

National Park Service (NPS) History Collection

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Alice Newton
November 5, 2019

Interview conducted by Nancy J. Russell
Transcribed by Rev.com
Edited by Alice Newton

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START OF RECORDING

Nancy Russell: 00:00:03 This is Nancy Russell, archivist for the NPS History Collection. Today's date is November 5th, 2019, and I'm here with Alice Newton to talk about her experiences working for the National Park Service and Harpers Ferry Center. Alice, before we get into your NPS career, could you tell me a little bit about your family background and where you grew up?

Alice Newton: 00:00:23 Okay. I was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I grew up in a Mennonite family. My father was a conscientious objector and was duty stationed during the second world war in Colorado Springs, so that's why I was born out there when the family was eastern Pennsylvania. My father was Abel Snyder Heffentrager, and my mother was Alice Dorothy Wampole Heffentrager. And from my birth in 1945 through 1963, we lived on a farm just outside Lansdale, Pennsylvania, and I graduated from North Penn High School in Lansdale, Pennsylvania in '63 and graduated in 1967 from Bluffton, which is now University. It was Bluffton College at the time, in Bluffton, Ohio with a BS in Education with dual majors in Elementary Ed and Art Education.

Alice Newton: 00:01:29 After graduation from college, every Mennonite youth is expected to give some voluntary service to God and their country. And I worked in D.C. Children's Village and also at the National Institutes of Health as a normal control patient in Bethesda, Maryland. After that, I had worked in the cystic fibrosis lab as a volunteer, and after that I was hired and spent a year working in the cystic fibrosis lab as a

lab technician and also as a liaison with the young people patients. And if you know anything about cystic fibrosis, at the time, in 1967, life expectancy was 15 to 18 years old. And I guess the hardest thing about the job was going to work on Monday morning and finding that some of my client patients had passed over the weekend as children or young adults.

Alice Newton: 00:02:53 I've been married for 52 years to James Kenneth Newton, who is an aerospace and electric engineer. We have a daughter, Camille Elizabeth Newton-Balderson, born in 1974. And before her birth I was employed by the Prince George's County school system for five years in teaching elementary school at Lamont Elementary School. I discovered that teaching probably wasn't what I was called to do, so I volunteered with the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and spent a year doing that before we moved to West Virginia. Our daughter was born around the same time this move happened to West Virginia. We've been here in our house 45 years. We built the house, or had it built. And needing employment, I looked into the school system in West Virginia and was very disgruntled to discover that with a master's degree or a master's equivalent I was still starting at step one, grade one in the Jefferson County school system and decided that wasn't what I needed to do. I started teaching quilting, cross-stitch, art classes in shops locally, and I then, also, became managing director of a five-person quilt group, a marketing quilt group, and Debbie Bellman, former textile conservator, was also part of that group.

Alice Newton: 00:05:15 I taught at Lord Fairfax Community College down in Middletown, Virginia for a couple of years. And then I co-owned and managed a quilting specialty store called Patches in Bolivar from 1977 to '86, and at that point I was approached by Fonda Thompson, who was textile conservator wanting to know if I knew of anybody who wanted some sewing work for the Park Service. And asking her what it was, it was for conservation of the Fort Sumter flags. I had made the decision to close the shop prior to this. So I sought employment with the Park Service, and I started on April 27th, 1986, and at that point Dave Wright had just become manager of the Center. And as an employee I was a term and temporary worker for the next five years.

- Alice Newton: 00:06:39 I started as a Wage Grade 2, stitch and sew lady.
- Nancy Russell: 00:06:46 And this was at the Shipley building?
- Alice Newton: 00:06:48 This was at the old Shipley building, which was unique in its place of employment. John Demer was the head of the conservation unit at that time, and some days he would stand by the front door and greet you with a handshake and say, "Thank you for coming today."
- Alice Newton: 00:07:18 At that point, there were no computers in the building and all of the recording of work done on any conservation project was done by hand, and then you typed it up and handed it to one of the secretaries to do the formal paperwork. At that point, we had three women in the office, Chris Mazor, Joyce Myers and Jeanette, I don't remember her last name. Gary Moreland was Registrar and Nancy Hatcher worked for him. Mike Wiltshire was photographer, and Mike was one of the first employees when they opened the center here at Harpers Ferry. He was a student employee. I don't know in what capacity, but he was with Conservation for several years as photographer, staff photographer. Ron Sheetz was in the furniture lab as Al Levitan was. Greg Byrne was objects. Toby Raphael was objects. Larry Bowers came in the same day, I believe, that I did. And he worked for Toby for a while. Like the whole group of technicians that came in, we were expected to work around the different labs where we were needed.
- Alice Newton: 00:09:04 Dan Riss was metals and archeological material. Bart Rogers was metals. Charlie Shepherd helped Bart in the metals lab. Fonda Thompson obviously was in textiles. Pat Craig, Anna, and I don't remember Anna's last name, and I believe Colette Hatfield, were technicians with the textile lab. Later on, Debbie Bellman came, and she followed me in by six or eight months. And Barbara Cumberland. Barbara had been a Texas Tech intern at Conservation and then came back as a term person. Jeannie Hearld, who is now a curator over at NCTC--
- Nancy Russell: 00:10:08 Retired.
- Alice Newton: 00:10:09 Oh, she did? Oh, I didn't know that.
- Nancy Russell: 00:10:11 Steve Florey's there now.

- Alice Newton: 00:10:13 Oh, okay. Oh. And Curtis Sullivan, and we had a young man who was kind of different as a technician down in the metals and archeological area. He didn't last very long because he was found smoking in the restrooms a couple times and other miscellaneous things.
- Nancy Russell: 00:10:45 So that's about, it's almost 20 individuals you named between the conservators and the technicians, plus the photographer, plus the registrar, and plus three support staff. That was a much bigger operation than we have today.
- Alice Newton: 00:11:00 It was. It was. And that was during the time--our services were there for the parks, and unlike what I think today is the model, the parks did not have to pay for our services. Sometimes they were asked to pay for our travel, but sometimes they weren't. And we always had a lot of projects ongoing. In addition, as you went up the front steps in Shipley School, directly in the front door was the main office and to the right was where the Fort Sumter flags were set up. And so Debbie and I worked in there for a while. The main textile lab was down in the basement on that same right side, but in the front, and the building had considerable age. You could look at the wood under the windowsill and see daylight. Therefore, it was always a challenge to come in in the morning and find whatever bugs had migrated into your work on your desk or the flag. So that was not conducive to good conservation work.
- Nancy Russell: 00:12:41 Not museum-quality spaces.
- Alice Newton: 00:12:43 No.
- Nancy Russell: 00:12:46 And a challenge to get some larger objects in and out of that building, right?
- Alice Newton: 00:12:49 Oh yeah, yeah. In later years, there was a ramp or a stairwell put back in the backside of the building up to the registrar storage room. But prior to that, everything had to come in a single or double-leaf door and upstairs. So that was in itself a challenge, and you were moving objects up and down two and three floors for treatment, for photography, et cetera.
- Alice Newton: 00:13:26 During that time, Greg Byrne had his youngest child, Emma. And Greg, to my mind, was a consummate father.

He had five kids, but he would come in after Emma was born, and he'd start cleaning our lunchroom, just cleaning it. And you'd go in to find him doing this, and say "What's wrong, Greg?" "Oh, this baby hates me," and I'm sure she didn't hate him, but he just took it very personally that his little Emma did not bond to him like he thought she should. Kathleen Byrne, Ann Hitchcock, and Candace...

- Nancy Russell: 00:14:24 Mueller?
- Alice Newton: 00:14:25 Mueller, yeah, were over in the bomb shelter and would often come over and have lunch with us. And when Kathleen got married, she came and brought her wedding gown, and Debbie and I fitted it for her. I stuck myself with a pin and bled on the back of her wedding gown, and Ann--no, not Hitchcock. Anne Jordan, I'm sorry. Anne Jordan's eyes got so big, and I thought, "Oh crap." So...
- Nancy Russell: 00:15:08 A little spit.
- Alice Newton: 00:15:09 Saliva takes blood out, takes blood out of wedding gowns, and we never told Kathleen that story till quite a number of years later, and she just roared when she heard that.
- Alice Newton: 00:15:29 Dave Wright as a director or manager of the Center, in my mind, was a very good person for the job. Even though our building was separate from the IDC building and the library, et cetera, on the main campus, he was often enough in our building and every time he came into the building, he would go around and visit each of the labs and talk to everybody there, find out what you were working on, you know, what problems you were having with it, et cetera. He was very much a hands-on, people person and I thought he was, to my mind, an excellent manager for the Center.
- Alice Newton: 00:16:27 The Conservation staff was a bit disgruntled with John Demer as the Conservation chief and marched--the conservators all marched to Dave Wright's office, and they had a meeting about this. And soon afterwards John Demer was reassigned to Historic Furnishings. During the time that he was gone, we had multiple temporary managers. Mike Paskowsky, who I don't know if he's--I think he's retired now. He was one of the managers, Greg Byrne was, Ron Sheetz was, and we had a woman, and I can't remember her name, she became a regional director, the regional director here for the local area.

- Alice Newton: 00:17:39 But during this time, both Debbie, and myself, and Larry, and Barb, our positions were changed. Debbie and I went from wage grade to museum techs. And in '90 I was made a GS-5 general museum tech, in '91 a GS-7 tech, and that was while Ron Sheetz was acting. And he moved heaven and earth to get us all upgraded. And very shortly after that, the Park Service came out with the edict that too many term and temporary people were hired, and it was an abuse of the work staff. So the announcements were put out for our positions as permanent positions. And in '91 I think the whole group of us became permanent at that time.
- Alice Newton: 00:19:15 During that time Fonda had me--I have decent writing skills, I will say--and at that point Fonda had me doing a lot of the documentation for the Sumter flags, and she also brought me down into the lab to be working on other objects. The very first object I worked on was a Civil War hat that Al Swift, who had been one of the Historic Furnishings curators had brought in. He had just bought some place up in Gettysburg and bought it and laid it on my desk and asked if I could do an assessment of it. And I'm sitting there going through the whole thing and turn down the sweat band, and there was a nice little tag that said Made in China. I had to go deliver to Mr. Swift the news that he had been had. Bill Brown in Historic Furnishings, along with Al Swift, were frequent purveyors of objects that were either bought or traded for the different parks, mainly Gettysburg and Antietam, all the Civil War blood and guts parks.
- Nancy Russell: 00:21:01 So at that time the Center was still organized by functional areas, so Conservation, Historic Furnishings, Exhibits, those program areas?
- Alice Newton: 00:21:12 Yep. Yep. And I think it was during Dave Wright's tenure that there was always a grand Christmas day. You had your unit Christmas party there in-house. We would have it in the hallway upstairs, and then in the afternoon people from other divisions would come and greet you, and you'd have cookies and Christmas greetings. It was kind of an all-day movable party. And there was one fella, and I don't remember where he worked over at the Center, but I can remember him in his inline skates, skating down the parking lots and around the buildings. And he'd come up the stairs in his inline skates. His name was Vince Bartoli. He was an interesting person and a year or so later I opened

the "Spirit of Jefferson", the local paper, and there was this big ad in it, "Vince Bartoli, won't you please come home?" from his wife.

- Nancy Russell: 00:22:46 How interesting.
- Alice Newton: 00:22:47 I don't know what that was about, but it just always amused me and made me laugh.
- Alice Newton: 00:22:55 During that period of time I did a lot--that was during the first Gettysburg refurbishment--and so I did a lot of uniforms and that type of thing.
- Nancy Russell: 00:23:17 So by refurbishment, you mean like an upgrade to the visitor center exhibits?
- Alice Newton: 00:23:21 Yes. And this was while they were in the old building there, and the Cyclorama was separate. And the Gettysburg Foundation, or whatever, didn't play very much an instrumental part in it. Larry, I can't remember his last name. He was curator of Gettysburg, but his family donated the land and the bulk of the Gettysburg collection. And it was always very interesting to me. I would sometimes go to Gettysburg with either Debbie and I to set up mannequins, or with Cliff Funkhouser and Paul Webb to set up other exhibits. And if you'd be up there dressing a mannequin and you needed a belt or, you know, something like that, the first time I just happened to say that-- and Larry Eckert was the curator, and it was from his family that everything came--he go home to lunch, he lived in Gettysburg, and he'd come back with a buckle or a Confederate buckle or whatever, you know, he had amassed--the family had a massive collection, and my understanding was that after the battle there, they were out on the battlefield just picking things up, and it had just been a repository in their attic for years. And this was what the foundation of the Gettysburg collection came from.
- Nancy Russell: 00:25:21 So it really was items from the battle, not just period pieces?
- Alice Newton: 00:25:26 Yes. Oh yes. And you know, I had never--when I worked at the Smithsonian again, everything was bench training at that time. Winterthur was in its infancy and so was New York and you've got your training by working there with the conservator, and that's where the basic training for the

five of us came through. I spent one summer grinding necks down on beer bottles for an exhibit up in Alaska because Bill Brown from Historic Furnishings had ordered these historic beer bottles, and they came in, and they were new, and they had the wrong kind of top and cap. "Well, I want them ground down, can you do that?" So I learned a lot about grinding glass one summer.

- Alice Newton: 00:26:58 I worked with Toby. One of the projects I worked with him was from Sagamore Hill. Roosevelt had a waste can in his study made from an elephant's foot. I cleaned an elephant's foot with cotton swabs and spit one summer, and I didn't know until that point that elephants had hair. So you learned there on the job, doing. I'm just trying to think what other strange things that I have laid my hands on during that period. But there were a lot of things. The only lab we didn't work in--did I miss Tom Carter on the list of staff? I did, or did not? Tom Carter was the paintings conservator.
- Nancy Russell: 00:28:01 Yeah, I think you missed him.
- Alice Newton: 00:28:03 Okay. Tom Carter was paintings conservator and Tom would have no one in his lab.
- Nancy Russell: 00:28:15 So that was the one lab you didn't work in?
- Alice Newton: 00:28:17 So that was the one lab you did not work in. You worked with the registrar, you worked with the photographer, you worked with the objects lab, you worked with the metals lab. All the labs you learned the descriptive terminology, you learned the techniques, et cetera. So that's where my training in conservation came.
- Nancy Russell: 00:28:48 What an opportunity.
- Alice Newton: 00:28:49 Yeah, I mean, I was very, very blessed to find something that I was very interested in, and I felt I had skills that I could adapt to use for this. After the different people that were temporary heads of conservation came through, Martin Burke was the permanent hire and--
- Nancy Russell: 00:29:30 That was about 1991?
- Alice Newton: 00:29:32 I think it was in '91. I had met Martin, he and his wife and family had moved out here not too long before that. His son was in the same class as my daughter, and they were in AP

chemistry or something. And we went to a parent evening, and that's where I had first met Martin. I thought Martin was a really good manager for the unit. He had a way of bringing the best out of his staff, I think, and would come to you, "What do you want to do? What do you want to be when you grow up?" You know, besides the fact that the man would take his shoes off and run up and down the hall and slide down the hall on his socks, just like a little kid. He wanted to hear what you wanted to do and what direction you wanted your career to go.

- Alice Newton: 00:30:56 And at that point I was beginning to have issues with my eyes. I knew the fine detail work that was--at that point I was working in the textile lab full-time pretty much--and I knew sewing hair-like threads in silk where I was beginning to need to use the binocular scopes to do this, I was beginning to have some issues and knew that I really probably wasn't going to be doing this a whole lot longer. And I told him, "Well, I'd like to...you know, we don't have a paper lab, we don't have a paintings lab. They would be two areas that I would be interested in."
- Alice Newton: 00:31:58 Well, very shortly thereafter, and I'm sure it was on the books at that point, he hired Nancy Purinton as paper conservator. So he had me set up the lab for her and work with her for a while and--
- Nancy Russell: 00:32:15 So Tom Carter had left. So there was no longer a paintings conservator?
- Alice Newton: 00:32:20 Tom Carter had left soon after we moved to Willow Springs. There was a buyout, I believe, and Bart Rogers, and I believe Tom Carter, and I believe that's when Ron Sheetz retired, the three of--and maybe, no. Did Paul? No, Paul didn't at that point. That was a different buyout. But you know, these guys took an early out. So what is now the paper lab was where Tom Carter had been, and you know, it required getting all that stuff out of there and packed away, and then stuff for paper lab purchased and everything. So I did that. John Demer had one computer in the old building and nobody was allowed to use it but him. One day the pipe broke above his office and killed his computer. I shouldn't laugh, but, na-na boo-boo. Serves you right. Before I started to work for the Park Service, I had a newsletter that would go out from the fabric shop and I was doing that myself. My old manual typewriter bit the dust

and I had asked my husband for Christmas, "I'd like to have an electric typewriter, I think." Well, bless the engineer, I got a Heathkit Computer Kit. No electric typewriter. "Come on, I'll help you put it together," so we put it together. The memory was not disc--

- Nancy Russell: 00:34:49 Magnetic tape?
- Alice Newton: 00:34:50 Tape drive. Trying to teach myself how to do things on that, I had to teach myself some programming and all. So I knew a little bit about computers. Well, when Demer's computer was replaced, it was finally put up in the library in the old building, and we were allowed to use it. And I was, I think probably the only person that had any knowledge of how to use computers.
- Nancy Russell: 00:35:32 So there was one computer for about 20 people, and nobody knew how to use it except for you.
- Alice Newton: 00:35:36 Yeah, and I wasn't that good at it. My husband's secretary always laughed, she said, "I don't hear you call him all the time. Now, this is the third time today, what's going on?" And you know what, I explained to her. "Oh, well you tell me what your problem is." Well, she worked me through a lot of my computer problems. Let me see. I'm rambling. I'm getting off track here.
- Nancy Russell: 00:36:11 That's fine. Were there discussions about the move to Willow Springs? Do you know how that actually happened?
- Alice Newton: 00:36:22 Because of the condition of the building, there were several plans floated. One was razing that building and building, partially underground, a building that would house the Conservation unit. At that point, I think that was what was almost decided on, but we had to get out of the building in order for any of this to happen. And then the building got declared a historic landmark so the building couldn't be razed. And it would be massive amounts of money, and we were, by that point, over in Willow Springs. That's where we were left, in Willow Springs. We moved ourselves.
- Alice Newton: 00:37:28 Martin had come on board before we moved over there and his direction was, "We're into a new building and I think we want it to look nice." Part of what we all did, we were out spray painting slot shelving units and refinishing filing

cabinets. I mean, no conservation work got done for probably six months until we got moved. We moved it small truckloads at a time until we had to move the Sumter flags over. And then we had to rent a tractor and trailer. By that point, I think the ramp stairs on the back of the registrar's storage area had been built. So we were able to bring the flags out that way. To get them into the Willow Springs building, in through the textile lab windows, we took windows out and all the panes out, and brought the flags in that way, because the loading dock door, you couldn't get the flag in and turn the corner.

Nancy Russell: 00:39:18 Can we talk about the Sumter flags for a minute, because you started working on the Sumter flags and now here we are in '91, '92, moving the Sumter flags over to Willow Springs. Was this the first treatment that they'd undergone? This was a multi-year--

Alice Newton: 00:39:43 Vera Craig, I believe, did some work on the Sumter flags before. When we first started working on the Sumter flags, they were covered with, almost an octagon shape stitching, piercing through the silk of the flag. You had to cut away that stitching and pull it out, and as you did that, that fractured a lot of the silk there. Once you had them down on the table and were cutting away, you couldn't move these suckers. I'm just trying to think--we used wheat starch paste on silk crepeline--I can't remember if it was a silk crepeline or whether it was Stabiltex, the polyester. I think it was the crepeline that, we used to adhere all these fragments of the Sumter flag together.

Alice Newton: 00:41:20 The main flag had gone back to Fort Sumter and was taken out by barge to the Fort, and at that point there were great big windows at the top of the exhibit area. They had to be taken out and we had to take the flag in that way because it was framed at that point. That was the only way we could get the framed flag into the exhibit area. The Palmetto Guard Flag, I think also went back at the same time. But the other flag--there were three flags in the suite--had not and there was a lot of discussion as to what would be done with the flag. After we moved to Willow Springs--that flag was over in Willow Springs--and Jane Merritt was textile conservator and her mantra was that flag should not be displayed out. It's too fragile. She had a large metal case that was built, that had sliding doors or windows where you could just see part of the flag. The case was on display and

they would rotate where it was open. For the flag that was framed and on display, it had cavities in the back of the flag frame. First of all, we had to go to--I'm trying to remember what the company was that made the Plexiglas, but we had to have them special make Plexiglas to fit this big monster flag. In order to do the pre-treatment photographs of this flag, before I even came on board, they had rented something up at the National Guard. A big room, like a gymnasium, where they could roll--the whole flag, took up the whole floor and they had to hire a lift to get Mike up there to photograph this.

- Nancy Russell: 00:44:33 I think I've seen photos of that.
- Alice Newton: 00:44:37 Yeah. I'm just trying to think. After I retired, I was down to Fort Sumter to do an assessment of the flags. The cavities that were put in the back of the two flags that were on display were supposedly to help keep the humidity levels straight and routine without so much fluctuation, because they were obviously out on the water.
- Nancy Russell: 00:45:18 Did they have a desiccant in them, in the cavities?
- Alice Newton: 00:45:28 It was a desiccant, but I also think there was some sort of pump in there.
- Nancy Russell: 00:45:33 An active system, not just passive.
- Alice Newton: 00:45:38 It wasn't just passive, no. The layering of the materials that supported it were different than what was normally done with a flag that was framed. There were layers of gator board, the back was sealed, all kinds of things. I mean, this is 38, 40 years ago.
- Nancy Russell: 00:46:21 But it was high tech 38 to 40 years ago.
- Alice Newton: 00:46:22 Yeah, it was high tech at that point. After I retired, I did a project for Fort Sumter as to what they should do. My recommendation to them was to do a one-on-one photo reproduction of the flag and get that flag off exhibit. I don't know what has happened since because the curator there left, there was all kinds of things going on down there. As a contractor, I found some people that would be able to photograph it right there on site, and then we could take it out of the frame and roll it and get it out that way. Because the original windows that the framed flag had come

through, had been boarded up. So you had to dismantle the frame, everything. There was no way they were even getting the plexiglass out of the exhibit areas there.

- Alice Newton: 00:47:53 I don't know whatever happened, but they had my report and recommendations on what they needed to be doing. By that point, after I retired, you could get a digital image, the size of a tractor trailer, relatively easily, relatively inexpensively. I think I priced it out at like, \$389 or something like that. That they could do that and have it laminated and put up there on display so people could see the flag and not have to endanger the flag. I think the flag finally did come out of there and came up to Landover, to the storage facility there. Bob, I think.
- Nancy Russell: 00:48:48 Yeah, MRCE?
- Alice Newton: 00:48:49 Yeah. I think Bob took it in, because there was no place down in the park to store it.
- Nancy Russell: 00:48:58 And with hurricanes and whatnot, it's best to get that out of there.
- Alice Newton: 00:49:04 Other than that, I don't know what else I can tell you about the--
- Nancy Russell: 00:49:08 That was great.
- Alice Newton: 00:49:08 --Fort Sumter Flags. Vera Craig, I have never met the woman, but apparently Fonda had worked with her at times and she was the flag lady. I think she worked part-time at the Smithsonian, but she would also come into the Park Service and work there for a while with the different flags. There were all kinds of accepted and not accepted treatments. Fonda had a suction table out in the hallway, outside the textile lab, and I can't remember what flag it was, but it was another one that had been conserved in the past with this--
- Nancy Russell: 00:50:12 Octagonal stitching?
- Alice Newton: 00:50:13 Octagonal stitching. She was experimenting with the suction table and adhesives trying to get this smaller, it was just a small size flag, back together again so it could go on exhibit. The only problem being, the wheat starch and other adhesive that she was using, you could see that. It left an

ugly marking on the flag, the fabric. I think that was kind of put aside and not done anymore.

- Alice Newton: 00:51:03 When Jane Merritt came in and we did flags with Jane, they were all compression mounted. So that you had a well-padded support board and the Plexiglas and the frame literally squeezed everything together. Some instances you ran a line of stitching across the top of the flag, but that was basically the only thing holding it to the mount, that and the compression. So the treatment of flags over the years, from Harpers Ferry, changed very markedly. Debbie Bellman, she loved working on flags, so she did most of the flags after a while that came in, after Jane came on board, and she got to be very expert at conservation of flags.
- Nancy Russell: 00:52:29 There's a niche for you.
- Alice Newton: 00:52:31 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 00:52:40 When they moved into Willow Springs, is that when they developed the science lab or was that something that existed at Shipley?
- Alice Newton: 00:52:49 Nope, doesn't exist at Shipley, and it was a while before it came into Willow Springs. After I had been in the paper lab, I went back to the textile lab and worked there. Like we all did, we did trunks for Statue of Liberty. We must have done 200 trunks between the four or five of us, cleaning them and getting them ready for exhibit. About that point, I was doing special projects for Martin, because I had computer skills. That's what launched me onto the computer thing. Because I had some computer skills and I knew how to set up databases and I knew how to set up spreadsheets, et cetera, Martin wanted a hit list. "I want all the parks, what kinds of collections they have, how far they are from here and what kinds of things we need to go after them for." So I made Martin this huge database.
- Nancy Russell: 00:54:10 Were you getting the data to input into that from the national catalog or from the parks? How were you-
- Alice Newton: 00:54:19 I was calling parks.
- Nancy Russell: 00:54:20 You were just calling them.

- Alice Newton: 00:54:21 Yeah, I was cold calling people. You know, I cold called you how many times?
- Nancy Russell: 00:54:30 Right.
- Alice Newton: 00:54:31 "Nancy, what do I do about this?"
- Nancy Russell: 00:54:35 Was Martin looking for that to see what business was out there or to prioritize?
- Alice Newton: 00:54:41 I think both. He was trying to formulate a plan to make the unit better, more responsive to what was needed out there in the parks. He had commented at one time, he didn't want to retire until the Park Service had, what was it, 12 or 16 fully qualified conservators. Well, he didn't quite make it, but he went a long way to that. At that point Sylvia Frye was registrar and there were problems with the functionality of the registrar's office. Martin asked me to take a detail down to the registrar's office and write a procedural manual for them to help them understand their process.
- Alice Newton: 00:55:49 Butch McNally--Roy McNally--was working down there with Sylvia, Joyce Myers, Karen Matson and Nancy Hatcher. I went down there and was totally horrified when--I could never understand why it took so long to get objects from the registrar's office. I went down there to find, how they track their objects, was a notebook. There was a notebook. You just wrote down where an object was, either in the storage room or in a lab. Page after page, after page after page of this crap.
- Alice Newton: 00:56:52 I set up just a very preliminary database so they could at least record this on a computer for her. It was a difficult message to convey and wasn't always understood. I went back up to the textile lab after my six months and my document to Martin was given. Next thing I know, Martin came to me and he said, "We are going to have an opening for a registrar. Would you like it?" I said, "I think so." Not knowing the whole mess--Nancy, you just can't imagine.
- Nancy Russell: 00:58:00 Oh, I can.
- Alice Newton: 00:58:02 Well you've been to parks that have been in the same position. So I went down there and Woody--I can't remember what his first name is. Mr. Wood, who was our

janitor, retired. Three days after he retired, his wife dropped dead and he was just a lost soul. Of course, Alice is a sucker for lost souls, and I took him on as a volunteer, and he helped down there. We were kept really busy at that point, because that was during the time we had more than 5,000 objects coming in every year and more than that going out every year. Between what the Historic Furnishings people were purchasing and the Conservation pieces, and they were all intermixed in the storage room.

- Alice Newton: 00:59:12 He had a heart attack, probably six weeks after his wife passed away and I went to visit him in the hospital and watched the young lady come in and draw blood and push this machine she had, and out came this little bar code and it went around the vial of blood. I asked her, "What are you doing? What is this?" She told me and I thought, oh gosh.
- Nancy Russell: 00:59:48 Light bulb moment.
- Alice Newton: 00:59:49 Light bulb. There was a time period when the registrar's office was taken out of Conservation and put under Support Services.
- Nancy Russell: 01:00:13 While you were registrar?
- Alice Newton: 01:00:14 While I was registrar. Because.
- Nancy Russell: 01:00:28 You became registrar about 1995?
- Alice Newton: 01:00:30 Let's see.
- Nancy Russell: 01:00:30 October '95?
- Alice Newton: 01:00:30 Yeah, October '95. Gary Cummins was the manager at that point, and the former registrar was good friends with Gary Cummins, and that was the reason the registrar's office was moved out of Conservation. We were placed under Support Services with Mike Alvarez, along with Wade's unit, Tom Durant's unit, Teresa Valez--
- Nancy Russell: 01:01:20 Vasquez?
- Alice Newton: 01:01:21 Vasquez, and Terry Smallwood. We were all moved to Support Services. The first thing I said to Mike Alvarez is, "I want to do a bar code system. I want to have some better method of tracking." And he just kind of looked at me and I

said, "There's a conference coming up in D.C. on IT stuff. I want to go." Well, he let me go, and that's where I ran into a couple of companies that I talked to them and I finally found a couple that could understand what I wanted and what my needs were. I worked with a company, convinced Mike that we needed special funding, and he got year end special funding for me to go get this company to come in and design the bar code system for the registrar's office.

- Alice Newton: 01:02:37 It had been in place less than a year, when I had a knock at my door one morning, and the inspector general was there. "I've come to find out what you've done spending my money?" So he went through my system, asked for this object, asked for that object. Went through, I showed him where all the objects were. 100%, everything was where my system said it was. From the labs to the parks to the storage room. A year later, he was back. "Just double checking to see how you're doing." 100% clean bill of health. It worked.
- Nancy Russell: 01:03:36 At this time, I mean, compared to what was going on in the parks with our cataloging systems, with ANCS at the time, this was light years ahead.
- Alice Newton: 01:03:47 Well I had sat in on a meeting with Ann Hitchcock--who was the gal that was chief curator for a while, but came from IT systems?
- Nancy Russell: 01:04:01 Oh Lynn Black?
- Alice Newton: 01:04:02 Lynn Black, Kathleen, et cetera, fussing at me why I wasn't using ANCS. I told them, "I have a problem. I mean, this may work well for the parks, but you keep in mind, I am getting objects from all of the parks, and I need a way of differentiating." At that point ANCS, there was no way to do that. I also said, "I need to expedite my work process here." I mean, with this new system, I could go in, do a little computer entry, and come out with every object I needed to send to Gettysburg or every object I needed to send to Antietam or wherever, and could work. Then, scanning each object as I packed it, I could have receipts of property generated; the whole nine yards.
- Alice Newton: 01:05:19 They just fussed and fussed and fussed and fussed at me. At one point, Greg, up at Gettysburg, wanted to try to get a bar code system into ANCS. And try as he might, he couldn't

get the ANCS people to work with this right. So, I was on my own, way out there, doing this strange thing, but it was working.

- Nancy Russell: 01:05:53 Now, that's the database we call REGGAR.
- Alice Newton: 01:05:55 Right.
- Nancy Russell: 01:05:56 Do you remember what that acronym stands for? I'm assuming it's registrations something. How was it named, do you remember that?
- Nancy Russell: 01:06:03 Registration something. How has was it named? Do you remember that?
- Alice Newton: 01:06:07 REGGAR database, registrars database. I don't know. I can't begin to tell you.
- Nancy Russell: 01:06:19 It's just something I've always wondered and stuff, it's called REGGAR but nobody can tell me. I'm assuming the reg part is registrar's registration or something. But then how it became REGGAR I don't know. I just was curious.
- Alice Newton: 01:06:31 I think that might have been something the contractor--oh, I can't even remember the name of the company, and the lady that worked on it, she was really, really good, you know. I walked her through process after process after process, and she could program the needs there. REGGAR. Beats me. I don't know.
- Nancy Russell: 01:07:06 It's not an earth shattering piece of information. I was just curious.
- Alice Newton: 01:07:13 This is an old brain, this old brain doesn't remember everything.
- Nancy Russell: 01:07:19 Well that was a huge accomplishment in terms of moving the program forward, and really the first in the Park Service to do something like that.
- Alice Newton: 01:07:26 Yeah. And it streamlined our work. Oh, Karen Matson was the other one that was in the registrar's office. She was in there as a secretary. And you know, it was Joyce and Karen typing up receipts of property and all of this stuff constantly. I mean, that's all they did all day long. And I

knew there had to be a better way. And this is what evolved, and I was well satisfied with the way it operated.

- Alice Newton: 01:08:18 Karen, I brought along, and we moved her into a technician position. I think we moved her up at least to a nine by the time she retired. And once in a while Karen and the database would have words. I would have to go in and help her a little bit. But for the most part, she wasn't terribly computer literate, but she could handle it. And so that to me meant it was successful.
- Nancy Russell: 01:08:56 Right. So when Gary Cummins came on and you were moved over to the office of support services, were there other changes made in the organization of HFC or just sort of that? Did it stay?
- Alice Newton: 01:09:15 Kind of smack your finger and get these people out of your purview, and we'll leave you and these others there to do what you want. That was always the way I took it.
- Nancy Russell: 01:09:37 We had started talking a little bit about the science program developing.
- Alice Newton: 01:09:43 In '98 the registrar's office was placed back under Conservation. And it was during this time that Judy Bischoff was hired. After I came back, after '98. And Eric Schindleholtz was the other one, both PhD scientists. And they were on board maybe three, four years. I don't know exactly. Judy left for another position and I think Eric did too. I think he ended up down in Portsmouth, Virginia or someplace down there at one of the naval museums, I think. If I recall correctly.
- Alice Newton: 01:10:59 I don't know whether people, meaning the hierarchy at HFC, understood the impact that the science unit would have or the need for the science unit, because the conservation field was evolving to a much more technical level than it had been 20 years ago. And I think it just kind of frittered away and disappeared. When they both left, because they were upper-level positions, that was easy money not to refill those positions.
- Nancy Russell: 01:12:02 And so at this point the positions were still based funded, they hadn't switched yet to the other funding model?
- Alice Newton: 01:12:11 Yeah.

- Nancy Russell: 01:12:14 I had understood that while it didn't implement under Martin Burke, it was sort of his initial idea that Conservation could be funded, other than base funds, with park funds and other things because of the need. Is that something that--
- Alice Newton: 01:12:34 Well, I don't know Martin's philosophy or opinion on that, but I do know after he left, during that period of time there was a lot of upheaval in Conservation, and there was a lot of upheaval at the Center, period. And there were two, if not three major thrusts at the Center for reorganization. And some of them were crock full of shit. Pardon the expression. But they were, and I sat on at least two of the smaller committees and out of those reorganization committees, on the back page here, there was quite a discussion about just getting rid of DOC, period.
- Nancy Russell: 01:13:54 Division of Conservation?
- Alice Newton: 01:13:55 Yeah. Send it to D.C. Send it to, you know--from what I was aware. That was one of the big things. Another thing that was brought out, well, every employee has to generate enough revenue to cover their own salaries, and the contributions the Center have to make towards your salary, et cetera, et cetera. And at that point I was working with a lot of the parks, both as my capacity as the registrar, because I talked to these people constantly. We're shipping you this, this is coming, can you send me this, I need paperwork. They would come to me because they had a project that they wanted done, so I would pass that along to Jane, and then it would get put in the funnel. We were generating well over a million dollars at that point in park-funded projects, which was kind of unusual. It started that parks only had to pay for our travel, and then parks had to pay not only for our travel, but for our time. And then not only for our time and our travel, but our secretaries and our manager, et cetera. I was being billed out at about \$190 an hour.
- Nancy Russell: 01:15:55 Wow.
- Alice Newton: 01:15:58 Yeah. And that covered not only me, my travel, my benefits, it covered the office staff part, the whole thing. And the parks, "Ah?" But they did it. And they had to get in line to get funding from the region for some of this stuff. And then the other thing that came out of all of this

reorganization was that--and I don't know if this came down from D.C. or whether this was something internal--Harpers Ferry Center should no longer be a hands-on facility. It should be a contracting facility. And they should do nothing but write contracts, administer contracts, et cetera. So these were the big takeaways from all this reorganization.

- Alice Newton: 01:17:10 Don Kodak said to me one day, "Well, you guys just ride along on our coattails." I said, "No, Don, we have generated almost a million dollars' worth of work this last year. We are contributing to the Center's budget." They didn't want to understand that, they wanted to get rid of us. So, I don't know.
- Nancy Russell: 01:17:55 And at that same time, it seems like the number of conservators and the technician support just disappears.
- Alice Newton: 01:18:05 Yes. Because, try and get a position refilled. I fought tooth and nail to get Karen a 9 because I felt she was doing the work and she deserved it. I fought tooth and nail to get a 12. Why do you need that? It's not that I need it, it's what I'm doing. There were lots of things going on. At one point, I was not only giving oversight to the registrar's office, I was working in the parks. I was on the road 20 to 26 weeks a year.
- Alice Newton: 01:19:19 Now, I like to travel. But after a while, boom! I was supervising the WASO digital imaging project. Jane had retired, and while John Brucksch was there, I was helping to administer the whole office. When Linda came in, you know it, she came into a mess, and it didn't get a lot better for a long time. I think partly because Linda did not understand the park service system, and didn't understand that as manager, she needed to be on that phone, and she needed to be talking to the parks, and she needed to be talking to the regional people, this type of thing.
- Nancy Russell: 01:20:40 Because this was about the time that the project funding model was really the way it was going, and then drumming up the business?
- Alice Newton: 01:20:51 Yeah. And a lot of the conservators, and this is nothing against them because they didn't have this constant contact with the parks, they would send off their treatment

proposals and get them signed and get back. And that was basically the amount of interaction they had with the parks.

- Nancy Russell: 01:21:29 And so at that point it really was more object treatment focused kind of thing versus going out in the parks and doing surveys? Is that one of the reasons that they weren't having those relationships with the parks?
- Alice Newton: 01:21:45 They weren't having the relationships with the park because they never had relationships with the park to that extent. Al Levitan was probably the only one on board at that point who was doing much in the parks, beside myself. You had one who refused to fly on airplanes. That was not the way they were groomed up into their positions, to be there talking and working with the parks. Where Martin and his badgering me into, "I need a hit list." I was talking to the parks as a museum tech, and I was talking to them a lot. I was talking to regional curators.
- Nancy Russell: 01:22:56 It really sort of changed the model.
- Alice Newton: 01:22:58 Yeah. I mean, it was a different way of doing business that these people hadn't been brought up doing, and it was hard for them. I know David Arnold struggled when he was brought in on a term position. I think he was in Boston at the time. I can't remember where he was.
- Nancy Russell: 01:23:37 Springfield?
- Alice Newton: 01:23:38 Springfield, yeah. For the CHIT CHAT guns. To help Charlie with the chit-chat guns, because we had probably 400 long arms that needed complete conservation treatment. So he was brought in for that. And then he went back to Springfield, I believe. And then it wasn't until quite a bit later that he was brought permanently to the Center as an objects conservator. But David worked at Springfield, he worked the guns with CHIT CHAT, and that was his experience with the parks. So it was not an easy transition for him to go through the national catalog and look for guns, and target those parks and say, "Hi, I'm David. I understand you have duh duh, duh duh. How are they doing? Do you need any work on them?" Et cetera. This was a way different model than most of the conservation folks were used to.

- Alice Newton: 01:25:08 Martin was really good at working the parks. Jane was good at it, and they would bring in work.
- Nancy Russell: 01:25:19 Conservators didn't have to think about it because the object would show up and they'd treat them.
- Alice Newton: 01:25:23 Right. Yeah. And that's no fault of the conservators. It's just not what they were used to doing. And so when it was decided that they had to fund their own livelihood, oh my goodness. That was hard. And I spent a lot of my time as registrar working with the parks and getting projects in.
- Nancy Russell: 01:25:57 Getting projects in PMIS for funding, or getting them into the Center?
- Alice Newton: 01:26:01 Into the Center. I didn't deal much with PMIS, but I could make recommendations that the park needed to put a project into PMIS, and if they needed help writing it, we could provide help writing the project. But that was the way that went.
- Nancy Russell: 01:26:30 So you mentioned the digital imaging project. Can you talk about that a little bit?
- Alice Newton: 01:26:37 Oh, naive woman here who was totally unprepared for what gob smacked me. This was a five year, \$5 million project, \$5.4 million project that was meant to provide parks that-- there was a funding level tied to this. I'm trying to think.
- Nancy Russell: 01:27:14 20% Rec Fee?
- Alice Newton: 01:27:16 Yeah. Those that did not have extra fee funds were able to apply and have up to 300 of their objects, their most significant objects, and they had to own them, to be digitally photographed so they could put them on their website or wherever. And at the time the project started, I already had photographer Darryl Herring on the registrar staff as an in-house photographer. And trying to do some research on this, this was something, again, out of my field that I knocked my head against the wall many nights over this. But finally made a plan as to how we needed to take care of this, and the plan involved having two teams, each with a photographer and a museum technician, be available for traveling to the park, taking the images and bringing them back.

- Alice Newton: 01:28:51 And then I had one person, Randy Sullivan, in-house who did all the processing for them, and prepared them for shipment to the parks. And the parks got copies, the regional curator got a copy, and WASO got a copy. So, each 300 objects generated five or 600 images times three. And we did this, I can't remember, I think we ended up-- maybe 189 parks that participated in the project, and we shipped about three quarters of a million images, to the three things. And that basically was the project.
- Alice Newton: 01:30:11 I was promoted to a supervisory museum specialist at that point because at that point I had Debbie in the textile lab under my supervision, I had the photo lab, I had all of the digital imaging project, and in all of this we also were expected to go out and recruit interns and student assistants. So I had those that worked in my area under me. And hiring during that time frame--there were big changes to the overall federal government hiring process, and veterans were given preference, and it was very difficult to hire anybody who wasn't a veteran, whether the veterans had the prerequisite experience or not. That was a big challenge for me.
- Alice Newton: 01:31:43 Darryl was a veteran. Frank was a veteran, and Reed, he was a veteran. And my naivety was under the issues that many of these veterans were bringing back with them, and how that impacted their ability to work and to get along with people.
- Nancy Russell: 01:32:32 The PTSD issues?
- Alice Newton: 01:32:34 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 01:32:34 What we would call it today.
- Alice Newton: 01:32:36 Well, some of it was what you would call PTSD, some of it was I don't know what, but there were a whole range of problems. At that point also, conservation became a dumping ground for staff that they want to get rid of out of the Center. I ended up with one photographer that way, and he didn't want to be supervised by a woman. He didn't want to do the work assigned. And as a result, he slapped a lawsuit on me that checked every box down the line, including sexual harassment. And that was a very stressful time. And I eventually was exonerated from everything except the sexual harassment. And they said they couldn't

do that because sexual harassment is a he said, she said. And so they have to take the word of the person making the allegations.

- Nancy Russell: 01:34:15 Interesting. Even though everything else was, it's still the burden of proof went there even though everything else was disproven.
- Alice Newton: 01:34:36 I gained 35 pounds, and Nutter's in Sharpsburg became my best friend. My husband would look at me when I'd come in the door and he'd say, "Hmm, do we need to go to Nutter's?" So that was something that I was ill-prepared for. I didn't know how to manage these guys.
- Nancy Russell: 01:35:05 And was there support from your upper management to help you, or are you just sort of on your own?
- Alice Newton: 01:35:12 Just sort of on your own. You got sent to supervisory management and that was it. You went one week to D.C. to take classes, and not a word was ever said about PTSD or returning veterans or anything like that. It was just what you needed to do, to do things the way they normally were to be done. And this was not a normal set of working circumstances. I had a secretary that was just for the project because she did all of their travel. The guys were two weeks on, two weeks off. Two weeks in the field, two weeks at home. And they knew that when they took the jobs.
- Alice Newton: 01:36:13 And it was the collateral alcohol in some, it was the collateral betting that was going on. It was the collateral somebody's off their meds and is freaking out over something. I was not capable or prepared to deal with this. And maybe now that I know more about this type of thing, maybe I could deal with better, but then again, maybe not.
- Alice Newton: 01:36:59 So, we completed the project. The last batches of images that were captured got processed in WASO. I think it was probably three parks that got processed in WASO, because I was told the project was over. I had to get rid of the staff. So I did. I could do that. But it was all the in-between things that I was just totally unprepared to deal with.
- Nancy Russell: 01:37:46 So it's interesting to hear that perspective, because from the perspective of having been in the park while the project was going on and having received photographers in to

photograph objects, and then getting the images, all of that seemed so smooth from the outside perspective.

- Alice Newton: 01:38:05 I'm glad it did. And I did hear it from many of the parks that for the most part, the guys were really good when they were at the parks. It was when they were back in the office that they fell apart. And they were doing good work. I can't blame them for that type of thing, but it was a ride.
- Nancy Russell: 01:38:40 Stressful.
- Alice Newton: 01:38:42 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 01:38:43 So how about another large project you worked on, which was the Yellowstone move?
- Alice Newton: 01:38:50 Oh yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 01:38:50 How did that come about?
- Alice Newton: 01:38:52 Oh, friends in high places.
- Alice Newton: 01:39:03 Of course, I think you're probably aware that Colleen Curry was at Arlington House before she was at Yellowstone. Mary Troy was at Arlington House. Maria Capozzi was at Arlington House. You name it.
- Alice Newton: 01:39:21 At any rate, soon after Colleen went to Yellowstone, she called me one day, and I had done projects, small projects for Arlington House. I considered Colleen a friend. Colleen and Mary had helped with Sitka move. I'm just trying to think, did they help me with another one? But I know they were both at Sitka when we did the move up there.
- Alice Newton: 01:39:55 So Colleen called me, and she said, "We're going to need to move the collections. What can we do here?" So, after we talked quite a while, I said, "Well, Colleen, what I am going to need to do is to come to the park and see where everything is and get my hands on the floor plans for the new building and determine how we can manage this move best." Then she said, "Oh, by the way, we don't have very much money for this."
- Nancy Russell: 01:40:37 Of course.
- Alice Newton: 01:40:37 Of course.

- Nancy Russell: 01:40:39 So the move actually happened, I think, in 2003 or 2004. How long were you in the planning stage?
- Alice Newton: 01:40:47 A year.
- Nancy Russell: 01:40:48 A year.
- Alice Newton: 01:40:49 So I went out to the park and talked with each--they had a substantial herbarium. They had a substantial archeological collection, and these were in different places all around the park. So I was out there almost two weeks, doing assessments of what they had. I came back and thought and thought and thought about this. I thought, "Oh, God, this is over 5 million objects. To hire somebody to do this is going to be a nightmare, as far as cost, and the park doesn't have the cost."
- Alice Newton: 01:41:41 At that point, already, I had been doing curatorial methods, and I had--for two years I ran a mini curatorial methods when Martin was in staff, brought technicians and curators in from the park. Because they decided they were no longer going to do the official curatorial methods, we did it in house for a couple of years. I ran that, and I thought, "Well, we've got a lot more technicians and curators in the Service now that need Park Service training and move training." So I talked to Colleen and talked to the superintendent out there and proposed that we--
- Alice Newton: 01:42:47 Well, let me stop right there and say when I joined the Park Service, there was something like 58 trained curators on staff. When I left, there were less than 32.
- Nancy Russell: 01:43:00 Wow.
- Alice Newton: 01:43:03 The collateral duty people that were being expected to fill these positions did not have the background. So what I proposed to the superintendent out there was that we bring in teams of NPS technicians and curators for a two-week period, I give them training on handling, packing and moving collections, and we would move collections. If they could foot some of this bill, the park--
- Alice Newton: 01:43:42 Eventually they had a house on--no, in town. It wasn't on site. It was in town, that was huge and had a couple of dorm-like rooms. So I was given that and said, "You can

have this for their lodging. We will pay transportation, and we will pay food." That's what the park contributed.

- Alice Newton: 01:44:25 It was during that point in time that everybody had to begin paying for their own salary by their projects. Martin and I got into quite a shouting match one day over all of this, because I started this Yellowstone project, and they weren't to be paying for my costs, other than my travel. Now, halfway through the project, I was supposed to have them pay for all of my salary. "No. No, that's not what we discussed and agreed upon."
- Alice Newton: 01:45:07 Well, he went to the manager, and they finally got that all sorted out that I didn't have to be charging the park my salary. So we would bring groups in. I had about 12 or 14 people every two weeks that would come in. We'd get one day of training, and then we'd begin work. I would divide the groups up into different locations, because there was something like 11 different locations that we had to move.
- Alice Newton: 01:45:57 Maria Capozzi was on park staff out there at that time, and so she was a good right-hand man. I'd worked with her before. Colleen, I had worked with before. So they knew the way I operated and what I was wanting to teach. We would go around and teach individual groups more specific things that they needed, and then we'd move. Every three days or so, we'd fill a truck and move it and unpack it and put it away--everything from human remains to beautiful paintings and photography from Yellowstone.
- Alice Newton: 01:46:51 It was three months of very intense work, but we got everything done. We got everything moved. The only things we didn't get put away were the natural history specimens that we were awaiting testing results from, as far as--.
- Nancy Russell: 01:47:19 Arsenic.
- Alice Newton: 01:47:20 --arsenic and that type of thing. But we had them in one room that were isolated. So we did that while I made sure every group that was out there got to have fun. One night, we would go whitewater rafting down the river. Another night, we would host the park staff for a barbecue. Another night, we would go horseback riding up in the hills. I'm just trying to think what else.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:07 We went to a rodeo.

Alice Newton: 01:48:08 Rodeo. Always, always went to a rodeo. Alice is the rodeo girl. We went wolf-watching. I'd haul these kids out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, and we'd go out with the wolf people and do that before we'd work all day. I'm just trying to think what else we did.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:31 There were some brown bag lectures, lunches kind of thing.

Alice Newton: 01:48:36 Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I had a whole range of things for these people to do, and most everybody participated in everything. Everybody went home dead after two weeks.

Alice Newton: 01:48:54 Yeah. But it worked, and it worked well. I got to know even more of the curatorial staff on a firsthand basis that way. So that helped in the future. Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 01:49:15 And more cost effective in the end.

Alice Newton: 01:49:18 Oh, yeah. I mean, the park--I don't know. It was probably less than \$30 or \$40,000 that it cost them to make their move.

Nancy Russell: 01:49:30 Which is shockingly low.

Alice Newton: 01:49:32 Yeah, for that amount of collections. Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 01:49:37 We'd never have contracted at that.

Alice Newton: 01:49:39 No, no. It would've been probably a good million-dollar move. But, yeah, that was good. I think that worked well, thanks to Colleen and some of the people I knew before. I had more people--after the first or second group went through, I had more people than I could take, and I kind of regretted that I didn't have another big collection move to do.

Nancy Russell: 01:50:31 Yeah. So when did you retire?

Alice Newton: 01:50:36 Retirement date, March 31st, 2011.

Nancy Russell: 01:50:43 Oh, wow.

Alice Newton: 01:50:44 Okay, and between '11 and '17, I ran my consulting business.

Nancy Russell: 01:51:02 So after you retired, you did some contract work for the NPS?

Alice Newton: 01:51:06 Yeah, I did probably, additional, 20 collection storage plans, housekeeping plans, move plans, and management plans. A lot of that, I worked by myself, but I also worked with a group before particularly the management plans, that we would go in and do. There would be five or six of us, and we would do a management plan there.

Alice Newton: 01:51:43 I listed, on the bottom here, all of the plans, both during my work time at Harper's Ferry and afterwards, the sum total of all of those planning documents.

Nancy Russell: 01:52:02 So working with the National Park Service as a contractor versus an employee for all those years, were there things that were better, more difficult? Did you prefer being a contractor? Did it make things easier or harder?

Alice Newton: 01:52:22 I only ran into one really difficult issue, and that was at Great Smokys. I had a lot of difficulty getting paid for the project, because staff changed at the park, and nobody wanted to touch it with a ten-foot pole. It took me almost two years to get my--

Nancy Russell: 01:52:46 Ow.

Alice Newton: 01:52:47 --my payment from Smokys. To me, that was really irritating.

Nancy Russell: 01:52:53 That's unacceptable.

Alice Newton: 01:52:54 Yeah. But otherwise, it was okay, because I could say no to jobs that I knew I didn't want to work with the staff at the park.

Nancy Russell: 01:53:09 It is an advantage when you can pick and choose a little bit more.

Alice Newton: 01:53:11 Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 01:53:12 Yeah.

Alice Newton: 01:53:13 Or, "Yeah, send me anything you've got from Alaska."

Nancy Russell: 01:53:20 Is that your favorite region?

- Alice Newton: 01:53:22 Oh, on any given day. But, yeah, I'd go back to Alaska at the drop of a hat, and I have, a couple times.
- Nancy Russell: 01:53:32 Right. Can we talk a little bit about the relationship between the Historic Furnishings Branch and the Registrar's Office? What was that relationship? Did it change over time? What were the responsibilities for Historic Furnishings?
- Alice Newton: 01:53:51 Oh, yeah. When I took over the Registrar's Office, as I mentioned, I think it was over 5,000 objects in and out each year, and I would say the majority of the objects were purchased objects from Historic Furnishings, because they needed to have these objects come in so they could inspect them, approve the purchase of them, and then have them stored until they were ready to go and do an installation.
- Nancy Russell: 01:54:33 Most of them weren't being treated?
- Alice Newton: 01:54:35 Most of them were not being treated, except very early on, Bill Brown and his beer bottles.
- Nancy Russell: 01:54:46 That was a nontraditional treatment, grinding them down.
- Alice Newton: 01:54:48 That was not a traditional treatment. Yeah, and that increased substantially the paperwork involved with the Registrar's Office. At one point, somebody in WASO had determined that if they were buying these objects, they needed to be cataloged by the Registrar's Office. "No, no, no, no, no. That's not what we do here."
- Alice Newton: 01:55:33 Finally, John Bruckcsh was head of Historic Furnishings, I believe, at that point. "If the park wants this type of thing, it's your duty to have somebody come in and catalog them while they're here," and that's fine. I think it only happened twice, and then that all changed, because of this business of everybody having to pay their own way, and I think the thought of them having to support the Registrar's Office, it became more expedient for them to do deliveries to the park, in some instances.
- Alice Newton: 01:56:44 There were still things coming in that they had very tight inspections on. When they were having reproductions made of certain things, they would send them. But if they had 50 bars of soap wrapped in whatever special wrapping, they

would often just go to the park, or they would go over to their office. I discovered that they had a closet.

- Nancy Russell: 01:57:14 So it really was just storage and tracking, but you had to register everything in?
- Alice Newton: 01:57:23 Yeah. Yeah, and we used, basically, the same rules. The same vendor, the same type of object would get--we would have decimal point--
- Nancy Russell: 01:57:37 Right.
- Alice Newton: 01:57:37 --or whatever. But that was part and parcel, because we were responsible for getting them to the park on time for when they wanted to set up their particular Historic Furnishings project.
- Nancy Russell: 01:58:01 Because you were doing the packing and shipping?
- Alice Newton: 01:58:02 Yeah. Yeah, and we won a parade ribbon in Wrangell because of things that we had shipped up to Wrangell for an installation in the cabin that Bill Brown was doing. All the packing materials, the staff at the park made a big float out of all the packing materials, and we won first prize on the float for the parade.
- Nancy Russell: 01:58:42 That's awesome. Recycling.
- Alice Newton: 01:58:48 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 01:58:48 That's perfect.
- Alice Newton: 01:58:49 Yeah, that was funny, and there were--I'm just trying to think. I think Historic Furnishings also changed in what they were doing. They weren't doing as many furnished sites, and some of that was being done on contract by the time I left.
- Nancy Russell: 01:59:25 They were doing more of the plans--
- Alice Newton: 01:59:27 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 01:59:27 --and then the furnishings itself was being done under contract?

- Alice Newton: 01:59:29 Yeah, yeah. So that lessened the amount of things we had coming and going. At one point, Roy McNally--Butch--when I first went to the Registrar's Office, we had a truck, probably a 16- or 18-foot truck, and he would travel around the country and pick up objects, pack them and pick them up and bring them back to the Center, or he would deliver finished objects out to the parks.
- Nancy Russell: 02:00:14 Last year, Ann Hitchcock asked me about something she wanted delivered. She was like, "Do you guys still have that truck that goes around?" I'm like, "No. Never even heard of that."
- Alice Newton: 02:00:24 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 02:00:27 So when did that stop happening?
- Alice Newton: 02:00:39 I want to say it was while the Registrar's Office was under Mike Alvarez, because Butch was placed down in AV. The AV depot was part of the support services, at that point, and I think he was placed down there, I believe. Then he left the Park Service. So it was during Alvarez's thing. He sent one of the other staff members with me on a trip, and I got lectured about my fingernail paint, and that he had never been out of the state of West Virginia before, et cetera, et cetera. I thought, "Oh, my word." Refused to put a tip down for dinner, that type of thing.
- Nancy Russell: 02:01:55 Different experiences.
- Alice Newton: 02:01:56 Yeah.
- Nancy Russell: 02:02:00 Well, is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you wanted to highlight, in terms of your experiences or folks that you worked with or changes at the Center? What was this robbery?
- Alice Newton: 02:02:21 Oh. Christmas Eve--and you talk about having somebody come in to catalog objects. Anthony--and I don't remember what his last name was. He was there cataloging objects for a project for Historic Furnishings, and his project was to end at the last of December, but he wanted to finish it up Christmas Eve, because he was wanting to take off with his wife someplace. I said, "That's fine. I'll stay."

- Alice Newton: 02:03:03 We were working in the Registrar's Office. He was working there, and I was doing some writing of some sort. The day after Christmas, when I went back to work, I had Dave Kacinec, somebody from down at the other end of the hall came to me and said, "We've had a break-in," and, apparently, they broke in the windows down in the far, short side of the building ...
- Nancy Russell: 02:03:42 129, which is now the archives. Yeah.
- Alice Newton: 02:03:44 Yeah, and stole a bunch of computer equipment and stuff. When Eric Sheetz, who is an LE ranger at the park, and Ron Sheetz's son. It was while Jane was manager, and Jane was off in France. I was left acting, of course, and so I called Eric. He came and, after reviewing the computer camera stuff, he said, "This happened while we were in the building, Christmas Eve."
- Nancy Russell: 02:04:30 Really?
- Alice Newton: 02:04:31 We didn't hear it, and the windows were not alarmed.
- Nancy Russell: 02:04:39 Wow. I'd heard the story of the robbery and the loss of the computer equipment, but I didn't realize you were in the building at the time.
- Alice Newton: 02:04:50 Yeah, yeah. At another point in time--again while Jane was manager, as I was her second-in-command and I would get called if we had a security issue--I got called one night and went into the building, met the state police there, and the state police refused to go in the building with me. They wanted me to go in by myself. I said, "Absolutely not. The alarms have gone off. I don't know if anybody's in there."
- Nancy Russell: 02:05:30 Right. Why would they refuse to go in there? They're the armed ones and the trained ones.
- Alice Newton: 02:05:35 I have no idea. I have no idea. Then LE rangers from the park came, and they went in with me. But I was not about to go in by myself.
- Nancy Russell: 02:05:50 Right.
- Alice Newton: 02:05:51 I don't know why the state police wouldn't go in. It was strange. Yeah. That was rather disquieting.

Nancy Russell: 02:06:02 Yeah.

Alice Newton: 02:06:06 The other excitement that we had at the building that I don't know if you know about, I was sitting at my desk one day, and the power went out. Couldn't figure out why, and the power company came and got things back running for us. After a while, we saw a squirrel out on the berm there. It had about that much of a tail, and his tail was up in the wires. He had shorted out the building.

Nancy Russell: 02:06:46 He survived?

Alice Newton: 02:06:48 He survived. Now, did you know that squirrels have a life expectancy of maybe 15 years or more?

Nancy Russell: 02:06:57 I didn't know that.

Alice Newton: 02:06:58 I thought we had a mutant ninja strain of squirrels, because I could look out my office window and see squirrels out there with a little bit of a tail. I made a comment to Dan Riss one day. He came back, and he was just like Tom--

Nancy Russell: 02:07:24 Carter?

Alice Newton: 02:07:24 No, archives.

Nancy Russell: 02:07:27 DuRant?

Alice Newton: 02:07:27 DuRant. That you'd give him something to chew on, and next thing you know, he'd come back with more information than he ever wanted. He came back. "Well, you know that it's not a whole strain of squirrels. That's probably the original squirrel." So we had a major power outage at the building due to a squirrel.

Nancy Russell: 02:07:51 Wow. I hadn't heard that one.

Alice Newton: 02:07:53 Yeah, and that squirrel hung around a long time.

Nancy Russell: 02:07:58 But he knew to stay away from the power lines.

Alice Newton: 02:08:04 I hope.

New Speaker: 02:08:04 Well, that's great. Anything else you want to touch on?

Alice Newton: 02:08:38 No, I guess I can't say anything there. Just to comment that I had very extraordinary opportunities while working at the Park Service, and I think I grew as both a professional and as a person from them. I had some very, very, very good highs and a couple armpit lows, but that's expected from anybody or at any time or any situation.

Alice Newton: 02:09:23 But the Park Service was gracious enough, even while I was a term or a temporary employee. My father had Alzheimer's, and we couldn't convince my mother to get him into a care facility. So I went, and I asked for a sabbatical of about six months to help take care of my father and get him situated. I got it, and I had a job when I came back. You can't ask for anything more than something like that.

Nancy Russell: 02:09:59 Right. When the chips are down.

Alice Newton: 02:10:01 Yeah, yeah.

Nancy Russell: 02:10:03 That's great.

Alice Newton: 02:10:04 Yeah. So met lots of really good people in the Park Service and met some very strange situations. Okay. I'm trying to remember. Was it Fort Stanwix in New York? I went up there for a project of some sort, and I walked into the storage room. There, growing on the floor, were mushrooms. It was so damp and moist and dirty that they had mushrooms growing on the floor in their storage room.

Nancy Russell: 02:11:00 So you've seen some of the best places and some of the worst.

Alice Newton: 02:11:06 Yes, and how do you tactfully say to someone, "You need some dehumidifiers. You need to get rid of your mushrooms"?

Nancy Russell: 02:11:15 "This should not be growing."

Alice Newton: 02:11:17 Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 02:11:19 Wow. Wow. Well, great. Thank you very much.

Alice Newton: 02:11:25 You're welcome.

END OF RECORDING