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**Peter Samuel**  
**February 10, 2016**

Interview conducted by Antionette Condo  
Transcribed by Antoinette Condo  
508 compliant version by Casey Oehler

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

Peter Samuel  
February 10, 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.

**Peter Samuel Interview: February 10, 2016**

**Early heritage area work:** I began in January of 1992 on a Lackawanna Heritage Valley State Heritage Area trail plan. I was working with Debbie Darden on this trail plan and going up every other week to work on the trail plan which was a joint project with the Corps of Engineers. They provided money to do the plan that the heritage area has followed since then. That was my first connection with a heritage area.

About a year later at the end of 1992-93 our office was doing a lot of work in Wheeling. They were already calling themselves The Wheeling National Heritage Area long before they were designated. The project was initiated by Senator Byrd who was putting a lot of money in the NPS budget to do planning for Wheeling. They originally thought they were going to be a national park but then decided they should be a heritage area. In 1993 I took over the whole initiative in Wheeling. They were looking at issues of transportation, interpretation, management plan. Lane, Frenchman Associates was doing it. For years that was my major project, in Wheeling. I helped set up the Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation. It was being managed by the City of Wheeling Planning Department and I was working closely with Paul McIntire who was the head of planning. Wheeling wanted to get rid of a parking garage, build another parking garage and redo the whole waterfront.

My first meeting on Wheeling was in Senator Byrd's office talking with his chief of staff about how to get money into the Transportation Administration budget to pay for a new parking garage in Wheeling. Senator Byrd put, I think, \$9 million in the Transportation budget to get the parking garage, called an intermodal transportation center. That gave me an insight into politics.

The plan for the development of the Wheeling waterfront was over phases. A lot of infrastructure money. The first construction was an artisan center where they combined several old warehouses and renovated the exterior and interior. Original plan was to use all the space for the artisan center. The locals thought it would be a good tourist attraction. I helped hire the first director to manage the Wheeling Heritage Area, Charlie Flynn, who six years later went to Yuma Crossing Heritage Area. He was very involved in the Alliance. When Charlie first arrived at Wheeling and looked at the plan for the artisan center. He thought that financially it was not going to work and provide the income they expected. He went out and found someone to renovate the first floor into a brew pub. The person he brought in was John Hickenlooper who had several brew pubs in Denver and was looking to expand his brew pub empire. Later he became governor of Colorado. The second floor of the renovated warehouses then became the artisan center and the third-floor offices. That's a building they are still using.

I worked on Wheeling almost as my primary project for at least three years. We kept on writing legislation to have them become a heritage area. Senator Byrd didn't want them to be a national heritage area because he felt that that would limit the amount of money they could receive. There were years he put \$4 million into the budget for them. In 1996 I left the NPS for about a year and became the director of the Schuylkill State Heritage Area. I worked there September 1996 into fall of '97 and then appealed to the NPS to let me back in. 1996 was when a whole batch of heritage areas in our region got designated. I went back in March 1998 to NPS. When I

came back, I was specifically working on the larger NHA program with Phyllis Ellin not just Wheeling. Worked on the Coal Area management plan, Rivers of Steel management plan. Majority of that work was hiring consultants to do the plan but then NPS had to approve.

It was a much more robust period in our office for heritage areas. We were under Marie Rust as regional director. She was very supportive of the heritage area program. Made it one of her objectives to always include them in what she was doing. She probably provided more support for the program than any regional director since.

Heritage areas were under Joe DiBello, then we moved to Park Planning and Special Studies. The program has been moved around in the region. In 2006-9 I left the heritage area program. The national heritage area supervision moved to Annapolis, MD. I was not going to move to Annapolis so applied for a park planning job in Philadelphia and did that for 3 years. In 2009 the heritage area program moved back to Philadelphia, so I went back to it.

Over the years I was able to hire a term position that didn't work out. Then I had a Student Conservation Association intern helping with the program. Then my program moved into the interpretation division under someone who was not an advocate for the program. In 2016 we moved again. This leadership might work better. Part of the reason my program got moved last time was someone new came in who needed more responsibility in the position, not because the combining made any sense. Heritage areas have a real problem with leadership at least in the regional offices.

**Management plans:** Over the last few years I've been involved in a number of management plans. A more recent one was Freedom's Way. Prior to that was Journey Through Hallowed Ground, Champlain, Upper Housatonic, and Niagara Falls National Heritage Areas. I'll use Freedom's Way as an example. I got involved in their planning sessions. Freedom's Way had hired a consultant to do their plan. I was not in on the decision for the consultant hire. They were a couple of months into it and I went up for a meeting with the chairman of their board and director and the consultant provided some documents which were very terrible. We decided the consultant didn't know what it was doing. The heritage area got out of the contract with the first consultant and hired Peter Benton who works with Elizabeth Watson. I would go to Freedom's Way as appropriate and review chapters of the management plane as they were written.

In my management plan reviews, I get the draft and review it in great detail, make comments and recommend changes and send it back to the heritage area or consultant. It then comes back to me and I review again and prepare a letter of recommendation and send to Martha (Raymond). The National Heritage Area Coordinating Office staff reviews and moves it on to the director and the under secretary's office. The back and forth with the heritage area on a management plan varies with the interest and ability of the HA and consultant.

If it doesn't get past me it doesn't go. It's gone through a sort of evolution. When we did plans early on in late '90s into the 2000s they had to do an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) with the plan which added lots of layers of excess information which I didn't think was necessary. But there was a whole structure of how the plan would be done. Back then we had to submit the plan to the *Federal Register* etc. One year I submitted stuff to WASO for the *Federal Register*

and then was told it had to be reviewed by a committee and then there was a whole ‘nother layer of review before it could go into the *Federal Register*. It went to an EA (Environmental Assessment) from an EIS. Luckily, thanks to Heather Scotten (Passchier), we now have a categorical exclusion so have the least amount of compliance for heritage areas, and no *Federal Register* notice. In EIS and EAs you have to do alternative recommendations. With Champlain Heritage Area they had to do an EA and kept complaining and not wanting to do it. I then had to work with the NPS regional coordinator in our office who worked with the EAs and changes had to go back and forth many times. Finally, Champlain was tired of the back and forth and sent their plan directly to the Secretary. I had to explain that if it didn’t go through me it wasn’t going to the Secretary’s office. The Secretary did not personally approve the plans. The executive director at Champlain had a strong relationship with Senator Leahy and thought that he would talk to the senator and just get it done.

When the plan is approved, we assume that (the plan) is the structure for their work.

**Further work with the heritage areas:** In the days when heritage areas were being approved, and a new one was designated, we would send a letter welcoming them and then work on a cooperative agreement. That was the front end of any relationship with the heritage areas. Some we had already been working with for years prior to designation, e.g., feasibility studies. The agreement and work plan and budget are my main oversight. After the plan is approved and agreement signed the annual work plan and budget are my main engagements with them. The work plan and budget should reflect the management plan. Generally, I am not that focused that this is consistent with the management plan. It is a tool to help them organize their work and how they are doing their business. I wouldn’t say there is a great accountability relative to the management plan. Often a heritage area will, after a few years, do a strategic plan, a lot of them have done plan updates. Any partnership programs are really opportunity driven. If suddenly some organization gives them money to finish a bridge over a trail, they are not going to pass it up because it wasn’t specifically in the plan. Champlain did call me recently to check that something they wanted to spend money on fit even though it wasn’t specifically in the plan. It met their objectives and mission.

**Reporting:** The funds for the heritage areas come through our Financial Assistance Office. They are put into cooperative agreements. Our Financial Assistance Office was audited and reprimanded because they were not doing a good job of post award reporting. The NPS, specifically me, as agreement technical representative (ATR), manages the agreements. Previously we thought people in the parks should be the ATRs for heritage areas since that would attach the heritage areas better to the parks. At some point our Financial Assistance Office said that they wanted me to review all the agreements and work plans and budget before they received them. I was to be the gateway. I was then realizing that I was working with a lot of people. The parks’ staff didn’t know what they were doing because it was becoming too complicated for people who weren’t doing it on a regular bases. Not only are the documents voluminous, training had to be done with the heritage areas submitting officers. The required task agreement submitted every year has about seven forms. So, I took on ATR duties for all heritage areas. My job has now become a lot of financial forms quarterly for 17 of the Northeast

Region's heritage areas, the Pinelands Commission, and the Heritage Development Partnership. I have to document the emails back and forth with the heritage areas regarding the forms. In addition, in my region I have bi-monthly calls with the heritage areas, annual interpretation workshop, and other training workshops at least twice a year. I often go to the Alliance meetings where I see them. I feel somewhat connected with the heritage areas. The Northeast is ahead of the curve relative to other regions in the NPS.

**Northeast region involvement with heritage areas:** We have been involved because we have so many. We have a long history with heritage area development. With heritage areas that weren't even yet heritage areas we were involved in the planning. When I first came to the NPS other people in the planning office were doing an evaluation plan in Pittsburg to see if resources would fit into the NPS; as well with Wheeling. The RTCA program was often involved, like my trail project in Lackawanna. I give Joe DiBello responsibility (for our success) because he wanted to see all these programs overlapping. There was a more collaborative spirit in the '90s.

We started drafting program legislation in the early to mid '90s. It was the same problem we have today. We couldn't get anyone to introduce it as program legislation. I think if there was more momentum built up through the director's office maybe there could have been. Our regional director seemed (involved) maybe because it seemed like a new thing; new kind of park unit. I was involved in Essex, and Coal, and Steel where there weren't any NPS people on the ground. The big differences in those days was the federal commission or non-profit. The NPS wanted to go to non-profits because federal commissions are difficult. Its up-side is that the commission can engage a lot of people who might not otherwise be involved, and they are often politically connected. Niagara started as a commission and then changed to a non-profit. In Niagara there was not really a management entity available and the Falls are in the state park system and very important to the area. The state park was very involved. The idea was to expand the range of who would be involved beyond the state park, so a commission was decided as the best. The make-up of the commission was written into the legislation. Since the commissioners all had to be appointed by the Secretary, sometimes also by the Governor, that would be very challenging (for time and effort). A political appointment doesn't always mean that the members will have time or interest to really be active participants. A non-profit usually is more engaged to see that the heritage area becomes successful. They might be more inclined to work on a board. Board members have an expectation that they are going to do some work. The model of having a commission for five years which took a whole year to get all members appointed was not efficient.

**Oversight changes over time:** I feel as though I don't provide the amount of oversight that really is warranted for the heritage areas. Ideally even in the oversight of work plans and budget I would visit them on a regular bases. One, we don't have a travel budget to allow frequent visits. Two, I'm reluctant to go to areas when I'm not going to add value by visits and tell them what to do. I don't want to go in and do an informal audit. That is not my job, nor my expertise.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation of the heritage area as it approaches sunset is managed out of Martha's (Raymond) office. She has the contract with the consultant. I don't get involved other than a meeting with the consultants as they are getting started. When they submit their

paperwork, I do a review to see if it is in line with what they are supposed to do. The evaluation consultant, Weststat, has done a number already, so it's not like they have to keep inventing the wheel when they do these things. Then the evaluations go to OMB. Quite a few have been done in our region. Four coming up in the near future.

**Performance measures:** The performance measures that were developed years ago have gotten rolled into annual reports to Martha. I think they are a good tool for the HAs to show success. There was a group put together a few years ago that included HAs that reevaluated the measures.

I have been funding economic impact studies over the last few years. We have done at least 10 or 12 in our region. We hire a consulting firm that does economic impact studies and that information shows what their impact is on the local communities and economies. The HA can take the reports directly to their members of Congress to show their effect to their constituents.

**Budget:** Every year the President's budget shows that the national heritage area budget is cut in half. Even the director says, "Well Congress will put the rest of the money back in the budget." Heritage areas are reminded to talk with their members of Congress and let them know that they have community projects that will be cut if that stays in the budget. Anything the NPS can do, like economic impacts studies, to support heritage areas I think are important.

I feel fortunate that I have some very strong leaders of heritage areas in our region. They are huge activists. Augie Carlino, whose background was as Hill staffer, is politically astute, and Annie Harris, who is a strong voice and never lets up and has met with the NPS director numerous times, are examples. Allen Sachs came from a state heritage program and already had the background of knowing heritage areas. He was chairman of the Alliance and was a strong voice and active for national heritage areas in Washington.

**Benefit to NPS:** National heritage areas are really the next way of doing business as the NPS, working in collaboration with the communities. You have stronger partnerships. You leverage funds. I have never worked in a park. To me, park units look like Army bases, how they are managed and run. Heritage areas look like they are more connected to the real outside world, and how business is run. When park units have been designated in our region the way they are structured is to be better connected to the community like heritage areas naturally are. What I am always trying to see regionally and nationally heritage areas can give parks the ability to connect with their community and do all the things parks say they want to do which is engage with younger audiences, more diverse audiences, get next generations of stewards interested to protect the resources. If parks can engage more strongly and integrate better with heritage areas they will have a better link to the communities and that benefits the NPS.

A few years ago, we did a strategic plan for heritage areas in the Northeast Region on how we can better connect the National Heritage Area program and the NPS system. That is the understructure of what I do with the heritage areas. A good third of my time over the year is spent on the agreements when the base for my work should be making those connections between heritage areas and parks and programs and working together. We have always said that even people in the parks generally don't know what heritage areas are and what they could do for the parks. The attitude is still there in some that the heritage areas take money from the parks.

My prospective on parks is that they are an autonomous group and they sometimes lose sight of their connection with other things. They get focused on just park maintenance and park program. Parks should have a wider agenda. Yes, heritage areas are for sure a benefit to the NPS. We have a Director who is an advocate, but he is not really pushing hard.

Yesterday we were talking about the NPS being very conservative about how much money they ask for (in the budget). It sends a bad message.

**Organizational Sustainability Project:** I have put my technical assistance money into an agreement with the Heritage Development Partnership, the 501c3 wing of the Alliance. The Northeast Region has been using that agreement to fund projects for some services like the economic impact studies to fund a consultant to do the studies. The first phase is trying to develop guidance for the heritage areas in how to diversify funding streams for heritage areas for their sustainability. Not how to become self-sufficient because we have never seen that as a goal. The second phase is on the ground training for heritage areas related to their sustainability. The plan is to have on the ground training in at least three regions and webinar type trainings.

**Vision of the National Heritage Area program:** The whole integration to really strengthen the connection of heritage areas into the NPS. Also, to better integrate other partnership programs. Over the years I've been more connected with RTCA and Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR). At least in our region it would be great to have all those programs working together. Wild and Scenic Rivers in some ways is similar to heritage areas but have a very different mandate. WSR NPS can go into hearings and communities and say, "No, that should not happen near that river." Heritage areas would not have that and shouldn't but they (RTCA) are staff that don't particularly work with park units. Over the years I've seen staff that focus on the parks and staff that focus outside the parks and aren't always on the same wavelength. Heritage areas probably maybe do a better job at trying to overlap with parks. Do that but at the same time integrate all the other programs. Someone needs to come in and look at what really makes sense and plan how all programs are organized to work together.