

**National Park Service (NPS) History Collection**

---

NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)  
National Heritage Areas Administrative History Project



Stephanie Toothman  
December 2, 2016

Interview conducted by Antionette Condo  
Transcribed by Antoinette Condo  
Reviewed by Antoinette Condo  
508 compliant version by Jessica Lamb

This digital transcript contains updated pagination, formatting, and editing for accessibility and compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Interview content has not been altered.

The original digital transcript is preserved in the NPS History Collection.

The release form for this interview is on file at the NPS History Collection.

NPS History Collection  
Harpers Ferry Center  
PO Box 50  
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425  
HFC\_Archivist@nps.gov

My Narrative  
The Administrative History of the National Heritage Areas Coordinating Office

Stephanie Toothman  
December 2, 2016

Interview conducted and transcribed by  
Antoinette J. Condo

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

**Stephanie Toothman Interview: December 2, 2016**

I have been interested in heritage areas since I started hearing about the Southwest Pennsylvania Heritage Area. I thought that it was a very forward-looking concept in terms of looking at new ways to protect lands without the NPS. So, probably in the 1980s. I know that in the 1990s my colleague, Keith Dunbar, who was Chief of Planning, my position was Chief of Cultural Resources in the Pacific Northwest, and I spent a lot of time and energy exploring how to identify and possibly create some heritage areas in the West. That has been a much more difficult proposition. There has been a lot of opposition from property rights folks. There are a couple of bills in Congress right now looking at areas we worked on. (Designated in 2019)

We were working on a heritage area proposal in the Astoria area of the Columbia River delta and a property rights group launched a concerted campaign to the communities and we had to abandon that effort. I think because of the percentage of land in federal control in the West that that will continue to be a problem (for heritage area development) there for much longer than it will be for other areas of the country. It's all connected with the whole sage-brush rebellion, the take-over of public property, so any effort to provide collaboration with the NPS and other federal government entities is immediately looked upon as being suspicious.

**Funding:** We have one funding amount that we have put forward that is based on a reality check of what we have been able to get from Congress in the past. We have identified a basic level of \$350K for established heritage areas recognizing that that funding helps support the basic infrastructure of the heritage area, the salary of the executive director, maybe a grants person. Kind of the things you can't raise funding for. I think some of the older areas that were getting upwards to a million dollars every year have been able to build much more robust infrastructure. I would say, in an ideal world \$500-750K in terms of our basic level of support makes a lot more sense. But \$350K is what is realistic. Above the \$350K is a competitive program assuming we had any funding left over. That would enable heritage areas to compete for additional funds based on certain criteria of whether they were making progress on their plan. Different heritage areas have different resources as far as their ability to match (funding). For example, the one out in Nevada has about 10,000 people in the heritage area. It is very difficult for them to raise and match any funding we give them. It has to still be somewhat tailored but \$350K is the bare minimum.

**NPS responsibilities to the heritage areas:** I probably have a more expansive view than some. I think that the NPS needs to recognize that heritage areas are a tremendous partner for the NPS in preserving large swaths of highly developed, settled areas that it would not be desirable or feasible for the NPS to actually incorporate into a park unit but provides a way to work with partners to preserve important sites and stories. I think our responsibilities are to continue to be an advocate for the concept, for the legislation that creates some clear guidance and standards for future as well as present heritage areas. For the park units associated with specific heritage areas to work with them as first line partners in terms of their abilities to protect the resources that tell a bigger story than the park has an ability to tell. I would like to see us ask for more funding but the whole budget process is incredibly convoluted so it's difficult to see how that is going to happen anytime soon.

Even though I think we have greater support within the department now we still have some major hurdles, at OMB, for example, to get support for them to have ask in the President's budget. There is a lot of games playing that goes on with our budget.

It has been a transition period from the time when they said that they weren't going to do earmarks anymore. Anything that's associated with old earmarks seems to get tainted, for example, Save America's Treasures. The whole strategy behind that (cutting NHAs in the NPS budget and having the areas apply directly to Congress for additions) is lagging behind the reality of the budget process. There are folks in Congress that will tell you, well we're only going to go for what the administration asks for and folks in the administration will say, this is just the marker 'cause we know that they'll beef it up. The heritage areas get caught in this conflicting understanding of how the process works. It's very hard to plan and we are in the same kind of craziness just within the NPS itself in terms of having any ability to plan to even deal with uncontrollable rising costs.

We need to also have a healthier amount for the technical assistance the NPS provides. In the field itself, depending on the heritage areas, there is a lot of technical assistance being provided by a park. In a number of ways, it's coming from the parks. In terms of our abilities to support the heritage areas here in D.C. and in the regions, we're not getting additional funding to even maintain the current level of support.

Most of the assistance that goes to the heritage areas is from Martha Raymond's group or a regional liaison. The (NPS cultural) programs don't have a specific charge nor do they have the extra capacity to do a lot of work. The work that I did in the Pacific Northwest was self-carved out of my schedule in terms of the partnerships program of working with groups looking for ways to preserve their resources and using it as a model. There is not any concrete set of ways in which the programs and leadership at this level work with the heritage areas. For example, HABS/HAER has no funding carved out for work with heritage areas. They have some base funding but most of their work is reimbursable, paid for by the recipients of the work. They don't have enough to do anything significant outside.

**A National Heritage Areas System:** I think we have made some big strides towards that. This has happened in the last eight or nine years. Working on consistent expectations in terms of planning and documents. Both looking at and reviewing proposals. We have identified criteria that we use to analyze proposals and legislation would be another step-in solidifying that. We are looking at them through a standard lens.

In terms of looking at them after they have been approved and operated for a few years, the evaluations program, which again, has been funded by end of the year money, which needs to be firmer, does that. The evaluations are helping us to be sure that they are meeting a certain level of criteria that we've established through the evaluation questions. I think those are ways in which we can try to bring some consistency to the service. When a bill comes up for a heritage area the Congress asks us for an evaluation, and we look at what's being proposed through a pretty standard lens.

We are doing what we can on our end to create a framework and standards to evaluate new units and also evaluate the efforts of existing ones.

**Evaluation criteria:** Things that we have incorporated include, nationally significant stories, an ability to tell those stories, a demonstrated ability or interesting collaboration, a strong entity to be the lead for making the heritage area work. Rivers of Steel-Augie Carlino, for example, has an incredible network and infrastructure; the Augusta Canal in Georgia has the hydropower and structure and resources to bring to the heritage area. Each group is different but it's really important to have a leadership agency that has a demonstrated track record in managing coalitions. Being plugged into the community. Being a respected entity in the community. Having basic business sense because we are really talking about functions which aren't dissimilar from a Chamber of Commerce or a tourism bureau in some ways. Those are the kinds of things that we are looking for in terms of the management aspects of heritage areas as opposed to the national significance. Do the boundaries make sense?

**Do heritage areas contribute to the mission of NPS:** I think so. In a broader sense, if you look beyond the Organic Act to National Historic Preservation Act, our roll in carrying out the Secretary's responsibilities to help communities, help Americans identify what they think is worthy of preservation and preserve it, then I think it is very much within the scope of our mandates. I am proud of the work of the heritage areas. I think the evaluation is a good indicator of how innovative and creative many of them are. I think they are doing cutting edge work in terms of interpretation, of looking for multiple sources of funding, support to preserve their resources. They are doing ecological work and our environmental work. The Blackstone River Corridor and the Hudson River Valley are excellent examples of the integration of environmental and preservation objectives.

**Challenges:** Most of them come under the headings of program legislation and funding. Having organizational support within the NPS and secondly being able to garner enough support within the administration to make an effective case up on the Hill. Under Jon's (Jon Jarvis) leadership and my missionary work, as well as the work Martha (Raymond) has done, we have done quite a bit in changing the attitudes within the NPS in terms of the value of heritage areas. The Secretary, herself, (Sally Jewell) was associated in her former life with one of the proposals in Congress now. Although we were a little hesitant to go too far with this, you can definitely protect resources over a significant area at much less cost through the heritage area. If you compare the proposed budgets for Blackstone as a park unit, versus the money we were giving the heritage corridor, there is a significant difference. That is something we don't know if it could be a two-edged sword, so we are a bit cautious in terms of talking about that.

There are no lack of stories. We talked about property rights, the probability that any association with a federal entity brings some people out of the woods to protest even if the protest is misdirected.

**Accomplishments:** If you look at an area like the Rivers of Steel, they have brought a tremendous amount of economic revitalization to their area, pride within the community, preservation of resources, environmental improvements. All of those have been done primarily through the efforts of the communities and individuals with some support and guidance but it's

really been a grass roots effort. I think that that is very important. It goes back to some fundamental principles in terms of communities being able to rebuild. You talk to a guy who's running the interpretation on one of the big furnaces at Homestead that is left still. He used to run one of those as a young man, so there is a tremendous amount of pride associated with this history being preserved even if the industry has gone.

We looked at a timber heritage area in part because of the decimation of the lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest and in some cases the demonization to work in the timber industry. The way the forests were being managed wasn't a great thing but a lot of hard working, dedicated people worked in that field, and we wanted to honor their heritage, their time on the land and their communities.

Each of the heritage areas is very different and I think that is one of the strengths. That there is not one model. They have done some very creative things with the Journey Through Hallowed Ground in terms of education. They have had some very high-powered leadership that had access to some substantial potential for philanthropic support. They have done a lot to some extent because of where they are and the interest in the Civil War.

Due to changes in the leadership, I think there are now a substantial body of superintendents who have had experiences with heritage areas and who are also having to understand and adapt to a future in which we are not the only game in town and we need to work collaboratively with partners not only to preserve the resources that we are mandated to protect but understanding that we are part of a bigger whole. That fences on the borders doesn't really make a difference because whether they be cultural or natural resources there is a bigger whole that we are part of. So, there is a bit of organizational mindset change that is in progress which heritage areas are part of. I think the new generation coming in has been exposed to that. I came in at a period when there were really warring perspectives, but more superintendents have evolved and understand these days that they are not an island unto themselves. A different organizational directive, so you are looking for leaders who are more collaborative.