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Gerald W. Adelman
October 4, 2017

Interview conducted by Antionette Condo
Transcribed by Antoinette Condo
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My Narrative
The Administrative History of the National Heritage Areas Coordinating Office

Gerald W. Adelman
October 4, 2017

Interview conducted and transcribed by
Antoinette J. Condo

This transcript was reviewed by Antoinette J. Condo
The narrator was asked to review the transcript but did not.

Gerald W. Adelman Interview: October 4, 2017

My interest in heritage areas was fostered early on from my interest in art and architecture. I had worked with my father in preservation of the town square of Lockport, Illinois, my hometown. Following graduation from Georgetown University with a degree in art history I spent several years in Europe which could only increase my appreciation for the preservation of history and historic buildings. During my graduate work at George Washington University in historic preservation under Dr. Richard Longstreth I received good practical training and was able to work on projects with the Smithsonian and through a grant with the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the DOI, the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, and programs of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Lowell, Massachusetts, was designated a National Historical Park in 1978 and was an example of restoration of an abandoned industrial area and revitalization of a depressed local economy. Lowell provided a model of what might be done elsewhere. Lockport is on the historic Illinois and Michigan Canal and I was drawn back to it and the work that had been done to create parks and trails along the southern portion of the canal. I wanted to stimulate interest in the upper reach of the canal toward Chicago. This area had been industrialized and the canal bed within downtown Chicago had already been turned into an interstate right of way. I contacted Judith Stockdale of Open Lands Project, a 501c3 created in the 1960s with the mission to preserve and restore greenspace in the Chicago area. She put me to work on the Des Plaines River Project, which was an inventory of historic and natural assets of the area. The inventory revealed a treasure trove of natural areas and buildings important to the story of the canal corridor.

With the idea of drawing public support, I approached John Husar, feature writer for the Tribune, with my inventory information in hopes that he would become interested. He was interested enough to explore the Canal area with me which culminated in a six-part series, *Our Hidden Wilderness*, which appeared in 1980. Encouraged by response to the articles, Open Lands sponsored focused briefings with user groups, academics, and government agencies, and plans were formulated for preservation and restoration in this heritage corridor based on the history of the area, Paleo-Indian to present, with the canal as the central *spine*. Somewhat unexpectedly, Governor James R. Thompson became involved and mentioned that an extra benefit of the project was as a reminder to Chicago and down state that they are linked by history and cooperative accomplishments. James J. Keene, Illinois projects staffer for Senator Charles Percy, followed by Senator Percy, became interested in the economic and recreational benefits of the plan. Senator Percy initiated consultations with Department of the Interior Secretary James G. Watt who pronounced the idea, "daring and precedent-setting." Congressman Tom Corcoran requested that the NPS submit a conceptual plan, "to protect and enhance," the significant cultural and natural attributes of the area, and "provide for economic development." The paper was completed in September 1981 by John D. Peine and Debora A. Neurohr. With input from local citizens and officials, one scenario of the paper suggested the creation of a federal commission and technical assistance from NPS. John became interested enough that he was a help to the project even after the completion of his study.

My inventory project turned into the creation, in 1982, of the Upper Illinois Valley Association, a 501c3, with me as director. I intensified my research work in the communities along the canal

corridor to find what could be done and who might be interested. The focus was now on working with the willing and generating further interest in the communities and industries and businesses along the corridor for a concerted effort of canal restoration and recreational utilization. With the help of business and industry leaders with interests in the corridor we encouraged local participation in clean up and preservation efforts.

The congressional interest led to Senator Percy's introduction of S. 2157, a bill to provide for the establishment of the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. Senator Alan J. Dixon added his voice to the discussion pointing out that the commercial and industrial interests in the area were in favor of the idea. The designating legislation, P.L. 109-338 was signed by President Ronald Reagan on August 24, 1984 in Chicago.

The 19-member federal commission created by the bill was slow to start because of the usual problem of nomination and approval, but was ably led by Brooks McCormick, CEO of International Harvester. The executive director and a staff of two were loaned from the NPS but did not seem to have very much experience with community development.

I sometimes served on the commission and for several years continued to be executive director of the Upper Illinois Valley Association (UIVA) which became the Canal Corridor Association. By 1986 the corridor had a complex management arrangement. A federal commission was composed of representatives from various stakeholders, public and private, which gave overall coordination and provided technical assistance through a staff of three seconded from NPS. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources owned and managed 62 miles of parkland with the state Department of Commerce maintaining two canal locks. Interested volunteers, local historical societies and Rotary Clubs worked on maintenance of trails and trash pick-up and raised awareness and generated community good-will. The Canal Corridor Association, with me as executive director, and its own board added promotion, organization, and planning with funds raised from public and private sources. In 1988, I was appointed executive director of Open Lands and represented it on the commission and association boards.

Primary factors in success of a heritage area: Local community involvement. An area needs to have motivated and active participants from every level of the local community, business, government, and householders.

Sunsetting: The federal funds are highly leveraged by the NHAs. The small amount each NHA receives has a substantial payback in heritage preservation and natural resource conservation. Why would we want to lose the resources that the areas preserve and restore for the little that they cost?

Individually designated heritage areas: We are expecting that only truly nationally significant areas are designated. Therefore, there should be standards to be maintained and a cohesion of program but not so that the individuality of the area is lost. The individuality is evident by each being separately designated.