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John A. Aubuchon
April 4, 1973

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Oral History Interview

John A. Aubuchon

with

Herb Evison

Reel 171

172

Washington, D.C.

April 4, 1973

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[START OF TAPE 171]

Herbert Evison: This is April 4, 1973. I'm Herb Evison, and this morning for the third day in a row, I am in the Southwest regional office of the National Park Service here in Santa Fe.

Herbert Evison: And with me is John A. Aubuchon, who is a part of the Southwest regional office staff at the moment; he has the title, I think it's correct, of chief service wide quarters evaluation team. I taped John in Death Valley in 1962, shortly after he became superintendent there. And what follows will cover, I hope, some of his pre Park Service existence, and then his activities since our taping session back in 1962.

Herbert Evison: John, let's start by getting on the record when and where you were born and something about the family that you were born into.

John Aubuchon: Okay. I was one of three children, born to parents of John D. and Edna Mae Aubuchon, and born in Colorado Springs in 1916.

Herbert Evison: Let's get the date.

John Aubuchon: November 11th, 1916. And my dad was a fireman in the city of Colorado Springs, and ultimately, he was injured in an accident going to a fire and died as a result of it sometime later. My family consisting of mother and my two older sisters, and I moved to Boulder, Colorado, with my grandmother, and we lived in Boulder for years. I went to school in Boulder, to the state prep school there, and had two years at Colorado University.

Herbert Evison: Oh yes. Was that the sum of your university education?

John Aubuchon: Yes, two years.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh. And that would have brought to you to about when?

John Aubuchon: To about 1937, I guess. Something like that.

Herbert Evison: Oh yes. Well into the days of the New Deal. When you went to the university, what were you aiming for particularly, and why did you go only two years?

John Aubuchon: Well, I started out thinking that the thing to do in life was to be an engineer, and by engineer, I mean civil engineer — and after having gone to school for two years, I'd pretty well run out of money, and finances were a problem in those days.

- John Aubuchon: I was able to get a job — well, the fact of the matter is that I got into the CCC camp as an enrollee and spent six months as an enrollee in the program and then I got a job as junior engineer working in the camp because I'd had some engineering experience, and there was a period when I was going to — well, I was still in school, and my dad was a contractor, and he did some work in Rocky Mountain National Park and different other areas, of work around the country, and I had learned quite a bit of the trade working with him. Of course, I was a kid — I'll admit that I picked up certain habits in customs and knew how to use equipment and this sort of thing, so that—
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- John Aubuchon: I had some idea of what engineering was all about because I had worked with others doing this sort of thing, so that when the soil conservation service gave me a job, I was working in Durango, Colorado and then down around Farmington and Aztec, as a junior engineer, laying out stock gapes and locating section corners and this sort of thing.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well now, did that mean that you were one of the staff of a camp, a camp foreman with the title of junior engineer?
- John Aubuchon: Right, this is correct. Uh huh.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- John Aubuchon: I went into that job after having been an enrollee.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Very interesting. And of course, you know Carl Walker was an enrollee originally, or did you know that?
- John Aubuchon: No, I didn't know that before.
- Herbert Evison: Yes. And of course, Jim Eden was. I've come across several people who started out as enrollees who have made park service careers.
- Herbert Evison: I would take it that you look rather kindly on the Civilian Conservation Corps.
- John Aubuchon: I think it was one of the best programs we have ever had, and I think it's a program that could well be repeated, and I think that those aspects of the present job corps program that paralleled the job — the CCC camp — was very good. I think they were admirable, and I recognize that there is a terrific segment of our population that needs, and not only just economically depressed people and in the case of the Job Corps, young men who lack education — but I think the experience gained in a CCC camp or even a Job Corps camp that they get out of this silly little bit that I

thought OEO was hung up on — that it can be, and is, a real worthwhile program.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know why I have never talked with anybody who had any experience of the CCC who didn't speak pretty highly of it — and that's a lot of people, too.

John Aubuchon: Of course, it was a totally different program than the present-day concept of the Job Corps program.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

John Aubuchon: But I think that the — a program of some kind, to assist young people who need orientation, experience, guidance and this sort of thing at an early age when they have not made up their minds what they want to do and they don't necessarily have to be economically depressed or uneducated to gain a lot of advantage from that sort of thing.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well now, we've got you to the point where you're a CCC foreman. I am pretty sure that when I taped you 10 or 11 years ago that we followed your career in the Park Service — but I think it'd be a good idea to get on the record here how you started with the Park Service; what brought about that?

John Aubuchon: Well, I suppose it's kind of a roundabout way of answering your question, but while I was going to state prep school, the university in Boulder, I was also a member of the National Guard, and when I moved to Durango, Colorado, I continued in the National Guard up to the point where I got a commission in the National Guard, and in 1940, things were still pretty tough on the outside, and the amount of money that they were paying me as a junior engineer on these six month appointments that we used to get was not as much as the money that the army was offering me as a second lieutenant, and of course, I took that — I was married at that time. I married a gal from Colorado Springs.

Herbert Evison: Okay, let's get the date and the name of the girl now.

John Aubuchon: Well, actually I was married on July 11, 1940, and the lady's name was Ruth Wasleckiter, and now it's Aubuchon, obviously — and the —

Herbert Evison: Still is, eh?

John Aubuchon: Yes, still is! And I wouldn't change for anything. And I went into the army then because at that time, the pay in the army for a second lieutenant was \$125 a month, and they also gave me \$40 a month for quarters allowance and they gave me \$21 a month for subsistence, making a grand total of \$181 or 83 a month, which was great.

- John Aubuchon: Out of that, of course, I had to buy my uniforms and this sort of thing, but that was before they had a uniform allowance for the military.
- John Aubuchon: And, after having gone to the military then, I was in the army, and was fortunate enough to have advanced in grade from a second lieutenant, and came out as a major in 1947, but I stayed in the reserves, and finally then, I retired from the reserve as a retired reservist as a colonel two or three years ago, right after I got to Santa Fe, anyhow.
- Herbert Evison: Really.
- John Aubuchon: But I have known quite a few Park Service people while working in and around Durango, and my wife at one time ran the curio shop for the DNRG when they used to have a concession at Mesa Verde National Park. So, she had close ties and connections with Mesa Verde.
- John Aubuchon: And along about 1943 or '44 whenever it was, I went overseas to the Pacific, and she and our daughter, Coleen, was looking for a place to live while I was gone, and they ended up going to Mesa Verde, and en route, worked for Jess Newsbaum in the Visitor Center in the museum, and accordingly when I came back from the army, home was Mesa Verde, and Don Watson — the park archeologist Gene Pinkley, and Jess Newsbaum all convinced me that maybe a life with the Park Service was better than most anything else, and they put me on as a seasonal, and I thoroughly enjoyed it and I'm still here.
- John Aubuchon: I turned down an offer for a regular army commission, and had taken all of the examinations and had to — the only thing I had yet to do was to make an appearance before the Board of Officers in Denver before being accepted for a regular army commission, and I declined the offer at the very last moment. Actually, my very first job at the park was that of a truck driver, and here I was a recently discharged army major and Monte Fitch was also a truck driver at the same time, a recently discharged captain, and we were faced with the position of being supervised by [a] very recently discharged private, and he took his supervision rather seriously, and he had a captain and a major really dancing tunes out there as truck drivers. And the guy's name was — well, we don't need to worry about who it was, but he was a real swell fellow, but for a while, he was trying to impress us that we may have been brass at one time out there, but we weren't any more.
- Herbert Evison: Well, that was a wonderful induction. When — just one more question about that early time — you were employed then as a seasonal, but when did you become a permanent employee and in what capacity?

John Aubuchon: Well, I was employed of course as a truck driver, to begin with, and this only lasted for a fairly short time, and I immediately went on to a laborer's job doing ruins stabilization at Spruce Tree and Cliff Palace only until the visitor season began to open up, and at that time, then, I was included on the interpretive staff. Don Watson had been a good friend of ours for years, and I had known him well and knew quite a bit about archeologists, but I was not an archeologist.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

John Aubuchon: But I think I did a fairly good job as an interpreter and was extremely interested. So, then I went from Mesa Verde as a seasonal to my first permanent job, as a ranger archeologist at Aztec Ruins.

Herbert Evison: Oh yes.

Herbert Evison: Now I'm sure that we've covered your Aztec Ruins experience from then on when I taped you before, but I want to come back again to one phase of that previous history, and that was the matter of which I alleged you might know of a little while ago.

Herbert Evison: I was wondering during your period at Custer Battlefield just how General Custer, or Lt. Col. Custer was when he was killed, how he was presented, as what kind of a guy.

John Aubuchon: Well, the museum exhibits at the Visitor Center had been installed as recently as about two or three years before I became superintendent at Custer.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

John Aubuchon: It was a new Visitor Center, new exhibits, and many of the exhibits were strictly oriented toward glorifying Custer, and my specific feeling was that the many cases that were specifically set aside for Custer merely glorified him beyond what he should have received in attention, I thought. You could look upon his West Point days and the uniforms and everything else as merely schoolboy clothes, and just what this had to do with the Custer fight was always questionable.

John Aubuchon: But the museum exhibits had been so recently installed that we weren't able to convince anybody that they should be changed. And the fact of the matter is, a couple of times, through correspondence or telephone calls or at meetings or something, I have been fairly well told that they realized at the time the exhibits were put in that they were pretty well Custer oriented and not necessarily covering the full extent of the Battle of Little Big Horn.

John Aubuchon: But they saw no way of doing anything; they didn't want to change anything until after at least Captain Loose had passed on and had gotten out of the picture.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

John Aubuchon: But they have changed the exhibit somewhat up there, but not nearly as much as they should have.

John Aubuchon: We had a professional historian on the staff, and I think we added quite a bit to the interpretive program up there for a while by having made a battlefield search for army cartridge cases or cartridge cases that may have been used by the Indians to follow routes from the Reno Banteen area, and then a plain table survey of locations was made so that we could come up with some postulations as to what actually happened.

John Aubuchon: But we tried to present the Battle of the Little Horn rather than the story of the Custer Battlefield. It's hard for me to make it — to distinguish the two, but I'm sure that the interpretive programs, or at least I'm not surprised that the interpretive programs were criticized, because there was much, much more attention paid to Custer, his earlier life and all this sort of thing, than to the causes and reasons for the battle, and the situation that existed at that time.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Herbert Evison: Well, thanks a lot for that. Let's go back now to Death Valley, where you had just very recently come in as superintendent and you were there for four years, and no — not quite — from August '62 to January '66, which is a pretty long assignment for a superintendent anywhere by modern standards.

John Aubuchon: Yeah, it is.

Herbert Evison: What do you remember about your period there? That stands out particularly in your memory.

John Aubuchon: Well, most people don't think of Death Valley of being beautiful, but I thought it was. It was spectacular, and probably its greatest beauty from time to time came real early in the morning at sunrise or late in the afternoon, the sunsets were beautiful, and during the fantastic storms, the lightning storms that took place, often we would get no rain at all down in the valley, but there were lightning storms in the mountains around us, and were really terrific sights to behold; they were marvelous.

John Aubuchon: The management of the area was interesting, but difficult, but of course we were paid to do the difficult things from time to time. There were many problems in connection with the valley such as mining and

prospecting, the water problems and the rather unsavory developments that came about because of the Senator Moss investigation of the water rights in Death Valley, and the issues that were made by others concerning the relationship between the Park Service and the Borax Company and this was a difficult thing; it didn't need to be handled the way it was, except that I blame some political interests for having made it as much of an issue as it was. But this isn't unusual, either.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, the first thing in there that you mentioned were prospecting and mining, and of course, Death Valley is one of the exceptions in the Park System in that, that is, not only is prospecting permitted there even this long after you were there, but that mining claims can be patented. Of course, one of the anomalies of that situation is that a man can come in and file a claim on land which, when he files his claim, belongs to the United States — and going through the regular process, he can finally get title to it. Then he can sell it to Uncle Sam if he wants to, and then he can go through the whole darn process again as far as I know, there is nothing to prevent it once it becomes again, Uncle Sam's property, it can be prospected just like anything else.

Herbert Evison: I'm curious to know to what extent mining and prospecting in there during your years did either of these things either affected the visitor's enjoyment of the area, or how seriously their activities affected the looks of the place.

John Aubuchon: Well, it's hard to say how much mining and prospecting influenced the visitors. I suppose about the only thing I can think of offhand that would be material in that respect is the fact that many prospectors were equipped with four wheel drive vehicles and this sort of thing, and they would get off the established roadways, which to the uninitiated, weren't always appreciated, and we had a lot of people with regular automobiles try to take those same little trails and roads, and they ended up in an awful lot of trouble. I don't recall anyone ever having actually losing their life as a result of it, but they were horribly inconvenient from time to time, and they ended up being rather expensive rescues to search and rescue, to bring them back out and to bring them safely home.

John Aubuchon: I think that the looks of Death Valley have been definitely impaired by this mining, and the thing of it is that practically all known minerals exist in Death Valley, but they do not exist in sufficient quantity that would cause a prudent person, really, to expend much money to extract them. This isn't true, of course, of everything. There is some lead and some silver, and of course, the barks — and there are other talc. But those mines and those operations are pretty well established — and prospecting today out there is merely done by a group of people who want to try and take advantage in such a way to obtain the home site or summer vacation site

or in Death Valley, actually a winter vacation site, I guess, or to file a bunch of claims that they can hopefully sell and this sort of thing. It's — I don't think Death Valley really offers a mining opportunity to anybody anymore, actually, and we found that many were coming in, sneaking into the lower end of the valley where at that time we didn't have anyone stationed at all, and they'd come in with a bulldozer on a flatbed truck, and they would unload the bulldozer and drop the blade and excavate a small hole every few hundred yards — enough to be able to have — meet the legal requirements of having done some exploratory work, enough to go ahead and file a claim.

John Aubuchon: We put in a strong request to get a mining engineer on the staff that could invalidate these claims as they were made. Technically, you're not allowed to file a mining claim until you have shown evidence of the existence of some ore, but we didn't have anyone on the staff who had the time or the capability to do this sort of thing. Since then, it's been reported, very fortunately, they have added a staff member whose job is strictly working with the mining interests and invalidating, checking out mining claims to try to get the whole thing straightened out. I thought that it was a real good plan that I had, and the Bureau of Land Management also was trying at that time to get a law passed which would in certain cases, allow us to invalidate all mining claims, and then make people come before you and actually prove up on a claim and revalidate them if they actually were worthwhile. But there were several political interests against this sort of thing, and of course, the U.S. Borax Company and some [of] its people weren't very enthused about this, either.

John Aubuchon: We did have a Grammie Lyles who preceded me as superintendent at Death Valley who had made a small land withdrawal of certain acreages in Death Valley which would be withdrawn by administrative order from — entry from prospecting.

John Aubuchon: And I took what he had done and added, probably another 250,000 acres of land at other key locations in the Valley and throughout the park, and had it published in the Federal Register, but again, we were never able to get the Secretary of the Interior to actually go along and effectively withdraw the land.

John Aubuchon: Now, if it is technically withdrawn, it remains in that kind of a state of limbo because you can't really enforce it. You can post it and all that sort of stuff, and I suppose for the faint of heart, maybe that's enough. But if it came to a point of trying to legally keep somebody out or prosecute them for entry, we wouldn't have a leg to stand on.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. You mentioned a situation with respect to water supplies, and I believe that refers to the boundary, either just inside or just outside of the monument.

John Aubuchon: Well, there were many places that we had conflict pertaining to water, on the mountains, on the west side of the valley, where water had been developed years and years before, and was used for grazing. We had the same thing happening in Nevada in the section of the monument extending into Nevada, for in the direction towards Beatty.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

John Aubuchon: The biggest problem, probably was right in the Florida valley, the difference of opinion of who the Park Service and the U.S. Borax Company, over the control of water that was available at Ferns Creek Ranch, and the Ferns Creek headquarters area, and who owned what and how much of what was available was owned by whom.

John Aubuchon: Years before I arrived there, there had been a plan to put the Park Service headquarters at a location east of the Ferns Creek Valley or put the residential area, anyhow, east of Ferns Creek Ranch, east of the Ferns Creek Inn up above the mesa there.

Herbert Evison: Right.

John Aubuchon: They had drilled a well, had a good water supply, and they had even staked it out for the housing area and all this sort of stuff; something came up that changed the master plan, and they went right back to Cow Creek where the residences are today, and they built in there instead.

John Aubuchon: There's an adequate supply of water there, and they didn't have to pump or do anything like that to obtain it, and they had a pretty good standard of vegetation already started.

John Aubuchon: The big question over water in the Furnace Creek area came up as a result of trying to get water, to insure that we had an adequate supply for campground development at Texas Spring campgrounds, and in back of the visitor center down near park headquarters.

John Aubuchon: I don't know whether that situation has ever been resolved or not; I don't think it has. But at least it isn't causing any problem anymore. Everybody is just living with the situation, I guess.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

John Aubuchon: But it had been a messy little deal all the time that I was there; we were obligated as a result of the House Investigation Committee headed up by Senator Moss, or Congressman Moss, rather, that any dealings we had in

any way with the U.S. Borax Company people, that could have any reflection of attitude or anything like that on this water issue had to be reported with a copy to Moss.

John Aubuchon: I got thoroughly disgusted with him one time when he came out with one of his little investigative jaunts, and while we were standing at Texas Springs, he asked me if I knew any of the officials of the U.S. Borax Company, and of course I did. I had met quite a number of them, and some even from England and so forth — the Girsleys and the whole bunch, had met them from time to time, if nothing more than courtesy visits and this sort of thing.

John Aubuchon: He further asked if I had ever had dinner with them or if they'd ever been to my house or if I had ever gone to parties with them and this sort of thing. And this was also true — they had entertained me here or I had by the same token taken a civil gesture to invite them back up to my house in return.

John Aubuchon: Well, finally, I answered affirmatively to all of these things, and finally I guess he realized that I was being totally honest but maybe I wasn't answering what he really wanted to know, and he asked if they'd ever invited me, my wife or both of us down to Los Angeles for a weekend, and they picked up the hotel bill and if they had entertained us lavishly and all this sort of stuff, and I said, again, no, and I said I didn't really know exactly what he was searching for, but I had to admit that in all probability everybody had a price, but I was damn thankful that my price was considerably more than selling out for a damn meal or a cheap weekend on somebody, this sort of thing.

John Aubuchon: But I think the investigative tactics of these committees that are involved with things like that are probably as crude and rude as anything you run into, and as far as I'm concerned, they don't really provide much information. I found that I was just plain disgusted with the whole thing.

John Aubuchon: We did have the '49er encampment was quite exciting and interesting; we worked with some wonderful people.

Herbert Evison: How much work did that entail for you and your staff?

John Aubuchon: Well, quite a bit but then of course, we were — this is part of what you do to provide service for your visitors. I think we had — we reached a point of pretty good understanding in Death Valley on this particular little thing of the '49ers. They were a real dedicated — and they are a real dedicated group of people. They're interested in Death Valley, they do a lot of good for Death Valley, they give it good publicity and they help in many, many ways.

- John Aubuchon: The problem that we had for a while was, though, that we were having these '49ers and they were people who lived in the vicinity of Los Angeles or Lone Pine or that general area of southern California, who had perfectly marvelous intentions, but they didn't always have the necessary know-how to get things done, and there was a little conflict from time to time about who would do what, and if it was something they as individuals wanted to do — for example, we had a fellow one time who had been directing traffic and trying to set up the traffic control measures, and take on that responsibility for himself as a member of the '49ers; in other words, they came in as a group, and he was going to be traffic controller.
- John Aubuchon: Well, we worked very, very closely with the sheriff's office, the Highway Patrol, and we had professionally trained rangers on our staffs. All we really needed them to do was to let us know what the program was going to be, and we felt obligated to provide our own traffic control, without the — not only guidance, but interference from the local '49ers who had nothing to do with traffic control maybe the rest of the year, and they really weren't in a position to do it.
- John Aubuchon: In that case, they wanted to take over; in other cases — oh, I can think of a real simple situation where at the end of a given program — certain signs and things like that, cardboard signs and all — should have been taken to Stovepipe Wells for the next program, maybe — and this is something that the '49ers could have well done by themselves; it was really their program, and we were assisting them, but they gave us many of their chores to do that they didn't want to do.
- Herbert Evison: Uh huh.
- John Aubuchon: So we had a good long, heart to heart talk, or I had, with some of the people and explained why there was resistance on the part of the park staff to work with the '49ers, and I think the resistance was primarily created as a result of situations like this traffic thing I was talking about, or their merely coming in and taking over, when they could have asked or if they'd done nothing, we'd have done it instead.
- John Aubuchon: But we finally worked this out, and I think it worked out very, very well.
- Herbert Evison: Yes. The '49ers put a lot of influence behind getting that visitors center in there?
- John Aubuchon: I think so. The '49ers exert a tremendous amount of influence out there. One thing, of course, they have our highly respected and former director Horace Albright is one of their members — this was good, and this was bad.

John Aubuchon: The same session I mentioned about a moment ago, that we got straightened out down in Los Angeles one time, there were two or three things that came up that weren't totally satisfactory to the '49ers, weren't satisfactory as far as I was concerned, either, that had to be resolved.

John Aubuchon: And a meeting was arranged. I got a call from Connie Wirth, and he said he'd heard from Horace and Horace had told him some things over the phone, and he said why don't you go on down to L.A. and get this thing straightened out, and I was real happy to do it.

John Aubuchon: So, I made arrangements to meet these fellows down in Los Angeles and go to the University Club for dinner and chat about things and get it all straightened out. There was supposed to have been about five other people in addition to myself in attendance, and two or three of them forgot to come (Horace was one of them), and Horace's brother-in-law, who I can't think of his name right this minute.

John Aubuchon: But anyhow, there ended up two '49ers present from the organization, and the ex-President of the organization, and myself, and of course, it probably enhanced the meeting considerably by having only the three of us there. And we had a real good dinner, several drinks, and we got down to the nitty gritty and talked about what our problems were.

John Aubuchon: Part of the problem, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that the '49ers had just involved themselves in personnel in Death Valley, and if Connie Wirth or some other director didn't like the way I was running the place, this was fine — but damn if I was going to be responsible to all 49 directors of the '49ers organization. And unless they were in my shoes, I didn't think that they had — that they could take their problems if they wanted to, to Connie Wirth, and it was up to Connie to evaluate them and do what he wanted to do.

John Aubuchon: But I didn't feel I was responsible to report to the '49er organization and make personnel changes one way or another with what they wanted.

John Aubuchon: So — as a result of that meeting, we had that night, we cleared the air on many things, and they understood my position a little bit better and I certainly appreciated theirs more, I'm sure, but we then quit running afoul of each other — we didn't have that sort of a problem anymore.

John Aubuchon: But I had to make them get off my back and quit trying to run the park — I had too many bosses.

[END OF TAPE 171]

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John Aubuchon: The Forty-Niner organization after that meeting and park staff were able to work very, very closely together and to put on a pretty good show each year. I think if there was any criticism I would have of the Forty-Niner encampment, it was merely that they were having the same programs every year. But, of course, that was from my standpoint, and I suppose visitors who were in Death Valley for the first time obviously would make — it wouldn't make any difference to them.

John Aubuchon: But the pancake race was always held, and they started — I think the only innovation that came about during the time I was there was adding an old-time fiddler's contest, and this was pretty great. But the same people invariably gave the same type of interpretive program and this sort of thing. And they had some who were exceptional at doing these programs. Tom Clements, for example, University of Southern California, a real famous geologist, used to put on geology tours in the park during the encampment. And this was great, but it was the same tour each year. And I suppose maybe having heard it four years in a row, maybe I thought they could have changed it in some way.

John Aubuchon: But the last year that I was in Death Valley, I knew — well, I had been approached on several different jobs before I left Death Valley, and when the encampment came along in November, I knew I was going, but I didn't know where. And I realized it was going to be my last encampment. And we had the new development at Grapevine had just been finished, the entrance station and comfort stations and the work on the campground, and they built some residence for the rangers up there, little apartment house complex and maintenance building.

John Aubuchon: And we had arranged to have a dedication of that facility during encampment, when we would have a big crowd around and all. And I was approached about that time by Miss Liddicolt and Mr. Webb from the Gospel Foundation who had Scotty's castle in the north end of the valley there, and they asked how many people I would like to have come to a dinner party. And, of course, it's not normal to ask somebody how many people you want at your party unless you're giving it or something. And finally, then I said, well, the party following the dedication is great. But why don't you select how many would you like to have?

John Aubuchon: And they said, no, that they would be able to handle anywhere from a certain low number to, I forget whether 50 or 60 people or something. And so, I finally gave them a list of those that I felt would — well, I'd like to have present at a party for me and that sort of thing.

John Aubuchon: So, at the appointed day we had the dedication, following which we went up to the castle, and the — Miss Liddicolt and Mr. Webb served me and

my guests, including my wife and the regional director, I think, was Ariat Hummel and Horace Albright and any number of others. There were about 30 or 35 of us all together.

John Aubuchon: We were the first people to have eaten in the castle dining room since Scotty had died, and we were the last people to have eaten there. We had an absolutely scrumptious meal, marvelous steaks and all this sort of thing, and we felt highly honored. We ate off the china and used the silverware that is on display in the castle, and as I say, we were the first and last people to have eaten in the dining room since Scotty died, which was a real nice thing, I think.

John Aubuchon: Then they had, of course, part of the dessert was a great big, beautiful cake decorated, and the decorations indicated — they had a drawing in decoration in the front that was a United States flag and a little ranger station that we'd just dedicated that day (inaudible), it was a very nice tribute, I thought.

John Aubuchon: But they were a grand group of people, and they were working real hard doing a job that not too many people really understood what was all about.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well now, of course, Scotty's castle is property of the U.S. Government.

John Aubuchon: Right. Right.

Herbert Evison: People of the United States. Well, I don't remember whether it was with you or — no, it must have been with Ted Goodman when I was first in there that we visited Scotty's castle and visited with Scotty.

John Aubuchon: I see. I never knew Scotty. Of course, I knew—

Herbert Evison: (Inaudible) his time a little bit.

John Aubuchon: — a lot about him.

Herbert Evison: And this would have been in the early '50s, not very long before he died. Well, when you left Death Valley, where did you go to?

John Aubuchon: Well, I left Death Valley and went to Mammoth Cave as superintendent.

Herbert Evison: Yes. And you were superintendent there for how long?

John Aubuchon: Well, let's see. I got there in January of '68, and I left—

Herbert Evison: Wait a minute. Have I got the (inaudible) wrong?

John Aubuchon: Wait a minute. Not '68. Year was '66.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

John Aubuchon: I got there January of 1966 and left and came into this job along about October of '68, I think it was.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, but you have been on this job since '68?

John Aubuchon: Yes, since '68.

Herbert Evison: You have the usual rather short period as a superintendent. (Inaudible) superintendents' (inaudible) were becoming shorter by the time you got there. Of course, by the time you got to Mammoth Cave, it was a pretty well-established park with its — I would take it — with its routine pretty well-established.

John Aubuchon: Well, routine in many aspects, but exclusive of the Job Corps Center. We had the Great A Job Corps Center there, and it was just getting underway. It was still under construction, just getting organized and just getting staffed.

John Aubuchon: It was in real early development stages, so that — and the last thing one could say about a Job Corps Center operation in those days is that it was routine.

Herbert Evison: Yes, I suppose so.

John Aubuchon: But running of a park was somewhat routine. We had an extremely competent staff, and many had been there quite a while and they knew their jobs well, so that from that standpoint, strictly what we think of normal park operations were routine to a great extent. We did have a master plan study underway at that time, and I probably contributed less to its study because I was just getting acquainted with the area, but the team was actually in the area making the study, and after experiencing the next summer's visitation, I quickly realized that what we had decided on at least tentatively the winter before just couldn't be lived with because we had too many problems. And we began experimenting with the self-guiding trail, semi-self-guiding trail through the historic entrance. This created quite a bit of concern within the ranks of the staff itself because this was a new concept.

John Aubuchon: And the park guides there are a real close-knit body of people, have been there for a long time, and they resist outsiders in many respects. I don't say that they didn't respect me, but they didn't really think I knew anything about the cave. But by the same token, while I didn't, I felt I was pretty knowledgeable about interpretation and keenly interested in it.

John Aubuchon: So, we experimented right in the busiest season of the year. We took a week after we had made some extremely temporary signs and other little devices that were needed to put the historic tour on a semi-self-guided

basis. We installed these signs, experimented for a week, and frankly it was very successful.

John Aubuchon: Then we took the winter months to begin to make it a permanent, or more permanent by making more permanent signs and changing the light, and the effect was what we were really doing was we were trying to conduct parties of many times up to three and 400 in a group through the cave with maybe one, two or three guides, and one party would be trailing the next, and due to the confines and limits of the — physical limits of the cave itself, you often couldn't get the group of people assembled and talk to them at one point. We would try, but it took so long to get them assembled. Then by the time you said a few words and you started out again, they spread out along the trail and with narrow passages, we were spending more time just walking and giving them practically nothing.

John Aubuchon: So, the idea was that we would merely — and we were discouraging people from taking cameras. Anyone with a walking cane or if they were feeble or something, they couldn't keep up because we had so many trips scheduled. So, we just simply junked the whole thing. We opened up the cave earlier in the morning. We stationed guides at locations in the cave. They rotated. They'd spend so much time at one station and go to the next and the next. Then they'd come out and have a bathroom — well, they'd just have a plain stop, so that they could warm up and refresh themselves and relieve themselves, and then they'd go back in the cave.

John Aubuchon: But in the meantime then the visitors could enter any time they wanted to, and they could walk the trail at their own leisure, and there were guides stationed along the trail to provide interpretation as well as interpretive signs, and then at a given point they were met by a guide who explained to them that, if they wanted to return, this was the point at which they should do it, because if they go beyond here, they might just as well finish the trip, because it will be less distance involved.

John Aubuchon: But this worked out very well, and this — we — I understand they're still doing it. And frankly, Carlsbad Cavern has checked with Mammoth Cave to find out how they were doing it back there. And Carlsbad has initiated a somewhat similar tour.

Herbert Evison: Oh, I hadn't heard that before. Very interesting to me. I was just wondering about the effect of decreased oversight or decreased controls, if actually there was a decrease.

John Aubuchon: Well, I don't think there was.

Herbert Evison: I'm thinking of vandalism, carving of initials on the rocks or what have you.

- John Aubuchon: To my knowledge, we didn't encounter any additional for one primary reason, I think, and that was that people were in a strange environment. And when they were there in a huge crowd, there was a ranger at the front of the party and one at the back of the party. And invariably the kids would leave the family and run up real close to be with the guide who was taking them through the cave. And they were you know, little — they were no longer in a family group. They were in — part of a crowd. And our experience really was that, when the people went through as a family group, the parents, at least, feeling somewhat insecure in this rather different environment, kept the children more closely related and associated with them than they did when they were with the big party, and I don't think we had as much problem.
- John Aubuchon: And we had some concern there was grave concern by some that people would wander off in these closed passages, and it would be dark, and they would get lost and we'd have to look for them. But people in a completely strange environment without flashlights and things like that just don't seem to do this sort of thing. So, it worked out real well.
- Herbert Evison: I think that's extremely interesting, and I haven't heard of any such undertaking as that before.
- John Aubuchon: Well, we were criticized. The concessioner didn't like the idea. In the first place, of course, formerly the Park Service had a longstanding arrangement where each tour, as they assembled at the mouth of the cave, would — the Park — the National Park concession photographer would be stationed up on the hill above, and the park ranger then would announce to the people, well, now, if you'll all turn and face the camera, we'll have a picture. Well, whether your picture's taken or whether it isn't is kind of a personal thing, and I didn't feel that we ought to be shilling for the concession. And we might let the concessioner announce to the assembled group that they would take a picture, and if you didn't want your picture, please turn around or turn the other way or something. And then after you finished the tour, the pictures would be available at such and such a price. But we let him do his own shilling for this sort of thing.
- John Aubuchon: And, of course, then when we put the trail on a semi-self-guided basis, that particular bit, the taking pictures at that location was wiped out. There was no need for it. But he still continued that sort of a thing at other cave site entrances. So, I don't think he lost all that much. But he was pretty hungry, thought he was. (Laughter.)
- Herbert Evison: Anything else about the Mammoth Cave experience? I think this is awfully good stuff.

John Aubuchon: Well, yeah. We had another master plan study, and this time the director appointed a — this director at this time, of course, was—

Herbert Evison: Hartzog?

John Aubuchon: — Hartzog — appointed a blue-ribbon committee, so to speak, to study, plan the area, including the wilderness and all this sort of stuff. And this was a very interesting approach. I don't think the plan has ever yet been developed or totally agreed on. The original concept that we were working with on this more recent study was to move many of the park facilities or the facilities that were in the park, move them out.

John Aubuchon: They had just built a new hotel there, finished it the year I arrived in 1965 or '66. And I'm sure that we would never allow them to do it if we'd given the same thought to it before it was built that we would give to it now. The concession facilities are right on top of the cave. The — there are many places to stay just outside the park. We were able to finally convince some of the local people that we were sincere in eliminating or at least; materially reducing camping in the park, and we cut down our overflow campgrounds, began to chase people out at night, make them go someplace else.

John Aubuchon: Then we worked real closely with at least two different neighbors outside and actually helped them develop campgrounds outside the park. And this is working well. The same can be said of overnight facilities, but it'll be a long time before they're wiped out.

John Aubuchon: But we were having a problem with the Job Corps Center which was on Flint Ridge. The site of that had been selected and was being used at the time I got there. They had developed a sewage lagoon for the disposal of sewage from the kitchen and the dormitories and the trailers that were hauled in for employee quarters, and we found out through the Cave Research Foundation that the — some of the effluent from the sewage lagoon was seeping down into the Flint Ridge Cave system and polluting the caves.

John Aubuchon: This, of course, was not good, wasn't desirable from anybody's standpoint. We had a kind of a rocky period there for a while trying to solve the problem. The sewage lagoon was built with an inadequate structure in the first place. It was about one inch in size.

John Aubuchon: The Job Corps Center was 214 men, and then there was the staff with the housing, and we needed about twice as much lagoon as we had. In addition to that, annual rainfall in that part of the country is about 50 inches a year. And the annual evaporation rate was about 40 inches a year. So, if you'd have an annual accumulation of ten inches of water in that

sewage lagoon, regardless of how big it was, it had to be disposed of someplace. And what had happened or was happening at the time is that we had a certain amount of overflow which was through the crevices and cracks in the ground, getting into the cave system and polluting it. There was no question about it.

John Aubuchon: So, we tried to resolve the problem. You don't just put in a lagoon overnight. We couldn't get the OEO to agree that we should close the camp in order to quit putting the effluent into the cave. Neither could we get any Park Service immediate reaction out of the whole thing, until finally we the national cave — National S____ Society had a meeting at Mammoth Cave, and at their meeting they mentioned and they read a paper that they were going to send into the newspapers and to the director concerning the fact that this effluent was still getting in the cave.

John Aubuchon: I think that meeting was held on a Saturday or Sunday, and the next day then I airtailed a copy of this into Region and told them what it was all about. And theoretically, at least I hoped they would have gotten the word to Washington, but real quickly then this all hit the Secretary's office and the newspapers at the same time. About a month later — so there was a month inactivity in through there. We were still trying to get this damned sewage lagoon in, but nothing happened.

John Aubuchon: Well, finally when the word broke about the National S____ Society's concern and the publicity that went with it, this did shake up a lot of people. And of course, a lot of people then, instead of assuming any responsibility for the inaction that we'd been getting, began to beat tables and say, why didn't you come in and sit at the directors' desk and just pound the table and tell him what you want. And, well, you don't do that. And I probably would have been cleaning garbage cans if I had and everything else.

John Aubuchon: It did finally result in a telephone call from the Secretary's office and someone who very bluntly asked all sorts of questions about how this would happen, what was going on, and he put it very succinctly over the telephone. He said, well, we don't care what happens down there, but stop that shit. And that's exactly what he said. And I'm sure this is exactly what they meant.

John Aubuchon: But with that amount of concern being exhibited here and there, unfortunately that's what it took to stir people up. We then were able to get some contract equipment and get busy and issued a contract and get the job done. (Interruption.)

John Aubuchon: — years that people spend doing this sort of thing is very great. They're all different experiences.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, I'm wondering what the impact otherwise of the establishment of the Job Corps was on the park. What kind of — were you able to get good work out of the Corps?

John Aubuchon: Well, yes, because we wouldn't accept substandard work, and it was a case of maybe sometimes having to do something over and over again until they got the work done and done right. But at the same time, we didn't get the amount of work that would be comparable to the accomplishments of the CCC or anything. But again, it was a totally different program, and part of the reason, of course, we didn't get anything was that, well, using myself as maybe a horrible example, but when I first went into the CCC program, I had worked — I was employable. I spoke and read English and there was no question about my being able to work if I could merely find a job someplace.

John Aubuchon: And but — with the Job Corps enrollees this was a different thing. My first trip over to the Job Corps Center to inspect or become oriented — I wasn't inspecting anything — I was becoming acquainted with the center and what it was doing. The center director took me around to the different activities that were going on, one of which was the kitchen and the dining room and this sort of thing.

John Aubuchon: And while we were in the dining room, I met the cooks, the civilian cooks, paid cooks who were running the kitchen for him. But in addition, I met two or three of the corpsmen who were working in the dining room as cook's helpers and KP's and cleanup boys and this sort of thing. And while we were in the dining room, the cook asked one of these corpsmen to go into the storeroom and open up five or six cans of green beans or green peas or something like this, some vegetable for dinner or lunch, and at that time, as I think they still are, they were getting their canned food from Army sources, and this meant that the food came in unlabeled cans, but on the outside it would be printed, "green beans" or "green corn" or "green peas," whatever case may have been, whatever the can had inside.

John Aubuchon: So we finally got through inspecting the dining room and the kitchen, and we wandered into the storeroom where all of these stacks of groceries were, and this well-intentioned young man had about seven or eight different cans, No. 10 tin cans, one gallon size, had them opened on the counter, but he still hadn't found the peas or the beans or whatever it was he was looking for. He couldn't read. And the — with good intentions, now, he was doing what he was told, but he couldn't do a job because he couldn't even read the label because of — and there was no picture because there was no label, so that's when you realized how totally helpless a person in that situation is, you realize that you've got a long, long way to go to make him employable.

John Aubuchon: And these Job Corps Centers, the conservation centers, as we have there at Mammoth Cave, that was the — that was the entrance to the program. These were non-employable people who had first to be taught good work habits. They had to be taught to read and write at least to some extent. And from there then they were to be graduated into other training programs or back into another life or most anything.

John Aubuchon: But this was the bare, base, grassroots program, and we've got a lot of good things from them, but we didn't get them as quickly and as rapidly as we sometimes wanted. The last year that I was in the park I thought I had a real good chance to do something and did. I can't actually swear to the reluctance of labor unions to accept minority members. I have no direct experience, but I've never seen many Black union carpenters or union plumbers or anything else, and I don't believe the data that they put out concerning them.

John Aubuchon: But I did have a chance to work with the labor unions, the AFL-CIO craftsmen's union, to work out a deal that I was real proud of, and that was that the training instructors that we had in the Job Corps program at our camp at least up at that point were Park Service personnel. And we had a lot of real good, dedicated Park Service personnel, but just because they were dedicated and just because a man was a good plumber or a good mechanic or a good carpenter didn't mean that he necessarily was a good Job Corps instructor in that same field. He may have come to the program with good intentions, but he may have found that the obscenity, as many thought it was, of language and the racial problems that resulted, many of our people tried real hard but weren't able to accommodate the program, because they weren't instructors, for one thing, maybe.

John Aubuchon: Well, anyhow we had this opportunity of working with the trades unions, and we got them to undertake a — not a cost plus but strictly a cost training program for us. Hoffa had just been caught, and they were shying away like mad from any cost-plus projects, but they were willing to do it at stated craftsmen costs. So, they guaranteed that they would bring aboard whatever craftsmen were involved and necessary and in whatever numbers were necessary to pursue certain programs that we had.

John Aubuchon: So, I very quickly got through the Job Corps route two houses under construction at Park Headquarters. At that time, we had a moratorium on building houses, but this was when you put in the project construction proposal to build a house out of Park service appropriated funds. And I'll admit I sneaked around and got these projects approved in the Job Corps, using Job Corps money, and it wasn't until the houses were well underway that somebody realized that we had a program underway that wasn't quite what they had in mind, but the sites had already been approved on

approved master plan sheets, and we built the houses on exact plans of the rest of them down there.

John Aubuchon: And the reason we did this was to provide a training exercise for the corpsmen with the labor union providing the supervision. And they also agreed then, this labor union, that they would provide union cards, if warranted, to these corpsmen when they showed enough expertise to warrant it. And we had several young men who left the center as genuine card-carrying labor union members as maybe mechanic's helper or equipment operator's helper or a plumber's helper or something like that.

John Aubuchon: But we broke at least initially the union barrier and got some Black boys in the program and got some of them pretty good jobs. And I was real proud and happy with this. And then in addition to building the two residences, they have since then finished a four- or six-unit apartment house. They have made a fire shed and fire suppression storage building, and they've made some major contributions. And one of the best things they made was a ferryboat used at the Green River ferry, and this is a complete ferryboat on the exact same pattern as the ones that were in use already. And we took it down and launched it and put it into use.

John Aubuchon: Now, then the Park has three ferries. One can be, so to speak, in drydock and under repair and general reconditioning while the other two are always in use. And this was another fine contribution.

Herbert Evison: Well, I think that's wonderful. You might be interested in knowing that that is the first account that I've gotten on tape from anyone of the work of the Job Corps. Now, of course, before I get away from here, I want to tape Louie Gastellum, who headed it for some time.

John Aubuchon: Well, I'm real happy to have had Louie in that job. Now, I wouldn't want to leave you or anybody else with the impression that I thought the Job Corps was perfect, but I think the concept was great. And if they'd kept some of those non-experienced, non-practical jokers away from the head of the outfit, from OEO, I think we would have done pretty well. We had the use of a lot of money for training, and we all got the benefits out of that. But I never went along — I still don't — and I probably never will concede that the OEO concept of discipline was proper and correct.

John Aubuchon: I don't think we can live in a society without discipline, and I understand the problems that these young guys had or at least I understand them as well as many do. And I suppose maybe you can never truly appreciate their position until you've been in it. And I'd have to admit this, that these guys — the Forty-Niners in California would have been right in interfering in my duties. But frankly, the permissiveness, in my estimation,

permissiveness that the OEO under Sarge Shriver wanted, was not acceptable.

John Aubuchon: There were several things that occurred that I thought were typical. We wanted to run a real good center. We wanted to do the best we could for the corpsmen. The Park Service wanted it to be a prestige program. On one hand, Hartzog, Howard Baker and any number of others would participate in this and say, by gosh, this Job Corps program's got to go. And I think most of us who were with the program and trying to do anything with it felt that we should, and we were trying to do something good.

John Aubuchon: On the other hand, Howard Baker and some of the assistant regional directors along in between me and Washington had told me from time to time when I had an opportunity to select this individual or that individual, well, you can't have him in the Job Corps program. He's too good. We're going to use him someplace else. And this infuriated me. And I don't think it helped the whole program at all.

John Aubuchon: But to come back, specifically I think the Job Corps program was valuable, and we had — I can think of a case that may point up what I'm trying to say. We had an instance of forcible rape in the Job Corps Center. Well, homosexuality is beginning to be accepted, and I'm broad minded enough to feel that, whatever happens between consenting adults in the presence of no one else is their business, and I'm going to leave it at that. But when we had the rape bit and the homosexuality bit that was going on in that community in the South with the Southern attitudes that exist, but they exist all over, I think, to some degree to a certain extent, it was not acceptable for those people who were participants in this sort of thing to still be a part of the program. There was too much local pressure against them for this to be accepted.

John Aubuchon: And every time that we were forced by OEO to try to keep corpsmen around who had these tendencies, we got into problems. Well, we had several problems. One, a lot of local pressures and no longer support. We were losing support for the Job Corps program by having the corpsmen there. Now, they probably needed good professional help. But we weren't equipped to give them that sort of help. And I don't feel it was our fault that we weren't able to give them this help, and I think maybe it's society's fault that we have no place where people with these problems can get help. But whether this is true or not, we weren't able to do it, and it would have meant in many cases that we spent an unwarranted amount of time with one man or two or three men trying to take care of their needs to adjust and accept, and we were ignoring the needs of 210 or 15 others.

John Aubuchon: And at one time OEO got kind of huffy, and, of course so did I, and they — well, we had certain things that, after certain types of offenses had been committed, I told the center director and OEO — now the center director was a Park employee who was in an unenviable position because he was responsible to me, but he was also responsible to OEO, and you can't serve two masters in any case, I don't think.

John Aubuchon: But in any event, I simply let it be clearly known that I forbid them bringing back into the center and into the park certain individuals that had been involved in certain activities because it was not socially acceptable, and I can't be responsible for our nation's standards one way or another, but we had to have this understanding. Well, of course, this didn't make OEO happy either or me particularly popular with them, I suppose. But my first obligation was still running the park and accommodating the visitors that came through and this sort of stuff.

John Aubuchon: But it was a tremendous program, and I'm sure as hell for it, but I would like to run it my way and really have a good program.

Herbert Evison: Well, that's wonderful. Now, I want to get into this present job of yours. As I noted here, there has been as much discussion and as much dispute about rental rates in the National Park system as there has been of what should be a proper uniform for people in the service to wear. I'm interested in knowing and getting on the record here something about how you're set up to do this job and just how you function. And, of course, I'm curious to know if recommendations as to rents, as to adjustments in rents normally are accepted, or if you have to fight about them very often.

John Aubuchon: Well, our organization was established as a result of this dissatisfaction that you spoke of and mentioned earlier. When we used to set rates, used to be field areas made the surveys, sent the data in to region. The region people were all SOB's, and they didn't understand the problem, and they raised the rents. And we never got the rates that we thought we should have had.

John Aubuchon: Then we had FHA do it, and admittedly — well FHA is divided up — each region, each state constitutes a region, and within each state there are a dozen appraisers. And you get a dozen different approaches to rental values. Some appraisers would go to Yellowstone, for example, and, decide, well, this is the most wonderful place in the world to live, and maybe they were there in the summertime and didn't see the winter aspects. They didn't understand the problem.

John Aubuchon: Other appraisers would [go] to an area maybe and say, good God, they ought to pay you to live here. And they didn't understand the situation either. So, with all of this combined dissatisfaction it was finally agreed

that the Service should establish its own survey committee, and I don't know whether I did something wrong or something right, but I was selected for the job. And I was asked to go to Washington to edit the Handbook, after it had been recently revised, and before it was finally printed, they called me in to edit it. And maybe I showed too much interest in the program or something.

John Aubuchon: Or maybe — I don't know what the reason is, but I was selected. It was interesting from several respects. In the first place, they wanted me to have this office that I have here in Santa Fe. They wanted it to be located in Denver. And I didn't want Denver. My home was Boulder. I never cared for Denver then, I don't like Denver now. It's a big, overgrown cow town, and I didn't want to be working out of Denver.

John Aubuchon: Then they said Washington, and we found out that the humidity and pollution in Washington would have been harmful from Ruth's health standpoint. She has arthritis and a lung situation. So, we rejected that. Then I told Louie Gesell, who was assistant director of administration at that time, and Marty Montgomery that neither Denver nor Santa Fe would do, Denver nor Washington would do. So, they said, maybe you better to tell Hartzog that you don't want to work out of either one of those places. So, I did.

John Aubuchon: And he said, there's no problem. You're going to be traveling a lot. You pick the area. So, I finally selected Santa Fe. And here we are.

John Aubuchon: Now, the team or committee consists of three people, and I've been with it since the beginning, and we have another man who works with me. At this time, it's Ford Young, and for two field appraisals and one office manager we just have three people, total.

Herbert Evison: Who's the third one?

John Aubuchon: Bea Upton. Her husband used to be Bob Upton, naturalist, that I'm sure you know. And —

Herbert Evison: You have a lady in the group, huh?

John Aubuchon: Right. She's our office manager.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yeah.

John Aubuchon: Okay, well, when we started out, we didn't have an office manager. There were just the two men, myself and Park Soulay. You probably remember him.

Herbert Evison: I taped him about three weeks ago.

- John Aubuchon: Park worked with us for — I don't know, from about October to December, January, something like that, and he found that traveling was too much. And he retired. And when Park retired, then I replaced him with John Cook, who — John O. Cook, who was at that time — came to this operation from the superintendency there, Chit-Chat in Chattanooga, and his son then is out here in the Western Regional office, of course.
- John Aubuchon: Well, John then worked for a couple of years, and he reached retirement. And when he retired, then I picked up Fore Young. And it's not necessarily just an old man team, but we're what — when we started this operation, one of the reasons at least they told me I was selected was that I had not up until that time had a central office assignment. And the field areas have always been very critical of people in region and Washington who set their rates for housing and didn't understand the problem.
- John Aubuchon: So, they got me completely naive and assigned me to this job. And certainly no one could ever say that I have paid high rent in Washington or Santa Fe and was just getting even and didn't understand, because I was known throughout many of the regions. I'd worked in all but one or two. And so, then we selected John Cook and Fore Young and Park Soulay for many of the same reasons, that they were known and had broad experience.
- John Aubuchon: Okay, well, the concept is that we then visit each National Park Service area having houses and with a local committee working with us — we take some of the park employees with us — and we inspect the park housing, so that we'll know what to look for. Then we go into the local communities and find comparable houses, as near comparable as we can, and determine what the rental rates are. And we involve park committees from the word go and their employees. They become a part of the program. Now, the authority to separate is vested in the directors and is further delegated to our operation here.
- John Aubuchon: The regional directors cannot set rental rates. The superintendents do not set rental rates. Nobody sets rental rates except our group, or if they are appealed, the director will, of course. So that approval is made at the time I'm in the area or we are in the area. The rates are determined. The effective dates are determined, and we have a presurvey meeting and closeout meeting to explain in the first place what we're going to do, how we're going to do it, where we're going to do it and when. And we have the closeout meeting to tell them then what we have done and what the results are and the effective date and to answer questions.
- John Aubuchon: In the last — well, since we've started this, we've had one important appeal which resulted from our very first survey, which was made out here

at Bandelier. And we didn't know what we were doing, and the park didn't know what they were doing, and they only participated part way, and we flubbed it a little bit, and they made an informal appeal in here through the regional director. We went back out and corrected it, and that was the end of that. And only one appeal since then has resulted, and that was from Yellowstone last year, and it — from a survey we made there in August; and September, and it reached as far as the regional director, where it was satisfactorily answered and returned to Yellowstone, and we heard no more about it.

John Aubuchon: So, we've cut down the employee appeals by simply sitting down with them and explaining what is happening, why and how come and primarily making them a part of it, so that they see themselves — they accompany us when we go to town and knock on the door and find out how much this house rents for. They stand and listen and hear at the same time that this housewife is paying \$150.00 a month, and she has to cut her own grass and pay her own utility bills and all that sort of stuff.

John Aubuchon: They're beginning to find out, many of them, what the facts of life are that many of us did not know for years and years.

Herbert Evison: And that raises a question in my mind, though. Take two areas, in both of which the salary rates are approximately the same. One area is next door to a decidedly high rental area, maybe some northern, near some northern city, Northeastern city, let's say. The other comparable area is in the South, where presumably rents are very much lower. Yet the salary scale in both are the same for the same kind of jobs.

Herbert Evison: Did you ever feel that maybe the guy who had the misfortune to work in the high rental, high surrounding rental area was rather unduly penalized by using local rentals as a basis on which to set his own?

John Aubuchon: No, I don't really feel this is the case. I suppose there's a good argument pro and con, either way. We aren't privileged to take that into account, and I'm maybe just as happy we aren't, because I don't know how we'd deal with it, what becomes normal and so forth.

John Aubuchon: Now, there is a — the present administration has recently through the Bureau of the Budget asked that — now called Office of Management and Budget — they just asked for a survey study of the results that we have achieved by making these on site surveys and comparing that to what the rates might have been or may be in the future if we used a standard consumer price index to affect rate changes. That has merit, and it has some drawbacks coupled with it as well. And what the results of that's going to be, we don't actually know yet, but the Bureau of the Budget now has the information, and we'll just have to see.

- John Aubuchon: But one of the things is that some of the advantages of living in this area where they have high rates don't exist in this area down here where they don't have high rates. And usually you don't get things for nothing. So that if you're living at Morristown, New Jersey, you're very close to New York City and all the shows. You're close to anything you could possibly want to buy and excursion trips, airports and a whole bunch of things.
- John Aubuchon: By the same token, the guy living at the same grade but in a house down here at, well, Port Davis in Texas, he's a long ways from anything. He may have his groceries and the other amenities and so forth. His shopping can be obtained maybe comparatively few miles away. But the little refinements, the plays, the theaters, the museums, the et cetera that the guy in Morristown has, he doesn't have. So, I think these are many of the same things that go up to make the reason for the high rents or low rents.
- John Aubuchon: So hopefully we're doing — well, we're still maintaining comparability. Now, in some cases, for example, in Florida, the Park Service areas in Florida are all adjacent to the coast, and they're all in high visitor impact areas. They're all in areas where they get a terrific seasonal change in rates, at least if not for rent, for motel or hotel room that you or I might use. And the Virgin Islands is about the same way the year around. And San Juan, Puerto Rico, is the same way the year around.
- John Aubuchon: Now, there again, what we do or what we have done twice is we have gone up through the center of the state we went up through more or less the center of the state, finding out from non-tourist influenced communities what rental values were more typically in — and we applied those rates then to the Florida housing and the Virgin Islands, San Juan, Puerto Rico. So, I think we're coming up with a different standard.
- John Aubuchon: Very recently then our job has been expanded. It took us just about three years to make a complete cycle of all of the parks, circuit of all the park areas. Now, we don't travel together usually. I'm in one part of the country. In fact, I'm in Santa Fe now, and Fore Young's back in the Southeast. And I just came back from Seattle and California and so forth. On big areas we often go two of us at a time.
- John Aubuchon: Now, last summer, to expedite the survey, Fore Young, Bea Upton and I all went to Glacier National Park because they had their shortage of staff and it was during the summer, and Bea did our administrative work while we were right there in the park. And we went directly from Glacier over to Yellowstone, spent three weeks, finished that up and came on back to town. But usually — and we usually try to take Bea out at least on one trip a year, so that she knows what we're doing, so she can take care of it while we're gone.

- John Aubuchon: But it takes about three years to make the circuit. Recently, then, they've added to our responsibilities the job of setting concessioner utility rates when they're provided by the government and also the job of setting agricultural special use permit fees when land is leased or rented to these permittees, and we use about the same criteria we do in this other thing.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well now, did that involve (inaudible) arrangements made for agricultural use of land belonging to the Blue Ridge Parkway?
- John Aubuchon: That's true.
- Herbert Evison: Or historic areas?
- John Aubuchon: Right. That's right. And the object is there to try to arrive at a more fair and equitable rate. The one thing that we contend in what we're doing is that, vast as we may be, but we're consistent. So that we will apply the same standards to all of the housing. We're doing that. We will arrive at rates based on the same type of determining comparability for special use permits or concessioner utility rates, and we think that this standardization is helping. But it doesn't add to our popularity. I think — well, I'm being facetious. I don't really think anybody hates my guts just because I've set the rental rate. They may have other real good, valid reasons. And I don't deny that a bit.
- John Aubuchon: But I don't think we made enemies per se setting rental rates, because they do understand what it's all about. But at the same time people do hate to have somebody else interfere with their pocketbook, and this is invariably what we're doing with concessioners, special use permittees and employees in government housing.
- Herbert Evison: Well, generally speaking, would you generalize? Do you — do your studies usually result in increases, or do they sort of offset each other overall?
- John Aubuchon: Well, on our first tour of the area setting rental rates we were real lucky because there had just recently been a change in the Bureau of the Budget Handbook. Formerly they had been allowed to deduct only as much as 50 percent of the comparable rental rate based on isolation. I'm thinking of Death Valley now.
- John Aubuchon: If the house in town rented, comparable house rented for \$100.00, you were able to deduct a maximum of \$50.00 because the houses in Death Valley were so darn far away from anyplace else. Just at the time we started this job and got organized on this the Bureau of the Budget changed the rules and regulations and said that you could deduct up to 67 percent maximum. So that even if the rents had remained the same, we

were able to deduct an additional 13 percent from the salary. Instead of charging 50, we could then charge \$33.00 for the same house.

John Aubuchon: But like skirts and prices and everything else, they've all gone up in the last number of years, so that there have been increases, and invariably the rates in general certainly have gone up. There can be no help. And this is true that everything's gone up.

John Aubuchon: So we can't say that — not many places have the rents gone down, but in New York City, for example, when we surveyed back there a couple years ago, on Sunday I read a supplement in the Sunday Times talking about housing, and housing is a big problem for civilians as well as park employees, and that on an average the room rate in New York City for residential living was \$100.00 a month per room. Well, on Monday morning then when we did our survey, began our survey, we found that at Hamilton Grange we had a man living in a two-bedroom furnished, including utilities, apartment in the basement of Hamilton Grange, paying \$6.00 every two weeks. So, there was probably the greatest increase in rent percentage wise. I don't know whether it was four or five, 600 percent. But it obviously went up.

John Aubuchon: And how we had — who or how or why they'd ever come up with a rent like that, I don't even try to find out anymore, because there's no way of telling.

Herbert Evison: Well, this has been wonderful stuff. Is there anything that you want to add before we call it (inaudible)?

John Aubuchon: Only this, that I think each and every Park Service employee that I come in contact with could certainly be said to have his shoulder at the wheel, but instead of doing anything progressive, about all he's doing is able to try to stop down the spinning of the wheel because of our reorganization and everything else that keeps going on. So, I think they're all trying, but instead of pushing, they're trying to stop the damn spinning of the wheel itself, not getting us anyplace.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, well —

John Aubuchon: And I don't know whether that — that may not be the evaluation of everybody, but it's certainly mine.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, it's a very interesting one. I'm glad you got it on the record, and I certainly am glad that you were able to break loose from whatever you were doing to sit down here with me this morning, get all this on the record.

John Aubuchon: Glad to do it.

[END OF TAPE 172, SIDE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]