

National Park Service (NPS) History Collection

NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)
Harpers Ferry Center's 40th Anniversary Oral History Project



Cindy Darr
June 16, 2010

Interview conducted by Michele Hartley

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Interview with: Cindy Darr

Interview by: Michele Hartley, NPS Employee

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START OF TAPE 1

M. Hartley:	00:00	... 11.
Audio Tech:	00:00	12.
M. Hartley:	00:01	Okay, so somewhere I missed my 10. Dave Wright.
Cindy:	00:07	Betsy? Didn't you just have Betsy?
M. Hartley:	00:08	Dave Wright. We just had Betsy.
Cindy:	00:10	Nancy Haack?
M. Hartley:	00:10	Ah, thank you.
Cindy:	00:11	Mm-hmm (affirmative).
M. Hartley:	00:12	That was it. Is Hannah here?
Cindy:	00:22	No.
M. Hartley:	00:23	Okay. I thought she was coming.
Cindy:	00:24	She's working today.
M. Hartley:	00:25	Oh, okay. I don't think we got a lot of visitors to the movies.
Cindy:	00:31	No?

M. Hartley: 00:32 I heard it was pretty dead.

Cindy: 00:34 Well, probably-

M. Hartley: 00:34 I haven't been paying attention, but I think it was just too--
It was so nice out, actually.

Cindy: 00:39 I know, and then when people started conversing and just
everything, it was really fun-

M. Hartley: 00:43 Yeah.

Cindy: 00:44 --telling old stories.

M. Hartley: 00:48 I'll prompt you.

Cindy: 00:49 Okay. So you just finished Betsy?

M. Hartley: 00:54 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Cindy: 00:54 Okay.

M. Hartley: 00:55 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Audio Tech: 00:55 Okay, we're rolling.

M. Hartley: 00:57 Okay, so I'm here with Cindy, and I just want to confirm
that it's okay we're recording our interview.

Cindy: 01:04 Yes.

M. Hartley: 01:04 Thank you. Cindy, if you wouldn't mind telling us your
name and the positions that you've held at the center.

Cindy: 01:14 Okay, my name is Cindy Darr, and previously, Cindy
Morton, when I started working here at the center. And I
started working here in the end of '76, which was the
Bicentennial year. Started in an upward mobility position
as the photographer, still photographer, and I set type, and
worked in the darkroom.

Cindy: 01:43 And from that job, I progressed to an exhibit specialist, and
produced exhibits. From there, I later became the branch
chief of exhibit production, and then the deputy chief of
exhibits, and then left there in 2002, left the exhibit group,
started the project management work group, with Peggy

O'Dell, and then later became the workflow logistics and creative options manager. And currently, now, the position I'm in is the associate manager for workflow and project management, soon to be the director of media services. So I had several jobs over a very long career.

- M. Hartley: 02:29 Yeah, well, if you wouldn't mind, how old were you when you started to work here?
- Cindy: 02:34 Well, when I started with the Park Service, I was 17. I was a senior in high school. And my guidance counselor asked, "Would you like to work for the Park Service?" So I went to Boonsboro High School. And not knowing much about the Park Service, and of course I said yes. So I didn't start in this building initially. I started at Mather Training Center.
- M. Hartley: 02:56 I think they're breaking down the tent, so we're just going to... It is what it is.
- Audio Tech: 03:00 Okay.
- M. Hartley: 03:00 Yeah, yeah, I think you can't avoid that, so, sorry.
- Cindy: 03:05 No, that's okay.
- M. Hartley: 03:07 Okay, so you were working at Mather?
- Cindy: 03:10 I started at Mather Training Center as a GS-1. So I've gone from a GS-1 to a 14, so that's almost hitting every step of the way through, what, 5 and 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14. But, yes, started as a GS-1, and I worked for a professor from Texas A&M. He was here on a detail for the National Park Service. He also instructed at--taught at Shepherd College.
- Cindy: 03:38 And so I would sometimes audit some of his classes there and worked for him in then this other position, because then I started going to school. I continued to work but then started taking classes, because I was going to go to the Art Institute before. Then he asked me to stay with the Park Service, and so I did.
- Cindy: 04:01 Started taking photography classes and a lot of classes. And then the job came open in exhibit production for typographer and a photographer. And so I applied and was

selected for that job. And that was an upward mobility position.

- M. Hartley: 04:17 And where were you physically located in the building?
- Cindy: 04:21 I was on the bottom floor, which is the first floor. Right now, it's our OIM central. That's where I worked for five, six years in the darkroom, and I did all of the camera work for every group here. Even though I worked for exhibits, I did a lot of publications work also.
- Cindy: 04:38 I set all of the type for all of the exhibits that we produced in-house. So I was a typesetter, and then I also produced film positives, and did screen printing, and then did the copy camera, making those film positives, and doing all types of copy reproduction, and then started doing--Then we started as the Bicentennial happened, and we stopped doing all of the work in-house, because--And that started with exhibits first, because as the Park Service grew, the need for media grew, and so we couldn't produce everything in-house. So we started contracting out.
- Cindy: 05:17 And so I continued with my education all the way through and started then overseeing contracts. I would detail drawings, as a producer, worked hand-in-hand with the designer and take their drawings, actually do the detailing myself. Wow.
- M. Hartley: 05:36 Is it getting pretty bad?
- Audio Tech: 05:40 Yep.
- M. Hartley: 05:41 I wonder if we could move to Jerry's, another office, which is just across here. I don't know if that would be better, but I don't want to waste anyone's time if it's on-
- Audio Tech: 05:55 Well, I mean, it's fine if you want to try it, sure.
- M. Hartley: 05:58 To move?
- Audio Tech: 05:59 Sure.
- M. Hartley: 05:59 Yeah, and...

END OF PART 1

START OF TAPE 2

Cindy: 00:00 Retired. How was Mary's stories?

Michelle: 00:03 Oh she was great. Yes. Good. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jim: 00:06 Okay, we're rolling again. This makes this thirteen now.

Michelle: 00:09 Okay. Thank you Jim. So, where were we?

Cindy: 00:18 Just talking about all the positions that I've held and where I was located.

Michelle: 00:23 Oh, you got your upward mobility position and you were located downstairs. Can you just paint a picture of what that area downstairs was cause it's changed?

Cindy: 00:31 Oh, it has. It's changed drastically. Well, on both sides there was one side that had a spray paint booth and in the back where the loading dock and then along the walls were several artisans. One--Walter Bradford--that would do all the models and all the military kind of uniforms and those types of things. We also had a woodcarver, John Segeren, and his wood carvings were spectacular. He was just an amazing person. I believe he was in his 70s when I met him and he worked until his late 70s. You know, so I worked with him probably for eight-nine years and just amazing wood carver and the other side was where we did the screen printing and so we had, you know. I was in one area with the photo shop and then where we did the screen printing and clean the screens but we had a setup area too. So they would build the exhibits down in the shop which is now our maintenance facility.

Cindy: 01:33 The exhibits structure were building there. They would bring them, you know, through by a truck up, offload them after their spray painting that needed to be done. Spray paint them and we would do the screen printing and so it was you know, it was a huge open shop space and sometimes there were several exhibits being done at once. Majority of the place were mostly male and there we're very few females and there were a lot of students. We used a lot of students from Antioch and so we had a cooperative

agreement with Antioch and so we'd have a whole area of students coming in and out.

- Michelle: 02:09 That's so interesting. Antioch of all places. Do you have any idea why?
- Cindy: 02:13 No, I don't I think. Well possibly Russ Hendrickson, you didn't interview him today but he was head of exhibits. I think that was his alma mater. I believe Antioch was his, I believe so. He must've set it up but so it was always fun because with the students, with the students it was always fun. And that was you know the late 70s, so it was still the 70s it was really fun, a lot of parties. A lot of parties every Friday.
- Michelle: 02:42 Wow. At the center?
- Cindy: 02:45 Well in exhibits. The guys from the shop, they'd all go to the cross road's restaurant in Brunswick. It was an Italian restaurant, have a pizza, drink beer and come back and, not that they would party there but it was kind of like, it felt like a party every Friday.
- Michelle: 03:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative)- Well it seems like there's a lot of pressure at the center that meets deadlines, producing things right here. Is that accurate?
- Cindy: 03:12 Now, today?
- Michelle: 03:13 Even back then-
- Cindy: 03:14 Oh absolutely, yes it was always a lot of pressure to perform you know, to complete the jobs and to complete them on schedule and I think the pressures grew from you know, when I started there was a more lax feeling and more of an artisan type of community and people were very professional and each person sometimes had different professions or different skills.
- Cindy: 03:39 After that you know, we started then moving towards contacting because when we close the shop we were no longer building the exhibits structures here. So that was the first element of starting to contract and so there were several of us exhibits specialist that would, we started contracting for the production at the exhibits and that was difficult because the guys in the shops still wanted to build

them but yet they couldn't keep up with all the demands and so we have to contract and so for a while I kind off divided the groups. There we're the shop guys, you know the good old boys and truly and that's not any disrespect, but you know, they were good old boys and then we started then doing the contracting for all the work, and I remember my first job was Tuskegee Institute--George Washington Carver Museum--and it was, I was a GS-5, and I oversaw you know a couple a hundred thousand dollar production job.

- Cindy: 04:38 With Toshiko Satcal [spelling] who was an 8A contractor in New Jersey, it was amazing. I was down there. I must have made eight to ten trips to Alabama. Didn't know a lot, learned a lot on that job, learned a lot, learned a lot about how to manage people and getting the work done.
- Michelle: 04:58 Do you have a project that stands out above the rest, that you could talk about?
- Cindy: 05:06 I have two. You know I produce exhibits but a lot of times I would be very much involved in the design. I actually have three so it's hard but I'll try to be fast. The one that stands out most in my mind--and Michelle you may have heard the story before--was working on the first King Center and so I worked with--Dave McClean was the producer or excuse me the designer producer--but Dave, Dave sometimes would do designs on like little napkins--actually napkins--and not finish the designs. And so I went to the King Center, met with Mrs. King, Coretta Scott King and went to Dr King's home and went through Dr. King's belongings, went through the basement of their home, selected the objects that went on display because we portrayed him in three aspects of his life and so that was so touching and just you know, and I remember in doing the installation of the exhibits and Andrew Young came through, and I had a moment to talk with him and just, about his experiences and you know the whole Civil Rights Movement.
- Cindy: 06:13 So that definitely, that's probably the most memorable experience that I've had. In addition, I worked on you know, the Park Services is so great because we have so many areas and it's not just you know, the great big parks that everyone thinks about, so the Sleeping Bear Dunes, it was Glen Haven Coast Guard Station, and I did a job, and I

worked with Scott Harmon and Rick Stran [spelling]. Rick Stran was a designer, and you know, most of his designs looked very much the same so on this one you know, I changed the design a lot, but it was fun, worked you know in the framework of his design, and we would get criticized, producers would get criticized from designers.

- Cindy: 06:54 Quit changing my design, but on that one, in particular, we won--I won a presidential design award, so that was great. The other one was the Arizona Memorial for the fortieth anniversary and so that was you know, very early in my career, it was '81, and I remember there was a "Life" article done, but I helped build the mounts. I made the mounts for a lot of the artifacts and it was paymaster on board the Arizona, Paxton Turner Carter, and it's like you know, when we used to do these exhibits you learn so much about the people and you know, the exhibit and you know the messages and the stories that we're communicating to the public but you know, you became intimately involved with those and so I built you know, a lot at the mounts, I made the mounts.
- Cindy: 07:45 I worked down in the shop with the guys down in the shop for about a year, learned how to bend the Plexi. I was on bandsaws, and they were all so protective you know, don't do this you know safety and everything but I learned a lot. Also did a Nez Perce Collection--Chief Joseph collection, but the Arizona Memorial job it was you know, spectacular. I think all the work you know, every part of every project that you touch has a special place.
- Michelle: 08:13 Mary was talking about Nez Perce, were you working on it together?
- Cindy: 08:17 Mary and I worked on that together. Oh my goodness. I don't know if she told you some of the stories?
- Michelle: 08:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Cindy: 08:24 Yes. You know they were just problems with the contractor, and the contractor defaulted, and I remember being out there, and a big sheet of glass fell on top of the contractor, and we thought oh my god it's gonna kill him. Yeah, there were just a lot of things. I was there for weeks doing the installation, and we had to you know, that's when we were doing some work and contracting the work, and it

was just amazing, and we had you know, all conservation staff there--the conservators, but we found time to have a little fun too, we had a softball game. I was a big softball player; I played competitively for about 15 years.

- Cindy: 09:02 We arranged a softball game there with some you know, some locals and it was really fun. We were there till the 4th of July so we just had a good time. I don't know we would yeah, we had a good time.
- Michelle: 09:19 Well it seems like there we're a lot of things that can go wrong that have to be fixed. I mean Nez Perce may be a bit extreme but, overall there seems to be a number of trouble shooting and creative thinking that has to go on during a project.
- Cindy: 09:35 Yes I think you know, starting, say in the 80s and today, the materials that are used in fabricating exhibits have changed drastically and we've tested a lot of things. You know, before we used to wet mount photos and then we dry mounted, we wet mounted. We did all types of techniques as photo materials changed, and materials changed we had to test things and find out what worked in climates too because you know we install in all the country and so you go from the very dry to very wet area, you know along the seashore so you know, finding materials that work right and so we've done a lot of testing and so you know but that's a lot of tried-and-true kind of techniques.
- Cindy: 10:20 Yeah, and I think that's what makes us special because this is what we do for a living, it's not like you do it once like through your career, you do one media exhibit. No, we do this every day you know, many projects, every year and so we learn a lot and then we have to go back and trouble shoot also and change things and correct things.
- Michelle: 10:41 So you kind of grew up in the center I mean-
- Cindy: 10:43 I did-
- Michelle: 10:43 I mean that's a fair statement. Any mentors?
- Cindy: 10:48 Yes, definitely. The first one would be Grant Cadwaller. Grant was head of the museum production group and his wife also worked there Susan but Grand was definitely my mentor. He was an architect and just amazing person and

he would try new things. I remember going to the hologram museum with Grant in New York City. Oh what 20 years ago and you know people weren't doing a lot you know holography or even understood holograms.

- Cindy: 11:18 Grand was always on the cutting edge. Sometimes so much that we did--at Hawaii Volcano's visitor center we recreated the volcanic eruption. We used neon and Plexi and so to really be you know--to demonstrate exactly what happens and what causes you know--from the seismic activity and to what causes the eruption. Well it upset, you know, the Native Hawaiians so much that they tore it down when we left because they believe in culturally the story of Pele and so it was like okay. You know, so you learn I mean Grant was out there on the cutting edge trying new things which was a great way to, you know, to show this and he worked with fiber optic maps. I mean Grant was the reason we started with you know, telling all the battle stories you know through fiber optic maps and you know he just tried new things and then Mary Herber.
- Cindy: 12:19 Most definitely. Mary was very progressive and just, you know, not just trying new things you know, she would research them and you know, and she liked listening to new ideas and Mary wanted to go out and find the best contractors to help us do the work and believed that you know, we could learn from the contractors too and let's get the best in the industry because we're doing really important work for the National Park Service so let's do the best job that we can do.
- Cindy: 12:47 Yes, so most definitely Grant and Mary. Yes.
- Michelle: 12:51 So why did you mean, You probably could've gotten a job and you know a big-
- Cindy: 12:56 I was offered many time-
- Michelle: 12:58 Firm. What made you stay?
- Cindy: 13:01 Just my love for the Park Service. Absolutely. Because you know, we can all--you know, it wasn't just working for the government. It was working for the National Park Service and understanding all the special places that we you know, protect our national resources for you know, and I don't wanna sound like a cliché but for future generations for

enjoyment and it's so important when I had my daughter because you know, really understanding you know this is for her future and for her children's future and you know it's important and to feel good every day about the work that you do.

- Cindy: 13:33 Not just about getting a pay check. How many people can say that they truly love, you know, what they do?
- Michelle: 13:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Cindy: 13:39 Yeah.
- Michelle: 13:43 The question I typically end with, unless you wanted if there is something that I've, that you wanna-
- Cindy: 13:49 No, I don't think so.
- Michelle: 13:51 What do you think, what is the Harpers Ferry Center's place in the Park Service and why, who cares or why is it relevant or is it?
- Cindy: 14:02 Well, I definitely feel that it's relevant you know, I've spent my career here so of course I feel that relevant because I have had a lot of opportunities to go to other places and you know, I think that we are extremely relevant but we have to you know, continue to listen to, you know, our clients and what their needs are. But no I definitely feel that we're relevant because we're the one place, the only place in the Service that you know, does media for the Service and you know, so it's great to have all the professionals here and to continue with learning and--because we work with each other and we learn from each other and hopefully as we advance and move forward into our future we'll be a place where we continue to learn and learn from each other and have a better form of learning from you know, past experiences and lessons. That's the one thing that you know, I hate that we feel, when we feel like we're recreating.
- Cindy: 14:59 So you know just to continue that and you know, listen to our clients, be collaborative, and just produce the best media that we can and that's not necessarily--it's really interesting I was in Shenandoah National Park last week and they talked about doing some new technology type of experience and you know, technology is great and as long

as the Park Service can supported it because you know, I just made a statement to them and you know, we're all for that but you know, when we walk out the door you have to maintain it and keep it operable.

- Cindy: 15:35 Because without that then your visitor has nothing and you know, so they're like "You know, well I think we need to rethink this" because you know what our budgets today in the Park Service we can't always do that but it's important you know when we can do things on a higher level, I think it's important to do that.
- Michelle: 15:52 Do you-
- Cindy: 15:53 I feel like I'm rambling.
- Michelle: 15:54 One last question. Do you say--what are the legacies you think that Harpers Ferry Center has already left in the Park Service or will leave?
- Cindy: 16:06 The legacies that we've left? That's a hard one. I just you know, I think it really depends on the projects because I think we don't have one person like you know, a park has its superintendent and then there are regions and that's what the Park Service is about. It's about the park, it's about the resources. For us you know, we're not, there is no one really representing for us but we are, I mean, we're our own legacy if that makes any sense because we work with each park you know, to help them tell their story, to communicate the significance of their site and their stories to the public but I'm not so sure that there is a legacy for us. I mean other than you know the media center but I don't know if that makes sense but you know our legacy should be you know, we're customer focused and we're doing you know a great job in media and we're great to work with and we're Park Service, so we're Park Service too you know.
- Michelle: 17:14 Thank you Cindy.
- Cindy: 17:14 You're welcome. You're welcome Michelle.
- Michelle: 17:17 Good job.
- Cindy: 17:18 Thank you.

END OF TAPE