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



**Carl and Esther Jepson**  
**March 21, 1973**

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison  
Transcribed by PRO-TYPISTS INC.  
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Oral History Interview

Carl & Esther Jepson

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## PROCEEDINGS

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is March 21, 1973. I'm Herb Evison, and this very snowy afternoon I am in Cedar City, Utah, at the home of Carl and Esther Jepson.

Herbert Evison: Now, Carl, as I told you before we started this, I like to start it off with a kind of thumbnail biography. First will you tell me when and where you were born.

Carl Jepson: I was born in a small country town near Brookings, South Dakota.

Herbert Evison: And when?

Carl Jepson: 1897.

Herbert Evison: 1897?

Herbert Evison: Tell me something about the family that you were born in? What did your father do?

Carl Jepson: My father worked at College Farm near the University of Brookings, South Dakota.

Esther Jepson: My father was a farmer in South Dakota.

Herbert Evison: And didn't he say that he was in charge of some—

Carl Jepson: The college farm.

Esther Jepson: Yes, but not always, Carl.

Herbert Evison: Brookings. Now, that's the University of South Dakota?

Esther Jepson: Right.

Herbert Evison: Yes. And your father was in charge of the college farm, is that—

Carl Jepson: That's right.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, I would assume from that that you got your grade school and high school education in Brookings, and also that you went to that university. Is that right?

Carl Jepson: I had about two years on the College Farm. Then from there I went to another farm about nine miles away, near \_\_\_\_\_ South Dakota.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Carl Jepson: And from there we moved to North Dakota.

Herbert Evison: And in both cases, you went to grade school in those towns?

Carl Jepson: No. I went to country schools for a couple of years. And after World War I, I went and lived on a dairy farm near Mott, North Dakota.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, can you supplement that?

Esther Jepson: After World War I, he attended school at Dickinson, North Dakota, the college of Dickinson, North Dakota. And taught school after that, he taught for a period of about 17 years, but not there. Later on, we moved to Montana and he taught – attended the university at Missoula.

Esther Jepson: He taught school at Phelpsburg, Montana for ten years. Back to school at Missoula and at Greeley. Finally working with the Forest Service during the summers, and in 1939 he entered the Park Service at Petrified Forest.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes. Now, that was as a seasonal Ranger or—

Esther Jepson: That was a permanent position.

Herbert Evison: I see. And I imagine that that previous Forest Service experience helped in qualifying you as a Ranger, too.

Esther Jepson: Right.

Carl Jepson: We took a Civil Service examination.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Carl Jepson: And from that we received an appointment to Petrified Forest.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, who was your superintendent when you first went there? Oh, yes, your wife says White Mountain Smith. I can't even remember – although I knew him well, I can't even remember what his right name was. Charlie, wasn't it? Charlie Smith.

Carl Jepson: Yes.

Herbert Evison: Yes. Now, of course, that was long before Petrified Forest was even considered as a possibility as a national park. How long were you there?

Carl Jepson: For about two years, I believe, in the first Petrified Forest. From there we transferred to Grand Teton National Park.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, you would have gone to Grand Teton National Park when it was still a very new park, within three years or so after it was established, I think. Isn't that the case, in '32? I think it was established in '29.

Carl Jepson: I think so.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. And again, you went there as a Ranger?

Carl Jepson: No (as naturalist).

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, I believe you were there for quite a little while and served under several superintendents. Who was the superintendent when you went there?

Carl Jepson: White Mountain Smith.

Herbert Evison: White Mountain Smith had preceded you there? Oh, yes, I remember that he had been a superintendent there. I think as a matter of fact he was superintendent when the monument was established, which means that he was superintendent there for quite a long time.

Herbert Evison: Now, all this time, though, you were a Ranger and not a naturalist.

Esther Jepson: He was a naturalist. He became a naturalist at Petrified Forest.

Herbert Evison: Oh, before you transferred to Grand Teton, you went into what was your final professional field, so to speak. I'm curious to know what you can tell me about being a naturalist at Petrified Forest. Who of you can remember what responsibilities or what programs that involved?

Carl Jepson: It involved the training of a man for the interpretive work during the summer season. And in the wintertime, we participated in the work of protecting the wild animals. There were some antelope there, too, but our main job was protecting these from the hunters that came in across the divide. (confused with the tetons (eg)) (Recording interrupted).

Esther Jepson: One of the main purposes of the protection was the – seeing that the tourists didn't carry off the petrified wood.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. And do you feel that that protection was anything like 100 percent effective?

Carl Jepson: No, it became almost ineffective there at times, when there were so few Rangers to do the job and protect the area. So many tons, probably, of petrified wood was carried away. After some time, why, they enlarged the staff so you could take care of things in a reasonable way.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, the monument was not fenced in that day, was it?

Carl Jepson: Yeah.

Herbert Evison: Was it, already?

Carl Jepson: Very shortly after its establishment portions were fenced. But a good deal of it was not fenced.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Can you add anything to the Petrified Forest period, Esther?

Esther Jepson: One of the interesting things that he did there was the location of the old Indian ruins.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes. Now, which ones?

Esther Jepson: Oh, there were some 200 ruins that were located, and it was – well Howard Stagner was there, and that was one of Carl's projects.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Esther Jepson: And it was very interesting to ride out and see a mound and dig into it and find out what was there.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Must have involved an awful lot of legwork.

Carl Jepson: Quite a bit, at times. Especially when there was heavy moisture and the roads washed up easily. The CCC had put in a water pipeline from the pump up near the river, pumping it – this was during the CCC days. They'd fill the big tanks of water just about at the headquarters.

Herbert Evison: Now, that was still at the south end of the monument, wasn't it?

Esther Jepson: Right.

Herbert Evison: Now, while you were there, did they get in any kind of a museum structure?

Esther Jepson: Oh, they had a lovely museum, but since then, I don't remember just when they added to the museum. But we had a lovely museum with displays.

Herbert Evison: Yes. And that again was at the south end.

Esther Jepson: Right.

Herbert Evison: Close to headquarters, really part of headquarters.

Esther Jepson: Right.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Esther Jepson: They started a new museum in the lodge part at Painted Desert.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes.

Esther Jepson: And there was a very small one there that was just started as we were there.

Herbert Evison: Yes. Well, now, you must have had a good deal to do with planning and getting materials into that museum.

Carl Jepson: One of the first assignments were planning and deciding what exhibits to be used, and how we'd tell the whole story. I was transferred to Grand Teton before that work was finished.

- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, now, when you got up to Grand Teton, did you run into museum business, too?
- Carl Jepson: A great deal of it. There was a lot of work to be done to present the whole story of the Petrified Forest, plus the story of the mountain man that came to the area, looking for deer in Jackson Hole.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, of course, the Tetons themselves were a fine example of one geological phenomenon, if I remember rightly, the uplifted block fault and that. I suppose pretty near every interpretive display or walk told the story of that.
- Herbert Evison: Now, how long were you at Grand Teton?
- Esther Jepson: Fourteen and a half years.
- Herbert Evison: Fourteen and a half years. Gee, that seems a terrifically long assignment in these days of bouncing people around from this to that to the other area after a year or two. One thing about it, if you were there that long, you had plenty of chance to get acquainted with it.
- Herbert Evison: You must have been Mr. Grand Teton himself by the time you left.
- Esther Jepson: They were wonderful years, and we covered all the trails many times.
- Herbert Evison: You say “we”, and I'm sure you mean that “we”, too, don't you?
- Esther Jepson: Right.
- Herbert Evison: Yes.
- Esther Jepson: And all the hikes, and hiking by ourselves to Lake Solitude, just to name one.
- Herbert Evison: Now, I suppose taking hikes back into the back country with a naturalist, your companion was perpetually looking at things, little and big, and you'd been making a written or mental record of it. Tell me about that, what his habit was when he was on a walk like that.
- Esther Jepson: Well, he'd look for the geology and flowers, the birds, tried to pass on all this interesting information to the folks that were on the trail enjoying the day.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Here's a question I would like to ask that's very much on my mind. I taped Russell Grater the other day. I'm sure you know Russell. And he was talking about what purported to be new and improved methods of interpretation, most of which, he said, if they were good they had been used years ago and if they were bad they were tried and discarded years ago.

- Herbert Evison: And I'm just wondering if you have any opinion about what progress if any in effectiveness of scope interpretation has made in the Park Service over the period that you've known it.
- Carl Jepson: (Inaudible.)
- Esther Jepson: We think there's been quite a bit of – there have been a lot of changes, a lot of improvements.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Esther Jepson: Of course, we probably don't approve of all the new changes, but each era has its own ideas, and I think they're all working out.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. I'd be glad to have you add anything to that, any comment on specific types of interpretation. Of course, one thing that you went through as an interpreter was the movement, probably inescapable, increasing toward mechanized interpretation, either the recorded lecture and projection of pictures, or the self-guiding trail or what have you. In other words, perhaps not less personal interpretation but more of the other kind.
- Herbert Evison: And I'm sure both of you have opinions about the relative desirability of, say, a personally guided walk and a self-guided one.
- Esther Jepson: Well, we think that the personally guided one was far the better, better contacts.
- Herbert Evison: Yes.
- Esther Jepson: And (inaudible) have the signs posted. Everyone doesn't stop to read them or interpret them the way they're supposed to be interpreted. It makes people go on their own time for an all-day hike. It just depends on the person, what they're looking for.
- Herbert Evison: But you agree, it's very evident, with 99 percent of the interpreters that nothing can beat the personal contact between an interpreter and the person he's interpreting to.
- Esther Jepson: Oh, you're so right.
- Herbert Evison: I would suspect, too, Carl, that you found an awful lot more enjoyable to do this direct person-to-person interpretation than to sit in an office and tell all the other – plan out the work of other interpreters.
- Carl Jepson: Well, that's just a part of the regular duties, to \_\_\_\_\_ the plans that have been made of the interpretive staff (inaudible).
- Esther Jepson: But he far preferred getting out on the trails with people and doing those things and giving the talks. He enjoyed the talks, with the little campfires, when they first started, and the group that came to listen.

Herbert Evison: Of course, I'm sure you were a person that just enjoyed human contact, period, regardless of whether you were interpreting or not. Am I not right about that, Esther?

Esther Jepson: I think so.

Carl Jepson: Yes, very true.

Herbert Evison: Now, you were at Grand Teton for that long time. And I would say by the time you left there, you must have known the location of pretty near every blade of grass in the place. How did you happen to move from there to somewhere else?

Carl Jepson: The winters became too rough in the Grand Teton area, and there was an opening down here in Zion National Park (inaudible). Spent about 12 years, I think, what is it? – at Zion. We left the Park Service there and retired.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, you would have been there from when to when?

Esther Jepson: Tetons June 1941 to 1955, October 1955

Herbert Evison: At Zion?

Esther Jepson: At Teton.

Herbert Evison: Oh, at Teton, yes.

Esther Jepson: I remember when Carl Russell came. Oh, I think this was in August. And he said, Carl, how would you like to go to the Southwest? It was a pretty hard decision to make, because we loved it.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. But you found the winters hard.

Esther Jepson: The snows got a little deeper as we grew older. There was just that much more snow to shovel. And we felt that a warmer climate might be the better thing.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. You were agreed on that, were you? You and Carl both.

(Recording interrupted.)

Herbert Evison: At a wild signal from my wife, sitting in the background, we interrupted this tape for a minute or two. And note was made of the fact that there is a perfectly beautiful book on the wildflowers of Zion and Bryce Canyon and Cedar Breaks, of whom the authors were Carl E. Jepson and Leeland F. Allen.

- Herbert Evison: And I – at the moment I am holding a copy of that book in my hand. Tell me something about the work of doing this, whatever either of you can tell me.
- Carl Jepson: Leland and I were taking flower pictures and (inaudible) right place at the right time. And we found the best time for most photography was fairly early in the morning before the day began to light up too much.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Carl Jepson: And get good control over the flowers.
- Herbert Evison: Well, I'm interested in this flower photography. I've tried my hand at taking some myself. Do you prefer to take a picture of a flower in the sun or just in good light?
- Carl Jepson: Each picture almost decides the form to be selected. And the ultimate thing is to do it as big a picture as you can without distortion.
- Herbert Evison: Yes.
- Carl Jepson: And continuity between the dark or the light sides of the picture. Each one has to be worked up. Sometimes you find great fields of flowers are easy to take if there isn't any wind blowing.
- Herbert Evison: I'm curious about this. When taking these flowers, did the park provide you with good camera equipment, or was that something you invested in yourself?
- Carl Jepson: Nearly all of it we owned.
- Herbert Evison: As a longtime amateur photographer, I'm interested in knowing what you used. Did you use a larger than 35 mm camera for most of your photographing, or did you use that?
- Carl Jepson: I used two or three different instruments, depending on the size and – for example, there were pictures for the museum, which were (inaudible) two and a half size.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Carl Jepson: And (inaudible) group of flowers, a good field of flowers, to get them just right at the right time is quite difficult. You get it while the sun is coming up you have much brighter—
- Herbert Evison: Of course, this is a really extraordinary lot of flower pictures. Did you take all of these pictures?
- Carl Jepson: Practically all of them, yes. A few have been taken by others. Art Bruin at St. George gave me three different pictures that I think are very well done.

Esther Jepson: It took a long time to take these pictures. If there was any breeze, I helped cut off the breeze.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Esther Jepson: And sometimes we'd have to come back another day.

Herbert Evison: I imagine that would happen often, wouldn't it?

Esther Jepson: That's right. And the front cover shows the beautiful spread of flowers up at Cedar Breaks National Monument.

Herbert Evison: This is Cedar Breaks. Yes, that is a beautiful spread of flowers. I'd like to have on here the dope on any other books that you were concerned with, either providing material for them or getting them out.

Carl Jepson: Yes, some nature trails were published, with just a few flowers, that would interest people in being in places where they might find more. That was the side edition to a trail guide, for example. I've got several people started in the work of taking flowers, and animals and other subjects they can use in their nature books.

Esther Jepson: Carl has always had photography as a hobby, started way way back. And he has trained a number in the darkroom.

Herbert Evison: How about this color? You surely didn't develop that, did you?

Carl Jepson: No, that was the result of the Kodak Company.

Herbert Evison: Yes, I wondered about that. But you could do about anything that needed to be done in a darkroom in black or white.

Carl Jepson: Oh, yes. But color – they started originally with some Kodacolor that didn't last. It was good for a year or two. But the new Kodachrome is more potent than the others. It's lasting very well.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Esther Jepson: Plus all the Park Service fellows that were interested in photography. They took the most – good many of the slides for the park.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Esther Jepson: That were shown at the campfire programs.

Herbert Evison: Yes. I have noticed – he was showing me a very considerable collection in there, in that cabinet. I tried to make a comment that I would guess there's about 2,000 slides there. Is that about right?

Esther Jepson: About 3,000.

- Herbert Evison: 3,000. And I'm interested – I remember I used occasionally to call on John Dorr to supply me with some slides for a talk. In the Washington office, they never were well arranged. But also, at that time, – see, I've been retired nearly 15 years, so often you go through 50 slides and 15 of them would be faded. Do you find that the modern color has much more lasting quality than those that we took, say, 30 years ago?
- Carl Jepson: Yes, there's been a decided improvement in color in the last few years. Three or four years ago, they came out with a new process that's better than the old. Always in terms of a couple or three, maybe four, seasons.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, my oldest ones are about 15 years old. They're from Africa, and it's surprising to me how well they've retained their color over 15 years, 14 years.
- Herbert Evison: Now, one thing that I notice about this, of course, is that it's published and copyrighted by the Zion Bryce Natural History Association. And I think I'm correct in saying that all the time that you were chief Park naturalist there, you ran that, isn't that right?
- Carl Jepson: Yes. I was the chief executive officer of the association.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, now, what can either of you tell me about that operation during your years at Zion?
- Carl Jepson: I was devoting a lot of time on assignment (inaudible) to various members of the staff, in order to work out certain programs that you felt important, or in preparation of booklets that could be taken home and enjoyed.
- Herbert Evison: Can you add anything to that? I bet you were concerned with lots of association matters, too.
- Esther Jepson: I don't know what to say on that.
- (Recording interrupted.)
- Carl Jepson: Over the years there have been certain – several publications that have been prepared or at least supported by the association. There were others that were prepared for the publication of some individual books on (inaudible) history. We've helped out on many publications by supplying a portion of the funds to go into that work.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Carl Jepson: And we have several of those on display at the museum at Zion. There's about \$48,000 grant as a result of their sales.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.

- Carl Jepson: And they use their funds to improve what is needed there and anticipated for the future.
- Herbert Evison: Now, did this continue to be the Zion Bryce National History Association all the time that you were there?
- Esther Jepson: All the time, until just recently. It still is the one association.
- Carl Jepson: They have the one separated now, it's at Bryce.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah, but it's centrally run.
- Carl Jepson: They have just the two, Zion and Bryce (inaudible) has come in—
- Carl Jepson: It (inaudible) I think last year. I don't know whether – about a year ago they were well over \$50,000 (inaudible). This has been turned back to the Park Service and the government to give us more of whatever we need.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Esther Jepson: Some other books that have been published are bird books and reptiles and geology books by some of the naturalists that worked under Carl.
- Herbert Evison: Yes. These would have been in connection mostly with Zion and Bryce?
- Esther Jepson: Natural history subjects.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. I'm a little at a loss to know what further to ask. But I would just be delighted to have either of you contribute whatever more you would like to to this tape.
- Carl Jepson: I seem to be having a lapse of memory here. It's hard to get back on the real trails. The association which was organized by Howard Stagner in 1939 at Tetons, somewhere in that neighborhood, I'm not sure of the date, and others have carried on supplementary work that's been very important to the interpretation and the history of Zion and the surrounding country of Cedar Breaks. And (inaudible) Zion Canyon.
- Carl Jepson: I just can't bring to mind those things I'd like to say. That's what Parkinson's does for you.
- Herbert Evison: I didn't get that last.
- Esther Jepson: He was talking about his illness.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, since I've run out of questions and we still have lots of tape left on this one, I'd be delighted to fill it with anything that either of you have to contribute.
- Esther Jepson: The Park Service has been a wonderful life and we've enjoyed every minute of it. And we think it's – the Park Service is doing a wonderful job

to preserve all these wonders that are about us that future generations will come to see.

Herbert Evison: I'm sure you would echo all that 100 percent, Carl.

Carl Jepson: Yes, I certainly would.

Herbert Evison: I can add to it that I think that the Park Service has been extraordinarily fortunate in getting people like you two to give it so very much devotion and dedication over so many years, and with your enthusiasm for the job, I feel sure just as great at the finish as it was at the start.

(Recording interrupted.)

Herbert Evison: We have noted at various points in this interview Carl's long interest in photography. And while we have the machine cut off, you told us something about the difficulties under which some of his photographic activity was carried on in the early days. And, Esther, I wish you'd tell something about that, how you managed to get pictures.

Esther Jepson: The photographic work started back in teaching days when we set up a little darkroom in the bathroom with a homemade projector.

Herbert Evison: Enlarger?

Esther Jepson: Enlarger.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Esther Jepson: And from there on it grew. And when we were at the Tetons, they didn't have a darkroom, so Carl improvised one in part of the office, which was as cold as the outdoors. The only time that we could work there was at night because the office was in use. We wore overshoes. Of course we couldn't wear mittens. We'd bring warm water from the house.

Esther Jepson: Then after the finishing job, we'd bring the pictures over to the house to be washed in the bathtub and dried on the rug on towels in the living room.

Herbert Evison: Yes. Well, now, from there you progressed, I judge, to somewhat easier-to-use facilities and with better heating.

Esther Jepson: Yes, we finally had an electric heater in the darkroom. Then a new darkroom was completed. We had the – more Park Service equipment then. From then on, the darkrooms have been sort of professional.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. I am sure that you two would both say that a darkroom is one of the essential pieces of equipment for any park.

- Esther Jepson: Oh, very definitely, because there's so much work that has to be done for all of the Park Service work, any maintenance work, any projects that are going on. Old trails, photographs from museums for books.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah.
- Esther Jepson: Oh, numerous things.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, I think most people think of Park Service photography as something that is used in the interpretive program. And I imagine few people outside the Park Service realize how many other demands there are for them.
- Esther Jepson: That's right.
- Herbert Evison: Not only photography, but reasonably quick photography.
- Esther Jepson: That's right. They have to be on the scene for various jobs. Anything new that comes up, any trees that are cut down, photographs have to be taken of those or accidents or things like that. Of course, now more photographic equipment is used by the other members of the Park staff.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. I imagine, though, that in his early days of photographing, in spite of the fact of being a naturalist, he was called on for lots of other kinds.
- Esther Jepson: Oh, yes, for cutting ice which was used of course, the summer supply for ice at Grand Teton, and he photographed the log cutting that we used for wood supply in the wintertime.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, now,—
- Esther Jepson: All year round.
- Herbert Evison: Of course, I was referring primarily to his taking photographs of other things that just what was used in his interpretive activities.
- Esther Jepson: Well, those were some of the things they photographed.
- Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, my wife has made a note here that the NPS furnished nothing at first. Now, I think we've brought that point out, but – no, we didn't, either, simply the point that he has used mostly his own camera equipment rather than what was furnished by the Park Service. But I take it from this that any developing facilities that were provided in those early days, any loss of them, came out of the naturalist's pocket.
- Esther Jepson: Pretty much. They used their own cameras pretty much and trays and things like that that they could find.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well, I think that's a very interesting phase of the work that both of you have been concerned with. I'm glad we got into a discussion of that off the tape so that I can get something about it on the tape.

(Recording interrupted.)

Herbert Evison: Let's have a little something in here about the social life.

Esther Jepson: Someone – it seemed was always at someone else's house having a cup of coffee and a cookie, especially a birthday or most any day. Those were always fun. We had our get-togethers once a month and square dance parties.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now, do you have in mind particularly Grand Teton in this connection?

Esther Jepson: Grand Teton was great for square dancing. Paul Judge was our square dance caller. And he was very fine.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yes, you must have known both of the Muries, or all of them.

Esther Jepson: Oh, the Muries, yes. We knew all the Muries. We had some very interesting times together, always used to show us some of the dances that they used to do in Alaska. They told some very interesting things about his Alaskan travels. They of course have written two very fine books and he has a new one, Marty has a new one coming out that was written by Olaus.

Herbert Evison: A new one written by Olaus. Heaven's sake.

Esther Jepson: Just coming out in April.

Herbert Evison: I hadn't heard about that. We'll have to get after Marty about that. Well,—

(End of proceedings as recorded)

[END OF INTERVIEW]