

(242) PC: Here we are at the Blue Ridge Baptist Church. What were you saying?

LH: The Owen's and the Calloway's were large property owners through this area of the Parkway back when it was being constructed, and a lot of the, I think some of the residents still live here.

PC: So that's from before the Parkway, that church?

LH: Yes. This is Benge maintenance area, which was constructed by the CCC. There used to be about forty people a year that worked out of the maintenance area, and now it's down to three.

PC: And that's an old CCC camp you said, huh?

LH: Yes.

PC: Well, really, there's not that much land between the cemetery and the maintenance area there, is there?

LH: No, just basically what it sits on and out to the center of the road. And that's located at milepost 268.

PC: Yeah, and here we are at Benge Gap, now, having driven down next to the Park Vista Motel and Watson's Country Store. [*tape paused*] (263) Here we are a little bit south of Benge Gap, and you were talking about Ken Holloway?

LH: Yes, he's a retired maintenance supervisor. He retired in, I believe, '78, so he probably came on the Parkway in the early '50's when it was constructed and he could probably tell you some past history of it.

PC: Where does he live?

LH: Milepost 268.9. Parkway Right.

PC: Is that that little yellow house there, or?

LH: Yes.

PC: Is that where he lives?

LH: Uh-huh.

[*tape paused*]

(273) PC: Here we are at the Cascades picnic area and parking lot.

LH: This is Jefferies Park picnic ground. It was constructed during the Parkway construction. There's a comfort station and about fifty picnic tables, a parking area, and a thirty-minute hiking trail going down to Cascade Falls.

PC: Does this place get a lot of use?

LH: It gets quite a bit of use. I'm not sure what the count is on it. You could probably check records in headquarters on the visitor count, but during the summer, it's used pretty heavily on weekends.

[tape paused]

(287) PC: Here we are at the Cool Springs Baptist Church area. Maybe you could talk about these structures.

LH: The Cool Springs Church was constructed in the 1800's. Local farmers and people that lived in the community came to the church on Sundays whenever they had the services. The cabin, it was also constructed at the same time the church was, the same era, and there was also a springhouse with it. It's been maintained over the years by the Park Service.

PC: It looks a little deteriorated. Is this on your horizon here for upgrade or?

LH: Yes, it's in the plans. Hopefully we're going to get the funding this fiscal year to redo the roofs and replace some of the deteriorated walls on it. And we're going to do some correction on the drainage problems, especially with the house.

PC: Yeah, there's water that pools up inside of that house isn't there?

LH: Yes.

PC: Although they're already on, I mean, they're on rocks to keep the wood off the ground. Is that the way they were or did you have something to do with that?

LH: Originally, it was on stone footings, and there's a culvert that comes under the motor road that actually turns the water toward the cabin. We're going to come in and raise the cabin up and add material to the cabin and slope it away from it so that the water doesn't get in and damage it any further.

PC: You were saying that you think the Parkway might have moved that cabin?

LH: Yes. I believe the cabin, they've changed the locations of it somewhat. That's the reason for the drainage problem.

[tape paused]

(324) PC: We were talking about the natural resource management of the Parkway and some of the pastures, and you were talking about Bengue Gap. What were you saying?

LH: That was where the lessees are taking care of the leases. A lot of them are growing up, and the road shoulders, we used to fertilize and lime them each year, and there needs to be a lot of lime reintroduced on a lot of the bays and road shoulders because we're losing our grass and our turf along the roads.

PC: Why's that?

LH: Lack of funding.

PC: I mean, what is it about the lime? I mean, the lime keeps it in grass? What happens if you don't lime it?

LH: If you don't lime it, the grass dies out and you have the moss takes over and smothers the grass out.

(345) PC: Now, we were talking about, you know, sort of the vision that some resource people have on the Parkway as opposed to maybe some historical, more the preservation perspective, the historical perspective. Maybe you could talk about that a little bit.

LH: It seems to me that some of the people like to see the areas grow back up instead of maintain them as they were.

PC: Why is that? What's their perspective? Try to get inside their head.

LH: I'm not sure. [*both laugh*] I'm not sure.

PC: So how would you like it to be then?

LH: I'd like to maintain it as it always has been. If it's a pasture, maintain it as a pasture and not let it grow back up.

(359) PC: Now, do you ever find that you have problems with an endangered species, or maybe not even an endangered species, but beavers, for example. They're not endangered, but different plants and animals, that that gets in the way of some of your historic preservation work?

LH: Yeah, bats, for instance, in some of the structures, with the fecal and all. We're trying to stay away from it. We just need to get more training on how to properly clean it up and we need to do additional work to keep the bats out. We've got rat problems in certain structures.

PC: Like where?

LH: Brinegar Cabin, for instance. We need to do a little more work on trying to keep them out of the structures to keep them from doing further damage. We've got bog turtles that restrict us from working in certain areas.

PC: You were even mentioning moles.

LH: Yep, from what I understand, the moles are becoming endangered from one of the resource personnel, but this past summer, I've seen the most moles I have in years.

PC: And so, I mean, there's actually a situation where you might not be able to keep up the Brinegar Cabin or keep those rats from eating into the cabin because they're somehow protected?

LH: Yeah, they're on the federal endangered species list.

[*tape paused*]

(393) PC: Here we're coming up to Boone's Trace, and you were talking about that a little bit.

LH: Yeah, we're at milepost 285. This is where Daniel Boone crossed on his way out west, and the past twenty years, the community would get a wagon train together and travel the route that he took from North Wilkesboro to Boone.

PC: And what time of year do they do that?

LH: It's end the end of July, the end of June, first of July.

PC: And who all is it that does that?

LH: It's just local people that has horses and wagons, just get together and make the trip.

PC: So the trail actually exists then, you can actually, or do they go on roads, or what is it?

LH: Yeah, it's pretty much roads. It's all gravel roads through Triplett community and Darby, and then they take a highway into Boone.

PC: This is the end of Side One, Tape One of the interview with Larry Hampton, December 16th, 2003. (417)

Side Two, Tape One

(B003) PC: We're just through Aho Gap. What's the story with the Aho community?

LH: I think the community got together; they were trying to decide how to get its name. And they couldn't come to an agreement, and I think it was getting late one night and somebody finally said, "Well," said, "The first word that's said after now will be the

name of the community.” And they were sitting there and this feller yawned, and when he yawned, he said “Aho.” That’s how it got its name.

(B009) PC: Now you were born and raised at Bamboo Gap, which is right past there, but you don’t know where that got its name, huh?

LH: No, don’t know how it got its name.

PC: Maybe you could describe that Bamboo Gap area when you were growing up. What was it like?

LH: It was all farmland, small farmers, a lot of family. Families lived close together and everybody owned small tracts of land, and they farmed it and helped each other on the farms during the summer. Raised a few cattle, and cabbage, potatoes...

PC: What were the prominent families there?

LH: Uh, what do you mean?

PC: Who were the different neighbors that you had when you were growing up? What different families lived in there?

LH: The name of them?

PC: Uh-huh.

LH: The Curley’s, the Watson’s, there was Cook’s, of course the Hampton’s, there was a few Greens, and that was pretty much it. Critcher’s, the Critcher’s were probably the largest property owners in the area.

(B022) PC: Now you mentioned when you were growing up, you had a feeling like you weren’t really allowed to go on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Maybe you could talk about that a little bit.

LH: Yeah, it was just the way our parents talked. It was the Parkway, we wasn’t supposed to really use it or was the feeling that I got. I know when I was a kid, I used to ride a bicycle to town, and I’d always heard that you wasn’t supposed to have any horses or bicycles or anything on the Parkway, so we’d hide in the bushes when the traffic came by and then we’d run across and hide if we heard something else a’coming and get out of sight. And we also had horses when we was kids, and we’d do the same thing with them when we crossed it. We just heard it was a highly restricted area.

PC: Did you ever have any run-ins with rangers when you were a kid?

LH: No. That’s probably the reason. *[laughs]*

(B034) PC: Yeah, you're hiding out. So we just went by the Raven Rocks area. What can you tell me about that area?

LH: It's just pretty much a view over to Moses Cone Estate.

PC: It's almost like there's a little cave in there.

LH: Yeah, there's some large rocks and boulders down underneath.
[tape paused]

(B037) PC: What's the name of that, uuh, we just went over an overlook, what's the name of that overlook?

LH: Thunder Hill.

PC: And you say that that gets a lot of use?

LH: Yeah, there's a lot of college students that hike up there, on the side of the mountain. I don't know. There's a pretty good view of it, but I don't know what their intent is. There's a lot of people from the overlook there early in the morning to see the sunrise.
[tape paused]

(B043) PC: We're back in the Historic Preservation shop and I'm going to get a tour here from Larry of the shop.

LH: Well, we've got balustrades here that we're restoring on the second floor of the kitchen. It's just a short section about twelve foot long. It's pretty much deteriorated. We've had to reconstruct the top rails, bottom rails, the balustrade boxes, and turn the balustrades. Originally the balustrades were constructed out of yellow poplar, which don't last but approximately five or six years. We've changed over to redwood. It seems to be working very well, and all the other materials, wood we're using, is cypress, and it appears to be adhering onto the paint and everything real well, so hopefully, that's going to save us some work in the future. We've got over-arm routers here in the shop. We've got a radial-arm saw, which we can size up to sixteen inches in diameter. We have a large plainer, which is used on our restoration work. We've got a joiner, table saw, a lathe that we use all the time. We've got a shaper that we use to reconstruct all our moldings. And, of course, we've got a good dust collection system in the shop to protect our employees.

PC: Yeah, it's really not very dusty in here considering.

LH: No, we've got additional air cleaners hanging from the ceiling that takes up the extra fine materials. But all the equipment is tied into the dust collection system, and it's collected in a recycling bin, and then it's emptied and taken to a local landfill, or sometimes we let the people with horses use it to put in their stalls.

(B074) PC: I have a question for you, which is, now, you grew up practically walking distance from here. I mean, you could long walk from here to where you were raised. Do you think you get a different perspective as a local person as opposed to somebody who's not from this area?

LH: Yeah, I probably do. When I was a kid growing up, back years ago, I could see how everything was at that time period and how it is now, and how I'd like to see it go back to at least thirty years ago.

PC: We were driving through Boone and commenting on all the new development, you know, the new buildings and things. It strikes me that, you know, here at the Cone Estate, which has got more land, you can actually kind of preserve that view from your childhood that really is going to be gone, you know?

LH: That's true. We have 3,600 acres, and it will not change other than the way the Park wants it to change. And the public, it's here for their enjoyment.

(B088) PC: Over lunch, you were talking to me about how you're involved in the General Management Plan for the Cone Estate. Maybe you could talk about that a little bit.

LH: Well, we've discussed the actual use of the house, what is the Park going to do with the house in the future, as far as public use, the possibility of tours being established. We tried tours on the second floor this year; it was a good success. I'm not sure about the attic yet. It's not handicap accessible, and that's a concern.

(B097) PC: You were talking about the Timber Management plan. What are you looking for there?

LH: Well, the pine plantation, all the timber has matured, and it's going to become hazardous. Some of the timber, I think, needs to be taken out and new growths reestablished, and do small sections at a time.

PC: Now, you pointed out some pretty severe pine beetle infestation in there too.

LH: Yes, it's in the plan to remove those trees. They've become hazard trees, and they're going to have to be removed, or either close the carriage roads down until the trees fall.

PC: Now, but was that originally a pine plantation? Was that in the Cone's, when it was Cone Estate, was it a pine plantation, or did that grow up later on?

LH: Yes, the Cone's actually planted the trees. They're probably fifty years old.

PC: So they meant for that to be a working forest, I guess.

LH: A working forest, yes.

PC: Sort of like on the model of the Vanderbilt Estate.

LH: Mmm-hmm, yeah. We have also done some grafts on apple trees that exist in the orchard with the Biology department at ASU, and we're transplanting those trees out in the orchard for interpretive purposes for the public to see.

PC: So, to renew that orchard, in other words, to keep some of those trees, new planting out there.

LH: Yeah, to keep that species growing for the future.

PC: This concludes my interview with Larry Hampton on December 16th, 2003 at the Cone Manor. My name is Ted Coyle, Philip E. Coyle. (B121)

End of Interview