

Log of Interview with Jackie Holt, Curator for Blue Ridge Parkway

Location: Park Service Headquarters

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Interview by: Philip (Ted) Coyle

Logged by: Philip E. (Ted) Coyle (tape is speeded up as a result of the use of a variable speed tape-deck. Log is calculated using the standard speed)

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Jackie Holt Interview 10/16/2002

Transcribed by Travis Bugg, anthropology student at WCU

Checked by Philip E. Coyle

This interview was conducted by Philip E. (Ted) Coyle during one of Jackie Holt's last days on the job. After nine years as curator for the BLRI, she had recently taken a job at Colonial National Park. She had been working with me over the previous days, showing me around the Curatorial Management Facility, that she had been one of her priorities during her time at the BLRI. Later I talked with Richard Starnes, an historian at Western Carolina University, who used to teach at Mars Hill and did research at the BLRI. He said that the papers used to be housed in a closet in the BB and T building, so this was quite an accomplishment on her part. The interview was somewhat rushed, as she was trying to get a lot of things done in her final days on the job. It took place in an unoccupied corner of the office space downstairs at the Hemphill Knob headquarters of the BLRI. Coyle: ...and this is...

Jackie Holt: Jackie Holt. I'm the park curator with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Coyle: Spell your... "correct spelling of your name and your birthdate!"

Holt: [giggles] J-A-C-K-I-E H-O-L-T

Coyle: My name is Philip E. Coyle and I am called Ted and I work at Western Carolina University. It is October 16, 2002. We are at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters, and we are talking about the oral history project that is just now getting underway, that you proposed initially...

Holt: Umm hmm

C: ...And earlier today you were saying that one of the reasons that you wanted to do the project was that you thought that you, that the Blue Ridge Parkway was repeating itself.

H: Well, I worked on the parkway for nine years. I came here in 1993, and working with the Blue Ridge Parkway archives for so long, I have been reading a lot of historic research studies, and oral histories, and transcribing. I just...it just seemed to me that we were interviewing the same people, that we were doing the same type of reports, and that there was so much more history of the parkway out there that we were missing and I just felt that we needed to bring people in to do that sort of research. Unfortunately, the park staff...We don't have the time to really do, you know, research, this sort of thing. That's why I put in a project statement. I actually put in two project statements. I put one in for an ethnographic assessment, and then I put one in for an oral history project, and what Tony Paredes did was he combined them into one large project. I see this as going on for years. I really do.

C: I remember you gave me a copy of the first project, which was the ethnographic assessment, and I have that, which was number 56812. The other one which was the oral history project that you were talking about, that was number 56827, and so you see it going on for years?

H: I do. There's just so much information out there that we're not really aware of, I feel. Well, there are so many people that worked on the Parkway. So many different groups. So many organizations. There was the CCC, of course, the Civilian Conservation Corps, which, you know, we tended to interview quite a few of those men, but there was also...it was a WPA project, you know. There was a Bureau of Public Roads. They were...[they] worked with the parkway. There was the State of North Carolina. There was the State of Virginia. There were private contractors. So there were, you know, and of course the National Parks Service. So there were just so many different organizations and they all worked together to build this road and it took fifty years to build it. So you've got a lot of...a lot of background.

C: Is there, is, was your idea to do this...was it related to the general management planning or was it separate?

H: It was not. I hadn't...I had submitted the project statements a long time before I had realized the general management plan. Larry Van Horne, who was with Denver Service Center, was the one that said, "Hey you need to get this stuff into the general management plan"

C: Larry Van Horne is like an ethnographer for the National Parks Service, a cultural resource person?

H: You know, I don't know. He's a cultural resource person, I don't know his title, but he is going to be doing the cultural section of the general management plan [inaudible] I have been working very closely with him.

C: Well one of the things earlier, we were over at your archives which are near the VA hospital near Wrightsville Road in Asheville. Maybe you could talk a little bit about setting those archives up, or the history of those archives. You said it's been a six-year process to get those archives established.

H: It's been a six-year project. The Parkway archives were originally catalogued as, I said, for about 1987. During 1990 we have approximately four hundred linear feet of catalogue archival material, and then I've been collecting material for the nine years that I've been here. The archives pretty much give the history of the Blue Ridge Parkway from the beginning. The development and the management of the Blue Ridge Parkway. I think we are one of the few National Parks that actually has such a good archives that we were able to keep all these items. What really happened was that a culture resource specialist that was here in the 1970's and 1980's felt that a lot of items were being thrown away that were really important. So he's the one that actually contracted with the regional office to have them catalogued.

C: Do you remember that person's name?

H: Art Allen. Yes, he still lives in Asheville. I would highly recommend talked to Art. He retired from the parkway...um, let me think...about eight years ago, right after I got here I guess. He's very active with the Southern Highland Craft Guild. So, I would highly recommend talking to him.

C: A whole other area. The whole Folk Art Center...

H: I'm not familiar with the Southern Highland Craft Guild, but yes a Folk Art Center, a whole other area that you should probably do. [laughs]

C: As I feel overwhelmed...So one of the things we were looking at in the archives was a 1996 project. Was it 96 or 97?

H: It was 96. An oral history project? You know I just started that because I got a grant, just a very small grant, a five thousand dollar grant from Eastern National. As you know, five thousand dollars doesn't go very far for oral history projects, and I was able to work with Radford University and Mars Hill College. I hired graduate students and they actually went out and did the interviews for me. I also hired someone to do the transcribing. We really just went out and did oral histories until the money ran out, is how we did it. It wasn't, it probably wasn't as professionally done as it should have been. I was just, sort of, by myself and trying to make sure that...but I think we came out with some pretty decent oral history. We focused more...I was looking more at age because there were so many people out there that we had not gotten their stories, but I was really looking towards CCC and construction people and Park service people that worked on the Parkway from the beginning, from the thirties into the forties... before World War II, because I knew that unfortunately we had very little time to get this done, and nobody had done it before. There was also an oral history project in the 70s from a Park historian, Andy Pardos, who went out and he interviewed a number of people. But he interviewed, it looked to me like he did a lot of interviews

of people from specific areas of the Parkway such as Mabry Mill, Doughton Park, that sort of thing. So we were very lucky that he did all those. We do have the tapes and transcriptions in the archives of the work he did. In the 1970s, I believe it was 75 or 76, the American Folklife Center...

C: Oh right, of course, I looked at that. I looked that up after our meeting.

H: I have that information here, I need to give that to you. I forgot all about that. They did a project that focused on the communities around the North Carolina/Virginia border, around the Galax community. And they did an incredible, huge project and they oral histories, they got tapes of music, they did...um...there was a book that was published. There was an album that was sold.

C: Sacred Song, or something like that.

H: Yeah, it was incredible, and there were all these photographs and slides and transcriptions. All sorts of things came out of this project. A copy was sent to the Park and I can't find it. [laughs] I found a few little slides and some transcriptions in our Park library, but apparently it was split up. But, the whole set is still at the Library of Congress, so you do have access to it. I think they, I'm not positive, but I believe their focus was more on local culture, you know, local crafts and music and cooking. That sort of thing is what they looked at, but it is a great, great resource.

C: I have a student, a grad student in the History department, and I said, "Rob, if you want a good project, it's to go up to the Folklife Center and ingratiate yourself with them through this project and then pull some of that stuff, make copies and bring it back to the Parkway. It's quite an institution up there.

C: Do you remember that person?

H: But getting back to the question...I guess you asked me how the archives got started. Really, I didn't start the archives, they were already catalogued when I got here. But they were in an abandoned building for a number of years and I just worked really hard, as you probably know in the Park Service it's very difficult to get funds for things because you have to compete with all other parks. So we all have to compete for the funding and I was able to start to get funding about six years ago. And we just got like twenty-five thousand dollars here, and thirty thousand here, and fifty thousand here. So we just went around and we got the security system installed, we got the sprinkler system and we just did it in little bits and pieces until we finally were able to get a real state-of-the-art storage facility. Hopefully the next curator that comes on board will be able to move into the office and get it set up and have a small research area where people can come and really look into the archives. It's been difficult to help people for the past few years because I want our archives to be used. I want researchers to come and look at the archives. So its...hopefully in the next year or two that will be all settled.

C: Well, speaking of the next year or two, you were talking about how there is a cataloguing project that's going on.

H: Yes, we received funding last year and this year to do what we call a backlog catalogue project. Those involve correspondence reports, photographs, postcard, and things we have collected since I've been here. The majority of these items came from Park records. We are also trying to catalogue the original linens of the Parkway development plans and landscape maps that are in our engineering division that have never been catalogued. We are working on that. We've got them interleaved in paper and that sort of thing. ...because they are incredibly historic.

C: Somebody's going to want those in the future.

H: Oh yeah, absolutely. We have...you should probably go through this, too, when you do your research, we have land use files that are back here in our division. Incredibly historic material. They date back from the thirties on up to the present. They are in sections. I don't know if you are familiar with the Parkway, but the Parkway, when it was developed it was cut up into sections.

There was 1-A, 1-B, 1-C, then 2-A, 2-B, and that's how they built it. This is all the original correspondence on anything that has to do with any land issues. The problem with it is that the staff here need to have access to that. It is definitely much working files. So we haven't quite figured out yet what we are going to do. If there is any way that we can get copies in the archives or if there is any way we can get the originals in the archives but the staff still have access to it. So that is another thing that we've been trying to figure out. The regional curators have been helping us with that, too.

C: So where are those located?

H: They're here in the RPPS division, down here. So as you can see there is a lot of material on the Parkway. We are still trying to get a lot of it in the archives as we go along.

C: One aspect of the archives that you talked about is that there is some material that was moved recently from Eastern Tennessee State University. Could you talk more about that?

H: Those were the archives that were catalogued in the 80s and we just didn't really have a home for them. We were in the middle of construction with the new archives, so we sent them.... Well, the historian that worked ETSU at the time said "I think we have some room in our Park Library," I'm sorry, "our school library, see if you can put them in there temporarily." So we did. They were over there for about two and a half years. And then we had to bring them back to the park, so they would be in the park.

C: That must have been somewhat annoying...two and a half years...

H: Well it was, and I was really worried about them for a long time, but now that we've got...especially since there were contractors in and out of here, that now that we've got a security system and we've got an HVAC system functioning, I'm not quite as concerned about that, so...

C: So, yeah. I guess you would want everything in that climate-controlled archive anyway. So it's probably for the best.

H: Yes. They're OK now...I hope! [laughs]

C: Yes, we always wonder about these sprinkler systems. "Don't just start going off!"

H: Exactly. That's what I'm worried about, if they haven't turned the water on yet.

C: Well, I see that your catalogued archives are sort of to the back of the...

H: They're...yeah...um...They should have plastic over them, but it's difficult to have access to them. But we're getting space savers.

C: Yeah. that's what you were saying.

H: So that will give them a little more protection.

C: And those space savers, those are on their way?

H: We're going to get them this year. We haven't ordered them yet, we've got a plan. I've already been working with our local company. So they will probably be installed within the next year.

C: What else would you like to talk about with the archives specifically? What else needs to be known?

H: Well, I guess I would recommend talking to Paul Rodgers in the regional office about the archival material that hasn't been catalogued yet, and see if there is a way that you can still have access to it, and be able to write...I guess you really should talk to Paul.

C: Right, about how I'm going to go through all that material while not getting in his way with the cataloguing process that he's working on.

H: Right, right. I guess our problem now is that everything is so temporary. Its like temporary shelving, so there won't be any...someone will just have to go back with you.

C: Yeah. What are your plans with those big museum cases that you have in there.

H: Oh, we actually have a pretty good size museum collection of objects. We have a number of murals. We have furniture. We have small household items. Items that have been on exhibit off and on over the years. So, those are in temporary storage now, too. They are located in a house in one of our maintenance areas, and they'll be moved over there. So we also have a number of natural history specimens. We have two large herbarium collections. I don't know if you are familiar with the inventory and monitoring program that the National Parks Service is doing right now. They're going around inventorying natural history collections in most of the National Parks. There will be a large collection from that project that will go into it. So it's not just archives.

C: So, it's the back room of the museum, sort of. Not just the archives.

H: Pretty much. Pretty much. It's typical national park service storage facility. It's got a little bit of everything. [laughs]

C: Well, let me kind of change the subject on you and ask you about your background before you got here.

H: I had a degree in historic preservation from Southeast Missouri State University, and I've been working for the National Parks Service since I graduated from college. I wasn't planning on it. I just sort of fell in. I did my internship at the Harry S. Truman house, in Kansas City. I'm originally from Kansas City, and worked there and really liked it and started out as a seasonal interpretive ranger. And then I was able to become a seasonal museum technician at the Truman Home. Then I went and worked seasonally as a museum technician for two years at Grand Canyon. I catalogued mostly archeological material. That's what I did.

C: There's plenty of that out there.

H: There is a lot of archeological material out there.

C: I got my degree from the University of Arizona, so that's close to my heart, that part of the country.

H: Oh, did you. Oh, ok. In Flagstaff?

C: In Tucson, Arizona.

H: Oh, that's Northern Arizona.

C: But NAU is a great school.

H: Actually David Anderson is a great architect. He and his wife both graduated from Tucson. You'll have to talk to them.

C: Nice.

H: But, I was there for two years, and then I got my first permanent position with the Park Service at Abraham Lincoln down in Springfield. I was the curator there for about two years, because I average two years every park. Then I went from the Lincoln Home down to Andersonville, Georgia. I was the curator at both Andersonville National Historic Site and Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. I was there for about a year and a half, two years. Both two different Parks, Andersonville was interesting because it was a prisoner of war camp, which you probably know, during the civil war. The Jimmy Carter Home, the Jimmy Carter Site was just getting started. That was kind of exciting, and then I came up to the Parkway. I've been here for nine years. Now I'm going to Colonial.

C: Well talk about that. Going to Colonial.

H: Going to Colonial. I'm going to be the curator of Jamestown. That should be really exciting. It's a large collection going back to a lot of archeology again. But I understand they're working now on a four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, which is going to be in 2007. So that is pretty much what we will be looking at. It should be pretty exciting.

C: Now you got your degree in Historic Preservation before you had worked for the Park.

H: Yes.

C: So, may I ask you, what got you interested in that in the first place?

H: I always, since a kid, I've always been fascinated with history. My father's an architect. My parents have always been history buffs growing up. When we went on vacation, we'd go to places like Williamsburg and we went to Washington, DC, and we'd always go to these, and my father loves old houses, and so we would always do that sort of thing. I've always been fascinated with it. I went to school for a while and I didn't really know what I wanted to do and I knew I wanted to get into some sort of history. But I didn't really want to teach, so I was just looking up things one day and I noticed a Historical Preservation degree. This is in 1982, I guess. It was still pretty new. There were only two or three schools out there that you could actually get a degree in this, an undergraduate degree. One was Middle Tennessee State, which I think was the first. One was Southeast Missouri State, and being in Missouri then, I decided to go there. We were one of the first classes to actually graduate with a degree in Historic Preservation. Yeah, I did my internship at Southeast Missouri with the National Parks Service. So that's how I got involved. Now, I understand quite a few graduates from that program have gone on to work with the National Parks. I believe the curator at Lincoln House and Stone River and a few other Parks have gotten some.

C: Do you know if they've moved on to have a graduate program?

H: I believe they do have a graduate program.

C: I'll have to send some of my students out there. That's an interesting opportunity for people.

H: It is. It's just a little bit different. Of course you still take a lot of American history. For example, when I was there we actually constructed an old log cabin. It had been dismantled, and we moved it, we were building a little village in an area we could interpret for students. We were out there I remember one really hot summer, it was a summer class, putting logs up, you know. It was very hands-on. It was really neat. The internship program is great because it's required through a semester. That's where to me you really get... that's where I decided I wanted to be going to a museum to work.

C: Do you think that there are internship possibilities here at the Blue Ridge Parkway?

H: Yes. I've had a couple of interns from Southeast Missouri, and yes, absolutely. I don't think the Parks Service could survive without volunteers and interns because they do so much work and they help us out so much. That's how the interns help. Unfortunately, we don't have... we can't pay them a salary right now.

C: Or even a stipend, there's no money at all?

H: Sometimes there is and sometimes there isn't. I had two students from UNCA who worked here for two years. They just completed their work here, and I was able to bring them on. But I had gotten funding to inventory our restore our historic photographs.

C: I see.

H: So it depends on the project.

C: Now those photographs, are they in the archive?

H: They are actually now here in our file room. They will be moved over there. We're going to have a separate photo room, media room. Temperature controlled. But they're here, and you can have access to them.

C: Those photographs are so neat. I love seeing them and all of the publications and everything.

H: Oh, we've just got...we've got over twelve thousand photographs.

C: That's incredible. That's a huge resource.

H: Someone did a heck of a big job years ago, and we were able to get them inventoried. They were all in the old library system. You could flip through them, but it took a little longer. We'd

like to get a lot of it scanned. One of our goals at the Park is to get a lot of these scanned and put on our website so the public will have access to them.

C: So they can steal them right there.

H: That's true.

C: So, you know, someone will be hired to replace you, we hope, soon. What would you think would be the top qualification for such a person, knowing what you do, having worked here for nine years?

H: To be able to work independently. It would probably be best to hire someone who's already worked in a National Park. This is a very complex collection, it's a very large collection. Not only do we have two storage areas, but we have living history sites, and we have the Minerals Museum, which is going to be a brand new exhibit. We have two Visitor's Center exhibits. So we've got a number of items on exhibit and everything spread out over 469 miles so you'd be doing a lot of traveling. Really, someone who can just walk in and take over the collection.

C: So there is a lot of responsibility.

H: A lot of responsibility and there's no staff. This is it. You're by yourself. So be able to hire volunteers, or get volunteers, or get interns as you mentioned. If your school is interested in an internship program, that would be wonderful.

C: Well it just seems that one of the things that's neat about the Parkway particularly, because it has all these different facets, you know, ethnographic, historic, environmental, is that there is room for a lot of different types of people to work here. Not to mention things like Criminal Justice majors, you know, and to be working with Park Rangers.

H: Yeah, and I know the interpreters are looking for interns, and our natural resource specialist people are looking for interns. For example, I just had someone from UNCA that worked here, who was a Biology major. What he did, he inventoried slides, but they were flower slides. So at the same time he was able to identify a lot of these for me. You know there is a lot of different kinds of things and he wasn't really planning on going into a curatorial museum when he graduated, but he had fun and he was able to get some college credit...

C: And you got some work done.

H: ...and I got work done. The Park Service will really work with schools. We need help.

C: How about The Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway or the Foundation? Have you worked with them much?

H: I have not worked with The Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway at all. The Parkway Foundation, Dr. Houck Medford, I have worked with him. He has supported the archives quite a bit over the years. He actually...we had this whole system set up. He has been locating items on Ebay for me and purchasing them, and then donating them to the Parkway, such as postcards books and things that I really don't have time to look for. We really can't afford them. So it's been kind of nice. He's very interested in oral histories.

C: That would be somebody to talk to.

H: He is somebody to talk to and I think maybe he would be somebody that could possibly get some funding for us. That's really what they're there for. To help us out on these projects, but I've never worked with Friends of the Parkway. I've never really dealt with them.

C: It seems, just looking at the brochures, that their missions kind of overlap and I don't quite understand the difference between them.

H: I'll be honest with you, I don't either. That's not part of my job. That's something that Gary can probably help you with, but I don't really know much about it.

C: Well one person that is closer to your mission has been this person called Lester Wood that you were talking about.

H: Oh, well, Lester. He's a maintenance guy at Rocky Knob, which is right outside of Floyd, Virginia, close to Meadows of Dan.

C: Beautiful.

H: Oh, it's gorgeous there. It's one of my favorite part of the Parkway. He has been, I don't know how old he is, I'd say in his fifties probably, but his family I guess has lived in that area for quite a few generations. He's been working with me on a project, we actually have the funding to hire, I think our regional historian is going to be doing this work, to do research on this cemetery, that supposedly a slave cemetery. It's actually hooked on to a white cemetery of a Baptist Church in Meadows of Dan. The church, he's a member of the church, and unfortunately the church members don't really want to talk because they're embarrassed about it, and we understand that. It's a sensitive issue, and what happened was that apparently these graves were marked at one time with field stones. This is where it gets kind of tricky. In the forties, apparently, either the church members moved the field stones, or the maintenance staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway moved them because it's sort of in a big field. Where the property line goes we're not really sure, that's one thing we need to work on. We moved the stones because we were tired of mowing. So, there is a gentleman who has been putting all of this on his website and has become very critical of the Parkway, saying that we did all this in the past and we need to do something about it. Unfortunately, it's not that the Blue Ridge Parkway doesn't want to do anything about it, we just don't have a lot of background information. What we'd like to do is possibly, of course, replace the stones. We're going to bring an archeologist in to determine where these graves are, so we would be able to locate them. But we don't know if we can determine who's buried there. That's a problem.

C: Do you know this person's name, off the top of your head, the one who's been critical?

H: No. I have the file over there. I can bring you the file.

C: Another issue you've been talking about, similar, is this CCC camp in Galax that you mentioned to me.

H: There is... as I mentioned before, there were four CCC camps on the Parkway, and I was able to find men who were at the CCC camps from the other three. This particular camp I really was not able to locate any men. I even put ads in the newspapers, I went to the CCC Alumni Association, I said please put this in your monthly newsletter and they did, and nobody came forward. This was an African American CCC camp and from what I can determine, Dr. Jolley did some work on this. You might be able to talk to him about it. We also found some information on the CCC camp. It was a little... It was controversial. To have an African American in this part of the country, but apparently they got along quite well. I don't mean to put down anybody in Galax, but I went some historians in the area, I went to the local library, and nobody knew anything about it. So I don't know what ever happened. It was also a conscientious objector camp during the war, too. I do have a gentleman, William Van Hoy, who I talk to who was a Quaker.

C: Not the Van Hoy's of Fiddler's Grove Van Hoys?

H: I don't know. He's... I guess it's quite a large... I can't remember what community he's from. It's in the archives.

C: Union Grove, could it be?

H: That sounds familiar. I talk to him on the phone, he's just so funny. I love talking to him.

C: So William Van Hoy you say?

H: William Van Hoy, and he was a conscientious objector. He worked there and so he gave us a

big background on why the camp was there and what they did during the war. That was their contribution. Apparently they had to sign up for the duration of the war. They...A lot of the construction stopped during World War II, but they still did a lot of landscaping, and they built some roads and made some side-roads, and built some of the maintenance yards and things like that. That's what he said that's really what they did during the time.

C: That would be interesting...

H: Fascinating person, you really need to talk to him, he's just incredible.

C: Well both of these people sort of represent perhaps future directions. Like immediate future directions that you may have gone had you stayed here. Can you think of other ones?

H: Well we've never spoken to the Cherokee about their feelings on the Parkway. No one has ever spoken to them. I don't even know where to start in the Cherokee community. I'm sure that there were men and women there who were around when we constructed the Parkway. I would also talk to Marsha Bowers, who is a ranger. She's a law enforcement ranger in our Balsam office. She's in that area. Her family's from that area, and I think she might be able to lead you to people you can talk to. She knows a lot about the area.

C: Is that B-a...?

H: B-o-w-e-r-s. Marsha. She's very familiar with this area. Apparently, she called me about a year or so ago, I think her grandparents or great-grandparents, I can't remember, owned a cabin or some property that I think the parkway received. I would look at local communities like Little Switzerland. I would look at local communities such as Glenville Falls, especially famous for [inaudible] Rock House, which is on the National Register. I assisted a historian a few years ago in getting that on the National Register. Definitely talk to the Tortino family. Frank Tortino lives in Fairview. He and his family and numerous others, Italian stone masons they were. They came before World War II, and I think some of them stayed. I think the Tortino family is still in business in Asheville, and they built the stone...they did all the stone work on the Parkway. Just about all of it, I believe they did all of it. They did the bridges and the culverts, and they even did the headquarters. So, we've never spoken to them. Frank Tortino, I've spoken to him on the phone. I asked him if he would have a problem with somebody interviewing him and he said no, he'd love to talk to someone. His mind is just so sharp.

C: These are the interviews we like. We like to interview people who want to be interviewed.

H: He wants to be interviewed. He came over here as a young man, still has a...he's hard to talk to because he has a heavy accent, still, even though he's been here for many years. He came over here when he was fifteen or sixteen years old. His uncle brought him over. He was like, "I thought I was gonna be working on this big four-lane highway and here I am working on this little tiny road called the Blue Ridge Parkway." But anyway, they are fascinating and nobody's ever talked to them.

End of side one/beginning of side two

H: No I'm sorry, they're Spanish.

C: Oh, the Tortino's are Spanish.

H: I got that turned around.

C: Apparently there is some division between the Spanish and Italian stone masons?

H: Yes, there is. Well, a lot of people thought they were Italian, I understand it was kind of a combination of Italian and Spanish, and some people do take offense to that. [laughs]

C: I'll try to avoid.

H: From what I understand. But, no. Mr. Tortino is a very nice man and he would like to talk to you.

C: So that is some great tips right now. What about further north? Can you think of... It must be hard to get up all the way up there. You know, Peaks of Otter and areas like that.

H: Well, about one a month...

C: Really? Do you really? That's incredible.

H: There's one farm that we would love to get more background on. There's actually an oral history in the archive that I've never had a chance to read and that's called the Saunders Farm.

C: That's what I was thinking...

H: Yeah, and that's in the Peaks of Otter area and I would recommend going to the local maintenance guys and asking them to take you out there. It's just the most fascinating farm. It's an old cabin. The family lived there until the 40s. And apparently, I'm not really sure exactly when the family moved in, but it was either during or right after the Civil War. And it's one of the only black farms in the area, but it got along quite well with their neighbors. And what's really fascinating about this farm is that they did what's called terrace farming? Are you familiar with terrace farming?

C: Yes I am!

H: And you can still see the rock walls. It's just an incredible site, I always go to that when I get up there. And luckily nobody's found it yet.

C: This would be my pet interpretive axe to grind, if I have one. Would be to actually interpret some of the different farming practices

H: It's just fascinating. And why we have not interpreted it, I have no clue.

C: People say that the land was degraded, and the Parkway sort of saved the land. But I'm sure that there would be a range of farming practices and that would be something to look at.

H: Sure, sure. Well there were some farmers around here that were successful, but I don't know... I have heard that, I have seen photographs. If you go into historic photograph collection, especially talk to Laura about this, because she's done some research on it. She's taken like before and after shots. She's taken shots now of the Parkway and compared them to older photographs from the thirties. You can really see the difference. I mean the ground is just... all the trees are gone... it was just wiped out. And we really brought it back to its natural state.

C: Well, I think... one of my suspicions here is that one of the reasons that the land abused was because of the depression. A lot of people had to go back into farming. So they needed to overwork the land because there was no other options for them at that time. Here I am, grinding my axe already. I know that you have an appointment in just a few minutes.

H: Yes I do.

C: You were talking about the use of tapes. Archival quality tapes.

H: Oh, gosh. When I did the oral history in '96, '95, I used 60-minute cassette tapes. And I know that the park service likes to do reel-to-reel. Patty said that we have a reel-to-reel player in the park. I didn't know that. It probably hasn't been used in twenty years. The reason that they reel-to-reel is because it's the only, so far it's the only thing that lasts a long time. But unfortunately I think we don't have enough good players. One of my problems is that I guess we have a player, but I don't know that we have anything that... I assuming that there are people out there that we can take the reel-to-reel tape that we have in the park and convert them. But it becomes expensive and becomes time-consuming. I don't mind CD. Everyone's like "why don't we put everything on CD now?" Well, that's fine, but from an archivist's point of view, are CD's going to be around in twenty or thirty years? We don't know, because technology just keeps moving so quickly and that's become

a big problem. So that's why we like plain old fashion paper. You know, write everything down.

C: You could always optically scan it later on.

H: You can. That's why archivists... they don't really like to change that much because we just don't know if it's still going to be right. For example, when I got here, I had all these tapes on beta. I had to go and have them changed. It gets expensive. It's time consuming.

C: Do that every ten or fifteen years.

H: You have to do that every ten to fifteen years. So that's why. I would recommend talking to Paul Rodgers and seeing what his point of view is. Seeing if there's something we could do. If you wanted to make a working copy, that would probably be ok. What I would recommend...

C: A working copy? Talk about that.

H: Well, I guess when I mean a working copy, I like to have the original in the archives, and not really use. Then you make a copy for duplication purposes or for staff use...

C: Transcription, maybe?

H: Transcription and that sort of thing. That's what I did. I always made two copies of everything.

C: Now where are those tapes? When you were showing me that oral history stuff from 1996...

H: They are in the back room in the archives. They're, when you go in the back room, take a right, and there are some wire shelves in the corner. They're right there.

C: So they're separate, archived separate from the transcriptions.

H: No. All the tapes and transcriptions are all together in those boxes. They are all labeled. So they are all right there, so you can have access to everything. I can't guarantee that the tapes work, because I have not had a chance to listen to them. A lot of them are over twenty years old. Some of them may be ok, some of them not. I found them in a box and they weren't in the best of shape.

C: Well it's coming on time, so let me ask you, obviously one of the things we talked about was release forms earlier today. So you understand that this interview is going to be transcribed and it's going to be archived for the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge Parkway. Do you give your consent to release this form to the National Parks Service?

H: Yes I do.

C: Thank you very much. This concludes side one, tape one of my interview with Jackie Holt at the National Park Service on October 16th, 2002.