

**Interview with William O Hooper  
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(revised per Hooper comments, 4/27/01)**

**Interviewed by Mary Myers, Asst. Professor  
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Background of William O. Hooper provided by a questionnaire he submitted to Mary Myers, with letter dated Nov. 9, 2000.

**Mr. William Oswald Hooper was born March 3, 1911. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina in 1932. He received a Certificate in Real Estate Law from the University of Virginia, (no date provided).**

**Mr. Hooper worked on the Blue Ridge Parkway from 1945 until 1975. He worked first as a Land Management Specialist, involved with parkway lands aggregating approximately 3,200 acres and 360 parcels. These were leased to adjoining land owners for agricultural purposes to maintain the open vistas. As a realty specialist, he was in charge of land acquisition and easements.**

(Below is transcribed from audio-tape. The first question asked by Mary Myers was obscured.)

Mr. Hooper, (referring to the parkway fences): Well now, to locate those things. The engineers, of course, would like to have it just a certain distance set back so they could mow it. But you know what that would look like. So always, if I was to locate those fences... If it was a cut slope here, (It had) to be below the eye line. And if it was a cut slope above, I mean if it had to be above the road, (it was best) to put it below the ridge line. That way your fence fits into the landscape so that it doesn't give a bad picture. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, it's attractive like it should be. That's the most important thing about locating fences. And as I said, there's a lot of fence. Some of it is wire. But most of it, in the old days, we tried to get as much rail fence as possible. We had to dip those rails in a preservative. I suppose they'll last a long time. I don't know.

**I'm glad you're mentioning this because when you answered my questionnaire, in your letter you mentioned the fences as being very important to the scenery. And I had that question, how exactly, you managed to do that (with the location).**

Well, it's not too hard to do, if you think about it and drive along and before you ever locate your fence, just see how its going to fit right in to that (landscape). It's very easy then I think. But as I said that wasn't always popular with the engineers. But there's one thing I didn't ever mention

about the parkway. You didn't ask any questions about it.

To me it was impressive what the landscape architects did. And it's not everywhere that you can see it on the parkway. I call it the canopy view.

At the Peaks of Otter, for instance, you have these old white pine forests and by opening, cutting out some of the under story, you exposed those great trees and you could look on through and get a view with that overhang of the tree tops which made it. To me it's one of the most beautiful things we had. But that's why, as I said, you need a landscape architect. Landscape architects planned that plan. That's why it's as attractive as it is.

As you know, there is an average of about 800 to 1000 feet right of way there, owned in fee simple. The federal government did not buy that right of way. The state of North Carolina, the state of Virginia bought the right of way and conveyed it to the United States. And that gave us some of the problems that caused me to end up as a realty specialist because they had easements for private crossings, maybe a road ten feet wide. Or it might be a cattle lane crossing, ten feet wide. Or it might be for over head power lines or anything like that. But the trouble with it is when you had a ten-foot private road crossing the parkway to get a farm on one side of the road reaching the residue on the other side of the parkway.

Sometimes some person would see some advantage maybe, and attempt to put in some commercial thing. It wouldn't be right on the parkway but t'would be maybe in sight if it was in open land. When they did that, actually a ten-foot road wasn't quite adequate.

Several of them, including a man named Yelanjiare.... I won't name them all but that problem was typical, would build a restaurant there. It happened at Ground Hog Mountain in Virginia, the same way. And they wanted to pave the private access road and widen it. Well, we couldn't allow that ever to happen. But we always had to go to court over it or something like that. That's where I came in because I knew the law on it.

But it did happen. They would build them sometimes. Somebody would build a business, something like that. It never worked. They never made money. They always failed. Usually we would make some kind of exchange of land.

Now that's another thing we did. Sometimes we would buy out that property to eliminate that crossing. Sometimes we would make an exchange which apparently doesn't happen any more because it's a very, very complicated legal procedure to trade land. And there is one thing too; there is no provision in law for any parkway land to be sold. There is no way to sell it. You can exchange it or you can buy it.

Then we had those huge tracts of land donated, like Cone Park, Price Park over at Blowing Rock. Now there is a reverter clause in that the Cone land, if any of it is traded off or sold or traded off, the whole property goes back to the Cones. So all those things are what you get into as a realty specialist.

**May I interrupt for a minute? (Pause) I am back with Mr. William Hopper agronomist and realty specialist for the Blue Ridge Parkway. We were just talking about some of the complicated land legal issues that he had to deal with. But Bill, I'm going to go back a little**

**bit further than that. I have been doing some work in the parkway archives and I came across some and memos and letters that you wrote related to soil conservation, seed mixes, stabilizing slope, etc. I wondered if we might get into that a little bit. When you started on the parkway...tell me a little bit about your educational background.**

I am a graduate of Appalachian State University. Then I did some work in agronomy at NC State University with a man named Dr. Cummings. I don't guess you've ever heard of him. Then with the Soil Conservation Service I finally was able to pass the Civil Service as a junior agronomist. I was moved to Sparta, North Carolina of all places.

That is where Mr. Weems, who was acting superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, found me and offered me this job on the Blue Ridge Parkway. And I think until this day I think that he probably should have kept on his pay roll, well, an agronomist. Because we had, along the road, according to the plans...and those plans were drawn up by the landscape architects, that this was to be agricultural land.

We liked to blend that land on the parkway as much as we could, with the land adjoining so that there is no apparent property line there and it all blends together. But now, you might be surprised at how much (there was). When it all (added up) those little old parcels here and there, sometime large parcels. . We had over three thousand acres at one time under special easement used by adjacent farmers.

Another thing we did, we had them use parkway land, requiring them to do certain things, contour farming, for instance if it were cultivated. Or if it were in grass or whatever, the use of lime fertilizer and those kind of things to... well, it improved the soil but it also gave them a yield that those mountain farmers were not accustomed to. At the time I was there in 1945 they knew very little about that kind of thing. So we tried to work with the adjoining farmers to get their property improved, and (to) teach them, too. That was all part of it.

But one of the more important things, at that time, 1945, highways in North Carolina, Virginia, any place else that I know of, were usually left with raw slopes. As far as I know, the Blue Ridge Parkway was the first parkway, certainly in this part of the world, the south, this was the first place we ended up without scars.

Even the parkway itself when I came there was scarred. You weren't to cover those slopes up. Because when they cut down there in those raw soils they didn't know that grass would hold. But by putting, as I said, the right type of grass and the lime and fertilizer, it was easy, fairly easy to stabilize those things. And I think we covered a lot of depth.

The other thing was that along the motor road was a shoulder, or shoulders. At that time they were using things like Lespedeza and Orchard Grass and some of those very flammable grasses. Well, we changed all that. And the superintendent was real glad to do it. So that from then on and even on the old, already constructed road way, we put in the grasses that were rather difficult...you could throw a cigarette out and not end up with a fire. And it made a lot of difference

**What types of grasses did you use?**

We used certain fescues mostly because they would stay green in winter. Right now I don't remember which ones were used where or anything like that. It's been too long ago. Another thing about it, it made mowing easier. Because if you used tall grasses on your road shoulders it took more mowing. But all those are just things that maybe seem to amount to nothing. But as I said, at that time, I don't know of another roadway anywhere in the country that covered the slopes and graded them so that you could drive through without ever noticing any scarring.

### **How did you try to check erosion?**

Well, actually we had a lot of erosion on parkway lands because it was old farmland that the parkway traveled through. In 1916, (they had) in western North Carolina and on into Virginia, they called it the '16 Flood... I know nothing about it but it cut huge gullies in a lot of places. And it stripped the topsoil on these slopes because some of those mountain people were putting corn on rather steep slopes, or other row crops. Well, so it was when they had that much rainfall, it left bare slopes, gullied slopes.

And I don't know how many acres we had of that but there was a lot of it. We had a program called Soil and Moisture Conservation. And we had certain funds for that. And a lot of it was if we were going to put it back to woodland we just simply planted trees on it. 'Cause that was cheap. If we were going to keep it open for pasture land we would go in and prepare a seed bed, put the right grass mix we wanted on it, put lime and fertilizer. When we got it stabilized, we might actually end up with it being pasture.

Now we tried to control pasturing. We would only permit a certain number of units of cattle per acre. That would vary by judgment. I had to use my own judgement. This pasture would need three acres per animal; another might need two acres, depending on the type of soil and other conditions. All that, as I said, was a matter of judgement. We soon became, I don't know, aware of these people who were using parkway land by permit or lease or whatever you want to call it, so that by just working with them we didn't have any real serious problems.

### **So it sounds like you were trying to check the erosion by solving the problem at the source, with the farms. Did you say that it was three thousand acres of farmland?**

Yes, a total of three thousand acres that were, well I just call it leasing, for a convenient term, out to adjoining landowners.

### **Would this be in North Carolina or Virginia?**

Oh, that's what I meant. As far as...well, the Parkway actually begins up at Rockfish Gap in Virginia and goes to the Smokies. Certain areas you are going through forestland then we would go into an area of somewhat plateau land where farming prevailed. Then we would try to keep some of those areas open. That's what made the parkway interesting. If it were to all grow in with woods all over it would be monotonous. But the landscape architects, I give them all the credit. They knew exactly what they wanted and they knew what would be a good view and what wasn't a good view. All I had to do was take their plans. From one end of the parkway to the other there is land use plan. That land use plan goes to the ranger in the field, the maintenance man in the field so that they can use that if they want to

know anything about it... But unfortunately now, unfortunately, sometimes those rangers, sometimes those maintenance people, don't use those plans like they should.

**I guess that can happen.**

That did happen. It does happen. I've seen it even before I left.

**In any specific areas that you recall? Were there problems where it wasn't being used?**

Well yeah, I won't name (names). But it's everywhere to some extent. If you were to look on a land use plan, it would say agricultural use or something like that and it may all be grown up in woods by now. Because, here again, to get those areas under lease, you don't just sit there and wait for someone to come and say, 'I want to lease that land.' You got to get out and find somebody to do it right. And the darn rangers... excuse me.

**Was that partly your task to try to coordinate those efforts? To find the people to lease the land?**

I did. I went to them personally. I hunted 'em all the way. I was the most traveled man that ever was on the parkway.

**How did you find the people?**

No specific way. I'd hear about them. I'd ask about them. I'd go hunt them up and talk to them, something like that. And a lot of times they were right there close by, not much else to do. Some of it came real easy.

But sometimes, I'd go... Well, we had in that Bluffs area where there is a huge pasture right there behind the lodge. I went to Judge, um, that federal judge, good golly, I can't think of his name. Hays. And he said... well, I was in an association with him. I liked him a lot. And we became pretty good friends.

And I asked him (about potential lessees).

And he said, "Now, my son Hadley, I shouldn't tell you about him, but he is in the cattle business and he will do what you tell him to."

So sure enough I went and talked to Hadley.

And Hadley said, "Oh, I need some pasture land up there."

And it's a huge area. It's over a hundred acres right there behind the lodge.

Can I tell you something sort of funny about it?

The judge then came up one day because they were supposed to bring some lime and spread it on that land. Hadley, the son, couldn't come so the judge put on his overalls and came up.

When I got there the doggone truck had run off into the grass which was real wet and soggy and the biggest mess you ever saw. And (the truck) kept pushing around. And he had torn up a lot of grass.

I said "Oh Lord, Judge, you're gonna have to fix this"

He said, "I will."

I said, "You know that guy... (the truck driver)"

He said, "Now listen, Bill. If he was as smart as you or me, he wouldn't make such a mess. He is a truck driver because he is a truck driver. "

I said "Well all right."

Well, I went out there and talked to the truck driver.

I said, " Now look, you are lucky. The judge knows that you made all this mess and so on. But he isn't going to give you any trouble over it."

He said, "I tell you, what about that judge?! You get him out here on the ground like this with them old overalls on and he's just a hell of a nice fella. But you get him in that courtroom and he's a son of a bitch." (laughs)

**(Laughs) Maybe that's one of the reasons we need the parkway so people can get outside and get more down to earth. That's a great story. I have been doing more specific research on the Smart View, Virginia area. Are you familiar with that?**

I know Smart View fairly well. I guess, it's still in the front as you go into it... Is the pasture there with the rail fence? All right, that's the way it used to be. I haven't been there in a long time. All right. That's it. Now it was used for pasture. And of course its picnic ground.

**Yes, its picnic and (I think) some camping.**

And some camping. That's right. That's the way I remember it. Now let's see there's a residence there. I don't know whether it is still there or not. We were trying to preserve it. But I expect it's gone.

**Near the picnic?**

Yes, right on the edge of it. It was right beside the road going into the picnic ground. Well, if you didn't see it... so it's probably gone. It was very old and that's about all I know about it.

**And then as you go up that Smart View section, there are some farms and valleys and crests and some nice underpasses where the streams go under the parkway.**

True, yeah, that's right, some nice little streams. We bought some extra land down there, I wish I could remember the name of it. Coming south, the parkway right of way is very narrow. I remember that. We had, when I left there at least, we had the open land leased. And then we bought another farmhouse on the left coming south. And I suspect that's been torn down because there was a crossing there that was trouble. I can't remember a whole lot of more detail about it. I remember too, there was some plant in there. Well, it wouldn't matter (but) it was unusual. I can't think of whatever it was. This old memory is getting pretty bad.

**I'll have to look it up and see if I can find it in some of the old documents about that area. I know that Malcolm Bird made some drawings for that.**

Malcolm Bird, Malcolm Bird...very unusual man. He knew plant life on the parkway like no other person I ever knew. You could bring in any plant you wanted to and Malcolm could tell you what it was.

But he always had the headache. (laughs)

**Too much up there. (Laughs) In some of the memos that you wrote... in fact I m going to pull one out right now, Bill and show it to you. These are just Xeroxes but this is actually a picture of you in this, along the parkway. Yes this is it. This is a memo dated August 9<sup>th</sup> 1948 and it's to the regional engineer. At that time would it have been Mr. Spellman?**

I suppose so.

**And it is from the soil conservationist. And that was Mr. perhaps, Mr. Taylor? I see the name Mr. O.B. Taylor.**

Yes, right, right.

**By the way did he come from the Smokies region as well, Smokies Park?**

No, no. O.B. Taylor was from Kentucky. Bowling Green. Served in World War One, was injured, was treated at Oteen. Went to NC State and I don't know what he taught. But he taught. He had a master's degree. He didn't have a doctorate but he taught something at NC State for several years. And a student who lived with him at the time because he didn't have much money was a guy named James Hunt, Jim Hunt, Governor Hunt's daddy.

**It's a small world isn't it? Well, in this memo it shows you examining a stabilization along section I-7 and it shows some other pictures here and it looks like you were very busy doing work along the perimeter of the parkway.**

That's right. That's what it was. In order to stabilize... Sometimes along the parkway, the erosion extended on into private land. It came from private land onto the parkway. So we had to help them with theirs. That's probably what that was, its what it looks like. (looks) Yeah, we had an awful lot of that to do when I first... Well to now, you just can't imagine what it would look like. The parkway doesn't look like it did then. Oh yes, (looks at photo), that's the kind of thing.

**This shows very bad erosion in this photograph number one of this memo and you re studying an old erosion on 2J which would have been in North Carolina with walls of gullies broken down and partially checked by some pioneer growth. How would you go about trying to mend that erosion?**

Most of it we would put something in there to make a seedbed. I don't remember what kind of machine we had. One time we had a bull dozer That was the best thing just take a bulldozer smooth it up, seed it, mulch it, and it would..

**What would you mulch with?**

Most anything we could find but usually we used grass or sometimes we would mow... We had some fields we kept in reserve just to mow the grass to use for mulch. And sometimes we would get pine brush and use pine brush.. Almost anything we could find.

**It would typically come from the parkway lands?**

That's right.

**(Rustles papers, looking.) I'm sorry . Here it is.**

The worst erosion that we had was that area around Blowing Rock and on north to the Virginia line and into Virginia a little bit. Because that's farmland, as you know, over there.

**It says in some of the memos that you were trying to get people to take on the hill culture methods of farming. Can you explain what hill culture is?**

Well, I don't know, I think I worked with VPI or Virginia Tech or whatever you want to call it. They had done some work to get certain plants that mountain people could use to an advantage, whatever they might be. One of them was, they developed some kind of a chestnut but that wasn't very successful.. But then were things like blueberries and, oh, let me see what we got into one time? Goodness, I don't remember. But that's what it was. Those kind of things that would grow in the Blue Ridge Mountain country and cover the ground like some berries, or....Well, it mostly had to be berries or some fruit or something that they could probably use.

It wasn't extensive though. Because those people were devoted to cattle. And actually we liked, at the time I went there, to have these great haystacks because we thought they were attractive. But then along come the machines. And (with) the machines, that is bailers and all that kind of thing, and it was hard to get anybody to put up a haystack.. Mr. Abbott, and I know you know who I'm talking about, had. I never knew a man like him.. If I had to pick the greatest landscape architect in the world I would probably say it was Stanley W. Abbott.

But he had a feeling for all these kind of things and he would tell me, "Now Bill, I want some haystacks. And I want some haystacks here"

Well, if you get out there and work at it you can get it, you can get people to do it. But it takes somebody to do that kind of thing. And if you leave it up to the rangers.... rangers are law enforcement officers. Now I'm not criticizing them a bit because they do a good job of it. But you can't expect them to do that because some of them never saw a haystack and wouldn't know what it was if they did. So that's the trouble. It's your staffing.

**So it sounds as if you ended up being responsible for a lot of that scenery that we see.**

That's right. But as I said, Stanley Abbott could do some of the most unusual things. He didn't ever carry any cigarettes but he liked to smoke one now and then. I used to carry one around in my pocket so he'd have one.. Often times you'd hand him cigarettes he'd take one out and put the (entire pack in his pocket)... and walk off that way. His mind was not on it at all.

But what a wonderful man he was. This Blue Ridge Parkway is really his vision. His. And Ed Abbuehl fitted in there with him. Because Ed Abbuehl was trained as an architect, I believe. I think 'twas at Oxford.

**(Brief interruption when Mr. Hooper's daughter in law arrives.)**

**You remember Ted (Pease)? Ted asked to be remembered to you, and his wife Jesse. I saw them in November.**

Yes. They sent me a card and told about you. And what they said about you was very nice.

**That's sweet.**

But they are lovely people.

**Yes they are. And they said the same about you. They said, oh you must meet Mr. Hooper. He is such a fine gentleman.**

Well, that's really nice of them to say. But Ted Pease is a very talented landscape architect. Out there in the field. And that's where they should be.

That's why I praise Sam Weems so much as a superintendent.

Because you need a landscape architect out there in the field all the time. For instance, one of the power companies was going to put in a power line to extend from here to there. And as long as its parkway that's gonna happen every now and then when you cross that power way. Well, you can put them where they show all over the place. If you're smart enough and so on, you get them located so that they are not offensive. Now I don't think that you ever notice them much driving the parkway but there are a lot of (power lines) crossing right overhead. But I don't think any of them are very offensive. Now you may have noticed something that I didn't. But Ted Pease did that kind of thing. Not only that but telephone lines, or might be anything like that, all the time.

Well, as I said, Ted was out there and he knew the parkway motor road and the adjoining lands and he knew the people and all this kind of thing. You need a... if I were superintendent, I'd have a landscape architect, just as Sam Weems did, one at least on the ground, I mean out in the field somewhere, in Virginia and North Carolina. And it makes a lot of difference. Those things that are happening now just... man.

**What is your concern about the way things look now?**

Well, see I haven't seen it in so many years that I hate to say too much about the way they look now because I don't really know. But I was disappointed the last time I was there. Several things I saw....

As I said, (the) mowing.

The lines that are being mowed. Now you may have seen some of these things, and you may know it. But on those slopes. When Ted Pease was there he would have them mow an extra one up there and make a curved mow line instead of that straight down here. I'm talking about that. And I saw a lot of that. And I suspect its getting worse instead of better. I don't know.

### **When were you there?**

Oh, it's been at least fifteen years since I've seen anything except going up to Bluff Park about seven or eight years. I did drive up to Virginia though.

Another thing that bothered me. As I said, when I arranged for a row crop. We didn't have much of it on the parkway. I always staked out a contour line or two for the farmer to run a contour line to keep the cultivation on the contour. And I know I saw some farms in Virginia where that wasn't happening any more. The darn... it was long slope like that, right up and down the doggone slope with corn there. I mean it just made me sick.

**I believe you're right. I believe I've seen that myself last fall when I drove the parkway. From what you're describing, it would be much more in keeping with the whole curving nature of the road to have the contour rows and the mowing.**

And we had some fields if it was a fairly long slope like that, in cultivation, more than two or three hundred feet wide on a slope, I had what (is) called strip cropping. A width of row crop, then a grass strip, then a row crop. But you won't see it on the parkway now. It's easier to do it the other way. And it's something that has to work. But I don't expect the rangers to do it.

### **What was the purpose of the strip cropping?**

The strip cropping, as I said, if you have some erosion, any erosion or water loss that you have on the plowed land will be caught in your grass strip and you don't lose any plant food or anything else. It's caught in there. But a long slope, the longer your slope is, as you know, the more erosive the water becomes along a long slope.

### **Was there a ratio of row to strip that you used?**

I just used my own judgement more than anything else. On steeper land, you have a narrower strip to cultivate. If it's not so steep you can broaden your cultivated strip because of the slope. All those things go into it. I don't know. It's just something you know how to do is all.

### **How did you know how to do this though?**

Well, I learned with Soil Conservation. I was with them twelve years.

### **With the Soil Conservation Service?**

Yeah. That was in connection with the old Civilian Conservation. We had these CCC camps in North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, all over the south. And they were doing soil conservation work.

And by the way, the farms were, you sometimes had terraces. But anyway, you had to go out and work a farm plan with a farm owner. And then if they had to put in terraces with waterway strips And all that kind of thing, that's what the CCC boys did.

I don't know, in North Carolina, there must have been at one time as many as fifteen CCC camps doing nothing but soil conservation. But somebody had to do the planning for them to work. And that's what I did.

**That's fascinating. And so they would do work on private farmlands?**

That's right. But the thing of it was, at that time, back in the thirties, that's when the soil conservation service came into existence. In the southern fields where agriculture was cotton, and corn and row crop and all that kind of thing, erosion was a two edged sword. One was, it stripped the land down to the subsoil so that you're losing subsoil.. And it's going into the streams and filling up all the lakes and everything else. So it was, as I said, soil conservation was a kind of two-edged problem. But anyway, that's where I had my experience with that kind of thing.

**So you worked for twelve years with the Soil Conservation Service prior to coming to the parkway? Or were you with the parkway?**

Well I was stationed in the little town of Sparta, in Allegheny County, (NC) and I was the county conservationist. And I knew the parkway fairly well.

In fact, I made one awful mistake without knowing it. A place called Mahogany Rock. You know on the parkway you have these overlooks? One of the most beautiful overlooks I ever knew of anywhere in North Carolina or anywhere else, was what they called Mahogany Rock. There was a great stone there and what they called a mahogany. It was not a mahogany tree at all, it was uh...now I'm lost. Anyway the parkway line was very close to the...there wasn't much width there. You could just get the parkway width there on parkway land. And below that is private land. And that land was steep and quite erosive.

And I worked out a farm plan with that owner. And I knew what that land should have. It should be reforested. So I got white pine trees which I could get from TVA and furnished them to the man and showed him how to plant them.

Now, two years later, I was with the Blue Ridge Parkway and I drove in there and I looked. And I knew those little old pine trees were all living and were getting up about knee high and what you gonna do? It wasn't gonna be very long until there wasn't gonna be any view! So the first thing I did was go to the superintendent. And I could always get along with Sam Weems by telling him the truth.

**(Laughs) That's usually the best way, isn't it?**

The best way. He said. I won't tell you what he said.

He said, "You've got to do something about this. I don't give a damn what you do but you do something about it."

"All right sir, Mr. Weems."

So I went to see this man, Elmer(sp.). And I liked him and he was a very nice fellow.

I said, "You have this land out here that you're using and there's what they call a scenic easement on it."

Don't know whether you noticed that on the parkway or not. Sometimes they didn't buy it fee simple. They put what they call a scenic easement on it and nothing must be built on it or used any other way.

But I said "Now that scenic easement is trouble to you."

And he said, "Ye-up."

"You can't use it for anything. You can't develop it or you can't do anything with it."

He realized that.

I said, "Now if you'll trade it to the government, United States of America, about a couple of acres of land right in front of that parking overlook, I will work it in the deed so that that easement is removed from your land."

And we did it. And so we got that much land in fee simple right in front of the overlook.

**Creative work, there. (Phone rings, tape stops)**

**It's all interesting, it's all good to get down on the transcript and on the tape here.**

But as I said, I think the greatest thing about the Blue Ridge Parkway, and I still think, is that magnificent planning that Stan Abbott had, was to get a right of way, as he called it, and then develop it so that you don't end up with scars or anything.

You provide what I call a window to the countryside. If you didn't provide this window to the countryside... and if you just allowed it to grow up all over giving no vistas ... Now we have some wonderful forest land, and some of the forests and so on that you go through, they are forests and are beautiful and good. And I love the woodland and everything. But you wouldn't want it all to be that way, monotonous, from one end to the other. That's the reason I say

I don't know how the man could have this great vision at that time. Because I don't know of any precedent (for it). Maybe you have heard of it and do. But I don't.

**Where do you think he got this idea of farm? Did he ever talk about it?**

No, not to me. And I knew him well. He was trained at Cornell in landscaping. That's all I know. And they must have had some... And, no, there was a little Westchester Parkway up there. And I think that had something to do with it.

**Um hum. When he worked with Gilmore Clarke up in New York, yeah. But still, bringing that down here, which was probably less developed and maybe the farms didn't look so**

**hot. It sounds like it was your job to make it look like a more fertile and productive and beautiful scene.**

Yeah, that's what it was. But anyway I said, all these things and staffing and so on to begin with, that was Stanley Abbott. And he picked Sam Weems for an assistant superintendent. Sam was working for some bank as I understand it. And it seems to me there was a Resettlement Administration, I don't know the name of it for sure. But anyway, the idea was that the government, under Franklin Roosevelt, had these various agencies.

And there were a lot of sub marginal farms. No way for them to make enough to actually live on. They subsisted somehow. The idea was to buy them out.

Then that great area I call Doughton Park, or Bluff Mountain, that's where Sam Weems came in and bought all that land. And it was some years later that we learned (he had) got the deeds. I don't know how it was. But Sam was good at that kind of thing. Cumberland Knob is another one and Rocky Knob. And I don't know about Smart View. But those large areas were areas that Sam Weems bought.

Mr. Abbott made him assistant superintendent then went into the service. Sam didn't (go into the service. So Sam became acting superintendent and then superintendent.

**So he was superintendent when you were there?**

Sam? Yes. Sam Weems was the man who employed me. Stanley Abbot was still in the army. Stanley came back and took the job as resident landscape architect which was the same pay grade. That allowed Sam to take over the job as superintendent.

(looks at document?)

Here they are. A whole bunch of those fellows on the parkway. That was before my time. I don't know what happened to them. They got into the armed services one way or the other. But nearly all of them were officers, except Stanley W. Abbott. He was a buck private. Came out a buck private.

**The military wasn't for him?**

The military wasn't for Stanley Abbott.

**And he went from a very high position, directing other people. It must have been a difficult experience.**

**When do you think the soil conservation became such a strong focus for the parkway, and why?**

I don't quite understand.

**Well, it started out as a parkway.. (a) recreation, scenic route through the mountains and then when you go through the archives you notice more and more about soil conservation. When you came in it became more important. Why? And when did it come about this way?**

Well, as I said, which is more that we needed a beautiful countryside. And as I said, the lands near the parkway, as I remember when I first came to the Blue Ridge Parkway...

You'd be surprised looking at it now you wouldn't know it but those people on those hillsides were trying to make a living with corn, potatoes and row crops which was just the worst use of land that they could possibly be engaged in. So what we tried to encourage all the time, and with the help of county agents and all, you don't do anything by yourself, get them more into the grassland farming, cattle and grassland.

It actually is more profitable to them because the yield of corn, as I remember it for instance, the average yield on those hillsides wasn't but about six or seven bushels to the acre. And they did it all by hand. Those people aren't dumb now. They just needed a little leadership here and there. In fact they are very intelligent people.

A lot of people think of those people in the Blue Ridge Mountains as being somewhat reticent and not at all congenial in any way. But good golly, once they know you they'll talk your head off. And nearly always, I don't know whether they'd admit it or not, but they'd always invite you to come in and stay for dinner and all this kind of thing. Very, very (friendly)—in fact they like to have company, especially somebody to talk to.

I remember one man who was a very religious kind of fellow but he made booze. That's the way he made his livin'. I drove into his house one day. I knew he was a community leader. You always have to, anywhere you want to have some influence with people, you always have to go to what I call the community leader. Cause if you can manage with them the other people see it and you get along very well.

I could see him as I drove toward this house on this little old private road, sitting on the porch holding something. Got up there and 'twas the bible. And he was reading it. And we talked for awhile. I introduced myself. I didn't exactly tell him I was a born mountaineer but I suggested to him that 'Oh I'm a native.' or tried to suggest to him that I was a native and all this kind of thing. 'Course, I talk like they do anyway.

He says, "You ever take anything for the toothache?"

I thought I knew what (he was talking about) and said, "Oh, yeah, yeah."

He said. "Come on."

And we walked out to the crib and he reached up in the crib, pushed back some corn and pulled out a half-gallon fruit jar of his booze. And 'twas right, filled right to the top. And he took the cap off and handed it to me. And I didn't know anything about it. 'Gosh', (I thought), 'I gotta go through this some way.'

So I tried to take a sip of it. And I don't know, I couldn't to do it. I just spewed it out. (laughs). And his little old boys were there, two of them.

He says, "Go up and get him some milk, honey. He's a fur-iner, (foreigner)."

**(laughs) That's a classic story. That's quite a test. But were you born, or raised in North Carolina?**

I was born, yes, over in North Carolina, just south of Danville, Virginia. You know Danville is right on the line. And we were just over in North Carolina.

**I see. That's great.**

My mother was from that area, from up there around Gretna, which is near Chatham. I don't know. Anyway that's the part.

**Okay, there were some items, these may be too specific for you. Anyway these were in one of the reports written in 1952. And there was mention made of berm and flume construction for erosion control. Could you describe that?**

Of course, in building the motor road now, they had culverts. The best I understand those engineers, we called it Public Roads Administration at the time, I don't know what it is now. But anyway they were fine engineers. But they didn't pay too much attention to the location of those doggone culverts. They just made it according to the distance, or something like that that the water had to travel in a ditch, more than anything else. But where they emptied into, they paid no attention to it. As a result, it often cut a gully down there in just a few years. Then we had to do something about that.

And another thing about it, sometimes that gully would extend into private lands. And we (thought), "Oh somebody's gonna take us to court...all this kind of problem." So what to do?

Now the engineers that we had, always thought of something, a flume or some type of ditch made of concrete to carry it somewhere. But there again you still gotta empty it. And with the Soil Conservation Service, I had seen a whole lot of that on private farms that the engineers did with Soil Conservation. The trouble with them is, sometimes water gets under them and will break them. Or water will get, I don't know, just different things happen to them, or somebody runs over them.

So I have always been, and still am, if I had to do it over again, in favor of vegetation. And I think that's what we ended up with nearly all the time.

So we would work with the engineer and divert that water to some extent to a better place. And then get some vegetation on it. Sometimes with grasses but sometimes we would use, oh, something like Vinca minor, which is, you know what 'tis, something like that to cover it. That's the best thing. We may have used...No, we didn't use. I started to say Kudzu. Couldn't use Kudzu on it because Kudzu would climb the trees. Soil Conservation Service did some of that though and you can see it all over North Carolina now, on some of the roads and some of the other places, just cover(ing) up the trees.

**There is some on the parkway. And it's a problem. It has invaded. I know it was never planted there.**

Um hum. No, we didn't have any Kudzu on parkway land itself. We never planted any. I don't think there's any on parkway slopes. Kudzu I'm talking about. Now we did use some of the vines.

I don't know remember what we used sometimes. We sometimes used shrubbery and low growing plants, something like that but Kudzu was something... We had some on the parkway that had been there before the parkway was built. But we tried to get rid of it. I don't know whether we ever got rid of it all or not. But anyway, it was out.

**You mentioned that the culverts were sometimes causing some damage when they flooded onto other properties. So your favored practice was to try to plant things to stabilize.**

Yes, yes, try to cover up with planting. Because plants will shift a little bit and keep growing. I haven't seen any of it fail if you use the right kind of a plant, or whatnot. But I have seen the others, the rigid type of structures. I don't like structures much. In fact I remember one area we had, must have been thirty or forty acres, nothing but the gullies, the whole thing. It was parkway land. Now when I came there I noticed, they were, with some kind of labor, I don't know what kind of labor it was, might have been CCC or what, but they had gone into those gullies and made little dams. And after another interval put in another dam of some kind. Usually, as I recall, they were using little log dams and then filling in behind them. But you could go on and on because as I said, there were acres and acres of that. And I don't know how many years, or how many months, or how much time they had spent on it. But they didn't have it under control at all. The erosion was still there. It was gonna take time.

I ended up doing, well, going to the TVA and getting, I don't know how many thousand of pine trees and just planted 'em over there. And they lived and covered it up. Doesn't cost much.

But as I said, vegetation in my mind is the best thing. Because after you put those little old dams in there you still didn't have anything under control and eventually they'd break out or something like that.

**You mentioned that there was potential for lawsuits by some of the adjacent properties. Did they ever actually sue over anything?**

I don't think we ever got into court over it. But we had one or two. Superintendent had to satisfy them and I don't know where the money came from. (We might) even go on their land and repair something.

One place I remember was in Virginia, new construction from the City of Roanoke to the top of the mountain. And that happened. I don't know much about the details of it because I was not involved. But I know a lot of money was spent repairing the damage on private land.

**They mentioned something called roadside pooling, pooling which may have been problems with just drainage pooling at the edges of the roads? I can check back through some of these things. It came from one of the memos...Now one of these memos is co signed by you and by parkway engineer Cozzani. Can you tell me a little bit about him?**

Cozzani was a Mississippi State engineer who was working for one of the railroads in Chicago when the depression came and he lost his job. And I don't know how it came about but he came to the Blue Ridge Parkway on the superintendent's staff.

'Course, he had nothing to do with the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway motor road itself. That was all by the Public Roads Administration. It was called the Public Roads Administration at the time. Cozzani, of course, there were several buildings and that kind of thing. Well all those maintenance buildings and those kind of things where the trucks are kept and equipment is kept, all that kind of thing. That's the principal thing that I think he did.

And he got a fellow named Clement as his assistant. Clement was a professor at the University of Georgia. And he was the brightest engineer that I know anything about. Well, it worked out that Banlon Clement became the chief engineer and Cozzani retired and went to Florida. But Cozzani was a real nice fellow.

**But you mentioned that he wasn't really responsible for the parkway road.**

Cozzani had nothing to do with the parkway road, nothing at all.

**He would just have been in charge of the structures? And maybe the roads into them?**

'Course, you know there were any number of those maintenance areas, like Rocky Knob, the Bluffs and all. Anyway he was interested in this because it was our problem. The Public Roads Administration...they got the contracts, the roads built and they were through. But the maintenance and all came along later, the maintenance of the parkway. 'Course, Cozzani was responsible for that now, the maintenance after the construction.

**So that's why he would be on this memo related to the drainage?**

Yes.

**Okay. I'm interested in the original design, I don't know if you can help me with that. Who the original engineers might have been...(phone rings tape is paused) We were just talking about the road design and whether you might know of anybody who was responsible for that beautiful relationship with the land and the spiral curves.**

It seems to me that Ed Abbuehl worked with the Public Roads Administration. At first they had nothing to go on 'cept just go out there in the fields and stay out there day and night working right on down,...with sleeping bags. And they would pick out the location pretty much and they flagged it. Oh, I don't know how they flagged it. It seemed to me with strips of some kind...Anyway they would do a section at a time, maybe from one highway (to another).

I remember Woodrow, (engineer Woodrow), but I don't think he had too much to do with out there in the field. So I don't know who those engineers were. I knew them at the time, good golly, names bother me now.. But anyway that's how it was done.

Later on of course, after the war we had aerial photographs. So those last sections wherever they might be, were located pretty much by aerial photograph. And the last section we built was Grandfather Mountain as you may have heard. That was a real problem. Because Mr. Morton, Hugh Morton owned Grandfather Mountain. (A) Mr. Macrae was the developer of a little town, Linville. (Linville) was one of the nicest resort towns anywhere, especially back in the twenties

and thirties. And I think this was right, that Hugh Morton married Mr. Macrae's daughter and maybe that's where he came into possession of Grandfather Mountain. I'm not sure. But at that time, I think it was the largest single private land holding in the state of North Carolina, was Grandfather Mountain. And as you know, there's a Mr. Morton who built a roadway up on Grandfather Mountain. And he charges a fee, did then and now.

Now it bothered him somewhat that the Blue Ridge Parkway would circle around that Mountain. Least, the best I know it bothered him. Because if it would be very high on the mountain it would get too much view. It might apparently. But anyway he didn't want it up there. He was very powerful in this state. He was a candidate for governor and withdrew. And that's about all I know about it because his quarrel was with the superintendent. And I wasn't in on it, know nothing about it. But they did not get along.

### **That was Sam Weems?**

Sam Weems. Hugh Morton, also was an advertiser. In other words, he spent money advertising his mountain with some of the newspapers. But he was known and had something of an inside track there with them. And they, the newspapers, the media, seemed to do what they could to favor him. At least they didn't take Sam Weems' side of the question. And this went on and nothing was done for quite awhile on Grandfather Mountain because of that.

Then Sam Weems left to go to Australia, Jim Eden succeeded him. Jim was a fine western superintendent who came here. Anyway he tried to work with Hugh Morton and the state of North Carolina because the state of North Carolina had to acquire that right of way from Hugh Morton.

They finally set it on the plan a little lower down the mountain. But probably the best place it could be, is where it is at any rate, with the tunnel through one ridge. And to place that thing on the side of the mountain so there was no scarring. Now they had to get, I believe, go to France to get the engineer. I don't remember his name. I knew him. Because to start with there at 221, they didn't want to cut into the stone which would make a proper scar and very expensive. So they built that, its like a bridge work, they would build and then add on and place it right into the side of the mountain. So there's no scarring where the roadway is placed on it. That kind of..I don't know what you call it.

And then we had to have some more land to connect with the Blue Ridge Parkway to give a—well, that's the old Onalassie Trail, to a connection with the Blue Ridge Parkway. And the land would have to come from Mr. Morton. And Mr. Morton had declared that he would never sell one foot of land to the United States. (laughs).. Well that pleased me.

### **Why?**

I went to him to tell him about it.

I said. "Now I understand you will not sell one foot of land, I think that's your statement, not one foot of land to the United States."

He said, "Yep." He may have said something different from 'yep' but that's what he meant.

I said, "That pleases me no end 'cause that's a whole lot of trouble. My, oh my, I don't have to buy a thing or go to any trouble at all. There won't be a connection there. That's great."

"Oh", he said, "I didn't say I wouldn't give it to you."

So he said, "What do you need?"

I showed him on a map what I had to have. And he donated that to the United States.

### **Were you surprised?**

Not as much as you might think. Because that was important to him for his business. That Blue Ridge Parkway traffic coming off there that would mean a lot to his business. Hugh Morton's a fine man. I don't want to discount that. He is very intelligent. And I knew he was a lot smarter than I was and I wasn't gonna bargain with him.

### **When did you meet with him, do you recall?**

I don't remember the year. Years, now so many years ago, was it (nineteen) seventy? I don't know. That was the last link of the Blue Ridge Parkway, though, was Grandfather Mountain.

### **Let's look at few of these memos that you were involved with..**

I'll tell you something offhand. If you were to go and looking the records there. Memos that were official memos to anybody about anything. You'll never see my name on them. I wrote them. But always for the superintendent's signature. Sam Weems liked it that way. Some of the others, they don't do that anymore. That's my way of thinking. It ought to be . . . It should come from the superintendent. He's the boss. And when he signs it he knows exactly what it's all about. And there's no side issue here that comes up to surprise him.

### **Would there have been anyway to identify it as your work versus somebody else's?**

No. I would write it. Well, yeah. You look at the bottom of it sometimes there's W.O. H. originator. But I never signed anything like that. But there are deeds. I used to write, all the land we bought, I wrote the deeds. And they had to go to the Attorney General and be approved by him. But there was nobody else to do it is the reason.

### **How much land did you actually buy?**

In all, I don't know. It would take me a long time to even guess. 'Cause it's quite a lot. We had to (get) extra land... Good golly, it amounted to several thousand acres I guess, just parcels here and there.

### **How much did you say? Seventy thousand?**

No, no. several thousand. I don't know. We bought out some entire farms. They're there yet. The reason for it was to prevent some development.

Now at Ground Hog Mountain there was a private crossing for instance. And this minister from Mt. Airy built a little summer home up there because somebody gave him the land, I think. And he became interested in it and with that backing from the man who had money, began to build homes all over it. Then he wanted to build a motel. And he did put in one of those and a restaurant, and all like that.

Well, that road, as I said, was limited in width to something like ten feet at a crossing. But there was no other access then. And (I) called some lawyers from the Washington office down there. And they suggested an underpass so there were no at grade crossings. But the only trouble which I'd already told them, it said that 'ten feet wide crossing at grade at station so and so'. And at grade means at grade.

But they said that didn't matter.

It did matter. And they had to give them another place, (an) opening down the road. Lost the whole thing.

But anyway that was the only serious mistake that I remember seeing. But no, we did buy out, because there was some land up there, there was money available for several years all, anywhere the park service needed, to buy land to protect, for protection or whatever they might need. Oh, I remember, I know now, they tried to raise money by donations and that kind of thing now to get money for acquisition of land.. I don't know how well they are doing with it.

**Okay, in one of these, (rustles papers), it says, I think it's by Mr. Taylor, Mr. O.B. Taylor, he talks about the plant Serisia. Is that one of the plants you were thinking about for stabilizing?**

Yes, Serisia is a Lespedeza, a perennial Lespedeza. It grows fairly tall and it's not good for much of anything else except groundcover. it doesn't make very good hay. It's coarse. But it is a wonderful, wonderful groundcover. Once you get it established there's nothing going to take it out of there.

**Were you trying to use plants, I know the Parkway was, trying to use plants that were native to the region?**

That's so. We were not allowed to use exotics anywhere. And I think that's proper. Then I remember... oh, some of the plants that the landscape architects used to like to preserve was a sumac. I don't know how it is. But (to) our landscape architect from Illinois, it was a Sumac, soomac, which is all right.

And I remember it came up one time down here at a meeting... some guy was sort of an authority, they asked him why it was pronounced Shumac down south...

This lady said, "I notice here they say Shumac and that couldn't be right, could it?"

He said, "Shure, it could, Shugah!" (laughs)

**(laughs) Perfect response. Who was it that said that? One of the landscape architects?**

I can't remember.

**That's great.**

That's one of the reasons I'm so bothered about it. My memory of names. I can't recall names real quickly.

**In one of these, and this is by Thomas Allen, Mr. Allen, the Regional Director, he talks about some problems with the disposition of brush by burning because apparently the parkway was burning its own brush along the motorway but advising the farmers nearby not to burn it. He says here, "Its not clear whether or not our own burning is given the same consideration as concerns humidity, time of day, as is required of our neighbors. And that the cost of brush disposal is a consideration." But I don't know if you came across any issues like that.**

Brush (was) burned by contractors who required by public roads engineers to have adequate equipment for control. What's the date on that?

**That's 1947, September 1947.**

So all right, it would be right after that. But that did happen out in the field some places. I didn't know that exact memorandum, anything about it. I suspect O.B. Taylor had something to do with it. O. B. Taylor visited the parkway and so on. Mr. Allen didn't. But of course there again, O. B. Taylor was a conservationist whom I admired and I trusted. He had an unusual gift, I think. You could have a meeting with different ones contributing to the discussion and after it was over then he could have a stenographer or secretary, (and he would) dictate like, (snaps fingers). every bit of it just like that, just perfectly. Not many people could do that. I couldn't.

**Good memory. In this other one which is the one that you wrote with Mr. Cozzani in 1947 and also with Mr. Johnson, Wallace H. Johnson, it said, it was pointed out that the "Blue Ridge Parkway probably has a more well rounded program of soil stabilization than any other federal agency or any state. The methods and techniques employed are as advanced as those used by any governmental agency." And in some of the other memos, I've seen the Blue Ridge touted as probably the best example for soil stabilization.**

We were leaders at that time, as you know. 'Course now, it's different. But in 1945, as I said, I don't know of another roadway anywhere that they even bothered a whole lot to hide the scars. Now maybe they did but I didn't see them. High way construction... You'd simply go out and build it. (fire alarm goes off in building and the interview is interrupted.)

**We are sitting outside after the fire alarm went off in Mr. Hooper's building. We were just talking about plants up on the parkway. One of your favorites was the Rhododendron carolina, carolinium?**

Yes.

**I like that one, too. Can you recall some of the other people? Ken McCarter?**

Ken McCarter was an architect. There were several of them. Ken McCarter was an old like parks employee coming to the Blue Ridge from some other part. He was very, very careful about anything that he was accustomed to.

In other words, on the Blue Ridge Parkway you take liberties. You could open up a view, cut the trees. But in the National Parks you can't cut the trees at all. And it made it a little bit difficult for him to adjust to these things. But he was a good architect, as far as that goes.

And then there was a fellow named Grossman who was also an architect there. And he designed the buildings that are now used by the concession, National Parks Concessions, at Bluffs, called Doughton Park, the hotel, the gasoline station and the restaurant. And of course, another one down at Crabtree Meadows, that restaurant, and then one up at the North end. Good golly, why can't I remember that one.

**Not Peaks of Otter?**

No, not Peaks of Otter.

**Mabry Mill?**

Nor Mabry Mill.

The hotels, restaurants at Peaks of Otter are a separate concession. Don't know why I can't think of the name now. But anyway he's from Raleigh, a hotel man. I think he started out with just restaurants but anyway he had some partners. And those buildings are buildings they built with their own money. They owned the buildings. And that's what got on a concession contract. I don't really know the contract. But that's the way that operation...but the buildings in Doughton Park. Those buildings were built with government money so they belong to the park itself. Then after that, after those were finished, I don't think there's been an architect there on parkway staff.

I don't know what the staff is like now. It's quite different in nature than anything that Sam Weems established. He would never try to get along at all without some landscape architects on his staff. Now he was an engineer himself but then that's just a difference (in training). He recognized the need for landscape architects.

(Interview relocates to a different building)

**Okay we're resuming our conversation and actually, I will put in a new tape here because (we will run out soon.)**

Let's see, what were we talking about. About (Dale ? the head ranger). About his rangers. He wanted 'em all just so. And he always talked in a rather deep voice, which he had cultivated to some extent.

Anyway he went with Sam Weems down to meet a congressman, can't remember where it was, Orchard Gap, I guess it was. Anyway, Sam, of course, used his official car but he had Dale, the

Chief Ranger driving for him and as they pulled up there waiting for the congressman to show up, the congressman came in his Cadillac with a black chauffeur and pulled in.

And Dale said, (deep voice) "Good lord Sam, look there! Got a chauffeur."

And Sam said, "He hasn't got a damn thing on me! Pull right up there beside of him." (laughs)

**(laughs) Funny.**

Weems was a bright man though. As I said, alot of people didn't like him because I don't know, he had his way about him. Sometimes he'd call it "My' parkway." and that kind of thing. That's the way he felt. He possessed the doggone thing. But he didn't miss anything much.

And as I said, when you wanted to get something done, Sam Weems was the man to do it. He managed to get to Washington to get funds to complete the parkway. And he kept on getting funds. .. Some of the other areas (didn't get funds.) (But) he would just get funds when nobody else could.

And I don't think the parkway might have been built to this day, I mean completed, if it hadn't been for just that kind of initiative that he had.

And as I said, when you think about the Linville Falls area was going to be sold. Somehow he heard about it and managed to get Mr. Rockefeller down there. I don't know whether anybody else would have bothered about it or not. But he knew what that area was like. I don't know whether you've been down to Linville Falls or not, but it's gorgeous.

The first time I went down there with Sam. We went up on that ridge, high above, looking right down into it. And I don't remember why we were up on the ridge at the time. And it was Easter time. And some fishermen, two, were down there. They had a fire going or were trying to (cook).

And Sam went looking over and said "Put out that fire!"

I said, "Mr. Weems, they can't hear you."

He said, "You sure about that?"

I said, "Why, they couldn't hear you down there above the falls, if you fired a cannon."

He went up there. He said, "You damn son of a gun, put out that damn fire!" (laughs)

**Laughs Did the fire keep going?**

Oh, (yes) they couldn't hear him at all. But he didn't mind.

Anyway things like that, (Linville Falls), added to the parkway made a difference. Same way with the Cone estate and the Price Park and all that. I don't know maybe somebody else would have done the same, managed it, too.

But I don't know that they would either.

But those areas are preserved and they all belong to the parkway. So it makes the parkway

interesting. You can spend a lot of time on the parkway visiting all those things.

**That's right. What did you like best, or what do you think was best about the work that you did on the parkway?**

Well, really I think the best thing that meant more to the parkway than anything else, was what I did initially. That is, get those areas on the parkway that were open at the time, get somebody to use them and lease them before they regenerated. Because there's no money, there wasn't enough money to maintain them in open. The maintenance money would not have spread if they had tried to keep them open. And they wouldn't have been open. They would have grown up.

And then that too, as I said, with that program on the parkway, we expanded it to our neighbors. And getting a good relation with parkway neighbors, that's very important. I tried to know in name and be acquainted with every neighbor that lived right along with us. And I think I knew just about every one of them. And when trouble came I knew who they were and they knew me.

And by working with them I think we made the countryside there that we tried to expose to the travelling public, far more attractive and interesting. I know it is. Because if you didn't have any interest along there, just drive along the parkway. I don't care how beautiful it is after awhile, but that's five hundred miles of that blooming thing and you have to have some variation. At least, that's what I think. I don't know.

**Were you dealing with mainly the farms and people immediately adjacent?**

Mostly that. Yeah, as I said we sometimes we would go out and couldn't find somebody that could handle one of those large parcels of land because they didn't have the equipment, didn't have the cattle, something like that.

I remember one that we had like that. He had to sublet, if you will, the pastureland to somebody else. That person withdrew his cattle (and) he didn't know what to do. The ranger went to see him. He wrote this letter to the superintendent. He said he couldn't get anyone to sublet or bring the cattle in. So he decided to graze it himself. Imagine a man grazing himself!

**You'd have to be very hungry.**

Yeah, you'd have to be very hungry. But anyway (it was) all that. And to this day I think, being right there early in the game when it was still open land and you could do something with it.

Otherwise I don't know what the parkway would look like today. It certainly would not have been what Stanley Abbott and his very, very capable group of landscape architects planned and wanted it to be. That master plan is something else. I don't know.

I never thought much about such a thing as a landscape architect until I was with the parkway. But I can't tell you how it affected my life.

And now even to this day, even a home, anything like that, public buildings and so on....(with) some of them you can tell there's a landscape architect that's been there.

One time I remember a lady, a famous artist but I don't remember her name, had a summer home at Roaring Gap. I never have been to her place. But they tell me where it was a little old private road led in. And that little old private road wasn't a little straight driveway. It curved around beautifully through the trees, there was the house and plantings all out in front. And believe it or not, she disliked straight lines so much, she had the front of her house made in a curve. (laughs)

**She carried it all the way through.**

I remember how, you see, as I said, with landscape architects and engineers. Engineers like straight lines. That's all they want, straight lines. And if you had built that parkway with engineers, you'd have straight lines all over the parkway.

**Right. Did you work with a lot of different types of professionals? You said that you worked with the landscape architects and soil conservationists.**

Oh yes, oh yes, mostly with them.

**Who else did you work with?**

We had a.. I started to tell you I worked with a historian. But I didn't because he didn't work. (laughs)

But that's something they should.... Strangely enough, there should be a history of the parkway. Now there's a man named Harley Jolley did a history book. He, at that time, was not employed by the parkway. He just worked some as a seasonal ranger. And he didn't have his doctorate or anything at the time. That's what he did his doctorate on. But as I said, they may have a historian now, I don't know. But they've had some. If they have ever considered anything like that, I don't know it. But maybe they did. But Jolley, well, he is a historian but he's an unusual speaker. He can hold an audience just almost spell bound, anytime, anyplace. He doesn't have to be prepared for it. He can just do it. And he worked in interpretation.

Now I don't have any faults to find with interpretation, as such. But it's a rather expensive program. I don't know how many interpreters they have up there and so on, on permanent, or what. But they really don't reach a whole lot of people. If they have an audience it's a very small audience. I've often wondered if the money couldn't be a little better spent in a different way. By that, I meant having your rangers because they are in contact with people all the time, trained more in history and interpretation and so on like that so that it works in with the job of law enforcement. Law enforcement becomes a little bit dull if that's all you're doing. And sometimes that is all they do. And sometimes they almost hunt for something to do. And they do a good job.

I think, by and large, that they are, I don't know whether they are now but they used to be, I thought moved. Most of them were moved rather frequently which didn't allow them the time to really become acquainted with the district they were covering. But that's just an observation.

**Is there anything you would have changed in the way the parkway was designed or managed or your own work in soil conservation, knowing things you know now?**

Not really, not in the design or anything like that. No, no, no, no. I don't think anybody would. To me, that design there is remarkable. You couldn't build a parkway. There is no way to build a parkway of that length today. It couldn't be done. Cause I know there was a proposal to extend it into Georgia. And it ran afoul of so many things. You run into...

Land acquisition alone. We were exploring the proposed right of way down there one time and we came to a sign. And it had: "No Trespassing. Survivors will be prosecuted." (laughs)

### **That will frighten people.**

That was in north Georgia. Anyway when you think of that many miles to acquire of right of way. And some of it was within the city limits of Roanoke, for instance, and Asheville, too. But they did it at that time. Now, with all these developments around... I don't know any way in the world it could be done. And the price of land. Gee, a lot of it at that time was twenty dollars an acre, thirty dollars an acre that sort of thing. I don't know what (it is now). It just staggers my imagination to think... that mountain land now... Anyway it was sort of cheap then. Now, a lot of people want that mountain land just because of a view or something like that. And it's the most expensive land you can find. So I don't know...

### **What do you think can be done to maintain that parkway scene, or to keep the feeling?**

It's gonna be real difficult. They are gonna have to, in some places, acquire more land. The other thing they are going to have to do... It bothered me. I don't know what happened about it but the state of North Carolina, it seems to me (the state) passed some kind of law that they were going to pave and widen and put standard all the roads in the state.

But now there are any number of those roads in North Carolina crossing the parkway at grade. But they are limited in width to maybe fourteen feet. It could be twenty. I know it's not very much. And that's all they have. Now they somehow prevailed and persuaded I don't know the superintendent, I believe, that they were going to continue, that they were going to widen and they needed their standard width, which was so and so. Well, there is no way legally that the government the United States of America, can convey, I mean sell now, any such thing as right of way, or even give it away to the State of North Carolina.

The only way it can be done, and I wouldn't want to see them build those roads but if they do, (is to) have a grade separation. Otherwise if you widen them that way those lands out there will be exposed. And all kinds of developments will take place. That is the most dangerous thing, as far as I know, to maintaining the integrity of the parkway, is not to have that kind of thing happen. It's a bit scary.

### **What about the farms that are right up close to the parkway . I noticed in Virginia there are so many people in those farms, tending them.**

That's right. And I hope they stay there. I don't know what's going to happen to farming in generally. 'Cause small farms now are not very profitable to support a family. I can remember when a farm family could exist somehow doing farming.

Well, those mountain farmers are the most self-sufficient people in the world probably. They didn't buy very much other (food), than things like salt, sugar, as far as groceries are concerned. They just didn't buy much of anything. They produced it on the farm. With very little income they could bring up a family, pass the clothes on to one another. Some of them would go to school (and) become rather well educated. All because of the support of the small farm.

But small farms now, I don't know ...the other thing that is real troublesome, so much good land now is being taking out of farm now and (put) into development. As you know Raleigh now is spread out over twenty or thirty miles instead of just a few miles. These developments are covered with roads, streets and like that. And you get a whole lot more run off from your rainfall and so on like that, which gets more troublesome as far as flooding is concerned, for one thing. But it also takes (the) good farm land (that) is the easiest to develop and leave(s) some farm land that is not easy to develop. So the best farmland is being developed.

But people don't like zoning. I think, sometimes they are going to have to zone. And another thing now, of course, there are taxes. You get a farm that is worth three or four hundred thousand dollars market value near a city. Someone inherits and pays the taxes. Good golly, he'd have to borrow money to pay his taxes. Now I don't know enough about it to make a verdict. It's a dilemma.

But we have a new Secretary of Agriculture, a lady. And maybe she will get some good things done. But our government has to think (it) through. There has to be a lot of thinking done about it. But it's hard to get things through congress now to benefit the small family unit of farming. I hate to see it happen. It's troublesome to me. Especially everything about it,...

These farmers used to manage with very little, as far as expensive equipment is concerned. They had a team of horses, and a plow and a harrow. And a few small things like that that didn't cost much. But you go into farming now and you get a tractor that costs maybe twenty or thirty thousand dollars and you get a hay baler and some of these other machines you need. And first thing you know, you've got an investment of maybe a hundred thousand dollars. You don't use it very much. So it makes it very difficult for a small farmer to own that kind of equipment using it as little as he does, and still make a profit on the farm. And of course, there are these tax rates I don't know.

But anyway there are a lot of these little farms along the parkway there. And I think they are nice if you travel along and see them. I hope somehow that they stay there. And I like cattle. Living creatures add interest. There is something about them. Now of course, wild creatures are coming back. Deer, for instance I can remember the time you'd never see a deer. You go down some of those places now, around Doughton Park and so on, sometimes they run across the road in front of you. Any kind of life makes (the scene) more interesting.

**Tell me about the fences again. We talked about that in the beginning.**

There is more than one type, there is one called the crooked rail which doesn't require a post but is sort of a zigzag thing, a rail on top of a rail. That takes up lots of room. Sometimes it's hard to keep the weeds out of the corners and so on but I think they are very attractive. Then we had what they called post and rail. You have a post and you extend a rail from one post to another and

build it up with enough rails to make it as high as you need it. That makes a very attractive fence also. Fortunately we started treating the rails a good many years ago. But we already had some fences up that hadn't been treated. So I don't know how long those old chestnut rails will survive unless they are the ones that have been treated. So rail fence may be something that disappears. But I would like to see them stay. (But) I think on the parkway they add a lot.

**And you said that the engineers wanted to place them according to some type of formula?**

That's right. They wanted to place them a certain distance from the parkway motor road so that in mowing they would just have a straight one, two, or three swaths of mowing. That's very easy. But when you curve the fences around to fit into the topography of the land then they may have to come back and mow a place in one of those curves and less in another place and all that kind of thing. And it does cost a little more as far as the mowing is concerned.

But if you're going to have a parkway you shouldn't think too much about just exactly the strict economics of something all the time. You want to maintain it, yes. But you want to maintain something that's attractive and in keeping (with the landscape) instead of maintaining something that is *not* attractive and in keeping.

So, those (fences) I hope, I hope that they will continue. Now I don't know what they may be doing now. But I do know as far as mowing the slopes is concerned and so on now they are not mowing them the way they did back many years ago when you had a landscape architect in the field to direct the mowing operation.

**And you said that when you were out with the landscape architects in locating, putting up the fences, you did it by visual judgement?**

The fences? Yeah, I did most of that though. They trusted me. I knew what they wanted. I lived with (landscape architects). Now they taught me. I didn't teach them. But working with them ...you see its like Stanley Abbott said one time.

I said, "Maybe I need to know something about landscape."

He says, "No, it's just judgement, Bill." He says, "I don't care how you plan it. You know, you want to have something that's attractive. Look it over and see what's attractive." He says, "That's all there is to it."

And course, that isn't that all there is to it either. You get into some pretty knotty engineering involved and landscaping and all that kind of thing. I know that. Another thing about this, in the construction of the parkway, Stanley Abbott made sure that he always had a landscape architect on the job all the time. And they would want to save the trees and on certain slopes how they shaped them and all like that. That's a landscape architects job. And that's why the parkway (is the way it is).

But as I said, when you see how that motor road is blended in you don't even think, at least I don't think about it-- the construction. I don't notice anything about the construction part. It's just something that fits. I may be wrong but that's the way I see it.

Then some of the stones, cut stone... I don't know, Mr. Abbott had them

There are not too many places where you go right through solid stone but when he did I know some of them, he had them break it up so it wasn't just a block of solid stone.

**In what kind of situation would that be, where you are going through the mountain?**

Sometimes you had to make a cut through solid stone and instead of just making it like slicing a cake or something like that, he wanted it broken up so that it wasn't just one straight line of stone, is what I'm talking about. And I think it helped. And the other thing(s) are those beautiful bridges on the parkway. And some of them curve and all that kind of thing. But I mean I would never... I mean that took some doing to fit those stones so they don't. .. I don't know how to describe it but they are different sizes and all that sort of thing so its not a monotonous thing like putting brick together. And then when you do that and they curve that bridge that's...

**That's not a simple task.**

That's not a simple thing.

**That's art.**

That's when landscaping gets into engineering. But one thing about it though. In the Public Roads Administration the engineers were real good people And I know when I first started... I was put under the supervision of Stanley Abbott the resident landscape architect. I traveled with him sometimes with the Public Roads engineer Mr. Woodrow.

It was real educational to see an engineer and a landscape architect, to see how they could blend their professions together to create that roadway that we call the Blue Ridge Parkway. It had to be something different. If you just had an ordinary highway as some people might have envisioned to begin with from Rock Fish Gap, anyway Shenandoah National Park to the Great Smokies. Anyway if it had just been an ordinary highway, I think it would have been money sort of halfway wasted. Because this is not a roadway built for regular traffic like the road system in Virginia and North Carolina. It's something special for recreation and enjoyment for now and future generations. That's the other thing I always thought about. in trying to protect the fields that we had that we would lease to our farmers. You know, if it was just for you its one thing. But its supposed to be for ever so you don't want to let some farmer come out here and use that land in such a way that you lose that topsoil and eventually have something there that you just have to plant back to trees or something to protect you.

You've lost it. Any loss is something that you just don't want to tolerate.

**Well, do you feel that in your work that you were successful in turning around some of the losses?**

Well as I said, I think we really did. Because we inherited a whole lot of land, as you've seen from some pictures, some land that was already topsoil destroyed. But at least we brought it back into use. Now you can't build topsoil because I think it takes nature six or seven hundred years to add one inch. If you use it and abuse it and let it get away, its just gone. That's all there is to it.

Oh, we made a few mistakes. When I say we, the parkway. But the worst mistake is something

we've already discussed.. the culverts under the roadway just discharging water right out into wherever it might be.. I think its all been taken care of pretty well.

**Did you try to put some of those culverts to rest and take care of the drainage another way? What did you do?**

Well, we would divert the drainage by a ditch or something, like what you might call a terrace but a ditch really to carry it somewhere safe discharging into woodland. You're always pretty safe turning it into woodland. Anything else you just can't turn loose that much water across any open field. That's all there is to it. You just can't do it. Well I think its all been pretty well handled. I hope.

But one thing about all that. Any thing that you do, you got to maintain it and watch it. I guess they are doing real well. And I don't know that they have the money now.

Strange that an operation as big as the parkway gets less money, considering the size of it and all the amenities, than some of these small areas. Some of them get more money. They don't need a whole lot but when they have a staff that's larger... Well, I know that Booker T. Washington Monument up in Virginia they probably don't have over a few hundred visitors a year. Well, if you spend fifty or sixty or seventy thousand dollars a year for staff over there, you spend an awful lot of money for what you get, as far as the public is concerned.

But you see on the parkway you get I don't know how many millions of visitors a year. And in a sense, that visitor business is exaggerated. A lot of people just cross over that (traffic) counter and they may not be real visitors but they get counted. And in a way they're visitors. But they (the parkway) really get(s) a lot of visitors.

And I don't know whether they bother with snow removal or anything else like that now. All of those things are very expensive. I think sometimes way back we used to have some pretty big snows that we got in too much of a hurry to remove the snow. Because it was winter time and if you let 'em alone a week or so it would be gone anyway. We didn't entertain enough visitors that it would matter. A lot of those visitors would be just local visitors after you cleared your snow. I don't know. All those kind of things. Well, I shouldn't even be talking about it because I don't know enough about it really.

**Well, we're going to wind this down. I'm interested in what the values were that you held, and perhaps that other people held who were working, many different people in different professions, on the parkway. What made it gel?**

What made it important to us? Well, I had a feeling about the doggone thing, the parkway, that 'twas to be here... I always thought it was something that would be here forever, for everybody else, too.

I know the first time I drove on the parkway I was just a visitor. And I love mountains. And gee whiz, I know I was in some kind of a heaven almost, (to) see all those mountains. I just couldn't get enough of it.

And after a while you get the feeling that you want everybody to have that same experience that you have (had), forever and forever and forever.

And what I want to see them do is protect that parkway, the integrity of it and every other aspect of it, just as much as possible like it is rather than have something encroach to the extent that it will destroy some of those best exhibits that are there now. Because as I said, the parkway ought to be a window to the Blue Ridge Mountains. It should always be something that is protected.

And another thing, it has brought... Oh my what it has meant to those mountain areas, the money that has flowed from this Blue Ridge Parkway. It's meant thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars every year to those counties. And always will.

**What do you think are the premier places? You said there should be some places that just really ought to be protected and preserved along there.**

I think we don't have time to get into it. I don't know whether to add on anything or not. The parkway gets... the best of it. And some people have proposed it. I don't know whether you ought to expand (the parkway.

**Mr. Hope's daughter in law mentions that it is time for his dinner. The tape ends at this point.**

## **ADDENDUM 1**

**Below is a typed excerpt of a hand written letter written by William Hooper to Mary Myers, Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup> 2001**

Thank you Professor;

...I am still bothered by the unfortunate interruption. (The fire alarm going off in his building during the taped interview.) So bothered that I forgot to explain the use of Special Use Permits: Private use of Park Lands must (legally) be covered by Deed Reservation or by Permit. Adverse uses such as private roads, telephone and electric power lines, water lines or cattle lanes are described and illustrated by sketch on the permit along with restrictions or information. Annual fee is much higher for these permits, commensurate with the use, than the fee for conforming agriculture. The agricultural use is described along with restrictions and the contributions of maintenance of fences or other facilities if necessary. Rotation of crops, pasturing or harvesting hay along with fertilization and land practices are described as features of the contract.

I am not familiar or informed about all the details of the agricultural uses since my retirement but I was informed by certain Parkway employees that the Special Use Permit had been abandoned entirely for use of small parcels with low annual fees in favor of a verbal agreement (By whom and how managed I don't know). On larger parcels with higher fees, a permit is still issued. This is patently wrong even if it was legal. Some permittees are thus charged a fee and others use the land free of charge and free of any particular obligation for using the land properly.

I can't overemphasize the need for strict comprehensive use of all legal means to protect the integrity of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Again, I insist that any widening or further opening of public roads across the Parkway Right of Way should and must be permitted only be grade separation with no access to the Parkway motor road. The State cannot condemn and take or purchase widening of the right-of-way without legal arrangement with the Park Service.

The beautiful ground cover on Mount Mitchell in 1940 was something to behold – it was Shamrock...

It was a memorable pleasure to chat with you.

Bill

p.s. We found in the Smart View area, way out front on the right entrance the pungent Ramps that are featured in the Carolina mountains in the Festival of Ramps.

## **ADDENDUM 2**

**Typed excerpt of a hand written letter written by William Hooper to Mary Myers, April 22, 2001 and sent to Mary Myers with his revisions to the original transcript**

Dear Professor,

Hastily—rather than carefully, I have reviewed the transcription and added a few notes. I'm sorry that my oral talents are so seriously impaired by memory and age. At this moment, I cannot sit long to write.

Ramps are perennials with some resemblance to the leek, not at all like the onion. My poor memory will not furnish a good description of the plant that seemed to prefer a moist habitat. I'm sure that I saw them about fifty years ago on the right side of the entrance road at Smart View. I imagine that you have somehow heard of a "ramp festival". Ramp eaters never catch a cold because no one gets near them.

Warm good wishes,

Bill Hooper