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Stanley W. Abbott
Summer of 1958

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
Transcribed by Shirley Evison
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OF

STANLEY W. ABBOTT

INTERVIEWED BY S. HERBERT EVISON

1958

Tape Number 55

DESIGNING AND BUILDING THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

Being transcriptions of a series of interviews made in the summer of 1958 with Stanley W. Abbott, first superintendent of the Parkway.

Interviews were recorded by S. Herbert Evison, retired Chief of Information of the National Park Service, and transcribed by his wife Shirley. S. Herbert Evison also did the editing of the original transcriptions.

FOREWORD

Some months before I retired from the National Park Service, on April 30, 1958, I mentioned to my friend Sidney R. Jacobs, then in charge of production for Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., that I planned to write a book about the Blue Ridge Parkway. When I gave him some of the reasons why I thought there was a good book in this unique Park Service venture, he agreed and suggested that I discuss it with Alfred Knopf. I gave Alfred the same story; while I can't say that his eyes lit up with enthusiasm, he did agree that the parkway story was an interesting one, with many unusual facets, and might well make a good book.

I reported this favorable action to Sidney, who immediately asked, "Did he pay you an advance?"

My answer to that was that it had not occurred to me to ask for one, but that I did not want one, anyway. "If I were to accept an advance," I told him, "I would be obligated to write the book. When I retire, I don't want to undertake anything that I can't drop whenever I feel like it."

Those words have come back to haunt me occasionally. If I had asked for and received an advance – probably a very large IF – I would undoubtedly have written the book. As it was, other things came along to engage my attention; five or six years later, when I might again have plunged into the task of collecting parkway material, it had already been considerably written about, and the first Blue Ridge Parkway park naturalist, William G. Lord, has written a detailed series of guides – good ones, too – covering its entire length.

Though a book on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the author of which was subsidized by the Eastern National Park and Monument Association, appeared several years ago and it gives a good deal of the story, I feel that it completely omitted many interesting phases of the Parkway's history and operations; the really definitive book on this tremendous and unique undertaking is still to be written. Though I long ago gave up the idea of trying to write it, the Parkway has continued to exert a great fascination over me. Consequently, in the course of my Oral History program for the Service, I have made a point of recording the recollections of as many men and women, who were playing or had played parts in its history, as I could find and persuade to talk. Transcriptions of all of these interviews will ultimately be available to the researcher. To these I now add transcriptions of the lengthy interviews I had with Stanley W. Abbott in the summer of 1958, as well as other transcriptions of interviews made during the first two or three years of my retirement. I hope they will all prove useful when the time comes for the writing of that truly distinctive book on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

S. Herbert Evison
July 6, 1974

INTRODUCTION

Late in 1933, following a suggestion first offered by an official of the Public Works Administration in Baltimore that was later urged upon President Franklin D. Roosevelt by Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, Public Works Administrator Harold L. Ickes announced that \$16,000,000 of Public Works funds had been allocated to the construction of a scenic highway to connect Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks; of this amount, some \$6,000,000 was made immediately available. Neither of the national parks had been established at that time.

Responsibility for supervising the task of planning and constructing the scenic highway – not at first envisioned as a parkway – was entrusted to the National Park Service, which was to carry it forward in cooperation and coordination with what was then the Public Roads Administration, subject to provision of the necessary lands by the States that the road would traverse.

Though the "scenic highway" evolved into a parkway – an elongated park traversed throughout its length by a road – it was not so considered or defined at first. Yet very early in the game – as appears in Stanley Abbott's account – the National Park Service turned to the foremost authorities on parkway design and construction. One of these was the late, great Jay Downer, a top-flight engineer who had been involved in parkway design and construction in Westchester County, New York, since the early days of the Bronx River Parkway, a revolutionary undertaking which redeemed a terribly mistreated valley and provided a new kind of vehicular route. The other was Gilmore D. Clarke, the chief landscape architect of the Westchester County park organization. These two agreed to serve as consultants on the design and construction of what came to be known as the Blue Ridge Parkway; however, they insisted that a man of their choice be assigned to the parkway as resident landscape architect, and their representative.

At the start, Gilmore Clarke gave some important advice which proved in a very short time to have been very bad advice. He suggested a width of land taking for the parkway of 200 or 250 feet; reports as to what he actually suggested vary. And as a means of protecting the view beyond the "right of way" he urged the use of what had been employed frequently in Westchester County – scenic easements, under which owners of adjoining land would agree, for a consideration, to refrain from certain practices which were figured to have an adverse effect on what the Parkway traveler would see. Combined, these two bits of advice have been the cause of a thousand headaches; they continue to be. However, Downer and Clarke did recommend the appointment of Stanley W. Abbott, a member of the Westchester County park staff, as resident landscape architect. He was beyond question the greatest piece of good fortune that ever happened to the Parkway. He remained in that position from late 1933 until he entered the Armed Forces in 1942. Meantime, as administration of the Parkway became necessary, he was successively acting superintendent and superintendent.

I well remember my first contact with Stan. In the fall of 1934, while on a brief visit to Washington, he was invited to sit in on an evening meeting of a committee which was busy preparing the report that was later published under the title Recreational Use of Land in the United States. The late George M. Wright was chairman of the committee; I was its vice chairman. Stan gave us a brief, enthusiastic report on the project; since it was being carried forward in what was still a rather isolated part of the country, most of us then in the Washington Office of the National Park Service were almost completely ignorant of it.

Stan had, and still has, the rangy build of the varsity oarsman; a stubborn lock of black hair persisted in hanging across his forehead. We were immediately made aware that he was both perceptive and articulate. At the time that he had been pulled out of the Westchester County organization he had, in fact, been serving as the public relations man for the Westchester County organization, though he was a Cornell graduate in landscape architecture. It was especially fortunate that, along with the kind of imagination that was the essential ingredient in the creation of such a work of art as the Parkway, he also had those other qualities. They not only enabled him to "sell" his ideas and concepts of parkway design and development to his Washington Office superiors and to the officials of the State Highway Departments with which he had to deal; they were a necessity of successful relationships with the Parkway's neighbors, the mountain people through or past whose properties the Parkway was to go.

As Stan recounted in one of the interviews I had with him, Downer and Clarke pulled out of their official connection with the Parkway rather early, after a brief but acrid encounter with Ickes. Thereafter, though the Parkway project was given general supervision by then Associate Director Arthur E. Demaray and Chief Landscape Architect Vint, Abbott was very largely his own man; the people in Washington helped him out of occasional difficulties rather than giving him much of any direction; the Parkway, in consequence, is very much his creation.

Though he did not return to the Parkway after World War II, the years with the Parkway were just the beginning of a brilliant National Park Service career. Among other assignments, he headed the group which carried through the Mississippi River Parkway survey; also, he was superintendent of Colonial National Historical Park during the period when the Colonial Parkway was completed and when a huge development program took place, in anticipation of the observance, in 1957, of the 350th Anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown; of the flowering of Virginia Colonial culture at Williamsburg; and of the British surrender at Yorktown. He continued as superintendent there until his retirement in 1966.

Since his retirement he has continued to practice landscape architecture and land planning in association with his son Carlton, a brilliant and innovative architect. It was at his home on the outskirts of Williamsburg overlooking an estuary of the York River that I taped his recollections of his post-Parkway career in the spring of 1971.

The transcriptions which follow are all made from recordings that I made, over a period of several days, in the early summer of 1958, when Stan was still superintendent of Colonial National Historical Park. The recording was done on a small, variable-speed, German-made tape recorder, from which the process of transcribing was difficult and laborious. That demanding chore was performed by my wife Shirley; I cannot imagine a better testimonial to her skill and patience.

S. Herbert Evison
September 9, 1974

DESIGNING AND BUILDING THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

Recorded interviews with Stanley W. Abbott

START OF TAPE 1

- Stanley Abbott: In the preface to Joseph Conrad's "Nigger of the Narcissus," there is a line that applies equally to all the arts, fine and practical: "Anything – any piece of writing that aspires to be a work of art," he wrote, "must carry its justification in every line." A good oil painting or a musical work can't have its dead areas, its neglected detail. They may be abstracted and broadly done on purpose, but they cannot be careless. All elements must compose, so as to please. The only reason for the Blue Ridge Parkway is to please the viewer and so its chief concerns are beauty and interest.
- Stanley Abbott: Prime national parks are wild areas for the most part; the Blue Ridge Mountains are, for the most part, managed landscape, for they are long lived in.
- Stanley Abbott: A western park man came through here recently and delighted me with a remark to the effect that the Blue Ridge Parkway nevertheless has a proper place in the National Park System.
- Stanley Abbott: You ask my appraisal of the natural beauty and human interest of these eastern mountains to which we became so attached. The grandeur derived, of course from the six days of the Lord's creation and the human interest from the overlay of history in the pioneer days – a persistent culture isolated in the crowded East. Some would wish for the pristine beauty of these tree-clad mountains unspoiled – but this is idle – there has been imposition of man on nature and this was the condition we had to work with in developing the Parkway – logging, soil erosion, forest fire. Rudyard Kipling wrote in "Brazilian Nights": "Once you tamper with nature, you had better keep it up."
- Stanley Abbott: This is one responsibility; and then we accept another responsibility when we make the determination to let the people into any park or preserve in order that they "may enjoy". Then we do indeed commit ourselves to design. Good design implies restraint, which is creative of itself. We should not minimize the art we practice. We thought positively: "Now we are coming in here amidst this natural beauty. We had better design and build thoughtfully, sensitively, creatively. We had better not have dull, insensitive people doing it. It requires sensitivity to design even such a comparatively minor detail as a sign and a signpost, as you usher men and women into the presence of the natural gods, as at the foot of Old Faithful.

- Stanley Abbott: About the wayside parks along the Blue Ridge. These are not a mere additive. They were a most important part of the formula for conservation along the Parkway. They are like beads on a string; the rare gems in the necklace.
- Stanley Abbott: It is fortunate that the Resettlement Administration came up with the funds. It was a favorable time for buying, in the base of the Great Depression. Most of the parks shown in the original master plan are in existence today, except that we never secured what we visualized in the National Forest areas like the Craggies and the Pisgahs and the Balsams. Grandfather Mountain was another. Interesting problems cropped up in connection with acquiring a number of these parks such as the Peaks of Otter, the twin mountains near Bedford, Virginia. The City of Bedford had a kind of proprietary sense about them. The local folks and summer excursionists had been climbing the Sharptop since carriage days and staying overnight aloft to see the sunrise over the valley.
- Stanley Abbott: State Senator Hunter Miller, who owned lands there, was one with this proprietary sense. He did not accept the parkway idea at first. I remember a number of occasions when we hiked up Sharptop together and struggled to find a method or means by which the peaks could be acquired and preserved. The old Hotel Mons was in operation at the time there in the gap between Flattop and Sharptop, nestled under Harkening Hill. Beautiful place name – Harkening Hill.
- Stanley Abbott: The ultimate solution to the purchase by the Federal Government of the Peaks of Otter was expedient. Funds were limited, per acre and for the whole, so we settled for certain concession rights in favor of the Peaks of Otter owners.
- Stanley Abbott: A Parkway like Blue Ridge has but one reason for existence, which is to please by revealing the charm and interest of the native American countryside. To accomplish that end requires the finest exercise of the several planning arts.
- Stanley Abbott: Your composition is one of fields and fences, lakes and streams, and hills and valleys; and your problem is that of placing your roadway in such a position as best to reveal them. It is as if you were going with your camera through the countryside you wanted to photograph to greatest advantage – how long would you look for a spot from which to take your picture. So, the all-important factor was: Where is the road to be located? And you determine upon your location by these very large compositional considerations, balanced by other considerations, lesser but important,

such as the opportunity for intimate glimpses into the deep woods and into the flora of those woods. This affords contrast to the heroic panorama – a stretch here along the crest, there on mountainside, along a valley stream, through the woods, along the edge of a meadow, passing a mountain farmstead. There were the ingredients of variety and charm.

Stanley Abbott: Then, having selected a route for the road, you get into the business of designing a road that fits the topography as sympathetically as it can be fit – the engineer, the landscape architect, the architect working together.

Stanley Abbott: That takes a – well, it's almost a form of sculpture. It takes a third-dimensional mind and insight into what is the main contour of this particular land form, whether one broad curve or, sometimes--since nature doesn't always deplore a straight line--there are places where the road wanted to straighten out for a while because the conformation of the land straightened out; or there had been a straight cut farm field against a straight edge of woods.

Stanley Abbott: Cuts and fills make roadways. Machine-made cuts and fills in rugged parts of the Blue Ridge could cover a 6-story building. This is big geometrics and often one doesn't appreciate the scale, be it because of rugged nature of the mountain terrain and the designed restoration of conditions alongside the machined roadway. Shoulders and slopes are topsoiled, seeded, and planted to cover the scar of construction; to afford a visual transition to the softer textures of grassy fields and pastures or blended into the rougher texture of the woodlands.

Stanley Abbott: You remember how, from the start of the administration of Franklin D, Roosevelt, Washington was on the search for projects of any worth – while kind or description. The Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park – I think the center section had been completed and the initial reaction was spontaneous enthusiasm that inspired Senator Byrd and others to say, "Well, let's do this all the way down the range." They had seen a map of the Appalachian Mountains at one time or another, in geography class or somewhere, as we all had.

Stanley Abbott: The National Park Service, up to that time, had had little experience with parkways. As a matter of fact, there were few in the Park Service who could give the legal definition of a parkway.

Herbert Evison: Even recently they referred to it as "a park-like road."

Stanley Abbott: I am sure it was so of Vint and Arthur Demaray, also. It was very likely Tom Vint, to whom the problem had been thrown, as so many problems

have been for so many years, who came up with the thought: "By jiminy, we have the best people on our staff already occupied with a great many things to do," – the whole CCC program was in full swing – "Let's get in touch with somebody who knows something about parkways." Logically they called Gilmore D. Clarke of New York, who sat then on the National Fine Arts Commission and was occasionally in the office of National Capital Parks. Clarke was the landscape architect for the Westchester County Park System. He had worked close to Chief Engineer Jay Downer, a very broad and brilliant engineer and a pioneer in parkway planning and construction. And I take it that Clarke went back to New York and talked with his colleague Downer. They decided, yes, they would consult for the National Park Service – take a look at it anyway.

Stanley Abbott: I don't know whether you have heard the story about how they wrote back to the Park Service – Tom Vint having initialed the correspondence – to say that they would do so at their regular fee of \$75 a day and expenses. This even today is a fair consultant fee and in those days was one in which a great deal of experience and expertise was implicit.

Stanley Abbott: Gilmore Clarke, back from Washington, telephoned me and told me about this proposition. He said that he and Mr. Downer were going to take it on condition that they could send down a lieutenant of their own choice to be resident on the job as their eyes and ears. At that time I was so-called public relations officer reporting to Mr. Downer, handling the press, magazine articles, etc., for the Westchester County System. I was making something like \$3200 a year in Westchester, an expensive part of the country. They offered me \$3800 a year. It seemed like a fortune to me, and the project most interesting and intriguing. I said, yes, I would take it, gladly.

Stanley Abbott: Shortly I had a request to come to Washington. This was by letter from Thomas Chalmers Vint, whom I visualized for some reason as a tall, slender chap, and highly sophisticated. I was quite surprised, going into the office in the old Army and Navy Building to see Tom short and portly, and so natural. It was a Saturday afternoon, and the building was nearly empty. You get an impression, very easily, if there are only a few thousand people in such a building, that it is empty. I went in, searched out Tom's office, and we had a talk, by which he seemed to be reasonably assured for himself that I would be of some help.

Stanley Abbott: Before I left I had filled out my first Form 57. The first of the year 1934 I reported for work. I was given my appointment papers in the brand new and awesome Interior Building – awesome to me because I hadn't known

the Federal City before in its great scale of office buildings. And I remember, in front of the building, being shown a heavy Dodge truck, with which I was told rather simply to lone-wolf it down through the mountains to the Great Smokies and to get to know the mountains as well as I could during the two weeks that would intervene between then and the time Downer and Clarke and Vint would come down for their first look, with me as a guide.

Stanley Abbott: Tom had made the point, of course – and you can just hear Tom saying it – "Stanley, there isn't anyone we can find who has ever put the maps together between Shenandoah and the Smokies; and we find that, in many places, there aren't any maps – unmapped territory."

Stanley Abbott: So, I lone-wolfed for two weeks of winter weather through the mountains; wound along on those little old mountain roads, sometimes snow-drifted, sometimes frozen, many times thawing in the middle of the day in the southern sun; getting stuck and unstuck; pulled out by horses or mules or a chestnut rail taken from a nearby snake fence. But by the time of the first trip with Clarke, Downer, and Vint, I had some sense of those awesome mountains. Also joining the party for the Bureau of Public Roads was District Engineer Harold J. Spellman, who followed through for so many years, as you know, in building what is to me the most remarkably engineered road in America. With him was Bill Austin, a BPR location engineer. There were many trips of that kind, two or three days in duration; it was a matter, at that time of just diagramming possible ways along various portions of the range.

Stanley Abbott: Bill Austin was outstanding in the parade of personalities that peopled the early stage of the study. He had a certain hard-boiled attitude, on the surface, which he loved to display to frighten young landscape architects, and he could. I remember hiking up any number of mountainsides during early reconnaissance, then climbing a fire tower; Austin would pull at my coat sleeve and say, "I know damn well I can't put the road up there."

Stanley Abbott: Austin had a friend named J.Y. Carpenter. Both were native Virginians and classmates at the University of Virginia. Many a night in a lonely hotel lobby with Bill Austin he would spin yarns, one after another, rocking back and forth in a rocking chair – if he could find one and he usually could on the veranda of a country hotel.

Stanley Abbott: I remember one description which I thought did his character so well, about how he was driving one night down through the Hoback Canyon, near Grand Teton, with J.Y. Carpenter. Suddenly a bear lunged across the

road. "I had a Ford V-8 and they had just come out with those new 4-wheel brakes. I jammed on the brakes when I saw the bear and there was a rather sudden stop and J.Y. Carpenter went out through the windshield and fell down on the highway in front of the car." Austin. got out and walked around front and said, "My God, J.Y., are you hurt?" And J.Y. looked up at me and said, 'Oh, Lord, no. What makes you think it hurts a man to go through the windshield, out over the hood, and land down on the road?'" That kind of humorous sarcasm was a very large part of his conversational style.

Stanley Abbott: I have no sharp memory about dates and times. You can dovetail with the files and records. But the states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee very early became interested in securing the route of this parkway through their boundaries. This led to a long and very interesting series of meetings, of chamber of commerce type, in various cities and towns; and then junkets by motorcade and bus and horseback and many other means into various sections of the mountains of the states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Stanley Abbott: Virginia was pretty exercised about parkway location in the south-west part of the state, because below Roanoke, you see, there are parallel chains of mountains; the Appalachian Range is seven ranges deep in places. And there was a grave question for a long time as to whether, indeed, the Parkway would better be placed continuing on down through the Blue Ridge in Virginia--as it ultimately was--or whether we should switch over and follow one of the Allegheny ranges west of the Valley of Virginia.

Stanley Abbott: It became a race on the part of local interests to secure the route of the Parkway through their section. The first one or two of these promotional drives were attended by Clarke and Downer, as well as by Vint and Spellman. Then a most interesting thing happened. We landed back in Washington and were unexpectedly called to the office of the Interior Secretary, Harold L. Ickes (The Curmudgeon). We walked into his office and Mr. Ickes, as always colorful, stood up and greeted Clarke and Downer. He nodded to the rest of us and then turned: "Mr. Clarke, I understand the Government is paying you \$75 a day and your expenses for your services." Mr. Clarke said, "That is right, Mr. Secretary." Clarke, during the war, having the initials G.D., was known as Major God Damn Clarke. He is a man of height and bearing and manner and not without firm speech when he thought the occasion right for it; so there was a little huff in his voice at that moment.

Stanley Abbott: Ickes said, "We have a policy here in Interior of not paying consultants more than \$25 a day in these Depression times, " – or something along those lines. Gilmore Clarke stepped forward and pounded the table in front of the Secretary – Mr. Downer standing discreetly aside, a comparatively quiet man. Clarke said, "I have worked, Mr. Secretary for years for the Government at \$1 a year, which I would be glad to continue to do. My regular fee here, as elsewhere today, is \$75 a day." And with that he turned and walked out of the office. He and Downer never came back.

Stanley Abbott: So the group of deliberate thinkers about this problem of a national parkway was thus narrowed to those in the field and Tom Vint and Harold Spellman. They made quite frequent trips to see us. By that time the Park Service had employed Ed Abbuehl as the second to join the team, and a third, a very picturesque Dutchman by the name of Hendrik Van Gelder, who had been trained in the Westchester Park System. I had known Abbuehl at Cornell; he had been my professor of descriptive geometry and mechanics. When the University, like other institutions, had to narrow its ranks, Ed was let out, being one of the younger instructors, and had gone back home to Holton, Kansas. Though he was an architect by training, I knew the broad nature of his thinking and reasoned: now here is the ideal man. Abbuehl started at \$3200 a year, which would have been the old P & S (Professional and Scientific) Grade 3.

Stanley Abbott: And the office at that time! This must have been in February of that first year, because February 10 I had gone back to New York with, I think, two or three days leave, given rather grudgingly by Tom Vint, in order that I might marry Helen. And down she came with me, and there are clear memories of once again having to pick up a truck in front of the Interior Department Building, and on our honeymoon, three days out from the altar, having to drive tandem in the middle of February, along the Skyline Drive to our first stop at Luray. The mountains were glazed with ice due to a heavy storm in a cold spell of that winter. Here was Helen, the bride, driving in our little canvas-topped Ford, and I driving behind her in the Government truck. A unique wedding trip!

Stanley Abbott: As we crossed the higher range there near Panorama in Shenandoah National Park, it was obvious – this was too much! There was not any heater in the little Ford. There was a heater in the brand-new Government truck. Regardless of Government regulations, Helen and I switched and up she drove to the door of the Mimslyn Hotel in the Government truck, I following, near frozen, in the Ford roadster.

- Stanley Abbott: By the time Abbuehl and Van Gelder reported for work, the Abbotts were living in a small apartment in a private home in Salem, Virginia, not far from the college there, with a wonderful old Virginian with a strong Confederate heart as our landlady. This little apartment was the converted second story of a residence – that's what it was. The point about mentioning that – and I have often thought, By Jiminy, I should have billed the Park Service – the first offices were our dining room and the dining table was the drafting board. It was three or four months before we could arrange office space in the Shenandoah Life Building in Roanoke.
- Stanley Abbott: R. Getty Browning, right-of-way engineer, single-handedly presented the case of North Carolina for the location of the Parkway through its boundaries to the Smokies – and did it brilliantly, too – when Ickes held that famous hearing and made the now-famous decision which eliminated Tennessee and routed the Parkway from Blowing Rock to the Smokies all in North Carolina.
- Stanley Abbott: There were numerous and strong political factors pulling in all directions in those days, and I don't know why it shouldn't be said now. It would be an obvious thing even between the lines.
- Herbert Evison: It is an extremely interesting part of the story of the Blue Ridge Parkway, that struggle between North Carolina and Tennessee; also the much lesser controversy over the route to the Peaks of Otter, whether it would go down by Natural Bridge or stay up on the ridge.
- Stanley Abbott: One of the basic philosophies important in the development of the character of the Blue Ridge Parkway was early recognition of a fact. That was illustrated in the earlier Skyline Drive. One panorama following right on another, thinking of that as fortissimo, doesn't make the interesting piece of music that fortissimo mixed with a little pianissimo provides. There again tough Bill Austin hit it on the head. "One could be gorged on scenery, and you can have too much ice cream and too much Beethoven." That, I think, was the most important criterion we hit upon. And, of course, going down from the ridges into the valley to Natural Bridge and back up again was to have been a major stroke in that direction of balance and variety.
- Herbert Evison: Senator Glass was too much for you?
- Stanley Abbott: Yes, that was a disappointing thing – not that the resulting thing isn't also beautiful country. But think what could have happened; at that time we visualized the Natural Bridge as part of the National Park System. It was tottering on the economic brink then; now, of course, it is well established, a commercial gold mine.

Stanley Abbott: Anyway, the charm and delight of the Blue Ridge Parkway lies in its ever-changing location, in variety. And of course there is the picture it reveals of the Southern Highlands, with miles of split-rail fence, with Brinegar cabins and the Mabry Mills. These are evidences of a simple homestead culture and a people whose way of life grew out of the land around them. Provincial life, gee! The mountaineer buildings we acquired to preserve within the holdings of the Parkway itself have resisted the whitewash brush, the Sears Roebuck catalog, and the tar paper of Johns Manville. They are as interesting a part of the Blue Ridge as the natural scene around them.

Stanley Abbott: So, as we decided that variety was the spice of the Parkway, then we set about applying that principle to the more detailed reconnaissance. The location problem on a broad scale was a matter of 100 miles or more at a bit. When you got it down to 10 miles at a time within that 100 miles, you were narrowing your problem, but within that 10 miles there was still opportunity for variety. We and the engineers together just drilled and drilled, all of us, on the business of following a mountain stream for a while, then climbing up on the slope of a hill pasture, then dipping down into the open bottom lands and back into the woodlands.

Stanley Abbott: There is a lot of the spirit of that road location, it seems to me, in Emily Dickinson's lines where she was talking about the railroad train, she who never traveled: "I love to see it lap the miles and lick the valleys up, and chase itself around a pile of mountains and then stop, docile and omnipotent, at its own stable door." Very beautiful sense of what either the railroad, or you in your car, experience when you thread the valleys and the mountains.

Stanley Abbott: I can't imagine a more creative job than locating that Blue Ridge Parkway, because you worked with a 10-league canvas and a brush of comet's tail. Moss and lichens collected on the shake roof of a Mabry Mill measured against the huge panoramas that look out forever.

Stanley Abbott: For the initial mapping prior to a "flagging" by the engineer and taking of topography along the flag line, we would use the Geological Survey quadrangle sheets and plot a line through--the sort of thing that we did with aerial photogrammetry on the Mississippi Parkway project. On many occasions we chuckled at the place names we came upon. North of the Peaks of Otter, for example, three mountains called The Pope, The Cardinal, and the Friar, which we later called The Celibate Group. Nearby there was a mountain called The Three Sisters and in between, mind you,

as a range called No Business Ridge. That doesn't just happen, you know; it was cute humor on the part of some Scotch Irishman.

Stanley Abbott: I forget what year – perhaps the end of 1936 – when the possibility came along to buy the land for a series of wayside parks – what Tom Vint called "bulges in the right of way" – like Cumberland Knob, Rocky Knob, Doughton Park, etc. These had long been part of our master plan. But then, as now, a million dollars for construction was one thing and one dollar for land was another – just a different kind of money. So when the Federal Land Bank made some submarginal land money available to us it was a great day.

Stanley Abbott: The Resettlement Administration sent down two land appraisers, a man by the name of Sullivan and a man by the name of Weems. Sam Weems had as much enthusiasm then as now and sold himself immediately. He would do very well with the country club people in Roanoke on the weekend and equally well with the hill people – the Dillons and the Wyatts – during the week – not shaving when he shouldn't but shaving when he should.

Stanley Abbott: One amusing incident of my own experiences was exploring the Bluffs Park area with the natives. Gesturing across the hill, I would say, "Whose land is this?" "Well, that's Sam's land." "Whose is that over there?" "Well, that's Dillon's land." "And whose is this over here?" "Well, that's more of Sam's lands." And I was thinking he meant land that Sam Weems had been buying for us. It turned out that he had been talking about Uncle Sam's land.

Stanley Abbott: One of the interesting things was the way that the people along the Parkway, in the very early days before the grapevine had worked fully, resented our coming, interfering with accustomed privacy, or stumbling on a pile of leaves and uncovering one of their stills, or otherwise disturbing them in their perfectly sufficient, agreeable, and pleasant life in the mountains. Of course, in those days the Bureau of Public Roads was part of the Department of Agriculture; we often thought they mistook the USDA of the car license for U.S. Dry Agent. Quite frequently we were conscious in the back of our spine of being followed at some distance with a sawed-off shotgun.

Stanley Abbott: We soon learned – particularly the surveyors who had to go out there to drive their "stobs" into the ground – the thing to do on getting up in the hills was to stop your car in full sight, call down to the farmer at his plowing, put your foot up on the fence rail and wait. In time, he would stop. When he asked, "What you lookin' about?", the proper answer was,

"We're lookin' about The Scenic." The hill man would then go on with his plowing.

Stanley Abbott: Another evidence of picturesque speech was the way the mountain folk referred to the parking overlooks as "balconies". How's that for the Anglo Saxon?

Stanley Abbott: I think that the people who proposed this project to President Roosevelt called it simply a scenic road to connect the Great Smokies and Shenandoah National Parks. They were not trained in road building or in conservation practices. The National Park Service had to supply the formula, a means, a method that would assure a roadside of beauty forever controlled and preserved. No parkway of such scale had been built in America or elsewhere. The parkways so far built were located in the suburbs of cities, in relatively flat land. A park-like right of way 500 feet wide was adequate. But in the mountains and through the countryside we needed a new formula.

Stanley Abbott: Our group in the field found a most understanding and sympathetic audience in Tom Vint and Arthur Demaray – who was a great believer in the Parkway. In those days, Director Cammerer was busy with the acquisition of the Great Smokies and many other things. You notice in the files almost everything emanating from the Washington Office was signed by Demaray. I think that, by agreement with Cammerer, Demaray had taken the Parkway.

Stanley Abbott: Let's be frank about it; the National Park Service had never been so busy as during the New Deal. The organization was groaning at every joint with growing pains. None was looking for more responsibility of more work, certainly not something of an uncertain kind like the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was looked upon by many as a red-headed stepchild. Some thought the Park Service shouldn't be getting into this kind of thing and few of us realized that the Blue Ridge Parkway would become a great instrument of conservation; that we would expand the suburban parkway concept to a much broader canvas.

Stanley Abbott: It was Gilmore Clarke and Jay Downer who wrote the first specifications, which called for a "right of way" 250 feet wide. That was without benefit of experience of the mountains themselves, or appreciating that the foreground of a view of miles in extent could scarcely be covered with a right of way taking so limited. And so, early in the game, Tom Vint began to drive for wider control through public ownership of the roadside.

Stanley Abbott: As we approached the State of Virginia, the greatest hurdle was that picturesque Henry G. Shirley, who was then commissioner of roads. There was less difficulty in North Carolina, and one of the reasons was that we were in a bargaining position there. We had not tacked down the route through North Carolina as between it and Tennessee. And also we had in this fellow Browning, and in Jeffries, the then commissioner of roads in North Carolina, men greatly interested in the project, and men of considerable vision. They agreed to acquire 125 acres to the mile, an average width of about a fifth of a mile; in Virginia, we settled for less.

Stanley Abbott: The Blue Ridge Parkway would not be what it is today without the acquisition of the wayside parks in addition to the broad rights of way. These parks, acquired with Federal funds, were large enough in extent, running from 2000 to 6000 acres, to comprehend a mountain or embrace a lake and the hills around with insulation enough to conserve it forever with some kind of integrity.

Stanley Abbott: You asked me whether I can describe the attitude shown by the native people in the early days of the park to the proposition of this large and incomprehensible – to them – outside agency, which was Uncle Sam or the Government. They wondered why the Government, or any group from the outside world, would want to come in and spend a lot of money and go to all the effort that was required to reveal a countryside which, to them, for generations, in their minds – because they hadn't traveled and had no basis for comparison – seemed an everyday kind of countryside.

Stanley Abbott: Let me illustrate. There was this story which came out of the Great Smoky Mountains in the Gatlinburg area. A gracious and cultured lady visited Gatlinburg and became enamored of it. She decided that their family should have a summer place somewhere in the foothills near Gatlinburg, and she contrived to have architects design such a place and bought a piece of property on which it could be located. She came back occasionally as the building progressed, and on one of her trips she noticed to her great horror that she was building this new home directly in the line of view of a cabin in the back occupied by people who had lived there for generations. So, with the sincerest apology on her lips, she went to her neighbors and said, "I am so sorry I have thoughtlessly and quite unintentionally – here we are building our house and shutting off your view of Mount LeConte." The mountaineer chewed thoughtfully on a straw for a while and said, "It's all right, ma'am, we've seen it."

Stanley Abbott: A story I have told so many times I don't know whether I experienced it or whether Sam Weems did: There were numerous times when the distances

were too far for the day's work that had to be done, when the distances were too far between appropriate stopping places where one might get a room for hire, stable his horse, so to speak, and darkness would fall, the car having got stuck too many times; and you would simply have to go off on the countryside and seek shelter with some often friendly though taciturn mountain family. Then, as we all know, as compared with the life we lead in the cities, they lead a very simple existence. They eat well, sleep well, work hard. They will likely go to church on Sunday 52 times a year, and maybe go to the polls to vote.

Stanley Abbott: Sam was going along the parkway the day of the story. It was an icy winter day in the mountains and the parkway was a newly-cut sub-grade; the contractor had gone away for the winter, knowing he could scarcely make dollars meet his contract price struggling with the elements up in the higher elevations in the middle of winter. Sam is going along on this new road grade and, as on an icy, slidey wet grade, the car began to go "woof, woof" one way or another. Fortunately, Sam landed in the ditch on the inside of the roadway rather than off the other shoulder and down into the canyon. With the snow flurrying, it seemed there was nothing to do but go down over the fields into the nearby hollow, rap on the door, there to ask for shelter, which quietly is granted with a nod of the head.

Stanley Abbott: Sam entered the one-room cabin with a small loft up on one side against the chimney. The little old man and the little old lady are sitting there in chairs and one of them says, "Well, just put your things over thar." To make a long story short, there was not too lively conversation, but at intervals things were said, and the suitcase was put aside in the corner for awhile and then ultimately put up in the loft and then, after a hospitable supper of sourdough biscuits and sowbelly and grits and maybe some redeye gravy for the grits, goodnights were said very early in the evening and Sam goes up on a cornshuck mattress and makes out a fair night's rest. Of course, the mattress itself is made of cornhusks and enclosed in some kind of woven homespun cloth, and a coverlet (and of course in the mountains they always said "coverlit") or two to keep you warm, on top.

Stanley Abbott: In the morning, Same goes down on the veranda, takes down the battered tin basin in which you wash your face, breaks the ice on top of the crockery pitcher with its ubiquitous cracks and mars, and pours out a little water and attempts – taking out his travel kit – to shave. And the water being cold, the morning cold, the razor cuts here and nicks there, so you have to take out a styptic pencil and repair here and repair there and use the after-shaving lotion. And of course, he brushes his teeth and combs his hair and straightens his tie. All this time the old fellow is sitting on the

porch in one of those familiar reeded chairs, his feet up on the railing, leaning back, sucking on a straw, and saying nothing, as is customary. Until after this half hour of maneuvering with his morning ablutions, Weems closes his travel kit and turns around, and the old fellow looks at him and says, "Young feller, you certainly air a heap o' trouble to yourself, now hain't you?"

Stanley Abbott: I had to go to New York one time to hear one of the best stories I have ever heard, to wrap up the nature of the mountaineer and his taciturnity. It seems there were three bachelor men – if that isn't too sophisticated a term – mountaineers living on an old tote trail way back in the mountains, and it was the custom each morning to come out after their morning fare – none of them was overly ambitious – and find, each one of them, one of the three pillars which held up the veranda porch, and there sit out most of the day. And on the eventful day of this story there came up along the tote road this wagon being pulled by a horse; tethered at the back was a mule. The brothers, as if it were a slow tennis match, watched this contraption go by, and after half an hour one of them spoke up and said, "Jeb, that were a might funny-lookin' contraption that came by a while back, the mule a-pullin' and the horse a-pushin' on behind." Nothing was said for another half hour or more, until Jeb said, "Clem, you are wrong about that contraption that came by heah. That were a horse a-pullin' and a mule tethered behind." The rest of the day went on uneventfully and the next morning Clem and Jeb had their breakfast of grits and made their way out to the veranda and each found a pillar to lean against. But the third one hadn't showed up, and when he did, he had a stick over his shoulder and a poke tied around the end of it in which were obviously all his belongings, and he stomped off the porch and down the trail and was just about to get out of sight when Jeb or Clem, one of them said, "Hey, why you be goin'? You bein' puttin' out?" The other brother turned around with anger in his eyes and said, "Yes, I'm puttin' out. You don't expect I'm goin' to stay round heah with you two arguin' like that.

Stanley Abbott: What happened in the case of the Parkway was that we quickly realized that the old Westchester width of 250 feet was not nearly comprehensive enough and that we needed something much closer, to, say, 1000 feet width which, on the average, we reduced to a formula which became 100 acres to the mile, permitting this in-and-out and snake- swallowing-the-apple kind of land purchase, the varied width being necessary, among other things, to accommodate to the property lines of the abutting properties economically, fields and fences. Important also, this flexibility, by intent and design, gave us maximum control of the scenic picture with a reasonable taking.

Stanley Abbott: Now, further along the lines of your inquiry, the Westchester County parkways were called the Westchester County Parks and Parkways. They were a system of parkways and they were laid out deliberately and knowingly as a series of parkways connecting county parks and recreation areas – the Poundridge Reservation of some 4000 acres up in the northern party of the county, the Saxon Woods golf course, the Huguenot Woods, Playland, at Rye. Any number of these park areas existed – were already county properties – prior to the decision to proceed with an integrated park system.

Stanley Abbott: So I think it can still be said – to clarify this thing – that it was something like the same; certainly it was the experience of Westchester that led us to think that, now, this Parkway we are building needs to connect larger reservations to the side that preserve on a greater scale a sufficient section, a representative landscape here and down the road a ways and down the road farther. This larger dimension was added to the magic carpet feeling of the Parkway itself. These areas developed for picnic, campsite, lunchroom, lodge and for hiking, became part of the experience – ride awhile, stop awhile along the wayside.

Stanley Abbott: The use of "right of way" as a phrase rather than "elongated park" is simply the jargon built up out of court procedure and legal definition. There were a number of court cases in the various states, particularly in New York State, before decisions were made defining the parkway as distinguished from the ordinary highway. And, of course, it remains today that few states have legislation permitting the construction of a true parkway.

Herbert Evison: How about the Mississippi River states?

Stanley Abbott: You will find in the Mississippi River report urgings upon the various states, in the various commission meetings, to get their legal books in order, to get the necessary authorization, that they would have the legal authority to build a true parkway and then to maintain and operate it without the vulnerability of the ordinary highway. Along the ordinary highway as built by the state highway departments, each abutting property owner has the right of light, air, and access. More recently, with the interstate highway, the abutting property owner has no such right, hence the phrase "limited access".

Stanley Abbott: I have had this thought, that the evolution of the national park- way as exemplified in the Blue Ridge Parkway was a process of utilizing and

adapting the metropolitan and suburban parkway idea to become a larger instrument of conservation of rural, wide-open countryside. The initial thinking, certainly of, say, a Westchester County Parkway or the Mount Vernon Boulevard was really, in the minds of most persons, "Well, let's build a pleasant and beautiful road to Mount Vernon." There was little understanding that here we had a new instrument of conservation, in law and in practice. Later, as the thing evolved, the parkway by the Federal formula is also one of the most economical and effective instruments that we have found for the conservation of the American landscape. We cannot afford boundaries like Yellowstone everywhere, but in many places we might afford the land required for a parkway roadside control. Perhaps in some future day we will have more parkways devoted to recreation.

Herbert Evison: With very dubious justification in the returns that you would get for your money.

Stanley Abbott: It is a very questionable thing, it would seem to me, in the field of morality, with a broad view of land use by people in America, if ultimately we are doing the right thing to devote so much land to commercial throughways – it takes 90 acres out of cultivation or other use to build one of these modern interchanges!

Stanley Abbott: Of course, like so many things, it is a matter of degree, but I certainly feel that the wonderful roads we are building today are too much addressed to the automobile age as if there were no end to it or that this is the only end of modern civilization.

Herbert Evison: Therefore there must be some comfort in the thought that you have made a very large contribution to a different type of road. My question here is: What local attitudes did you encounter at the start, toward the parkway project, the government, and yourself?

Stanley Abbott: To sum up what we have covered already, there was this, "My God, what will they do next?" attitude on the part of many people, thinking "This is a pipe dream if I ever saw one; and then there was on the part of many Park Service people themselves a doubt as to what a parkway might achieve, what purpose it might serve.

Stanley Abbott: Now, it was far easier to educate members of the Service who were close to the picture than it was with the body of the National Park Service. For example, it must have seemed an impossible and crazy thing to many of the western park people, who had no reason to understand what a little ribbon of land 1000 feet wide and 500 miles long could contribute to our

major objective of conserving the fine landscape of America. Then, of course, there was the larger problem of educating, because you need public support, as all public works do. There was need to educate and promote understanding of the significance of the parkway to the public through the mountains and villages, so that we could engender proper public support for what we were trying to do, and win their cooperation. That meant a program of education which, as you know, resulted, for one thing, in the publication of the little Blue Ridge Parkway News.

Stanley Abbott: Early in the game we began to accumulate slides, colored and black-and-white, with which we talked to schools, churches, service clubs and many other groups, down through the mountains, to show what we wanted to do. We showed parkways, such as those of Westchester County and the George Washington Memorial Parkway. At the start, we had no pictures of mountain parkways to show; then, as the job began to unfold, we were able to make more progress, because we could say, "Now, just south of the North Carolina line, where we built the first section of the Parkway – here it is, this is what it might look like going by your door, down by Asheville, or the Peaks of Otter, or whatever." A parkway was principally known then to the American people as a perfectly good name for a laundry or a sub-division road which wanted to pull a little swank.

Stanley Abbott: The contribution of the Bureau of Public Roads to this project will never be overmeasured, I am sure; and I think of the number of survey men and rodmen and project engineers who fought the sleet and the snow and the wind and cold and heat and snakes and many discomforts at comparatively low Civil Service pay, to really grind out the flagging of the road through those mountains, and the survey of that line, and the construction of it – a great contribution. And of course you will remember that the taking of topography on these rough hillsides was, by agreement with the States, a contribution of the States to the project. There are very romantic stories behind just the building – like the building of the bridge over the River Kwai – that sense of the number of workers, laborers, and others who lost their lives in the building of that road. Heroism – heroism – is involved, as such construction is a human effort often attended by danger. Maybe I should better use the words "hardship" and "hard work".

Stanley Abbott: Only from sight and feeling, when you have stood up there in the bitter winds yourself in the high elevation in winter weather and watched the bulldozers at work or the young engineer trying to keep his fingers warm when, at the slightest moisture on his fingers, his skin would freeze to the level or the survey instrument. And the terrific heat, and the difficult and arduous work that it would be just to walk from Point A to a certain

gap where the road ended, through five miles of the rough, rocky mountainside to get to the point where you first set up your instrument for the day's work, to do another half mile of location-staking on the ground – the representation of the parkway-to-be translated from the drawings.

Stanley Abbott: R. Getty Browning can give you many interesting details, and there was one very good article written about him in the Saturday Evening Post. He was a giant in land purchase from these mountaineers, one of those sympathetic human beings who can win the friendship and confidence of all the people; a very smooth person, who sat hour after hour with the mountain men trying to get a reasonable price for his agreement to sell, short of condemnation, which is always an onerous thing. He is one of the greats of that part of the picture, for sure.

Stanley Abbott: The land buyers in the Virginia State picture were several. It was a little bit more singlehanded for R. Getty Browning. He was Mr. Parkway for North Carolina.

Stanley Abbott: As for the Virginia engineers, some of them are still living; a number of them are still quite young. Max Holtz, now retired and living in Salem, was very much involved. A man named W.A. Royal, involved before Holtz, is now in the Richmond Division. A.H. Pettigrew, who was the chief right-of-way engineer for the State of Virginia, is deceased, I believe; but he was the trusted lieutenant of Shirley, who was a man of conviction and fine personality. I think he was a great public servant and rightly impressed with his own authority and importance; he used it to the advantage of the State, never for himself; but he did not readily buy the idea that the State of Virginia ought to go in for the wider right of way that we all still wish we might have persuaded them to. Consequently, the North Carolina rights of way are considerably finer than those of Virginia. They are far fewer times riddled with the private access road.

Stanley Abbott: The water-tightness of a parkway right of way is directly related to control of limited access; and of course an outgrowth of this whole business of evolution of roads from that experience is the now rather prevalent limited or controlled access highway theory such as is represented in the throughway, freeway, turnpike type of design. Of course, a turnpike pretty necessarily has to be landlocked, or it loses out on its revenue.

Stanley Abbott: Regarding scenic easements: Well, scenic easements were instituted in the Westchester Parkway System as a device to reduce costs of acquisition, because, of course, in that case, the owner retains most of his rights of ownership to the land and sells only some comparatively minor rights; that

is, he agrees not to spoil the land. And I am sure that the definition of the scenic easement as we wrote it out is familiar to you.

Stanley Abbott: On the Blue Ridge Parkway, we had faith, in the beginning, more than I think was justified, that it would be an instrument of good purpose. In the early squabble or struggle with the State of Virginia to upgrade their thinking as far as the necessary rights of way for the parkways were concerned, we – particularly Downer and Clarke – fell upon the idea of scenic easement as a method of compromise with that, and so the initial formula of 250 feet of right of way plus 1000 feet of scenic easement. The scenic easement is a comparatively sophisticated idea that was difficult to explain to the Scotch-Irish mountaineer who could not quite conceive how you could own land and not own it outright, in every regard to do with it as he might wish. Consequently, we who were most concerned right down there in the field sought to break down this once-agreed-upon-by-the-Secretary-of-the-Interior formula and improve upon it. We hit upon a horse trade whereby so many feet of scenic easement—say 400 feet – were worth, in our estimation of values, 100 feet or 200 feet of land acquired in fee simple. That also you will find in the files. By that time, the State of Virginia acquisition people who had to face it realistically had found also that you didn't easily buy scenic easement from a mountain property owner; they acquiesced, and we hit upon that life-saving agreement with Shirley and the Secretary of the Interior which converted scenic easement into greater width of fee simple acquisition for the Virginia section of the Parkway. In many suburban areas – again where the situation is more sophisticated (to coin a word for that purpose) the scenic easement still has merit.

Stanley Abbott: In answer to your question, yes, there were a lot of scenic easements; but you would find, less and less as time progressed. In a word, the greater proportion of scenic easements that we do have is adjacent to those early built sections of the parkway.

Stanley Abbott: I suppose the diaries of the day would bring out instances of difficulties in connection with land acquisition, if we could refer to them. On numerous occasions in the early days, I made long trips with Getty Browning or Pettigrew or Holtz or Royal or with Dodge of North Carolina, who is an assistant to Browning, where we jointly interviewed people who resisted sale of their property. That was in an effort on the part of the State land buyers to prove that not all Federal people were dry agents and that not all were ornery; that park folks are people you can live with. There were many interesting trips, particularly with Browning, for whom I had a great fondness.

Stanley Abbott: Sam Weems tells a particularly interesting story – this has to do with later in the game for lands for our wayside parks – but Sam on one occasion went way back up in the hills to a mountain hermit who lived in a single-room cabin without chimney. In the center of the hearth floor there had been built a fire, the smoke from which went through a hole in the roof, on the ridgepole. And on this cold and blustery day, Sam – about as thin then as he is now and subject as all of us thin guys are to feeling the cold – sat there knowing it was going to be a time-taking thing; the mountaineer sat warming his hands over a very minor little fire on the earth floor, with a battered old overcoat, its collar turned up, wrapped around him, and wearing an old slouch hat. Sam propositioned him about buying his land, and the response was the "Well, I'll think it over" sort of thing. Time went on; very little was said. Sam sat on a chair on the other side of the fire, ineffectually warming his hands, when he spied over in the corner a billet of wood, and he said a little tentatively to the mountain man, "Gee, do you think we could have a little more fire?" The guy got up slowly and creakingly and went slowly to the corner of the room to the pile of wood and picked up a little handful of duff, dropped it on the fire, and said, "Thar, that's a blast fer ye."

Stanley Abbott: And there's one of the beautiful little stories of the time we went up to bring the check to a Negro woman who had inherited her block of land from a very old plantation family who owned from Williamsburg back to the mountains. Her name was Aunt Lizzie Price. Aunt Lizzie was then 100 years old. When we walked up to the little neat whitewashed cabin – the land still in her name and pickaninnies running all over the place – she had progeny and they had progeny and they were all very much in evidence. And we were bringing her her check and handed it to her – it was sizeable – she had sold quite an acreage.

Stanley Abbott: "Well, Aunt Lizzie," I asked, "what are you going to do with this?" She sat there smoking her pipe – 100 years old. "Well, you know, Mr. Abbott, it seems to me that what I is first goin' to do is to go get me some George Washington rough-cut tobacco fer this pipe of mine." And we said, "Aunt Lizzie, do you think you ought to be smoking at your age?" "Lord-a-me, Mr. Abbott, I done been smoking fur well onto 80 years. I 'spect it done got a habit on me."

Stanley Abbott: It was like living in the railroad days; we experienced in this century things that you read about having happened in the Wild West.

- Stanley Abbott: I remember, writing the Blue Ridge Parkway News, how clarifying it was to go through the process of writing. You find that having to put it into words of two syllables and make it perfectly clear, clarified your own thinking. I think it was Tolstoy who said, "He had not clarified his own thought enough to understand it."
- Stanley Abbott: You ask about the extent to which land acquisition involved displacement. There were a number of people displaced. As much as possible, the State people, with our acquiescence and help, made it a comparatively rare – not a regular – thing. We also made it an optional thing in that we permitted right by the wayside – picturesquely, in a number of places – ownership on the part of older people until their death should occur. Old Santa Claus was one. There are beautiful pictures of him in our files, with a bearskin draped around his lap; a particular favorite of Abbuehl with his camera. Ask Abbuehl about old Santa Claus who lived by the side of the road and used to sit on the veranda and watch the equipment building and leveling this great road, as he later watched the tourists come by. I would occasionally stop and sit on the porch just to listen to his comments.
- Stanley Abbott: In a number of cases the State agents offered to move the house; many homes were moved back on to the residual property that was retained by the owner.
- Stanley Abbott: Guy Hawkes is a grandnephew of Mrs. Puckett and yet has her maiden name. He said, "When they bought that land I had to put up that house in a hell of a hurry, back away from the road; they seemed in an awful hurry to get her off the Parkway." However, Mrs. Puckett lived there contentedly until the end of her life.
- Stanley Abbott: Perhaps there was a little less sympathy demonstrated by the State of Virginia acquisition people than by those with the North Carolina group.
- Stanley Abbott: An amusing story: When I went back and married Helen and brought her down to Salem and left her, as a bride in the little apartment, while I went on a business trip, I hadn't been gone very long when in came a wire which Helen rightly felt was official, so she opened it and read: "Delighted to meet you Asheville Hotel Thursday night. (Signed) Betty Browning."
- Stanley Abbott: They were fine right-of-way engineers who did the job for the States. They were accustomed to facing, for the benefit of all the people of the State, the individual property owners, with a somewhat rugged attitude of "This is for the common good of the Government. I'm not spending a nickel more than I have to to buy this land." Those things were all relative,

and I feel sure there were very few serious injustices. Rather more frequently than in North Carolina, the Virginia land acquisition program fell somewhat behind in point of time. One of the reasons for that was the long and difficult negotiations on our part to get the whole acquisition program upgraded.

Stanley Abbott: Incidentally, in that scenic easement picture one of the corrective opportunities was our land-leasing program. By it, we would say to the neighboring hill farmer, "Would you like to farm some of this land of ours on such and such a basis?" At once there was a winning of confidence and growing together. Of course, an agreement meant the eradication, aesthetically, of that artificial line 100 feet off the center line, and brought the cow, or the winter wheat, or the corn up to the fence at the edge of the road.

Stanley Abbott: It is one of the things that give the Parkway character as you drive along – this freedom from the impression of a boundary line. It is a marriage to the country, to the farm or the woodland. The countryside becomes the handmaiden of the road.

Stanley Abbott: Changes? They are coming first in the nearby towns where you were beginning to get the chain store; and the Montgomery Ward catalog was more familiar in the mountain cabin than it had been. Sometimes the money paid for right of way turned into a gallon of fresh paint for a cabin that never before had seen paint and for that reason was picturesque; or into a tin roof to replace the old shake roof – so very picturesque. That simply transferred to the National Park Service the obligation to preserve examples of the pioneer architecture within its holdings as historic exhibits.

Stanley Abbott: You ask about the way the Blue Ridge Parkway evolved in concept. In part it emulated the parks and parkways of Westchester County, well known to our chiefs in the Washington Office. We bypassed the Regional Office for a long time, but with WPA and CCC on great scale, we later grew close to the RDA. The Stewart Woodwards and other people who reported to your office – the Regional Office – would swing through our country, looking at our RDA projects after a swing that took in State parks, county reservations, and various other things. I had the impression that because we had so large – if not adequate – staff of technicians and professions, they comparatively gave us less time, or that we required less. It is just as today the Regional Office, in a sense, exists more for the small area that cannot hire its own technical people than for the Great Smokies or the Blue Ridge Parkway, which have certain self-sufficiency of staff.

- Stanley Abbott: As to who chose these sites – the RDA's and the other bulges – I think it was principally Ed Abbuehl and myself. As we traveled through the mountains on general reconnaissance, favorite places came into our thinking and we might say to ourselves or out loud, "We ought to control this," or "A gem." Then we were guided, too, by some sense of need for rhythm or pattern – or a jewel on the string of beads occurring every so often, so there was a comprehensive plan – but not a rigid one. Our theory was a major park every sixty miles, and in between two lesser day-use areas, as against night-use, or larger, more rounded development.
- Stanley Abbott: That became eighty miles in some cases, because of the proximity of a large center of population as Asheville or Roanoke; or down to 40 miles as between Rocky Knob and Fisher's Peak, both of which were to be major developments. Of course, Fisher's Peak is yet to come. But the original master plan, drawn remarkably early in the game, has continued to be the guide as far as having spotted the precise areas.
- Stanley Abbott: You ask if there were problems with respect to relocating the Appalachian Trail along those portions where the Parkway preempted sections of the Trail and, if so, what they were. I think at first the importance of the Appalachian Trail, as the only means longitudinally to view the Blue Ridge Mountains, was reduced by the very building of the Parkway, which permitted people to do it by auto. But the auto never substitutes for close-to-nature experience of the hiker, and now the famous Appalachian Trail is gaining in popularity. Long stretches of the Appalachian Trail were improved by acquisition of park and Parkway land; this provided control of the trailside. Formerly much of the trail was privately owned; you were there by sufferance; there was no conservation being practiced along it.
- Stanley Abbott: So the right of way of the Parkway, though it did not provide awayness from the passing auto or the notes of civilization, did provide a more attractive conservation picture in those sections where it had to be relocated within the right of way; and in the bulges a far superior picture because, of course, 100 years from now they will be enjoying the 100-year-old pine trees that otherwise would have gone to the lumber mill.
- Stanley Abbott: So – there was a give and take on the part of the Appalachian Trail. Portions of it are now integrated with the parkway trail system, as for example up Rocky Knob, a superb piece of walking through flame azaleas, which had never existed for the Appalachian Trail before. Of course, that gets much traveled, and must have done great things for their

trail records, if a measure of the success of the Appalachian Trail is in numbers of persons using it.

Stanley Abbott: Of course, one of the most interesting trail people with whom we came in contact in the early days of the Parkway was the late Robert Marshall, who was a very single-minded man in his recreation and a great lover of the wilderness; a literate fellow, he was, as you know. And then the naval architect, Myron Avery, up in Washington, who inclined to have a reasonableness of approach to the problems of the trail conflict with the Parkway, which wasn't present in all discussions we had with trail people.

Stanley Abbott: Of course, the national forests in Virginia and down through North Carolina's mountains – the Craggies, the Balsams, the Pisgahs, which are the highest ranges traversed by the Parkway – provide a sense of awyeness or of wilderness which the narrower belt in the lived-in highlands section of the Parkway never have provided and do not today provide. Where we conflicted with the Appalachian Trail wasn't very magnificent country anyway, because there was no control and they were going through private woodlands and farmlands.

Stanley Abbott: You remarked that I wore two hats – one that of resident landscape architect, the other that of acting superintendent – and you asked if that complicated matters in any way, or led to conflicts. The answer to that is "no". It greatly simplified things, certainly from my own point of view, for one reasons more directly with oneself than with another. Concern for the practical side as well as the aesthetic becomes an automatic cross-reference when the responsibility is fixed in one individual for administering both the design and the operation.

Stanley Abbott: I also believe that the happenstance of the Parkway having had its start during a very busy time for the Park Service was a very happy fact. "She had so many children" so to speak, we and the engineers of the Bureau were left alone to do a job. After all, the project was a new type of park facility – a pioneer development that might well have been constricted by application of old ideas and standards and the urgings of too many memoranda and directives. We know, who are in the public service, the tendency of the bureaucratic system – or corporate system, for that matter – to stifle creativity, to develop one safe but rigid standard. Since the national parks exist because they are unique or different landscapes, their development for human enjoyment succeeds to the very extent that the planning is different and fitted feelingly to each differing environment, evolving from it. There will be adverse forces later, never doubt – ill things like overuse and vandalism and too little money for proper upkeep.

Stanley Abbott: So it is great that the Blue Ridge Parkway had its start in the depression years when money flowed into public works and talent flowed from the private sector into public planning. What a staff the CCC joined! And the Parkway! This was a great collaboration in a project in a beautiful part of the country, uninhibited by precedent and sympathetically directed by a choice few in Washington.

END OF TAPE 1

NOTE BY EVISON: The third to last paragraph on page 24 and all of page 25 that appears above this note, are a slight but effective revision of the statements originally uttered and transcribed in 1958. I felt that the transcription failed to say what Stan really wanted it to say, so I sent him a copy of it.

"I found myself at a loss to edit what you said about one matter," I wrote him, "your good fortune in having been pretty much left alone to work out the Parkway's destiny back there in the 1930's. At the time I taped you I was, of course, after information; now, however, I am typing what will be an important and valuable archival item. Hence my plea to you to go over the accompanying excerpt from the transcription, which is exactly as it flowed from Shirley's typewriter, and edit and revise to produce a statement that is just what you want it to be. It does not matter to me – or to the archives – whether you change it greatly or only slightly.

"I realize that it may not be easy, after this lapse of time, to get into the mood or the tempo of that series of interviews. On this particular phase of our discussion, however, I have a hunch that the point you made then is just as clear in your mind today as it was in July 1958."

Stan occasionally descends to flattery, as this paragraph from his reply bears witness:

"Seems my original thoughts came faster than I could marshal them, a fault I have in an area where you are guiltless. So, my good editor, please edit as you do so well."

Second Tape Recorded Interview with Stanley W. Abbott
June 1958

Introductory Note. One of the distinctive features of the Blue Ridge Parkway, alluded to in the earlier interview with Mr. Abbott, is found in the use of some of the Parkway lands close to the Parkway road for the growing of crops as well as for grazing by domestic animals. The decision to permit the cropping and pasturing of some of what Abbott refers to as the Parkway right of way – an erroneous term carried over from the field of the ordinary highway – was arrived at in the late 1930's. Besides preserving and displaying the mountain farming picture – and such display is one of the Parkway's purposes – the practice has been an immensely valuable public relations tool, used without sacrificing any principle of sound land use. In many cases, it has permitted the former land owner – sometimes not too happy about having had to surrender land to the Parkway and often left with hardly enough land for profitable farming – to resume farming on land he once owned.

It should be added that the mountain farming picture presented on these leased lands is, in one important way, not a true and faithful one; the practices exemplified on them are usually a far cry from those formerly followed, which permitted and encouraged erosion and were appallingly wasteful of soil fertility.

A year or two after the practice of issuing agricultural leases and permits was initiated, it became apparent that the services of a soils expert – an agronomist – were needed, to work out plans for the crops and for the treatment of the lands, even to determine what lands could properly and safely be devoted to agriculture and what treatment they should be given in advance of such use; also to work closely with the permittees in seeing that National Park Service requirements were put into effect. The first agronomist employed by the Parkway was Daniel Levandowsky.

A final note: Practices required of permittees on Parkway lands have commonly and almost as a matter of course been extended to the other lands farmed by the permittees; also, parkway agricultural practices have served as demonstrations that have not been lost on other mountain country farmers.

S. Herbert Evison, September 17, 1974.

START OF TAPE 2

Stanley Abbott: You ask about Daniel Levandowsky, what sort of person he was and some of the things I feel that he accomplished. Daniel Levandowsky was the son of a General Levandowsky who worked for Tom Vint – one of the old-time heel-clicking generals from the White Russians. Daniel himself escaped from Russia with the greatest difficulty during the Revolution. He was an agronomist, I suppose by training, first; second, by predilection. He had a great interest in growing things and a great love of the soil. He was a tall, handsome, blond Russian type, and he had that fascination of the foreigner. He spoke not quite as we did. He had the enthusiasm of many of the European people and I would say that his great contribution was to inspire many of our staff – because he wasn't there very long – with his large approach to conservation of the mountain soils in this now well-established program which Bill Hooper has been carrying on ever since. Levandowsky and Hendrick van Gelder, the Dutchman, were interesting together and shared the enthusiasm, the joy, of discovering, finding the mountains. Dan, like so many Europeans, had a philosophical approach to his work. And he would come in hours late, having got interested in the flight of a butterfly, or something of that sort.

Stanley Abbott: Dan, too, had an apartment in Salem right across the street from the Abbotts. I will never forget going over to have dinner with them one night shortly after they arrived. As the apartment door opened, Rose-Red, the Levandowsky's very large dog, leaped upon us. There they were, man and wife and two small children, boys, 4 and 6 years old, all embarrassed. Rose-Red was ejected and we sat down. On a small coffee table were a tall bottle of wine and some very handsome crystal goblets, which made your mind go immediately to the elegance of Russian parlors. Just as the wine was being poured, Rose-Red burst again into the room. His great tail lashed back and forth and wham! went the crystal glasses and the wine.

Stanley Abbott: "Oh, it does not matter." Other glasses were brought, the wine was poured again. We talked of mountains.

Stanley Abbott: Daniel made some very interesting experiments as, for example, whether we could use sawdust, which existed in great piles behind the sawmills throughout the Blue Ridge, to mulch plantings on the Parkway. From his experiments we learned that you might use it that way if it was from hardwood, but not from the pines or other coniferous trees. From these, since they were resinous, you would get a damage factor.

Stanley Abbott: You ask if his plainly foreign accent handicapped him in his dealings with people along the Parkway. The answer is yes, he did mystify a number of

mountain people. But then, I think that any of us, who did not speak the mountain drawl, could mystify some of them. Daniel actually had a good English vocabulary and made a notably scientific contribution. He inspired Bill Hooper, who came later and sold the program with his ability to get next to the mountain farmer.

Stanley Abbott: Now, about the rehabilitation of eroded and worn-out fields. Ed Abbuehl can cite you many examples of this work. One example is Cumberland Knob. It was badly scalded when we took it over but today it is recovered and fertile. We used CCC and ERA (Emergency Relief Administration) forces to bring about these miracles along a 120-mile stretch. The Parkway was divided into work units with either the CCC or the WPA (ERA) responsible for a single unit. Work projects included rehabilitation of eroding farm lands, landscape planting of the roadside, the building of campgrounds, picnic grounds, foot trails, and a variety of park facilities.

Stanley Abbott: You inquired about Robert A. Wagoner, the first deputy ranger on the Parkway. He was a mountain-bred man of high caliber, who came from just south of the North Carolina line, in the Cumberland Knob neighborhood. Cumberland Knob was the first extensive widening of the boundary that we came by. With no one from the Government regularly passing by, we had trouble with lumbermen cutting beyond our boundary line and removing valuable trees. Trespass was the danger that we had to guard against. Wagoner might not have passed a park ranger examination today, but I think there are a lot of good protection rangers who couldn't. The arrangement worked out very well in the early days.

Stanley Abbott: About "land-use plans." As time went on we were agreed that what we wanted was not just lands extending a fixed distance each side of the center line of the road but rather a studied right of way, of land-taking. These plans came to be known later as landscape development plans, because they showed the topography, the grading of the Parkway road within that topography, the parking overlooks to the side, the cover of the ground, whether field or forest. They were a rather complete picture of the physical properties of the Parkway. They have more recently been called "land-use plans" and of course they have been picked up by Natchez Trace and other parkways as a much needed kind of record and a basic reference for the rangers, the superintendent, the engineers, the maintenance people. The parkways are much more complex than an ordinary highway in the sense that there is that ribbon of park land, important to the visitor, the farmer, and the park maintenance people.

Stanley Abbott: As for the people along the Parkway, its immediate neighbors: They are distinctly country folk, of limited horizons; they are at the outset taciturn; they do not waste words. They rather incline not to like you if you do. They look at you with a slight look of suspicion, on a first meeting. In the early days – and of course all this has changed slowly – they looked with distrust on people who came in from the outside, from whatever direction. One of the sure things – this is true for the most part and of course it is always true in varying degrees – they had an isolated economy, for the most part a hand-to-mouth living; the more backward existed, rather than lived; it was a matter of very few cash crops. In the early depression days they must have felt something of the nation's wide downturn, though far less, comparatively, than the people of other parts of the United States.

END OF TAPE 2