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Elbert Cox
March 17, 1971

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

ELBERT COX

EVISON INTERVIEW WITH ELBERT COX

ELBERT COX - 1906

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[START OF INTERVIEW]

- Herbert Evison: This is St. Patrick's Day, 1971. I am Herb Evison, and I am in Richmond, Virginia today. I was going to say I was in the office of Elbert Cox, but I am in one of the offices of the Commission of which he is the Executive Officer. That's the Commission on Outdoor Recreation?
- Elbert Cox: Commission of Outdoor Recreation.
- Herbert Evison: Commission of Outdoor Recreation. Of course, Elbert is known to National Park Service people more for his long and very distinguished service as Regional Director. I think he was first a Regional Director in Region One and then in the Southeast Region.
- Elbert Cox: After the name was changed.
- Herbert Evison: Elbert, as I said to you before we started this thing turning, I want to begin by getting a few vital statistics on you. Where you were born and when, something about your family, your education, etc.
- Elbert Cox: Very good. According to my mother, life began for me on a cold Sunday morning, January 28, 1906, in Grayson County. The post office we had then was Baywood, Virginia. I think this has been discontinued so we say now Galax, Virginia. This may be more than you need for this purpose, but the place where I was born is now inaccessible except by foot or horseback.
- Elbert Cox: Incidentally, if the New River project is developed – the Blue Ridge Dam – the old house where I was born will be under water.
- Elbert Cox: When I was about four years old, we moved two or three miles closer to the crossroads, and I lived there until I left home to go to college. I went to Baywood High School and graduated in a class of five boys in 1923. That fall I entered Roanoke College where my next older brother had entered the year before.
- Elbert Cox: After four years at Roanoke College, I taught school in Tazewell, Virginia, for a couple of years. I taught English and History. After teaching a couple of years I decided I should go back and do graduate work, which I did. I had been to summer school in 1928 at the University taking graduate courses in English and History. So, in the fall of 1929, I went back to the University to begin work on my Masters in History, still with a minor in English.
- Herbert Evison: Yes, now you say the "University."
- Elbert Cox: The University of Virginia, of course.
- Herbert Evison: Yes.

- Elbert Cox: I had completed the required course work for a Masters by June, 1930, but remained at the University through the summer, working in the Library and finishing writing my thesis. I was looking hard also for a job – I must have written a hundred letters of application to school superintendents, headmasters, and even libraries. Those were depression years and jobs were scarce. I couldn't find one anywhere.
- Elbert Cox: So, I decided to stay at the University for the 1930-31 school year, taking courses that would count toward a Ph.D. and working part-time in the Rare Book Room in the University Library – the library was then in the Rotunda. How I happened to end up in the National Park Service with a “government job” is an interesting story, Herb, if you have plenty of tape.
- Herbert Evison: Don't worry about the tape.
- Elbert Cox: About midwinter, 1930-31, the second year in graduate school, we were waiting to go into class one morning. One of my classmates asked me, “Did you see the notice on the bulletin board as you came by?” It was a notice of a Civil Service examination for the positions of Historian and Assistant Historian at Colonial National Monument. He said, “It sounds pretty interesting, and it pays pretty good, \$2600 a year.” In those days for a schoolteacher that was a very good salary. He said, “I think I might try it, but I haven't finished my thesis so I can't qualify.”
- Elbert Cox: After class I went by and looked at the announcement. All it required was an application outlining academic routine and a copy of my thesis. Although I had never had any serious thought of working for the government, I sent in my application. Some months later I received notice of an eligible rating. I didn't think much about it because I really was not too interested in a government job. I still hoped to find a teaching job.
- Elbert Cox: Between final examinations and Commencement exercises, I had a break of a week or ten days, so I went back to my home at Baywood for a visit with the folks. On the morning of June 11, I had been crow hunting and when I came in for lunch – there was a letter for me forwarded from the Civil Service Commission saying that I should be in their office in Washington on June 11, at 11:00 for an oral examination! Well, obviously I couldn't make that, so I threw the letter aside and sat down for lunch (it was always “dinner” at our house). After lunch I began to think, well, this couldn't hurt anything, and it might be worth checking out. So, I called the Galax bus station and they said they could wait up a bit if I would hurry. I caught the Galax bus to Roanoke and from there the night bus to Washington. The roughest ride I ever had – didn't get to Washington until daylight. After I got off the bus I wandered around a bit, found a place that

said "Turkish Bath"; I went in and took a cold shower and by 9:00 was in the Civil Service office bright-eyed and waiting for my interview.

Herbert Evison: They didn't make any trouble over that you were a day late?

Elbert Cox: No, I had sent a wire from Galax saying I had just received their letter, was en route to Washington and would be there the following day.

Elbert Cox: My examiner was the Civil Service Manager and Dr. Earl Atwood from the National Park Service. Being fresh out of Graduate History routines, I didn't have too much trouble with the questions about history. After a rather short interview and certainly no later than 11:00, I was on the highway thumbing my way back to Charlottesville for Commencement. After receiving my degree, I remained at the University working in the library and still trying to get a teaching job. I was living at Madison Hall where I could get a room for free for picking up the newspapers each day and putting them on the rack, and I think I got about \$20.00 a month for work in the library.

Elbert Cox: One morning about midsummer, walking to the post office, I met Dr. Raymond Pinchbeck. He was a professor of economics at Roanoke College when I was there and was at the University for the summer. He later came as Dean to Richmond at the University of Richmond. He greeted me with something like "Congratulations, Mr. Cox, congratulations." I had not heard a word, but he had read in the morning paper the notice of my appointment as Assistant Historian at Colonial National Monument. So, with that I called the Superintendent at Yorktown to confirm it, and that weekend took the C & O to Lee Hall. Frank Brown met me at the train, and took me to Yorktown where I reported in, still with not the slightest idea of what I was going to do or what the job was or what the National Park Service was really all about.

Herbert Evison: Now, was Robinson Superintendent then?

Elbert Cox: Robinson was Superintendent and had been there maybe a couple of months. Floyd Flickinger, another assistant historian, entered on duty a month before I arrived, and Oliver Taylor and his crew, who were getting ready for the celebration, were there. So that's how I got in the National Park Service.

Herbert Evison: Now this would have been in 1931?

Elbert Cox: This was August 1931.

Herbert Evison: That made you really quite an old timer by the time you pulled up your stakes.

Elbert Cox: I am becoming one of the old timers, I find.

- Herbert Evison: What astonishes me is that anybody who is still comparatively young in actual years can have so many years of Service behind him as you have.
- Elbert Cox: Well, I was lucky to get in when I did, even though I still figured that the National Park Service job would be a stop gap and that I would go back to teaching, but of course I never did.
- Herbert Evison: Just a temporary thing.
- Elbert Cox: Incidentally, soon after I took the job in Yorktown, I got two offers of teaching jobs.
- Herbert Evison: I bet neither of them would have paid \$2600.
- Elbert Cox: No, I don't believe they would have.
- Herbert Evison: Yes, that was opulence at that time. The depression was really getting started. Let's get a quick summary of your assignments. You didn't have very many, as I remember.
- Elbert Cox: Well, I reported for duty the first of August, 1931, as Assistant Historian. The first project at Colonial was to get ready for the sesquicentennial celebration. So, we were doing anything from carpentry to maintenance man work to get ready for that historic celebration.
- Elbert Cox: In the fall of 1933, I went to Washington to do research in the Library of Congress. I was still on the rolls at Yorktown but working under Chief Historian Chatelain. It was really interesting duty. I had a Study Room in the Library of Congress and a desk in Chatelain's office. I shuttled back and forth, running errands, doing odd bits of research for Dr. Bryant or Chatelain. With some E.C.W. and C.W.A.¹ help we set up a small research staff in the Library of Congress. I helped Chatelain with his search for Field Historians and reviewed their reports. Quite a few of the Historians who came on in that period I helped pick.
- Herbert Evison: The astonishing thing is that so many of them stayed on to have careers in the Park Service.
- Elbert Cox: Very, very excellent people, too. In 1934 the position of Superintendent of the new Morristown National Historical Park was established. A couple of CCC camps were already there and the camp Superintendent had been Acting Park Superintendent. At that time, it was a pretty firm policy in the Service to select Historians for Superintendents of Historical Parks, which gave me a special advantage. I really had no aspirations; I was just doing

¹ E.C.W. was Emergency Conservation Work, the designation of all work performed by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps); C.W.A. was Civil Works Administration, a huge, short-period relief venture of late 1933. – H.E.

what they told me to do where I was and enjoying it. Chatelain one morning said, "I think you ought to write a letter to the Director saying you are interested in the Morristown job of Superintendent"; which I did and sometime later I got notice of my selection, I reported for duty at Morristown in August 1934. August seems to be my month.

Elbert Cox: Thinking back I am amazed that the Service would select anyone so inexperienced and untrained for an assignment. Of course, at Yorktown I had been Acting Superintendent for Robinson when he would be away, which gave me a little contact with administrative routine; but I didn't have any real background in vouchering, purchasing and personnel procedures, so I had a lot to learn.

Elbert Cox: Morristown is really one of the interesting areas in the System and, as you know, the Park was put together by two or three important gifts, The Jockey Hollow Campgrounds area – about 1000 acres – was a gift from Lloyd W. Smith, a very wealthy man who lived just out of Morristown. The Washington Headquarters was donated by the Washington Association of New Jersey and Fort Nonsense by the town of Morristown. The CCC Camps were working their usual routine of forestry clean-up. There was a project already approved for a new museum under Public Works. John Russell Pope's office of New York was retained to prepare the plans for this new facility.

Elbert Cox: Much research on Jockey Hollow and the Museum material remained to be done. The Washington Association had an exceptionally fine collection of objects and manuscripts. But a lot of work and expertise would be needed in restoring the Ford Mansion and preparing the material for the new Museum. In addition to the Museum, we had a project to connect Jockey Hollow by parkway with Fort Nonsense and the town of Morristown. The line went through some very large properties, one of which Mr. Lloyd Smith owned. So, I did a lot of visiting and talking, trying to persuade these landowners to donate a right-of-way for the parkway. Once or twice, it was pretty well sewed up, when one of the landowners had business reverses and withdrew his offer to donate his land. As a result, the project never materialized, but the Museum was completed.

Elbert Cox: If you remember, Ned Burns set up a museum laboratory at one of the park buildings at Washington Headquarters to work on exhibits for our building and for other Service areas. That was quite an activity. And then, in addition, we were busy with the Wick House, a very fine historic building in the park; and Guerin House, which became the Superintendent's quarters. The architectural work was handled by Tom Vint's section. Tom Waterman and Charles Peterson were most involved.

I remember Ab Good came up a number of times. Ab was very knowledgeable in the area of period furnishings. He advised us on such things.

Elbert Cox: Elizabeth, then Elizabeth Austin, was working with the Museum Branch and she did a lot of work on our pewter collection, which was an excellent one. She and Ab Good hit it off quite well as I recall, because of his interest in pewter.

Herbert Evison: Yes, if I am not mistaken, this is the gal who for a great many years has been Liz Cox.

Elbert Cox: That's right. This is an interesting personal story. When we were looking for a curator or docent, as they say in the Museum business, I visited the Newark Museum. The Newark Museum had then and still has, I think, an apprentice school. They take young college graduates for a year's training, assigning them for successive periods in accessions, exhibit preparation, etc. Two or three graduates of this school came out to look at Morristown and to talk about the job. Miss Austin was the one that finally took the job. And that is how it all started.

Herbert Evison: Were you the one who picked her?

Elbert Cox: Yes, I selected her twice. First for the job and then for Mrs. Cox.

Herbert Evison: Well, that shows your early possession of excellent judgment.

Elbert Cox: Well, Morristown really became the base for other responsibilities. At that time, the Service had coordinating superintendent assignments, and while I was at Morristown, Hopewell Village, Statue of Liberty, and Saratoga were assigned to Morristown; also, Salem (Derby Wharf and the old Custom House). I had to make frequent visits to those areas. Some wonderful folks were involved in these associations – Ed Small at Salem, George Palmer at Statue of Liberty, and later Waring Mikell, who was in charge of rehabilitation of the Statue itself. That's when I got to know Mike. At Hopewell Village, Roy Appleman and Melvin Weig, historian on my staff, did the historical research.

Herbert Evison: Weig later became superintendent of Edison and Morristown.

Elbert Cox: Melvin was a very thorough Research Historian. He did a good job.

Herbert Evison: One thing I am curious about. CCC Camps were already on the ground when you reported there as the first Superintendent.

Elbert Cox: That's right.

Herbert Evison: Well, had the work done by those camps had sufficiently good supervision so what they did was good and not damaging?

- Elbert Cox: Well, generally, yes, although we did much work with CCC in the early days that we would not do today. For example, I recall one of the first historians on our staff was Herman Kahn. He later held a very high position with National Archives. Herman was one of the brightest minds I ever had any contact with but his first assignment when he got to Morristown was to take charge of a small crew of CCC boys and go out and plant some young trees. Herman didn't know a dog-wood from a pineapple tree actually, and most of the enrollees were from Jersey City or Newark. So, there was a good deal of lost motion in this kind of activity. Looking back, I remember we carried out some so-called archaeology which wouldn't pass muster under present-day standards. We just didn't have the background of experience in the crews and in the staff, really. We had some very able Historians there. Vernon Setzer was Chief or Senior Historian on the CCC rolls when I got there. Russell Baker was another Historian. We had a Historian by the name of McCain who later became State Archivist in Mississippi. He had his Doctorate in History even when he was at Morristown.
- Herbert Evison: You were at Morristown until when?
- Elbert Cox: I came back to Yorktown as Superintendent in '39 in February or March. I remember it was right after Washington's birthday.
- Herbert Evison: About that time were you a married man?
- Elbert Cox: Oh, yes, we were married in '35. I didn't want to move. I was really upset when Mr. Demaray called me to his office in Washington one day and said they had decided I should go to Yorktown. Flickinger, who had been Superintendent, was leaving the Service. We were very happy at Morristown. It is a wonderful location, and we had a fine house for quarters; the projects were still young and there were a lot of interesting things yet to do. It was a nice promotion, of course. Also, moving was a bit of a problem. Elizabeth had a bad strep throat the winter of '38-39, so I first came down alone. She stayed with friends until she could make the trip a little later. I remember going back for her. We rode the train down to Cape Charles, ferried across to Old Point Comfort where a car from Yorktown met us. You can't do that now, you know. There is no longer train service to Cape Charles and a bridge-tunnel has replaced the ferry.
- Herbert Evison: Any other things that stand out in your memory about Morristown before you left?
- Elbert Cox: Well, one interesting episode – I don't know how much is really of record about this in the files of the Service, probably much of it could be reconstructed – but the Washington Headquarters which the Association gave to the Park Service contained many fine objects, but two items they

were particularly proud of and with good reason. One was a Washington portrait, a Stuart painting, and the other was the original manuscript copy of Washington's Commission as Commander-in-Chief.

Elbert Cox: I can't remember the exact sequence, but I had had occasion to check on this document while I was still working with Chatelain in Washington. I remember talking to Dr. Fitzpatrick, who was at the Library of Congress then (he did the Washington writings) about it. He had never seen it, but he expressed some doubt about the document. I had one of the researchers, Charles Cochran, do a report on this document; Cochran was an expert researcher, especially in genealogy, but he had a great flair for debunking. He loved to find something questionable in the families of George Washington or Robert E. Lee.

Elbert Cox: In his report he came up with a serious question about the Washington Commission. But Cochran had never seen the document so we sort of laid the report aside until something more could be done about it. My own comment was that it would really take more than this superficial research to make a definite finding. This was one of the things that we had to do after I went to Morristown. Of course, we needed to be very circumspect here because the Association would have been really upset if we had come in and thrown out one of their prize possessions.

Elbert Cox: I talked to Mayor Potts of Morristown about it, but he didn't have any doubts at all. It had come to the Association as a gift from a very reputable collector. Then one day – and I am not certain of the sequence of events – I got a confidential memorandum from Demaray enclosing a memorandum from Secretary Ickes in which the Secretary said in effect, "I understand that the Washington Commission at Morristown is a phony and the historians of the Service know it, but don't do anything about it." Demaray asked me for a report. Well, I didn't know quite what was going on back in Washington and I didn't want to upset our relations with the Washington Association. But obviously we had to make a more systematic investigation. So, with Mayor Potts, I took the original document into New York to Mr. Osbourne, the handwriting expert in the Hauptmann trial—

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes.

Elbert Cox: —and he examined it, enlarged the signatures and all that and came back with a report, "without qualification this is a genuine John Hancock signature."

Herbert Evison: Do you suppose that word was officially relayed to Washington and from Washington to the Secretary?

- Elbert Cox: I am sure I reported on it, but still I wasn't entirely satisfied. Mayor Potts was a great gentleman and a distinguished engineer and the most enthusiastic person about Morristown you can imagine. As an amateur historian I always thought he enjoyed history more than I did. He didn't bother with the fine points so much. For example, in presenting this problem to Mr. Osbourne, who was quite an elderly gentleman, he had really given the old man quite a glowing speech about Morristown and George Washington. Anyhow, I had the feeling that the handwriting expert's technique wasn't quite enough, so I took the document around to the New York Public Library and talked to some of their people. One was a Mr. Lynch, I think, but I remember particularly Dr. Paltsits, their manuscript expert. I left it with him and in a few weeks, he called me. By taking an infrared picture of the document he found a watermark date much later than the original document. So, the Washington Commission had to be withdrawn from its place in the exhibit case.
- Herbert Evison: I am glad that you recollected it. What was the reaction of the Association?
- Elbert Cox: Well, we did it very quietly, and there was just no argument really. I don't remember how it was published or how it was reported to the Association actually. But you just couldn't argue with the evidence. We had been very careful about it – almost to the point of not doing our job, so the Secretary thought. But we were certainly indebted to the Association for their donation of the Ford House and the property around it; but more than that, they were our chief support in day-to-day operations. When the museum was completed, we didn't have money enough to buy chairs for the auditorium, so they bought chairs for the auditorium. They also bought manuscripts, books, etc.; in fact, they were a wonderful, wonderful group, very fine people – all of them.
- Elbert Cox: Well, I came back to Yorktown in 1939. Of course, while I was at Morristown it had been a very busy period at Yorktown, with active CCC programs, public works projects, etc. The Service had acquired Jamestown Island and had done a lot of restoration on the Yorktown Battlefield.
- Herbert Evison: Now, when you were there first, they didn't own any of that land on Jamestown Island?
- Elbert Cox: Jamestown Island, no. I recall doing one chore on Jamestown while I was assistant historian. I went to the courthouse and copied all the deeds on Jamestown Island land ownership. This was in anticipation of acquisition proceedings. If you remember, the Service had to condemn all Jamestown Island except about 22 acres still owned by the A.P.V.A.
- Herbert Evison: I didn't remember that at all.

- Elbert Cox: The actual acquisition was after I left Yorktown – I don't remember the exact date.
- Elbert Cox: We had a very excellent staff in Yorktown. Pinky Harrington was at Jamestown, you know, in charge of archaeology. And Virginia became Park Historian until she retired when her first child came along.
- Elbert Cox: Tommy Pitkin was the next Park Historian, a very able man professionally, but he was not too happy in a community like Yorktown. Yet some of the finest work that came out of my time at Yorktown, I'm sure Tommy Pitkin did as Park Historian. He is a very able man.
- Elbert Cox: Of course, things began to slow down with World War II in '41 and '42. I don't remember quite why I decided to do it, but I applied for a commission in the Navy. Partly, I am sure, because of my close association with the Navy people and the very fine Commanding Officer at the time at the Naval Mine Depot. Well, anyhow, I passed my physical in September 1942, and received a Commission as Lieutenant, J.G. at the Naval Mine Depot. My billet was Assistant to the Executive Officer, after two months indoctrination at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. I tried repeatedly to get a transfer from Yorktown to another assignment, because I felt I was not really making use of all my training or ability. But I never could get away. Each time the reply came back "Cox is under 38 and has not had sea duty."
- Elbert Cox: I really didn't know when I was well off, because we had a beautiful setup. The Navy furnished quarters with a yard boy to care for the grounds, and my duty was really very pleasant with fine people. I spent three and a half years in the job at the Naval Mine Depot.
- Herbert Evison: Now you were not a Lieutenant J.G. when you got out?
- Elbert Cox: This is interesting. In the Naval Reserve, after you have put in a certain length of time, if your performance was satisfactory, you got an automatic promotion. The Chief of the Bureau would issue what we called an ALNAV, a directive to all Navy personnel listing the names of those being promoted. An ALNAV came in promoting me to Lieutenant Commander on the day I went to Norfolk to be processed out, i.e., discharged. So, the question was should I accept the promotion to the higher grade or remain a Lieutenant to be eligible for the \$100 mustering out pay, which Lieutenants and below got when discharged. I think it cost me a few dollars to accept the promotion, although I had already collected the \$100 and the Navy never checked me for it. I still probably owe the Navy \$100.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, that was a promotion by the Navy. You never served as Lieutenant Commander?

- Elbert Cox: I bought the stripes for my uniforms and probably wore them less than a month.
- Herbert Evison: I taped Pinky. Of course, he sat in your chair while you were gone and in some respects apparently had a very distressing time. I remember him having told me the other day about a visit down there from Hugh Miller during the war when Pinky was really down in the dumps. And about how Hugh Miller raised his morale so, eventually, that he decided that after all he would stay there for a while. But here you were still located right in the middle of the area that you had been Superintendent of. How did things that went on respective to the park while you were in the Navy strike you?
- Elbert Cox: Well, of course the Park Service was really reduced to a custodial operation. There wasn't much activity. I frequently could help by talking with the Navy people about Park Service problems. For instance, the Colonial Parkway was closed. I could be of help in communicating between the Park Service and the Navy on things like this. But there was very little work being done in the park. Gasoline was rationed, you know, and we stayed pretty close to base. Of course, we saw Pinky and Virginia frequently.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, what I was referring to...I don't think there was any single area in the whole Park System which had such a steady bunch of requests – or demands, occasionally – for either transfer of this piece of land or permits to build a road somewhere or what have you. And I was wondering how much of that you had any contact with.
- Elbert Cox: I knew about it and could often be helpful, but those matters were handled pretty high up for the most part. I was just the Assistant to the Executive Officer, and I suspect the Captain didn't want my opinion about some of those things, anyway. The Navy normally – and certainly during a war – feels pretty positive about its needs and rights in this sort of thing, which is quite understandable. I remember there was a transfer of some land and a permit to use other lands for a housing project – Cooks Terrace and Cooks Terrace Annex. I would have to go back to the files to verify dates or sequence on any of this.
- Herbert Evison: Well, you were commissioned as Lieutenant Commander and kicked out of that Navy all at once?
- Elbert Cox: Well, Tom Allen had already indicated to me that he would like to have me in the Regional Office. I had no desire really to go into the Regional Office, and I remember talking about this to Newton Drury and Newton's advice was, "Well, we think you could be helpful there and you don't necessarily have to stay there right on, you know." So, it seemed to me

this was where I was being asked to go and so we did it rather than go back to Yorktown.

Herbert Evison: You went there as Associate Regional Director?

Elbert Cox: I came in—

Herbert Evison: I left the job as Assistant Regional Director there in October 1945. Now, when did you get out?

Elbert Cox: I got out of the Navy in early October. I had a couple of months leave so I came on duty late in 1945. This is the same job.

Herbert Evison: Yes. You were my successor.

Elbert Cox: That's right. I remember that now. We really had a hard time to find a place to live in Richmond. We spent two months house hunting. Even after I started work, we still didn't have a house. We were living in a rented cottage. That was really the worst thing about the whole deal. You see, we had always lived in government houses. I never had to go out and house hunt – a really depressing experience in those days, because you could not rent anything. Prices were out of sight, I thought, all relative now, of course. I'm sure I never expected to stay in the Regional Office forever, but I almost did.

Herbert Evison: For what, twenty-three years?

Elbert Cox: Well, I went in in late '45 and came out in late '66.

Herbert Evison: Only twenty-one years.

Elbert Cox: Right.

Herbert Evison: But I guess at that, that was longer than anyone else had served as Regional Director of one office.

Elbert Cox: Well, I really don't know about that record. Probably is.

Herbert Evison: I'm pretty sure that's so. Well, let's get on the record. First you worked as Associate Regional Director, and for how long, under Tom Allen?

Elbert Cox: From late '45 until '51 when I became Regional Director.

Herbert Evison: Well, of course, a while ago, I was making you Regional Director from the start. You served under Tom Allen all that time?

Elbert Cox: Right. A very interesting experience. Tom and I got along very well together. Tom is a very positive personality, you know, but we never had any trouble. I enjoyed working with him.

- Herbert Evison: My question now is whether during those years that you were “understudying” so to speak, were there any developments of interest that you participated in or observed that might go on this tape?
- Elbert Cox: Well, it would be hard to single out anything right off the top of my head. I really don’t think of anything. Of course, I always had in the back of my mind that I would move on to a park again, you know. Everybody figured on that. Newton Drury was always a great comfort to one in my frame of mind. I think he actually would have helped me get back into a park if time had not run out. As a matter of fact, at one time, while I was still at Yorktown, he said that if I were older, they might consider me for Yosemite. Well, I got older, but I didn’t get to Yosemite. In many ways it’s fine to be able to put down roots and stay where you are. I missed, of course, the experience and the knowledge I would have gained if I could have got back into a park again, but I don’t regret it. The Regional Office was a busy, active job, and there certainly was variety enough, and more than enough to do.
- Elbert Cox: I’ve really wondered how we covered the region when there were 23 states. It seemed like we worked just as hard after it was reduced to a dozen. It was an interesting experience to see so much of the country, and in getting around to the old Region One from Maine to Florida, working with the states. In those days we worked much more actively with the states. This was one of the strong areas of our Region One program. We had some really fine folks in the state cooperation section – “Steamer” Bursley, Ammerman, Al Edmonds, Perkins – Arthur Perkins. They really gave the states a lot of help and that shows up any time you get into some of the states that we worked with.
- Herbert Evison: Well, I think it would be very nice to get on the record some comment on some of these people that worked with you in the Region – first of all when you were Associate Regional Director and as Regional Director. Now you mentioned three or four. “Steamer” Bursley, who in my book was a guy of top ability.
- Elbert Cox: He was a great man. Of course, Buck Lisle was the Assistant Regional Director all the time I was in the Regional Office. He had been Assistant Regional Director when I was Associate Director. When we reorganized to set up a Chief of Operations, Clark Stratton came along. He was in that job for a while – a very strong man. Another was Pinky Harrington. Pinky, and Virginia, too, worked with me in Yorktown. We have had a lot of fun out of the fact that we worked together so long. It is almost true that I had never done a job without Pinky’s help!

- Elbert Cox: Very capable, both of them. I always kidded the Harringtons that you never needed but one of them, because if you got one of them, you had the advantage and full benefit of the other, because they worked together. If Pinky was developing an idea, Virginia always helped him, and I always told him that that was where he got some of his best ideas. They were unusually competent and have always been completely loyal to me.
- Elbert Cox: Jim Holland, after Roy Appleman left, came on as Historian. A very able man professionally, but retiring and diffident in manner and personality. He wasn't as good in covering public relations such as meetings of DAR and that sort of thing. But a very able, even brilliant, historian. We had good people in the field, of course, such as Al Manucy. There is just not another Al Manucy anywhere and never will be. Also, we had the Design and Planning Office. Ed Zimmer was there and Bob Smith, Ross Sweeney. Well, it's hard to call up all of them in so short a time.
- Herbert Evison: Ludgate—
- Elbert Cox: Ludgate, of course, the landscape architect.
- Herbert Evison: I am going to tape Lud tomorrow morning.
- Elbert Cox: Oh, yes, yes. Well, he had a lot of experience in the Smokies and at George Washington's Birthplace and this is the thing that we were strong in. We had men who had field experience and many of them knew the areas that they were working on and looking at. A little later Reese Smith, an outstanding man, came on as Chief of Operations. And a pillar in our Regional Office, Ray Mulvaney, I owe as much to Ray as anybody because he was not only an excellent administrator but especially effective in working with the superintendents. One of the outstanding things about the Regional Office – which I realize more and more, I sort of took them for granted when I was there – was the excellent secretarial help we had. They were unusually able and some of them are still there, you know.
- Herbert Evison: Yes.
- Elbert Cox: You just can't say too much about the value of a competent secretary, and we had the best.
- Herbert Evison: I can think of two or three other people who always seemed to me to be very competent. One was the late Tyler Kiener.
- Elbert Cox: Yes, and Bill O'Neil, of course. Bill was an unusually broad engineer in his training and experience. You just can't find engineers now who can tackle a problem in engineering the way, Bill could. Tyler was a little more specialized. In a problem with a dam, Tyler was the one we called on. Well, I am overlooking others – Fred Arnold, of course, for the whole

time I was there was the Chief Forester and was highly qualified in his profession; dedicated and completely loyal, always.

Herbert Evison: While you were Regional Director from '51 to what, '66?

Elbert Cox: Yes, '66.

Herbert Evison: Quite a lot of things happened to the Regions generally, some of which I suspect didn't make you too happy.

Elbert Cox: Well, of course we went through several reorganizations, and it was a bit of a trial to break up a functioning team. It was quite a wrench when the design offices moved out. And then again when the BOR was created, taking certain activities out of the Park Service. That was quite a wrench, too. Yes, those were troublesome times, and it was a real problem to keep the morale up in the organization during so many adjustments and readjustments.

Herbert Evison: Now, of course, you lived through as Regional Director the entire period of Mission 66.

Elbert Cox: Yes. A busy period and a lot of celebrations. Region One, or the Southeast Region, bore the brunt of Civil War celebrations. I don't know how many Centennial to-do's we had but about all of them had celebrations, right on down the list from Manassas to Appomattox.

Herbert Evison: You must have gotten tired of making speeches at Centennial celebrations, didn't you?

Elbert Cox: Yes. I remember some of them in particular. In Manassas, it was an extremely hot day, both days there, really fierce. We really sweated through those days.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, wasn't the first Manassas observed by a reenactment of some kind?

Elbert Cox: Oh, yes. They had really quite a production in a battlefield reenactment there. Francis Wilshin could fill you in on that, I'm sure. There were a lot of questions about that, and we probably won't do it again, but a lot of people enjoyed it. It had meaning for a lot of folks. There are an awful lot of Civil War buffs around yet, you know. They really ate it up.

Herbert Evison: Well, if I'm not mistaken, that was the first, and last, reenactment at a Centennial here, wasn't it?

Elbert Cox: I think that may be the last, but you remember the Yorktown celebration in 1931, a reenactment of the battle, surrender and all. Very elaborate, really.

- Herbert Evison: Something of great pleasure that you missed by being up in Morristown, was the pleasure of listening to Herb Evison as the speaker of the day at the Yorktown celebration in 1936.
- Elbert Cox: Well, I suspect I have heard as many Yorktown speeches as any person living, but I did miss one or two, and that is one that I regret. There have been some interesting ones. I recall one in 1932, I think it was. Albright was still Director. I had gotten acquainted with Bishop Denny in Richmond. He was Bishop of the Methodist Church and quite a history buff. So, we invited him to give the invocation. Well, he was a great gentleman, a great preacher, and a great orator and his prayer was an oration to the Lord, you know. He must have prayed for fifteen minutes. It was cloudy and threatening rain any minute. I remember Horace Albright's remark, "I thought we were going to have a parade and a prayer and that would be all." But it didn't rain.
- Herbert Evison: Must have given you a sorta nostalgic feeling if you watched the Inauguration of President Kennedy.
- Elbert Cox: I remember that one, too.
- Herbert Evison: Well, do any other things occur to you in connection with the Mission 66 program that worked out in your region?
- Elbert Cox: Mission 66 was a remarkable concept. It was really serious programming and even though there was an element of gimmickry about it, the real value and the real strength of the Mission 66 was that it was a concerted effort to do systematic planning. Of course, any time you set yourself to a specific job you can really do more than you would accomplish if you just leave things go on in a normal routine. Concentrating the way we did on Mission 66, and being able to get some money, made it an unusual program that had a tremendous impact on the Service. Region One came in for some special attention because of Civil War centennials. But Service-wide it was very helpful and a very rewarding program. It extended beyond the Service in its influence. Many other agencies took a cue from Mission 66 and did their own thing.
- Herbert Evison: As I remember there was a very concerted effort made to complete visitor centers and so far, as possible to complete Mission 66 developments on the Civil War areas before the Centennial date.
- Elbert Cox: Right. And for the most part they did this. Vicksburg for instance, we didn't make it – visitor center there and the revision of the road system has just recently been done. As a matter of fact, I saw Vicksburg this year. Even though we couldn't get Vicksburg done during Mission 66, the impetus was there and fortunately plans have now been carried to

completion. It was a new experience to have money to acquire land or build a building or a visitor center; in the days after ECW and PWA you just didn't come into an appropriation to do a visitor center except in a very rare instance.

Herbert Evison: As I remember it the only real Visitor Center that was built between World War II and the start of Mission 66 was the one at Grand Canyon.

Elbert Cox: I really wouldn't know. Very likely.

Herbert Evison: Incidentally, of course, the concept of the Visitor Center marked quite a radical change in planning for the National Park Service. I wonder if you have any particular reactions as to what that meant?

Elbert Cox: Well, I think it was a good move. Of course, here again there was design in this change in nomenclature. Museums became sort of a bad word; if you wanted to get money for a project, you didn't call it a museum. And then, too, the emphasis on service to the visitor was reflected in this visitor center concept. I think it was a good plan and then, of course, in the small areas we began to combine the so-called museum and the office headquarters or even the utility shop operations, in one unit. All an improvement in our planning techniques, I think, really.

Herbert Evison: You know I was down at the Great Smokies at the time that the Visitor Center was dedicated. So were you.

Elbert Cox: Right.

Herbert Evison: And I remember that was the only Visitor Center dedication that I ever attended and one of the things I remember about it was it was so darned skimpily attended.

Elbert Cox: Yes.

Herbert Evison: At that time – I think it was at that time – I learned of the plan for (that must have been earlier than that), revision of the road system at that junction at the visitor center and headquarters. I have to admit that I have argued it with Connie Wirth occasionally, and as far as I know he still thinks it's a good plan, and I still think it's a rotten one.

Elbert Cox: Well, Connie Wirth of course is a great planner, but I don't remember this particular one.

Elbert Cox: Connie was usually pretty reasonable, I always thought. He could pick up a plan and read it so quickly – I mean size up the terrain and topography and come up with improvements. Of course, he was trained in this area. This is his great talent, and we owe a lot to him and his planning ability as Director. But I remember, in many cases, we had plan after plan.

Appomattox – I don't know how many times we changed the approach to the Surrender House at Appomattox. I think generally we came up with as good as you could do under the circumstances. Of course, there are always several different ways to solve a planning problem. I hope you have taped Connie.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Elbert Cox: Good. You asked about people in the Regional Office. I am trying to think of ones I may have overlooked and certainly I wouldn't want to fail to give credit to those in the Regional Office that worked with me. I also think back again of the people in the Washington Office that I worked with. The Directors, one after the other. I always claimed a special distinction. I began work while Horace Albright was Director. Through the years that became an even more rare distinction, Cammerer, Demaray and Newton Drury, and right on down – Connie Wirth and now George Hartzog, really an unusual group of men. I might just mention one thing, a special distinction, Herb. I believe I have been involved longer than any other living person at Jamestown. I am Chairman now of a committee whose principal function is to plan the annual observance of Jamestown Day. And right now, I am trying to work up a program for May 9th for that affair.

Herbert Evison: You know, I didn't know until right this minute that there was an annual Jamestown Day.

Elbert Cox: We always have an annual observance on the Sunday nearest May 13th. This year it is on May 9th, so we will be at Jamestown on that day. This way I keep in touch with the Yorktown-Jamestown folks.

Herbert Evison: I know there is one bit of factual information that you failed to give me when you were giving me your vital statistics. We got you married and nothing after that, and I know darn well some very important things happened.

Elbert Cox: Well, yes. I overlooked that. We were married in 1935. Tommy, our older boy, didn't come along until 1945. Terry, our second son was born in '46. So, we have two boys – the project for a little sister never materialized! Tommy is in second year law at Washington & Lee University; married last September. Terry, the younger one, just finished Architecture at the University of Virginia two years ago and is working here in Richmond for the Telephone Company. He is not married and lives in his own "pad." We know he is here but don't see much of him.

Herbert Evison: Now you refer to him as "Terry." Is he Terence?

Elbert Cox: No, no, my dad's name was Joseph Terry. He was named for Terry Fulton. You know, back in the hill country, they didn't worry about proper names, often using an abbreviation or a nickname. This probably explains the Terry. His name is John Terry after his two grandfathers, but we call him Terry.

Herbert Evison: Well, I certainly don't want to cut you off, but the time comes eventually, and you are the one to decide.

Elbert Cox: Well, I have talked longer than I should and I'm sure I've omitted many important items and probably made errors in sequence of happenings. If you have questions about any of it, let me know and I will be glad to try again.

Herbert Evison: Well, I'll end up by thanking you very much because I not only enjoyed what I have on here but I'm just glad as always to sit and talk with you.

Elbert Cox: Very good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]