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**Katherine H. “Kate” Stevenson**  
**January 21, 2016**

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

Katherine H. "Kate" Stevenson  
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Interview conducted and transcribed by  
Antoinette J. Condo

This transcript was reviewed by Katherine H. Stevenson

**Katherine H. "Kate" Stevenson Interview: January 21, 2016**

**Interest in heritage areas:** First thing I ever heard about heritage areas was in the 1980s or even the 70s. Because in those days Jerry Adelman was working for NPS, I think for the Historical American Building Survey. He was interested in the Illinois & Michigan Canal. He was really a visionary. Jerry had this idea of preserving it not as a park but as something else. I was an Assistant to the Associate Director for Cultural Resources at that time.

I started working for the NPS in 1972. I had worked for the Smithsonian for a year and then worked in NPS' Register of Historic Places, then the policy office for the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, then as Assistant to the Associate Director for the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation. Just about that time the NPS had separated us out and put us in The Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. In 1980-87 I went to Denver and started as Assistant Regional Director in the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and then became a division chief in the NPS regional office when we merged. When I came back east, in 1987 I worked as Associate Regional Director for Cultural Resources and Partnerships in Philadelphia (the old Mid-Atlantic Region--MARO). That is when I got strongly into heritage areas. Between '87 and '91 I was very involved with heritage areas. My first was Southwest Pennsylvania parks. Randy Cooley was a superintendent and he and another colleague had a special relationship with Congressman John Murtha and were able to get a lot of appropriations. Since I was doing cultural resources and partnerships, I went to a lot of meetings with them. Those related to construction and the Denver Service Center and so on. At the same time, Steve Golden, the planner in the Northeast Region (NERO), was very interested in heritage areas as were Bob McIntosh and Jim Pepper. The planners in both MARO and NERO talked to each other; very involved with each other particularly in the recreation programs. That was Debra Gibson, Debbie Darden, and Glenn Eugster, the head of that office, and Joe DiBello were working with me as division chiefs. There was always a struggle between regional offices and Washington and parks. A lot of power struggles in those periods, continuing today as far as I can see. Everybody wanted the same thing. They just had different ideas of ways to get there. Since Randy had all the money, he was able to do a lot of things his way. Murtha's chief of staff at the time was Debbie Weatherly. She was always a delight to work with, always. It was a tightrope walking between what the people in the Southwest Pennsylvania group wanted to do, what Murtha wanted to do, what the region wanted to do. It was not easy.

I came from Philadelphia back to Washington as Associate Director for Cultural Resources, Recreation and Partnerships and National Heritage Areas were part of my portfolio then as well. By then there were a lot more National Heritage Areas

We tried to establish a relationship with the National Heritage Areas. Each had an executive director, someone who was managing for them; Augie Carlino, who is in Pittsburg, and others. There were a lot of getting to know you issues, money issues, control issues, legislation issues, who's going to give them advice. Who gets to say what they can do, and so forth. So, I was all involved with that as well.

**Funding for the office:** Debbie Weatherly had moved to be the chief of the staff on the Office of Appropriations on the House side. She felt very strongly that National Heritage Areas could

be on their own, and we didn't need to have a lot of money to manage them. We had many conversations about it. She would give me only the money for one person and a little bit of travel for the Washington Office. When Judy (Hart) left to go to California then I hired Brenda (Barrett). We met with the Alliance frequently and the same issues arose over and over again. Who was in control? Who was going to assist them? Could they lobby for their money? They lobbied heavily for their money. The first eight heritage areas were very successful (in lobbying for their money). Then things got tighter as there were more heritage areas.

Funding was mostly lobbied for by the heritage areas individually with varying success. Partly to do with who their member of Congress was of course. In those days the earmarking was still okay. Either it would be lumped together, which we didn't like, and Debbie would tell us how the money was to be divided; or it was given to us in a lump and Debbie would tell us to figure out criteria for distribution. We didn't like that because then we got push back from the National Heritage Areas. We did our best to make reasonable rules for distribution.

**Staffing for the NPS heritage areas program:** I was Associate Director for Cultural Resources, Recreation and Partnerships and all the granting programs came under partnerships. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Historic Preservation Fund and other granting programs and all these other programs came under it. Sam (Stokes) and Tom (Ross) were on the recreation programs side. They put Judy (Hart) in the recreation programs and the other folks were to assist her. To give more support to the National Heritage Areas, Sam formed a team to work on heritage areas and that team of Alan Turnbull, Steve Morris, and Judy Hart was very good.

As Associate Director I spent maybe 10% of my time on National Heritage Areas, if that. The relationship with the National Park Foundation, the cultural resources programs and Land and Water took a lot of time. Also, the First Lady had asked us to start a brand-new grants program, Save America's Treasures. Hillary Clinton was incredibly active in that. Mrs. Clinton started it for the millennium and then Mrs. Bush continued it. Again, thanks to Debbie (Weatherly) and others. The Ohio congressman who became chair of the appropriations committee on the House side was fond of both Mrs. Clinton and Mrs. Bush, and his wife was a big supporter, so they did a lot to push that forward and continue it. That was a great program.

**Later work with the National Heritage Area program:** Fran Manila then wanted to replace me with a friend, and I went to the Trust (National Trust for Historic Preservation). I lost touch with the National Heritage Areas programs the four years I was away. When I came back, I was Associate Director for Business Services. Because I was in the business office, I was tasked with analyzing a study done for NPCA (National Parks Conservation Association) on economic value of NPS parks. I was underwhelmed with the NPCA study but as it turned out the study vindicated what we had been doing with the National Heritage Areas.

**Program legislation:** I testified in over 100 hearings a lot being heritage areas. I never truly understood what their (the Congress) concerns were. It must have been financial, because there was nothing in the language of the bills that made them any different than the language in the individual bills. Even though they (Congress) didn't want a program bill lots of heritage areas were designated anyway. They just didn't seem to want a program.

Deny Galvin was a real supporter of heritage areas. He was a strong visionary in what the National Heritage Areas could be and of how they could contribute to the NPS and to the United States. He saw them as an alternative to parks. He was the drafter of most of the National Heritage Areas standards. He's smart and capable and remembers stuff. Anything Deny says I agree with.

**Legislation language over time:** The constant testimony over the standards seems to have actually solidified them, in my mind anyway. Deny was clearly the author. I think the testimony solidified it in everyone's mind. Even though it (program legislation) never got passed. I think the effect of just repeating things over and over again sometimes makes them true.

Glenn Eugster was another early person involved. The fact that he and Debbie (Weatherly) were married helped as well.

**Challenges:** Personalities were tough, dividing up the money was tough. Trying to determine what success was and how each of them would determine what success was. Whether we would determine it. How to meet their (the national heritage area) expectations for technical assistance help because that would come out of the regions. Some regions were good some were terrible. Both trying to expand the program but without looking like we were too greedy for expansion. And trying to keep the standards up.

We didn't want to have a heritage area unless it had some semblance of organization, some hope of succeeding. And, meeting the criteria that we had established, although never authorized. We kept pushing and trying to encourage plans. It was a challenge all right.

**Heritage areas a benefit to NPS?:** No question about it. I thought it offered an alternative. Because what happens, sometimes when a park is created people have this idea it is going to be an ideal life. That everything can go on as before and the NPS will assist them. The NPS is a government agency and there are rules in government and when you become a park those things apply e.g., boundary adjustments, permissions for construction, funding delays etc. All the nitty gritty things that annoy normal people. When people talked about creating parks out of significant cultural resources, I talked to them about thinking of not being a unit of the NPS but being a heritage area. Being a unit of the NPS is not easy. When they wanted a park, I would suggest that they might want to be something else, even though they didn't have money. I think National Heritage Areas are a significant addition to the NPS and a real positive one. Salem, Cane River, Silos and Smokestacks are wonderful examples. They are not the only ones, but they really did a good job of coordinating local sites; the politics of the towns and what they wanted to accomplish and blended them into something bigger than the individual towns. They were very, very successful as far as I can tell. I would encourage more places to seriously consider it.

The other thing is we were pretty convinced even then that the movement had to come from the grass roots. It had to come from the areas themselves to be successful. They had to have, enough organization, enough agreement, enough vision to be able to bring it up to their congressman and be created. Looking back that all turned out to be true.

**NPS Director interest:** I would say they all gave it passing attention. I can't remember a single one who would have been obstructive about it. Deny is held in very high esteem. I would say that if Deny supported something, everybody supported it. Even the Comptroller, Bruce Sheaffer, supported them for Deny because he would not have otherwise since it took money away from the parks. It's a small pot (the money). They (NPS) could ever get increases of only modest amounts. It meant if you had money for one thing it took away from something else. You do your best to get your fair share and it was not always easy. There were only two pots of money to spread over all programs and parks. It was all about selling your program to the Comptroller and he would make the case to OMB. We all did our best to look good. The business managers at OMB are not imaginative and really don't like anything that spends money. They don't like anything new and anything of which they don't have direct and fierce control. They hold the purse strings and are the business managers in a lot of ways.

**Division of responsibilities WASO vs regions:** In a bureaucracy, and I think you'll find this in big companies as well as government, there is a power struggle between Washington office and regional offices. When you are in a region you think the Washington office knows nothing, and when in the Washington office you think the regions know nothing. It's because your experiences and pressures are so different. That struggle dynamic took place in almost everything one did. People had their preset ideas, so everything had to be worked out. And there are personality issues too, of course. We all have personalities.

**Leadership of the heritage area program:** The managers of the National Heritage Areas were very vigilant in lobbying. They would come to Washington and meet with their congressmen and try to make their points about the success of their heritage area and what they wanted to accomplish further and how much funding they needed to accomplish all. They were very effective in their lobbying.

NPS was successful in establishing what we thought National Heritage Areas were and making that known. I think our testimony, in the long run, made a lot of difference in determining what the criteria were for heritage areas and still are. The Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Regions were very active with their heritage areas. The National Heritage Areas team in Philadelphia with me included Mike Creasey, Joe DiBello, Glenn Eugster, chief of planning, and Deidra Gibson and Debbie Darden.

Some heritage area managers and people who were head of the Alliance (of National Heritage Areas) sometimes were very interested in working together with NPS and other times they were not. Some were diplomatic and others were not nearly as good. I'm sure they would say the same thing about us. I'm sure they would say so and so was good to work with and some weren't. We really tried hard to work with them. Sometimes we could (work with them) sometimes we couldn't.

**Challenges:** I would say that the relationship with the Southwest Pennsylvania heritage area was very rocky. That was the rockiest time I ever had working with the heritage areas. They had a lot of money, and I personally did not think they were spending it the best way they could. But they were fiercely proud of what they were doing, and that didn't help things. I made myself

very unpopular with Randy (Cooley) by demanding accountability and making sure that we knew what was going on. He did not like it even one little bit. He got special legislation enacted to say that he could continue to work for the NPS but not be answerable to the NPS.