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Herbert Evison's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1952-1999



George A. Grant  
December 10, 1962

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison  
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GEORGE A. GRANT

REEL IV,

SIDE II

Includes changes and corrections received April 8, 1964

## [START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is Herbert Evison, and this afternoon I am in Santa Fe. It is December 10, 1962, and with me in a very comfortable looking chair is George A. Grant, whom I have known ever since the days when I started with the Service in 1933 and who, even then, had long been an employee of the National Park Service. George is a photographer and a darned good one, and because I probably would not hear this from him himself, I am going to put on the record something that I just learned for the first time from his friend, Dave Canfield.

Herbert Evison: And that is that when, in 1934, I think it was, the Post Office Department brought out a series of ten very beautiful stamps illustrating ten different national parks, pictures taken by George Grant were used as the basis for the design of five of that series - two, four, six, eight, and nine. Do you remember which ones those are? Two was Grand Canyon.

George A. Grant: Grand Canyon, Zion, Glacier, Mesa Verde, and Crater Lake. There were five of them.

Herbert Evison: Well, I think I still own a set of those. But I suspect, George, maybe that's one of the things you are pretty proud of.

George A. Grant: Well, it was - we had an awful time making those selections. We even reduced those things, by copying, down to stamp size. Secretary Ickes was quite interested in it at the time, you know; he was a stamp collector also. In fact, he sent Dave some first covers of that entire set, a beautiful set of covers.

Herbert Evison: A beautiful set of stamps. As a matter of fact, I have first day covers of that whole set.

George A. Grant: I don't know where they got these, but the place was a reservoir when they needed to make an engraving of some kind, see, so they - it wouldn't surprise me but what that one on Devils Tower was one of mine, because you can move five feet from one side to the other and it won't look the same, you know; but it looks very much like a cropped picture of mine.

Herbert Evison: Well, I think it would be interesting to find out. As a matter of fact, I worked with Mr. Fellers over there in the Post Office Department in connection with the selection of a picture for that, and I should remember but I don't, whether it was one of yours. Anyway, I have a set of fifty of them in a very nice leather cover, signed by Mr. Summerfield, made at the time of the ceremonies out there on the 50th anniversary. But I strongly suspect that was one of your pictures, because certainly one thing that was characteristic of yours was that they were clear pictures, sharply defined.

George A. Grant: Well, I tried to follow the rules of composition whenever I could, too; most of them are on 5x7 film, and they are all set up with a tripod and plumb bob and all that kind of business.

- Herbert Evison: I didn't realize that you did operate that way. Did you always?
- George A. Grant: Yes, they are all plumb, you know. My buildings don't lean backwards, and the trees go like railroad tracks, and stuff. In fact, you can't do that with a hand camera; you have got to use a plumb bob and tripod, and rising and falling front, and all of that, and compose it just like you would a motion picture frame, so that none of it should be cropped, if you want to carry out that composition.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, you said that you first did this work as early as 1922.
- George A. Grant: Yes, I made quite a few in Yellowstone while I was a temporary ranger up there under Mr. Albright. I worked in his office and with Scoyen, you know. We kept the travel statistics, and I got trips all over the park just because of that camera I had there, I think.
- Herbert Evison: Was this your own camera that you used on these?
- George A. Grant: Yes, at that time, but I don't even own a box Brownie now.
- Herbert Evison: Have you quit taking pictures entirely?
- George A. Grant: Yes, I don't take any at all anymore. In fact, it's beyond my financial capacity; it takes a lot of money to follow a hobby like that, you know. I turned all the stuff in, most of it, most of my field equipment.
- Herbert Evison: Well, there is a very very extensive file of your negatives, though, in Washington in the Department files of the photo lab.
- George A. Grant: Well, they are all dated, too. That should add to their value. And there's quite a bunch of stuff in Omaha, too, that I took on those River Basin studies; the negatives are still there, and they are all dated, too.
- Herbert Evison: George, looking back over it, there must have been sometimes when you had a pretty rough time getting pictures, didn't you?
- George A. Grant: Oh, yes, it's quite a - in fact, it sometimes worked the other way, and I was glad when it rained and I couldn't get any, I got tired of it, it got kind of stale once in a while, you know; you need a little respite. Darned near every night I had to change films in some darned make-shift place, because my holders would all have exposed film and I would have to reload them, and keep track of them, too.
- George A. Grant: I remember leaving here one time with 1200 exposures and going up to Salt Lake and setting up a lab up there, and I had to do them all by hand, 1200 of them. I was up there six weeks on that job.
- Herbert Evison: You mean developing them?
- George A. Grant: Yes.
- Herbert Evison: I think I remember that.

- George A. Grant: The assignment was for the Grazing Service; Mr. Forsling was head of it then; much of the work with Mr. Hugh Bryan. Well, the grazing service head office was in Salt Lake then. I took all that stuff up there and darned if I didn't get them all identified and dated. That's a lot of stuff, you know, with grasses and soil erosion and all that business. I had to keep a diary for that reason.
- Herbert Evison: Yes. You still have the diaries for all your period as a photographer?
- George A. Grant: Yes.
- Herbert Evison: I would love to have the privilege of going through those sometime.
- George A. Grant: You would die from boredom. It's just too darned much coverage, you see.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, one thing that I remember from having made a great deal of use of your negatives during the time that I was in Washington, was that they were all - well, I wouldn't say that they were all separately enveloped, because occasionally you would take almost identical pictures but for the little different—
- George A. Grant: Sometimes I would go a hundred miles to get one or two subjects, and I couldn't afford to take only one – too risky. You could never tell when your bellows was leaking or your cameras had gone haywire or your shutter wasn't working, and so the thing to do was to make two or three; sometimes I would make four or five, if it was an unusually good shot, and stick them all in one envelope. But I marked which was the better one, or the best one.
- Herbert Evison: But I do remember that you always had on the envelopes identification and date, and I think you even sometimes put down on individual ones the time and shutter stop, didn't you?
- George A. Grant: Not very often. We had some envelopes that were printed that way, but it got to be so automatic that I didn't bother with it; there were too many other things; it wouldn't have been of any use anyhow.
- Herbert Evison: Well, you certainly must have gotten into lots of backwoods places, well, we'll say like Betatakin or Inscription House or Keet Seel; and you didn't drive up there in your automobile.
- George A. Grant: Oh, no, we took lots of horseback trips. In fact, I went all over the Olympic Peninsula on horseback, you know, with Dave Madsen, on those early surveys up there. We were down in the Smokies just a couple weeks ago and got over to Cades Cove. The last time I was there was in '31 on a horseback trip with O. G. Taylor, Ross Eakin, and Charlie Peterson.
- Herbert Evison: What's the story Dave Canfield wants you to tell about the borrowed horse?
- George A. Grant: Well, it was in 1922 in the fall, when Warren Loyster and I were sent to the Crevice ranger station in Yellowstone to patrol the north boundary of

the park there from poachers, you know - the elk season. And I had to have a horse, so I borrowed a horse from an older ranger there, Jimmy Dupuis, and told him that if I liked the horse and could use him, I would buy him for \$75. You could have bought a horse up there at that time of year for \$10, but I had to have a horse; I never owned a horse, you know. So, I borrowed him from Jimmy Dupuis, and one day we went up that steep trail from the Yellowstone River up to Crevice ranger station, and he bucked me off and went down over the hill and broke his leg, and from that time I knew he was my horse. I didn't tell that as something that ought to be written up in a nice decent way, you know; maybe you can do it. That's the only time I ever prided myself on horse ownership, and I never owned a horse since. But I have used lots of horses, but that's the only time I ever owned a horse.

Herbert Evison: The only time you ever owned a horse, he had to bust a leg.

George A. Grant: Yes. It was just like being a gladiator for ten days, something like that.

Herbert Evison: Well, I am glad Dave knew something about that, to remind you of it.

George A. Grant: Yes, I get told about that every time I go to Yellowstone, they are still telling me about that horse. Honest to God, I could have bought a horse up there at that time of the year if I had been smart, for \$10, you know, or just to feed him over the winter.

Herbert Evison: Certainly, it seems to me that when you got out into some of this back country like the places I mentioned there at Navajo National Monument, or - you photographed in Dinosaur, too, in the early days, didn't you?

George A. Grant: Yes, and that was a horseback affair, too. I went up there with Douglas Chew; we were all over that plateau country.

Herbert Evison: But nothing happened?

George A. Grant: In the way of accidents? No, that's the only time I ever had a horse break his leg, was when he was a borrowed horse that I owed for.

George A. Grant: The worst place I've ever had the use of horses was up in the Olympics. The damned wasps, you know—

Herbert Evison: Yellowjackets?

George A. Grant: —they just raised hell up there; they would drive the horses frantic. Miss Story was hurt on one one time because of that; she broke her leg, didn't she?

Herbert Evison: Did she? I didn't know about that.

George A. Grant: Yes, up in the Olympics, on account of one of the horses throwing her. Oh, that's a nasty place to ride horseback. You are from up there; you know what I'm talking about.

- Herbert Evison: Yes. As a matter of fact, I was in there about two months ago right after that great storm that hit the Northwest, remember, on the 12th of October. We went up to the Hoh ranger station the day after that storm. The road clearers were just ahead of us most of the way.
- George A. Grant: Were the Huolsdunks still up there, and Charley Lewis, and those folks, up the Hoh?
- Herbert Evison: Well, I didn't see anybody up there I don't know who is up the Hoh now.
- George A. Grant: Now, the Missouri River, for instance, I did a lot of work with the Omaha boys on the Missouri River Basin Studies. That river now is just a series of lakes from Yankton on up damned near to its source. I got in there to make a lot of pictures of places that are covered up with water now, all the way up. It was quite a nice experience in itself – the old Elbow Woods and Indian agencies and all that kind of thing; the Cheyenne agency; that's all covered up now. Most of that stuff is in Omaha if you ever need prints made.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, what kind of stuff were you taking, what kind of pictures were you getting on those river expeditions?
- George A. Grant: The historical stuff, like—
- Herbert Evison: Stuff that was going to be inundated?
- George A. Grant: That's right. Whole towns, you know, are submerged now. But it was quite interesting just on that account; it was a nice experience.
- Herbert Evison: Well, where else did you go that sort of stands out as of special interest to you when you look back on it, George?
- George A. Grant: Well, one of the nicest assignments I ever had was working with Eddie McKee down at Grant Canyon on the geology studies there, and Dr. White, of the Survey, Dr. David White. We got pictures of fossils in place and the contacts between the different zones and all that. It was a nice job. Now, that stuff should still be back in Washington, with all the technical data. You probably ran into some of it.
- Herbert Evison: No, I don't remember ever having done so. I know that Eddie McKee was briefly here in town—
- George A. Grant: Oh, was he? I would like to have seen him.
- Herbert Evison: —Friday night, I think it was.
- George A. Grant: I haven't seen Ed for ten years. He still lives in Tucson, I guess.
- Herbert Evison: No, he is in Denver.
- George A. Grant: Denver. He is still with the Survey.

- Herbert Evison: That's right. I just got an address for him last week. Of course, I guess he still ranks among the top men of the interpreters of the geology.
- Herbert Evison: Well, George, I don't know what specific questions to ask of you, and—
- George A. Grant: Well, that's what the trouble is, it covers so damned much territory that I wouldn't know where to start or end up, you know. It's just like I told you, that's what my trouble is. I could probably write ten books, but nobody would have the patience to read any of them, you see.
- Herbert Evison: After you retired, you lived somewhere in Maryland for a while, didn't you?
- George A. Grant: Yes, at Snow Hill. I'm going down there on Friday. I'll go through Pittsburgh on Saturday night about 1:30 in the morning; I'll be on a train.
- Herbert Evison: And you can still get where you want to go, on the B&O, huh?
- George A. Grant: Oh, yes.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, to my great regret, you can't go into New York any more on the B&O.
- George A. Grant: No, they don't get to but one station in Baltimore, now, the Camden Station. They don't use the Mount Royal Station anymore.
- Herbert Evison: I think there's some consideration of that as a museum.
- George A. Grant: Yes, I think so. Well, it may be an old railroad museum, but there's also some consideration for that too; you know, the old place where the first telegram was sent from, the old Montclare station and shops. That's the one they're figuring on getting the Park Service interested in. I read a report on that thing.
- Herbert Evison: Well, George, I don't want to cut this off, I am very unhappy at the prospect of cutting this off with a lot of perfectly good tape to use, if I could get your words on it.
- George A. Grant: I recall one nice assignment that I had down at the dedication of George Washington birthplace. I went down there with Mr. Demaray and Mr. Albright and Secretary Wilbur, and oh, a whole bunch of them. I got photographs of most of Washington's collateral descendants. Now those pictures are still in the Washington file under Washington's birthplace. And that was a nice job. Phil Hough was there then, and they opened a post office there then, that very day; it was quite an affair, it was nice.
- Herbert Evison: Incidentally, was Congressman Cramton in that group?
- George A. Grant: Yes, I think he was. I am sure he was.
- Herbert Evison: I ask that question because the first man that I taped on this trip was the Hon. Louis C. Cramton.

- George A. Grant: Where is he living?
- Herbert Evison: In Lapeer, Michigan.
- George A. Grant: I'll be darned. He was a Michigan congressman, wasn't he? Yes, I am sure he was there.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, what other special assignments do you remember that were of interest or that gave you particular satisfaction?
- George A. Grant: Well, the work I did with Dave Madsen up in the Olympics when they were making those first surveys up there. That was just like going into pioneer stuff - it was pioneering, too, because the roads, the trails up there were terrific, and I suppose they still are, on account of the dampness and all that; I don't see how they can keep trails maintained up there. It was as rough as the devil, but it really was interesting.
- Herbert Evison: And you took a lot of pictures on that, I judge.
- George A. Grant: Oh, yes, quite a lot of them.
- Herbert Evison: Did you get any Olympic elk on that?
- George A. Grant: Very few. We got them up at the head of the Bogachiel. That's the one just north of the Hoh.
- Herbert Evison: Well, I don't want to force this thing, George. I have got some stuff on here that I am awfully glad to have, and maybe we had better just sit and chin without recording it, for a little while. I would enjoy that.
- George A. Grant: Well, why don't you just shut that off? It's hard to recall any particular incidents, you know, when there are so damn many of them. It's like telling you how many times I was stuck in a snowdrift, or got back out of a mudpuddle, or something. Hell, that happened every day.
- Herbert Evison: Well, I am glad to have on here what I do have, George. And of course, entirely aside from that, it's good to be here with you a little while and just to chin with you. So, I'll just say much obliged.

[END OF INTERVIEW]