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

Sam Weems
July 16, 1971

Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison
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[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herbert Evison: This is July 16, 1971, I am Herb Evison, and again this morning I am in the penthouse studio on top of the Interior Building in Washington.

Herbert Evison: With me is a friend of a great many years, Samuel P. Weems, a lot better known as Sam, who spent a very long period on the Blue Ridge Parkway and who had a very large hand in setting the character of the Parkway itself and of the management.

Herbert Evison: Now, Sam, let's start off with where you were born and when, and something about the family you were born into.

Sam Weems: All right. I was born in Marietta, Georgia, on July 17 (I will have a birthday tomorrow), 1904. My mother was a Canadian. She was born in Toronto, Canada, of English parents, and she met my father when she came to the United States at the age of 19 and settled there in Georgia. My father was a music merchant, he sold pianos and organs and banjos and – you name it and he sold it.

Herbert Evison: Was he a musician himself?

Sam Weems: Yes, he was a musician.

Herbert Evison: Are you?

Sam Weems: No. I can't carry a tune in a bucket. But he was an accomplished trombonist and pianist. So, this is the way I got started.

Sam Weems: My grammar school education was in Marietta, Georgia. I went to a preparatory school in an A&M (Agricultural & Mechanical) school as a preparatory. Then I went to Georgia Tech, where I received a certificate in civil engineering in 1926. I worked my way through Georgia Tech, because my parents didn't have a great deal of money. So that is the reason why I got a certificate rather than a degree in civil engineering.

Sam Weems: Then I worked with the Engineering Department; after I left Georgia Tech, I went with the Engineering Department of the Norfolk &Western Railroad in Roanoke, Virginia, until after the Depression.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, what did you do for the Norfolk & Western Railway?

Sam Weems: I was an evaluation engineer.

Herbert Evison: Now, that hooked you in with the Interstate Commerce Commission in some way, didn't, it?

Sam Weems: Yes, the ICC. We were working under what is known as the recapture clause. In other words, the railroads could not earn any more than a certain percentage of their capital investment. Their capital investment had to be

documented. So, we had a crew in the chief engineer's office that did evaluation for the railroad upon which the ICC based their recapture clause.

Herbert Evison: Now, how long did you stick with that?

Sam Weems: I was with them until the Depression in '33. I remember that distinctly, because three-point beer had just been declared legal at that time.

Sam Weems: I went from there to the Federal Land Bank in Baltimore as a land appraiser and I stayed with them until I went to the Park Service in '35.

Herbert Evison: Now, if I remember rightly, there was a change in the law that kind of did you evaluation people out of your job with the railroads, wasn't there?

Sam Weems: Yes. They repealed the recapture clause of the Interstate Commerce Act, and that, along with the Depression, they practically eliminated the department.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you went with the Federal Land Bank and that was right at the beginning of the Roosevelt Administration.

Sam Weems: It was 1933. That is right.

Herbert Evison: Now, I am interested in the sequence of events that took you from the payroll of the Federal Land Bank over to the Parkway roll of the Park Service.

Sam Weems: I had to take a Civil Service test when I took the position with the Federal Land Bank, and I qualified and passed it, was certified as a Civil Service Land Bank Appraiser, and I was a supervisor appraiser far Northern Virginia with headquarters in Culpepper.

Sam Weems: The National Park Service went to the Federal Land Bank and borrowed a Federal Land Appraiser, and they assigned me to the job to appraise some resettlement areas outside of Shenandoah National Park. At that time the Shenandoah National Park had been authorized but it had not been established. It was not established until 1936. This was 1934. So, I spent a good lot of time appraising areas outside of the Park to re-settle some of the squatters that they were trying to get out of the mountains, who owned no land but who were squatting on non-resident property that was to become part of Shenandoah National Park.

Sam Weems: So, after I finished that job this Blue Ridge Parkway job came up and they again went to the Federal Land Bank to borrow a land appraiser, and the Federal Land Bank assigned me to it. This was in April 1935.

Herbert Evison: Now, you were assigned then in connection with certain specific types of purchases under the Resettlement Administration, if I remember rightly.

Sam Weems: Well, it came a little later, really. I was actually still employed by the Federal Land Bank when I was on loan to the Park Service there. That was in 1935. But after six months of working on a loan basis, I became very interested in working for the Park Service, and particularly for the Blue Ridge Parkway. And in November of '35 I was offered the job with the Park Service as Project Manager for the recreation areas being planned for the Parkway. It was these recreation areas that I had been appraising land for, so in November '35 I resigned from the Federal Land Bank of Baltimore – or rather I was transferred. But I was making $3,200 a year, and I took a job with the Park Service at $2,900 a year. I took a $300 cut; I lost my Civil Service rights, because I was being paid out of Resettlement funds, which weren't subject to Civil Service; and I did not regain either my money or my Civil Service rights for three years, until July '38.

Sam Weems: That shows you how bad I wanted to work for the Park Service. $300 was a lot of money in those days.

Herbert Evison: Yes, it was. Having lived through it myself I know that very well.

Herbert Evison: Well, Sam, I think that the story of these – what Tom Vint called the bulges along the Blue Ridge Parkway, are one of the – first, is one of the interesting phases of the creation of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and it is one of the things, it seems to me, that gives a very special character to the Blue Ridge Parkway. And you were involved in them right from the start of their acquisition.

Herbert Evison: Now, let's get on the record what these bulges along the Parkway were; how were they designated like The Bluffs, for instance. Can you list the ones along the Parkway that you were involved in at that time?

Sam Weems: Oh, yes, I can. My first assignment was to appraise the land for this – for these bulges, as you call them, or as Vint called them – and then when I went to work for the Park Service in November 1935 I went in as Project Manager, and I found myself buying the very land I had appraised; so I had to use my own figures in negotiating for purchase.

Sam Weems: These bulges, or recreation areas, – they were to be established as a guideline about every sixty miles for over-night use and every thirty miles for day use at areas in North Carolina that I purchased and helped develop as Project Manager were.

Sam Weems: Cumberland Knob, which was the first one, of about 1500 Acres. And then The Bluffs, which later was changed to Doughton Park in honor of Congressman Robert L. Doughton, who was Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee for so many years. This was one of the largest areas,

approximately 6,000 Acres in that one. And these were the two in North Carolina I was involved in.

Sam Weems: In Virginia I was involved with – well, we started with Fishers Creek, but I did a lot of appraisal work on it and some preliminary work, but the City of Galax owned a lot of land in there that they didn't want to relinquish, so we gave that away. But we did acquire land for Rocky Knob, which is about fifty miles south of Roanoke, and this is one of the big over-night areas. There is about 47500 Acres in that one.

Sam Weems: And Peaks of Otter we acquired, and this was a little – these other areas we acquired with Resettlement money, retiring sub-marginal lands, lands that the mountaineers really couldn't make a living on.

Sam Weems: Now, Peaks of Otter was a little different story, in Virginia. Peaks of Otter did not qualify for sub-marginal, in the first place, and in the second place, our funds available through that program had expired. So, we put $50,000 into the U.S. Forest Service pot, and we got them to buy the land for us and then transfer it to the Parkway. And in doing this, I worked with their appraiser and their land management department, in putting the Peaks of Otter together.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, as I remember it, there were some rather special features of that, stemming from the fact that there were limits on what they could pay per acre for their lands – see if I have this straight – so they met these limits but they had to pay in addition, in a way, by giving certain long-lasting privileges in return, too. Isn't that correct?

Sam Weems: Well, that is not quite right. We didn't have any real monetary ceiling. What we were required to do was to not pay more than 10% more than the appraised value. How in some cases we did extend life-time reservations, in certain instances where we found an old mountaineer that we felt would just completely break up his life if he moved off of property, or we moved him off property that he had inherited down the line. So, in these cases we did give life-time permits.

Herbert Evison: Well, how about this permit for bus service up to the top of the mountain there? Wasn't that something that was involved in the purchase?

Sam Weems: Yes, that is right. Well, you see, the Peaks of Otter – the old Hotel Mons had been an old, long-established mountain resort hotel, and it was run and owned. By the Peaks of Otter Company, which was headed up by Hunter Miller. Hunter Miller was a very good friend of Harry Byrd, and consequently we had to tread rather lightly with this one.

Sam Weems: And Hunter Miller had developed a road to the top of Sharp Top Mountain, and in our negotiation for the purchase of this, which amounted

to about 2,200 Acres, he asked for the rights to collect tolls on this Sharp Top, as a condition of the sale.

Sam Weems: Well, we bought it under those conditions, but we put a limit on how many years he could collect the toll. As a matter of fact, the war came along, we didn't get the Parkway built, and the limitation ran out on him. So there never was any money collected on the toll road to Sharp Top, so that expired, and we inherited the whole thing.

Herbert Evison: That I hadn't heard before. I hadn't realized it. Well, now, how did the other bulges get in, like Crabtree Meadows, and there were several others that were acquired along there. Were they just acquired with Recreation Land Acquisition money?

Sam Weems: Well, Smart View, you will recall, was a small area; now that was acquired through Resettlement money, retirement of submarginal lands program; but some of the others we got by transfer from the Forest Service. Crabtree Meadows, for example, by transfer from the Forest Service on a transfer from jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior.

Herbert Evison: Did you have a hand in the negotiation of that transfer?

Sam Weems: Yes. I met with the Forest Service people to work out the details of the transfer on it.

Herbert Evison: Now, getting back to the areas like Rocky Knob and The Bluffs and those others, who did the work of determining just how much you were going after there – how much acreage?

Sam Weems: Well, this is a funny thing. I have been looking for the original maps that were given to me as a guide for the purchase of these areas, and you wouldn't recognize them today. For example, at Rocky Knob there was only three tracts of land in the plan that was given to me.

Herbert Evison: Amounting to about what, in acres, do you remember?

Sam Weems: Amounting to about 500 acres; and we ended up with over 4,000. But it was done very unrealistically. And as soon as I got on the ground and saw it, I consulted with Stan Abbott, who was the resident architect and doing the planning for the Parkway over-all – and incidentally, he is the real father of the plan, and it is to Stan Abbott who should go any credit for the esthetics and for the plan of the park. My work mostly was managerial and in the early stages, as I say, acquisition and development of the recreation areas. I didn't become Assistant Superintendent until July 1938.

Sam Weems: But anyhow, going back to what you were talking about there, you didn't mention Cone Park or Price Park.

Herbert Evison: No. Those came along later, after the war.

Sam Weems: But while we are talking about these bulges, let me tell you that story.

Sam Weems: We ran the Parkway location through the 3,600-acre Cone estate, and Mrs. Cone (Mr. Cone had previously died) was so upset over our engineers going through the estate that she called the Secretary of the Interior, who at that time was Mr. Ickes – this was in the early stages of the Parkway acquisition – and invited Mr. Ickes down to spend the weekend at the Cone estate at Blowing Rock to show him how putting the Parkway through there would absolutely destroy her estate, and she was very upset by it.

Sam Weems: Well, I am not sure whether Mr. Ickes actually went there or not, but at any rate we got instructions to stay out of the Cone estate.

Sam Weems: Mrs. Cone had gotten quite elderly and we said, "We have got too many other things to do now, so let's don't upset the applecart." This is another reason why we delayed the Grandfather section, because this was immediately north and we couldn't get at Grandfather Mountain without going through the Cone estate. So, we left that whole block – the Grandfather Mountain location and the Cone estate location, put it aside and worked on other sections. This is why they were so late in coming up.

Sam Weems: Now, after Mrs. Cone died, this estate was offered to the State of North Carolina for a state park. The State felt it was not located close enough to their population centers to justify their developing it; that they needed state parks more in areas more closely related to populations.

Sam Weems: So, the next thing I heard was Mr. Demaray called me from Washington and said, "We have had a tentative offer of the Cone Estate to the National Park Service. You go down and have a look and give us a report."

Sam Weems: So, I went down and met with Ben Cone, who at that time was Mayor of Greensboro, North Carolina, and we had a very pleasant time. And I met him later and we went over the property together, and I turned in a very favorable report to Mr. Demaray, recommending that by all means we take it, because the Parkway going through the middle, it made a very fine recreation area. And here it was, free.

Sam Weems: So, he said, "All right. You go and meet with the Cone trustees who have charge of the estate, and tell them we will take it and find out what conditions there are, and if they are not too bad we will accept it."

Sam Weems: So, I met with the Cone trustees in Greensboro, and they outlined the conditions: One, that it was to be known as the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park. Two, that the roads to the cemetery where Mr. and Mrs. Cone are

buried on this date should be open to the friends and relatives of the Cone family. Three, that at least $10,000 a year would be spent on maintenance and upkeep of the park.

Sam Weems: Well, the first two were acceptable, but I explained to the board of directors that one Congress couldn't commit the next, and therefore we could not accept the $10,000 obligation; that we might hit a year where we couldn't meet the $10,000 obligation, and then the property would revert after we had spent a lot of money developing it. So, it was not acceptable.

Sam Weems: So, this caused quite a stir at the meeting and finally they said, "Well, do you have any suggestion for a solution?" And I said, "Yes, I do," knowing also, I said to myself, that the trustees had a great deal of money invested in the Cone Mills that was available through the estate. I said: "If you would give us $10,000 a year and change the wording to include not only maintenance but improvements, I think we could accept this."

Sam Weems: And they said, "Would you mind excusing us, Mr. Weems, for a while?" And I went outside and read a couple of magazines while they were debating this; and they finally called me back in and said, “We will accept it.”

Sam Weems: So, we have been getting $10,000 a year from the Cone trustees ever since we accepted the property.

Sam Weems: Now, as an upshot of this, after we finished this, Ben Cone said to me down in Greensboro one day, he said: “Sam, you know Mr. Julian Price was killed in an automobile accident going back from Blowing Rock to Greensboro, and as you know he was President of the Jefferson Standard Insurance Company; and as you know, they were in the process of developing a large tract of land right next to the Cone estate which consists of about 4,000 acres. And it is a beautiful piece of property. Would you be interested in that?”

Sam Weems: And I said, "Well, I would certainly be interested in talking to somebody about it." So, he picked up the phone and called Julian Price's son, and he said, "Ralph, I have got a friend of mine over here from the National Park Service, Sam Weems, and I would like to bring him over and talk to you a little bit."

Sam Weems: He said, "All right, bring him over." So, we went over, and as an upshot of that meeting, the Prices gave us that 4,000 acres if we would call it the Julian Price Memorial Park, which we did.

Sam Weems: So as an upshot of that, we have over 7,000 acres of land right in the Blowing Rock section, extremely valuable land that would have been

terrific real estate for some development. And here we have got it in the Park Service.

Sam Weems: So that is the story of those two bulges.

Herbert Evison: You know, Sam, except where you were dealing with people like the Cone family or the Price heirs, in your chore as Project Manager of this double-barreled – that is, two-State – recreation demonstration area project, you had to deal over the years with a very interesting lot of people, and a lot of them, I know, in order to round up these land purchases. I would like to get on the record here a little bit of how you proceeded, from the time you first looked at a piece of land – well, even including the first time you looked at a piece of land – between that time and the time the deed finally passed to the United States.

Herbert Evison: Here you were, up in a mountain country which was still backward and had been for two hundred years, with mountaineers. And I am awfully anxious to get just as vivid a picture as I can on here of what that chore really involved.

Sam Weems: Well, I can reminisce a little on it. I can tell you few incidents that happened. But you are exactly right: this country was wild.

Sam Weems: For example, in Floyd County where U. S. 221 goes through, there wasn't one foot of pavement, even on U.S. 221, when I started in there. There wasn't a foot of pavement in the whole County of Watauga, as a matter of fact. U.S. 221 from Roanoke County line to Hillsville was all dirt, gravel, and the bridge over Reed Island Creek on 221 was a wooden covered bridge that I have traveled through many a time. And I was very amused one time I came to the bridge and here was a big truckload of automobile tires, and it had been loaded so high he couldn't get through the bridge. And he was standing there, cussing, and rolling tires through that bridge. It was really a sight.

Sam Weems: So, you see how very far back in time that goes.

Sam Weems: Some of the interesting things that did happen there when I was buying the land: I had borrowed a pick-up truck, which was about the only kind of vehicle you could get in those mountain roads in those days. I had borrowed this from the Redevelopment people, and of course it was a program that came under the Department of Agriculture, and it had a "D.A." initial on the license plate – Department of Agriculture.

Sam Weems: Well, I kept going around in that truck, trying to get some information about certain tracts of land I was interested in and trying to buy for the recreation areas; and I couldn't get anybody to tell me anything. They

would clam up. And this went on for quite a while, and finally I said to Carl Weeks, who was an attorney in Floyd County there. I said,

Sam Weems: "Carl, there seems to be something wrong here. I can't get these people to give me any information about the land or the boundaries or a thing in the world. What's the matter?"

Sam Weems: He sort of laughed and he said, "Well, I started to tell you this before, but until you get that “D.A.” tag off your truck, you are not going to get anywhere. These people here think that stands for "District Attorney."

Sam Weems: So, I said, "Well, I'll be darned." So sure enough, I changed vehicles and I began to get some information. But these people are very leery of the Feds, you know, particularly. Mountain people, most of them, are moonshining, which they consider all right and legal and their right to do.

Sam Weems: So, I had quite a few experiences. I will never forget the one I had in Bluff Park with – I won’t call his name, but he had a little shack up on Cold Creek, way back there, and he lived up there by himself. I needed the land. It was in the heart of the Park, and I needed the land, so I went up, as usual exchanged the time of day, petted his dog, and a few other things, and then just got acquainted. Then I would let him think a while, and go back a couple of weeks later.

Sam Weems: So finally, I got him to show me over the land, and we were going through some woods and he started to skirt the woods, and I said:

Sam Weems: “Let's go through the woods. I would like to get an idea of the timber." And he says,

Sam Weems: "Why, there hain't no use goin' in there. I can tell you how much timber is in there." And I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, maybe you can, and I wouldn't doubt your word one bit, you understand, but I have got to make an appraisal of the timber and I have got to see it myself before I can make an appraisal on it."

Sam Weems: “Well,” he says, “I am telling you, I can tell you what's in there, and there ain't no use goin' in there.”

Sam Weems: And I says, “Oh, come on,” and we went through the woods and we came up on a great big apple brandy still. And I stopped and looked at it, and he looked at me, and I looked at him and I said:

Sam Weems: "Fielding, someone has sneaked a still in here on your land."

Sam Weems: He says, "Well, it sure looks like they have."

Sam Weems: And I says, "I haven't seen one of these apple brandy stills for a long time. Let's see: you put the sour mash in here, and it goes in here and out through here and down into the boiler here, and then the whiskey comes out here,"

Sam Weems: "Oh, no," he says. "That 'ain't the way it works. Here's the way it works," and he went through all the details of how it operated. And then he turned around and said,

Sam Weems: "At least that's what they tell me."

Sam Weems: So anyhow we went on about the appraisal and a couple of weeks later I came back and I stopped at the little country store right nearby. Ellis Blavens was running the store and he was the J.P and the storekeeper and the mailman and everything else around there, and he said,

Sam Weems: "Where are you going today?" And I said, "I am going up to see Fielding." And he said, "Well, if I was you I wouldn't go up there," and I said, "Why?" And he said,

Sam Weems: "Well, they raided his still last week, and he kind of thinks maybe since you was just up there you might have had something to do with telling the sheriff where it was." And I said,

Sam Weems: "Good gracious alive! I wouldn't do a thing like that. I have been around this mountain country longer than that. I had better go up there and straighten it out."

Sam Weems: He says, "No. He is pretty mad I wouldn't go up there if I was you."

Sam Weems: And I said, "I have got to go." So, I want on up there, and the door was shut and it was a little bit chilly and there smoke coming out of the chimney. And I started to cross the clearing in front of Fieldings' old shack, and I got a little nervous and my back began to itch and I says, "My gosh! He is liable to shoot me out of a crack in the cabin." And I hollered at him, but I didn't hear anything, and I went on. I went on up and rapped on the porch and finally Fielding opened the door a little crack and said,

Sam Weems: "What do you want?"

Sam Weems: And I said, "I want to talk to you. And he said:

Sam Weems: "I ain't got nothin' to talk to you about." And I said,

Sam Weems: "You come out on the porch. I have got something I want to talk to you about." So, I finally got him out on the porch and I explained to him that I did not give the still away, and I said:

Sam Weems: “Do you think I would be back here if I had given your still away? Do you think I would be sitting here talking to you?”

Sam Weems: "Well, I reckon you wouldn't."

Sam Weems: So, anyhow, it took me all the rest of the afternoon to straighten it out. So, when I got ready to leave, it was just about dark. And Fielding said:

Sam Weems: “Hold up. I will walk down the way with you a-piece."

Sam Weems: And I said, "Oh, Lord, you’re going to take me down here in the rhododendrons and out my throat." So, I said, "All right." So, we went down the road and across a little old creek, and he said,

Sam Weems: "Hold up a minute," and he stepped off the path and rattled around in some leaves and brought out a jug of the prettiest apple brandy you ever saw. He said.

Sam Weems: "Did you ever take a drag?"

Sam Weems: And I said, "Well, I never do while I am working, but I guess I have just about quit work." So, we sat there and drank out of that jog, with no chaser or anything, until I couldn't put one foot in front of the other. And I am telling you, I went on down to where I had parked my car, and by that time it had gotten dark, and I slipped and fell in the creek and tore my britches, and by the time I got into Sparta, where I was living at that time, I was the wettest, dirtiest, drunkest mess you ever saw in your life.

Sam Weems: But I ended up getting Fielding's land. This is some of the experiences I had.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, that is an account of one purchase, but generally speaking, what sort of approach did you use with these mountain people that convinced them, for one thing, that the price you were willing to pay was a fair price? That must have taken some little argument once in a while, didn't it?

Sam Weems: Well, it sure did, and I will tell you: I look back on it and out of the five big recreation areas we bought I dealt with hundreds of owners, and I didn't have to condemn one piece of property. They were all purchased by negotiation. And when I look back on it now, I wonder how in the world we ever got it done.

Sam Weems: But one thing was in our favor: it was the depression and people were hard up and they needed money, and roads were bad, their kids couldn't get to school; and they saw this as an opportunity to improve their way of life by getting a little bit of money to move out onto better roads and closer to

better schools. And I think this is the main factor that helped me in my negotiations. But some of them—

Sam Weems: You take Caroline Brinegar: You remember the Brinegar cabin? Down there?

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Sam Weems: Well, Caroline Brinegar was living there in that cabin up on top of the mountain all by herself, and she was old and ill. Brinegar had died some years before, and she didn't want to leave, and we didn't have the heart to – but she was right in the way of not only the Parkway, but she was also on land that we needed as part of Bluff Park.

Sam Weems: So, I sat in front of Mrs. Brinegar's fire and talked to her for hours about how she ought to get down closer to the roads; that she was isolated up there. And she kept telling me this is the way she wanted it.

Sam Weems: So, I finally said, "Mrs. Brinegar, I'll tell you what: why don't you just go ahead and let me give you the money and you can enjoy it, and stay home just like you have been doing. But I am going to tell you: We are going to have to build a road up here about 100 yards from your front door. And if you don't mind that you just stay here and live the rest of your life just the way you are."

Sam Weems: Well, she had to talk to her children about it, and the children finally agreed with us that maybe this was the thing for her to do, and she could take the money and use it to good advantage the rest of her life, and leave the little bit she had. So she did.

Sam Weems: Well, the minute the bulldozers showed up and started rooting the land around in front of her door she left and went down and moved in with some of her kinfolks.

Sam Weems: But these kind of things happened along the way.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, there must have been others. I think you said there were others to whom you allowed a life occupancy.

Sam Weems: Yes, very few. And some of them stayed on until they died, and some of them like Mrs. Caroline Brinegar – it just got a little too close and too noisy and too many people, and they just voluntarily gave up their lifetime reservations.

Herbert Evison: I just wonder if there are any other specific examples of that that might be of interest.

Sam Weems: Well, I don't know of any right off, except there was one down in Carolina, an old gray-whiskered fellow we used to call Santa Claus – I have

forgotten his name now but he stayed on in his house until he died, right next to the Parkway. But there weren't too many of those. Most of them were willing to take their money and go out and settle somewhere else.

Herbert Evison: Now, were you the only person in land buying for these bulges?

Sam Weems: That is right, because I was the only one authorized to do so. This was an unusual thing; they sent me – We did our own abstracting and title searches. I don't know whether you ever knew this or not, but I had a legal staff that was sent down. When I was in North Wilkesboro I had a lawyer by the name of Seileg that was in charge, and he had three or four abstract attorneys.

Herbert Evison: How would you spell that name?

Sam Weems: S-e-i-l-e-g, I think. But he had his staff of about four or five lawyers that worked for me; they were assigned to me as Project Manager, to investigate – I have got a picture somewhere of me delivering the check to the first man that we bought land from in Rocky Knob. And then later on I got involved in developing these areas, and they sent another appraiser down and he did the appraising, but I still did the negotiations for the purchase of lands.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you talk about, as Project Manager, becoming involved in the development of these areas. I think it would be nice to get on the record a little something of what you went through in connection with that development: how it was done, for one thing, and who planned it principally.

Sam Weems: Well, Stan Abbott and Ed Abbuehl were the planners. Until about '38 or '39, you know, we worked directly out of Washington, and we weren't regionalized until about that time.

Sam Weems: We had our own planning – at one time I had seventeen landscape architects on the staff, because we had a lot of work going on, and there was a landscape architect assigned to every contract – every large contract. And it was during those stages – now of course these architects worked for Stan Abbott and Ed Abbuehl. My job was the development of recreation areas with plans that came out of Stan's and Ed's planning department.

Sam Weems: So, we had at one time five CCC camps; we had during the war four Conscientious Objectors camps; and prior to that we had WPA programs, and we used all of those. We used CCC labor and materials; we used WPA labor; we used labor and materials of the Conscientious Objectors camps; and that, plus after these camps were disposed of we developed it under contract and sometimes with force account labor. But these are the ways they were developed; they started out with WPA and CCC camps, and

from there to Conscientious Objectors, and from there to contract or force account development.

Herbert Evison: Now, I was down in the Smokies right after the war, when there was still a Conscientious Objectors camp in operation, and things didn't always go smoothly in relationship between the park and the Conscientious Objectors group there. What was your experience on the Parkway on that?

Sam Weems: Oh, we had two camps that we had trouble with. We had one down in Carolina that had a lot of Jehovah's Witnesses in it. There were about 15 different types of religion represented in this particular camp. The Jehovah's Witnesses through their local affiliation with the Jehovah Witness people had gotten these sound trucks, and they would bring them into camp and put these records on on the witnessing of Jehovah, and play them all night. And consequently, the boys wouldn't get any sleep, and consequently we wouldn't get any work out of them the next day. And that was one of the problems that we had.

Sam Weems: Another was – the church people, you know, managed the camps. Well, they hadn't had very much experience in this kind of thing. For example, if they would want some wood cutting detail, during the meal they would rap on the table and ask for volunteers to go out and cut wood. Well, if nobody volunteered, they wouldn't get any wood cut. And then they would go into meditation, and they would meditate and then they would ask for volunteers for all kinds of things: kitchen duty, wood cutting details; and naturally the jobs that weren't the really better jobs wouldn't get many volunteers after meditation.

Sam Weems: Now, our best work came out of the Mennonite Camps. The Mennonites – we had no trouble with them. They were good, hard conscientious workers, and we had some wonderful work out of them with no difficulties.

Sam Weems: I want to tell you about this one in Bedford. One day the camp adviser called me and he said,

Sam Weems: "I can't get the boys to go to work."

Sam Weems: I said, "What's the matter?" And he said,

Sam Weems: “Well, you know we have been clearing up the Peaks of Otter recreation area and have been taking the dead chestnut out. And the boys have found out that this chestnut is being used for tannic acid, and tannic acid is being used to tan leather, that this is being used to make pistol holsters and belts for carrying bullets. And they think that this is making a contribution to the war; and this is a Conscientious Objector Camp, and they refused to go to work.”

Sam Weems: So, I went over and had a talk with them, and I couldn't get anywhere. So, I called General Hershey's office in Washington and I told him what the situation was, and he said,

Sam Weems: "Well, I'll send somebody down." (I didn't talk to him directly; I talked to somebody in his office.) And they went down, and we went to the camp and gathered the boys up again in the lecture hall, and the representative from General Hershey's office says:

Sam Weems: "Boys, I want to tell you: If even one of you doesn't report for duty in the morning at 8 o'clock, you are all going to be reclassified as 1-A. That is all I have to say." And he left for Washington, or he stayed around until the next day, to see that every one of them was back at work. So those were some of the experiences we had with those.

Herbert Evison: Now, Sam, there are just so many interesting phases of the Blue Ridge Parkway story it is hard to know where to start asking you questions. But next week I expect to tape – and tape at some length – a guy by the name of Bill Hooper, down in Roanoke. He has been concerned for about thirty years, if I remember rightly, with one of the very special phases of the Blue Ridge Parkway operation. I would like to get something on here from you of the principle and the practice of letting some of the land on the Blue Ridge Parkway – some of the Blue Ridge Parkway land, more properly – be used for pasturage and for the raising of crops. I hope you have some observations to offer about that.

Sam Weems: I sure do. As a matter of fact, I started that program. And we started out by leasing this land back at $1 per acre flat fee; didn't make any difference what it was, it was $1 an acre; the classification of the land had nothing to do with it.

Sam Weems: We found soon that we needed an agronomist to prescribe for these lands, because some of them were becoming eroded, some of them were over-grazed, and some of the crops weren't being rotated properly. So, we decided the thing to do was to put an agronomist on our payroll to police these leases. The purpose of these leases, of course, was to try to maintain the roadside picture through rural country to show how mountain farming was done. A fringe benefit of this was keeping some of these vistas open for view. But we soon found that we needed some expertise in the area of land management, so we established a position of agronomist, and we started looking around for somebody for it, and Bill Hooper was recommended.

Sam Weems: Kenneth McCarter and I went down to interview Bill, and he was sitting in a little office up in the Court House in Sparta, N.C., working for the Soil Conservation Service. And we want up and had a conference with him and

a long discussion, and offered him this job on a transfer. He told us he would like to think about it; he felt some obligation to the Soil Conservation Service. Later on, he accepted it. I don't remember what year this was, but it was – it was before I became Superintendent, and I think it was probably about 1939 or maybe 1940, but it was back about that time.

Sam Weems: Well, when Hooper came in, he started writing prescriptions for these permits. In other words, he would give a farmer a five-year rotation, – two years of grass and three years of crops, and then they would vary the crops.

Sam Weems: For instance, buckwheat is a real top soil destroyer, if it is not followed by a stabilizing crop like grass. If you lease a buckwheat field bare and you get a winter storm or a rain storm, it will blow the top soil right off, because buckwheat is a kind of plant that will aerate the soil to the point where it is very loose.

Sam Weems: Now, in grazing we knew there shouldn't be more than so many head per acre, depending on the type of grass they were grazing.

Sam Weems: Well, none of us were agronomists, so Hooper would determine how many cattle could graze certain types of pasture, and also determine how much and when certain fertilizers and lime should be applied to these acreages and these conditions; and it went into the permits.

Sam Weems: Now, we have right at this time – or did have – when I left the Park Service – approximately – 400 agricultural leases scattered over the – nearly the whole 469 miles of the Parkway.

Sam Weems: So, you see this is quite a job. Now, the rangers sometimes help to see that these conditions are carried out, but Bill Hooper is the man who writes them. He has been a very valuable employee to the National Park Service, and was one man who knows how to get along with the neighbors and who does an excellent job.

Herbert Evison: I think you have had some rather unusual permittees at times on the Parkway. I remember reading a year or so ago of the death of a Judge from down in North Wilkesboro, and I recognized that name as the name of a man whom I had met up there at one time when I was out with you or Bill, who had a permit for the pasturing of cattle on part of Daughton Park.

Sam Weems: Well, that is right. Judge Johnson J. Hayes. He was a Federal judge down at Wilkesboro, and he was an unusual man, and he was very much interested in cattle. He was very interested in the Parkway and in the Park Service. Judge Hayes rented a tract of land we had bought from Congressman Doughton's brother, Frank Daughton, a tract of about 275

acres, and he kept white-faced cattle mostly. Judge Hayes specialized on white-faced Herefords.

Sam Weems: We felt the Doughton Park Lodge owned part of the lands that we had previously leased to Judge Hayes, so we fenced off an area there for the Lodge grounds. Well, one morning I was talking to one of the lodge guests, and he said,

Sam Weems: "You have anything to do with this Parkway" And I said:

Sam Weems: "Yes, I am the Superintendent." And he said:

Sam Weems: "Well, I have got a complaint to make." And I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, what is it?" And be said:

Sam Weems: "Those damned cattle kept me awake all night."

Sam Weems: "Yes," I said, "I heard them once or twice. What happened was one of the calves got on the other side of the fence and mama was bawling for it."

Sam Weems: He said, "Well, I'll tell you right now I am going to write to my congressman – taking my money for the lodge and then keeping cattle, to keep you awake all night!"

Sam Weems: I said, "Well, I will tell you what: I'll talk to Judge Hayes about this and maybe we can get these cows with calves put in some other pasture."

Sam Weems: He said, "Who did you say?"

Sam Weems: I said, "Judge Hayes."

Sam Weems: He said, "Well, for Lord's sake don't tell him I complained about it. I have got a case coming up in his court tomorrow."

Herbert Evison: Didn't some of the cases that arose from fences on the Parkway go before Judge Hayes?

Sam Weems: Oh, yes, we had cases before him. You see, he was a Federal Judge; and although we had Commissioners, sometimes if a person – an offender – did not choose to be heard or tried by the Commissioner, then his case was carried on in the Federal court and then in that case it would be tried by Judge Hayes. So, we did; we had quite a few cases.

Herbert Evison: Well, I would judge you found him a sympathetic judge when it came to dealing with offenders who had violated the laws or the regulations of the Parkway.

Sam Weems: Well, it's true, but Judge Hayes was a fair person. He was a fair judge. Sometimes he didn't always rule in our favor, if he felt we by any chance

were persecuting somebody, why, he wouldn't go along with it a bit. He was a fair judge; he was fair to us, and he was fair to the general people.

Herbert Evison: Well, I didn't mean to imply by my question that he would treat them unfairly in favor of the Parkway. But you know in many places – of course I think it is more the case of County Judges, people like that, that are more likely to favor the local person against the Federal government.

Sam Weems: Well, that is true. But what helped us was that Judge Hayes was so familiar with the Parkway and so familiar with what we were trying to do that he was in a better position to judge these cases than most of the other judges, who really didn't have the same concept of the Parkway that Judge Hayes had.

Herbert Evison: Now, I was interested in your statement that some of the land on which he pastured his cattle had been purchased from Congressman Doughton's brother. Didn't Congressman Doughton's brother, after he sold that land, for a while have a grazing permit on it himself?

Sam Weems: Yes, he did; and finally he got so he couldn't handle it himself, and that is when he gave it up. And that is when we gave it to Judge Hayes.

Sam Weems: But we had a policy in the early days of any land that we bought from a family or a grazer, we would give him the first chance to lease it back. That was a policy that we had.

Sam Weems: Now, another thing that I would like to clear up: Congressman Robert L. Doughton was a real good friend of mine, and I won't want to say anything about him. And I am sure that it was because of his age that this particular thing occurred.

Sam Weems: Congressman Doughton got the idea that he had given us land for the Doughton Park, but he hadn't, because I bought it from him myself, and I bought about this 275 acres from Frank; but I bought about 50 acres from Congressman Doughton himself, that adjoined this land, and it was purchases from him and it was not donated by him.

Herbert Evison: But he did harbor the idea that he had been real generous?"

Sam Weems: That is right.

Herbert Evison: Well, now: There is an element of this business of leasing back land to the former owners that I am sure was important from a public relations standpoint, and I would like for you to develop a little the situation that came when – not in – connection with the lands that you had bought in some big block, but along the Parkway where the Parkway sawed right through a man's land; and I know in some cases it left him with not enough land to make a living on, and left him perhaps, let us say, unhappy.

Sam Weems: Yes. But of course, you see the Parkway right of way was purchased by the States and donated to the National Park Service. So, these settlements outside of the recreation areas, the rights of way themselves were the matter of State negotiation with the property owners, and it is true they did go through the heart of some of these farms. And this is another reason why we gave the land owner first choice at leasing his own land back, pointing out to him that "now you are not having to pay taxes on this land, and it is only costing $1 an acre a year to lease it back from us," – which was a good public relations move on our part, and it did, help us make some friends who could have been antagonists to the Park Service.

Herbert Evison: Sam, we are getting about to the end of our first hour of taping, which is one side of one of these spools. And since I don't want the thing to run out in the middle of a sentence, I am going to run it off and turn it over.

Herbert Evison: Sam, in the course of our previous taping, you mentioned that somewhere along the line you ceased to be Project Manager of these bulges and became Assistant Superintendent of the Parkway under Stan Abbott. Your previous mention of him was as Resident Landscape Architect, but somewhere along the line I believe he actually became Superintendent of the Parkway, and you became Assistant Superintendent under him.

Sam Weems: I became Assistant Superintendent in July '38, but Stan Abbott retained his title as Landscape Architect and was Acting Superintendent. So, I was actually the first appointed Superintendent.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, going from Project Manager to Assistant Superintendent – what did that involve in change of duties for you?

Sam Weems: I took over the responsibility of the protection force and of the ranger organization, and also the administration of the work camps – CCC and Conscientious Objector camps, and also the accounting, procurement, and things of that sort, which left Stan free to tend to the higher administrative problems and the planning problems.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, was a successor appointed to you as Project Manager of these areas?

Sam Weems: Well, what we actually did after that – about that time the Redevelopment money and ERA money and all of that was about running out, in the late 30's, so what we did was we just took over the continuation of the development of these under me – as Assistant Superintendent – instead of as Project Manager.

Herbert Evison: Now, one of the things you mentioned was the starting of a protective force, a ranger force, and I know there are some very interesting elements

of that story, particularly in connection with what I think was a first force which was a warden's force, isn't that right?

Sam Weems: That is right. And the first Warden we had – I can't remember his name, but he was from Sparta, a local man, a boy, and he was our first ranger, but he was a warden rather than a ranger. And then we developed a warden classification, for the simple reason that our local people simply could not meet the requirements for a ranger, due to lack of education and also of training. So, this is why we developed this warden system. But it proved, in those formulative days, a very valuable part of our organization.

Herbert Evison: I would like you to develop that: Just in what ways it was valuable.

Sam Weems: Well, all right. The local boys we put on as wardens were respected in their communities and by their citizenry. And they knew the country; they knew the people, our neighbors, and they were very helpful in later years in breaking in our new more educated but inexperienced rangers. And some of those wardens are still there. Some of them were reclassified as ranger jobs later on, through the fact that they had built up enough experience as wardens to qualify them for ranger positions. We have got Superintendents now in the Southeast Region that were at one time wardens on the Parkway.

Herbert Evison: No! I didn't realize that. Do you know who they are? Can you name any of them?

Sam Weems: Yes. Al Richter, who is Superintendent at Shiloh was one of our wardens.

Herbert Evison: Of course, I didn't know any of them had gotten to be superintendents. I interviewed a district ranger down at Cape Hatteras several months ago, Clay Caudil, who had started as a warden after the war, one of the relatively few who had been willing to leave the Parkway for an assignment outside.

Sam Weems: That is right. Clay and Al Richter were both there, but they left pretty hard; they didn't want to go, particularly Clay. He finally – as a matter of fact, I talked him into going, because I felt I had done as much on the Parkway for him as I could, and he ought to broaden out.

Herbert Evison: Well, don't you have some more to offer in connection with the uses that you made of them, particularly in those personal relationships with the Parkway neighbors?

Sam Weems: Well, as I say, I think that was their greatest value – was maintaining our personal relationships with the mountain people and the rural people that lived along the Parkway. They were part of the community and they

understood them, and they could explain things to them that it was hard for us so-called city slickers to explain.

Herbert Evison: They were more willing to listen to them?

Sam Weems: That is right. They could tune in better. This is one of the values and the other big value, as I mentioned, is helping to train and break in some of our new buck rangers who had the educational background but who did not have the practical experience. They were very valuable in that respect.

Herbert Evison: Here is a phase of this rangering business that I would like to get some comment on from you, too.

Herbert Evison: I think you know that from time to time people who have started in the Service some place in the West have been transferred to ranger jobs on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I am sure in the case of some of them it was a period of some sort of servitude until they could get back to the West again. But I wonder if you would have any observations to make on these people with western backgrounds, and their attitudes on the job when they came on the Parkway, and especially the value of this experience to these people.

Sam Weems: As you know, our eastern parks developed much later than the western parks, but I think the western boys who were born and brought up and trained in the western areas had a sort of dim view of what our eastern parks were like, and in their opinion they just didn't stack up with the western parks. And I know the general statement is true; they came over here thinking: "Well, we have got our lands, we can show these eastern fellows how to run a park." But there was many a one that landed on the Parkway that got a real shaking up when he found out what the requirements and the duties and responsibilities on the Parkway were.

Sam Weems: This is particularly true because the Parkway being nearly 500 miles long, we had to break it up inro managerial districts, and when we did we put these boys out and gave them a set amount of responsibility outlined, and told them to go to it; they were on their own; if they got in trouble they would catch hell, and if they did a good job they would get a pat on the back. And they were pretty much on their own, which was a new experience to them, because the western parks, so they told us, were pretty regimented as far as where they could go.

Sam Weems: They couldn't do much on their own; they had to go to headquarters for authority. And we were putting them out and telling them to sink or swim. And in this way they learned a lot of independence and they learned how to think on their own and to act on their own and accept responsibility we had given them and this, to my mind – is why to many of the boys have come off the Parkway and done so well in careers in the National Park

Service. I attended a meeting of the Southeast Region last fall in Richmond, and I sat there and counted 17 superintendents that came off the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Herbert Evison: Is that true! I have heard boasts made that as far as rangering is concerned there is no better training school anywhere in the Park Service than the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Sam Weems: Well, I think that is true and I think if you ask most of the rangers who have been on the Parkway they will tell you the same thing.

Herbert Evison: Now, here is one peculiarity of the rangers' job – and I suppose even more so, district rangers – contrasting with the western national park guy whose – the boundary of whose area was usually continuous with a national forest with just continuous wilderness out beyond the park boundary, whereas on the Parkway they had to live on pretty intimate and pretty good terms, if they wanted to get along, with a lot of neighbors. And it always seemed to me they had to absorb an awful lot of information, particularly as to – if a guy did something there it was all right, but if he did something in here it wasn't, because it was on the Parkway. He had to know the dividing line between the private property and the Parkway property in most cases, and they were not simple boundary lines to learn, either, I would suppose.

Sam Weems: No. This was one of our big chores. When you stop to think about it, there is more than 1,000 miles of boundary that they had to look after and protect.

Herbert Evison: Far more than Yellowstone National Park has.

Sam Weems: Oh, yes. And all of this boundary had to be walked, marked, and protected; and that gave us a lot of neighbors.

Sam Weems: When you stop to think about it, we had two States to deal with, we had 26 Counties, we had 4 National Forests – all of these things complicated the job of protecting and administering and managing an elongated park like the Parkway. And this was a great challenge to our rangers to maintain relationship with all these neighbors and to protect the boundaries of all of these different parts of the privately-owned land, and publicly-owned land, for that matter.

Sam Weems: One of our big problems was also that we went through the Asheville Watershed for 15 miles. Well, there is a State law that you cannot stop in a watershed. Well, we don't have any law like that on our books, so we had to deputize our rangers in that district so they could enforce no-stopping and other laws that protect watersheds. That was another one of our complications.

Sam Weems: I would like to say, too, about this ranger organization that grew up from the warden system.

Sam Weems: Our first Chief Ranger was Mac Dale, who later became superintendent of the C&O Canal. Mac did a wonderful job, and he was particularly good at public relations. I have seen Mac out of his own pocket buy a baseball mitt and glove and a ball and give it to the school kids, neighbors, by. And in those districts where Mac was familiar to these kids, we got less damage to our signs and park property than anywhere else, because he made friends with the kids, and used to go to these schools and talk to them about the flowers and the trees and the parks.

Sam Weems: So, another thing on this neighborhood business. In order to communicate with our neighbors, we got out a little monthly bulletin. Do you remember that?

Herbert Evison: Yes, you bet – the Blue Ridge Parkway News.

Sam Weems: That is right. And our rangers distributed that. We put little metal boxes up all along the way and put these Parkway News in these boxes for the neighbors to get. And we tried not to talk down to them, but to put things in the language that was familiar to them, what they could well understand because this was foreign to them – they had never seen anything like a parkway. They couldn't understand a road that they thought at first was built only for the rich folks, and here was a piece of paved road through the mountains, and a lot of them had never seen paved roads before. And they couldn't understand why they couldn't take their cattle and their milk and their produce out on the road, particularly in the spring when the roads were thawing and they were four feet deep in mud, and here was this beautiful parkway with a paved road, and they couldn't understand why they couldn't haul on it. So, you see we had quite a challenge to do an educational job with our neighbors.

Herbert Evison: Yes, a tremendous one.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, during the 30's the work on the Parkway was an opportunity for employment by quite a number of those mountain people, – not your CCC so much, probably, but your WPA and ERA, which I am not able to distinguish very well, between those two. But anyway, they were relief programs.

Herbert Evison: Once the Parkway was pretty well as establishment and being used, the employment as far as local people was concerned changed, but there still must have been and must still be a considerable contribution by the Parkway to employment along its route. Can you develop that some?

Sam Weems: Yes, very definitely. Let me go back somewhat to the meeting that Mr. Roosevelt had with Harry Hopkins and Fechner of the CCC and Harry Byrd, who at that time was Governor of Virginia, and several other prominent U. S.—

Herbert Evison: And who was not the originator of the Parkway idea, – Senator Byrd.

Sam Weems: Well, that is a moot question. Some people give him credit for it, and some people don't. But nevertheless, he was at this meeting on Shenandoah, and I think they were celebrating the first CCC camp at that time. And this was when the subject came up, as to why not develop a parkway along the backbone of the mountains between Shenandoah and the Great Smoky Mountains. And I think that records will show that Mr. Roosevelt said: "Well, why not take it on up to the Green Mountains in New England?"

Sam Weems: But, nevertheless, General Anderson, who later became Highway Commissioner for Virginia – maybe he was at that time – was assigned the job of coming up with a proposal. And General Anderson told me later about this, and he said:

Sam Weems: "I had to do this in a big hurry, and I got together the best maps I could get, and the best thing I could come up with was a 350-mile parkway between Shenandoah and the Smokies, to cost fifteen million dollars." What it turned out to be was a 469-mile parkway, and we have spent up to now a hundred million on it.

Herbert Evison: I didn't know before of General Anderson's part in formulating that plan. I do remember that, in the early days, there was a good deal of trouble over the comparative narrowness of the strip of land Virginia acquired in fee simple—

Sam Weems: That came later. I'll tell you about that.

Herbert Evison: —and the contrast between the situation in Virginia and the very generous arrangement made in North Carolina, for an average of 125 acres to the mile. I would be glad if you would discuss that situation.

Sam Weems: I want to go back to that, but let me pursue this first about employment that you asked about.

Sam Weems: When we first laid out the Parkway, you couldn't find one house in a hundred that was painted, along the route. Now you can't find one in a hundred that is not painted. You could very well see the results of the employment. First, by the surveyors who hired some of these men for bush cutters, running lines, dragging chains. Next came the contractor, who employed them for work and for watchmen along the way. And next came the Park Service, who employed them for maintenance work.

Sam Weems: And over the years, from the very time we started the survey, this has afforded employment to mountain people who never had it before.

Sam Weems: And of course this goes back to that meeting with Mr. Roosevelt in Shenandoah. And this was the idea of projecting this thing in the first place. They had discussed the fact that people in the urban areas had been given WPA projects and ERA projects, but nothing had been done for the rural people; and here was an opportunity to connect these great eastern parks, Shenandoah and the Great Smokies, with a mountain-top scenic highway that would afford employment to the rural people who had been neglected.

Sam Weems: Now, as I pointed out, this had been a boon to them, because this came along right after the chestnut was killed, in the mid-twenties. The mountain people used to gather chestnuts for a cash crop. They used to turn their hogs loose in the mountains to eat chestnuts and grow fat, then they would market them. When the chestnuts were killed through the mountains, about there in the mid-twenties, they only had sawmill employment to keep them going. Well, when the depression hit, there was no market, hardly, for the lumber, then all the sawmills were practically shut down, so the mountain people, or the rural people, were desperately in need of employment.

Sam Weems: But it certainly paid off, because the whole economy of the country changed after we got the Parkway going and these people got employment. They spruced up their houses, they started mowing their grass; they saw what we were doing on the Parkway, and they took pride in trying to keep their places somewhat along the lines of good maintenance that we had been doing.

Herbert Evison: Two things that I am pretty sure you were almost entirely responsible for on the Parkway, that also affected the prosperity of the mountain people, and made very interesting and attractive things for the tourists, were:

Herbert Evison: First, the establishment set up on the Cone estate in the Cone mansion for showing the mountain handicrafts – the Southern Handicrafts; and, second, the Northwest Trading Post. Now, I don't know – but I would like to get something on here of the story of those two institutions.

Sam Weems: Yes. Well, I was responsible for those two, that is true. Let's take the one at Cone Park. This started out after we acquired the Cone estate. Here was this 22-room manor house that was in beautiful condition, and what to do with it? Tom Allen was Regional Director at that time, so I had a conversation with Tom about it, and he said:

Sam Weems: "I figure you ought to move your headquarters down there," and I said, "Wait just a cotton-pickin' minute. Do you know – just hold on a minute," and I dug out some photographs showing about l2 feet of snow down in that country in the wintertime – no way of transportation in or out except by highway – 30 miles from the airport. I finally thought I had convinced him that this was no place for Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters, but I think Tom held out a long time.

Sam Weems: So, I said, "I have got to find something for this house, before I get moved into it." So, I went over to Pineola to see Miss Lucy Morgan, who is the founder of Pineola, really, and I said:

Sam Weems: "Miss Lucy, I want you to come over to Blowing Rook and look at a proposition I have got to make to you," and I got her there and took her over the Cone property and I said:

Sam Weems: "I want you to move part of your handicraft training and shop over into this building," and she said:

Sam Weems: "I have got more to do now than I can take care of, " and I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, look what a great thing this would be: all these people coming down the Parkway would get to know about Pineola," and she said:

Sam Weems: "Well, anybody that's worth anything already knows about Pineola." So, she gave me a hard time, and I didn't get anywhere with her. So, I went to the Southern Highlands Handicrafts Guild, of which she was a member and on their board, so I invited the board over there to Cone Park and I fixed up a picnic lunch for them on the terrace and I made a proposition to the boards and one of the board members said:

Sam Weems: "Well, do you suppose we could gross as much as $500 a month?" And I said, "I will underwrite it right – now on my own." I don't know what their last gross was, but it was a very good figure. It is their second best shop now. But anyway, they had another board meeting and decided to take me up. So, I entered into a concession contract with them – a concession permit, I believe, to start with, which I could do; a concession contract had to go to Washington, but I could negotiate a concession permit. So that is how we got started at Cone Park with the Southern Highland Handicrafts Guild.

Sam Weems: Now, another concession that I did was at the Brinegar cabin. People had pried the boards off the place trying to get inside to see what it looked like, etc., and so on. Would you like to know about that one too?

Herbert Evison: Yes, you bet.

Sam Weems: Well, I got tired of people tearing the cabin up, trying to see inside. I thought, well, the best thing to do is to see if we can't make this a living example. But we can't afford it, because I can't hire somebody to stand here at the door and show people through the cabin. So, I got the idea that this might be a good thing for the Chatham Blanket people who have a mill, a Chatham Blanket Mill, right down below the mountains there. So, I went to see the Chatham boys.

Sam Weems: At first, they said no, "we don't want to get involved in anything like that." And I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, you know this is exactly the way Chatham Blanket got started – in a little mountain mill where people would bring their sheep to this mill and they would use the same power for grinding corn that they did for separating the wool. This is where Chatham Blanket got started." And they said, "Well, that's right." and I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, here is an excellent opportunity for you to tell the story of the Chatham Mill through demonstrations of this old 150-year-old loom that you have got right here on display. And you could put your women in costume who can tell the whole story of cabin life and weaving right here." So, they said:

Sam Weems: "By golly, maybe you have got something there." So, they took it, and until very recently they operated this through their mill operations.

Herbert Evison: You say, "until recently." Don't they now?

Sam Weems: No. They gave it up I understand last year, from Superintendent Liles, but they have renegotiated a concession now to the woman whom Chatham had hired to look after it for them.

Herbert Evison: In other words, the weaving still goes on?

Sam Weems: The weaving still goes on, and we have a demonstration there as it was done 150 years ago.

Herbert Evison: Now, I want to go back to the Cone mansion again for a minute. I would like some of the details of the arrangements you made for that. Do they pay a fee?

Sam Weems: Oh, yes. Here is the arrangement we made for that: They pay a very nominal fee, because we felt – well, we put in their contract that they would have to have people demonstrating the various mountain crafts, like weaving, wood carving, and wool dyeing, and things of this sort. So, they agreed, so we reduced their fee to a very nominal thing. And they have demonstrators who are members of the Southern Highlands Handicrafts Guild who come there alternately and demonstrate one or the other types

of mountain handicraft. Now these people stay there in the manor house while they are demonstrating their crafts. They have a nice big kitchen – the one that was used by the Cones – and they do their own cooking, and they feed their own demonstrators when they are there. And then a gift shop is run in connection with it, and we only take a very, small percentage of their gross revenue. This is how it was developed, and we feel that it is an interpretive device for our Parkway visitors to see these mountain crafts carried on.

Herbert Evison: Now the other one that I mentioned, of course, was this Northwestern or Northwest, I guess it is—

Sam Weems: Northwest Trading Post. Now that is not northwest United States; it is northwest North Carolina.

Sam Weems: This came about when a banker from Sparta., N. C., came to see me one day and said:

Sam Weems: "My bank is interested in doing things for the people in this northwest section of North Carolina, because we have banks in Sparta and one in North Wilkesboro and in some other places, and we feel that there is a need out on the Parkway for the people in these counties to bring the things that they produce out, so that the visitor from other parts of the country can take home a souvenir of something from the mountain country through which they are traveling, something that is typical or indicative of their visit, and at the same time it would help our people."

Sam Weems: And I said, "Well, I will have to look at it. We have got a problem of setting a precedent. If we did this for you we would have to do it for everybody on the Parkway," and I said, "I will have to look into it." So, I got to thinking about it, and I said,

Sam Weems: "Well, there is not many places along the Parkway that can qualify for this kind of thing; there are not this many places where you have got a community interest, so I don't believe we would run too much of a risk in setting a precedent, so I'll take a gamble on it. " So I went back to the bank and I said,

Sam Weems: "All right, you get an organization together that we can deal with and we will work out a special permit, concessions permit, under certain conditions. Number one: You build a building according to our design, and you operate it in accordance with price controls, and you operate it through a screening board of which we have some say-so as to the type of things that go into the shop, and you are not to have things in there that come from outside of these eleven northwest counties in northwest North

Carolina through which the Parkway goes. Now, under these circumstances we will give you a permit, concessions permit."

Sam Weems: So, they got their organization together, consisting mostly of people from West Jefferson, North Carolina, and we set up – gave them the design. They built it and got into business. And it has become a very popular place for our Parkway visitors, and it has done a great deal to help our public relations in these eleven counties. These people now can make their homemade things – and it is not as high a quality, all of it, as our Southern Highlands Handicrafts Guild shops, because they have got a pretty stiff board that screens their things. This board is probably not as stiff as the Southern Highlands Handicrafts Guild, but it is stiffened enough along with our control, so there is no junk or anything like that in the shop. The other shops are mostly handicrafts. This one doesn't necessarily have to be handicraft, although there is a lot of it in there, but it is hand-made. There is a lot of difference between something that is hand-made and a legitimate handicraft item.

Herbert Evison: One of the things I always think of when I think of the Northwest Trading Post is the magnificent sharp cheese that is offered for sale there. I hope it still is.

Sam Weems: It still is. That cheese is made over in West Jefferson, which is only about 30 miles from there.

Herbert Evison: Now, is there more than one producer of that wonderful cheese?

Sam Weems: Yes, there are two types of cheese there. Now this sharp cheddar that you are talking about is local cheese, is made locally. Also, you will find – I don't know whether you noticed it or not – small wheels of white cheese. This is made by the mountain people themselves up in their little cabins. It is very good cheese, but it is not the yellow sharp cheese you are referring to.

Herbert Evison: Well, I will have to try that other kind when I'm down there next, for I don't think I have ever passed that without getting at least a pound of cheese.

Sam Weems: Well, I am with you. I usually take a wheel back and divide it up with my friends.

Herbert Evison: Well, there is another thing that was built along that Parkway on a cooperative basis that is quite unusual that I would like to get your story of on here, and that is the story of the Museum of North Carolina Minerals. I don't think the average non-Carolinian even realizes that North Carolina is a mineral-rich state, so I suspect this has been a revelation to an awful lot

of people going along that Parkway. I would like to get your story of how the heck the thing came about.

Sam Weems: Yes. Well, you are right. This is a very interesting stop on the Parkway. I first came into it with George Ross, who at that time was Chairman of the North Carolina Conservation Department. He was particularly interested in minerals, and still is. He was the one that got us really going on it. George made an agreement with the Park Service that if we would operate and maintain the museum, the State of North Carolina would pay for the building, with the understanding that we would have nothing in there except minerals from North Carolina. Now as you know, the best florescent minerals come from the western states and not from North Carolina. However, there are enough florescent minerals in North Carolina to make the very interesting florescent display which we have there in the museum.

Sam Weems: There was a banker in Asheville, North Carolina, who was also terrifically interested in minerals, who was very helpful and very, influential in getting this mineral museum established. The mineral industry, in Spruce Pine nearby were also not only interested but very helpful in gathering minerals and specimens and contributing to this museum.

Sam Weems: So, I went to Raleigh on several occasions after we got the plans developed for the museum itself. We took it down and met with the Governor, and the Governor looked at the plans and looked at the estimates and said,

Sam Weems: "You'll have to cut it in two. I can't give you but half that much money." He said, "You take this over to my budget director and whittle it down."

Sam Weems: So George Ross and I went out of the governor's office with his budget director and we took the plans and laid them out on the table and started whacking rooms and corridors and everything else off of it, until we got it down to where it is today; but our plans were a little more ambitious than they are, but I think it is adequate. As a matter of fact, we may have been a little bit too ambitious with the original plans.

Sam Weems: But I think the museum has turned out as very satisfactory. We get a lot of visitation. We have got a section in there where people can not only look at the minerals, but they can go back in and examine them. If they identify themselves as persons truly interested in minerals, they can go back into the storage rooms and examine a lot of the minerals that are stored and catalogued back there.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, who is responsible for the working out of exhibit plans for this?

Sam Weems: We did this through our Museum Division in Washington. I have forgotten who was in charge of the Museum Division at the time, but our Museum Preparation Department – they came down with a team and we worked out the plans and the lay-outs and the exhibits. I know one of the biggest gold nuggets in the world was found in North Carolina—

Herbert Evison: I didn't know that.

Sam Weems: —and the Bechler gold coins were minted in North Carolina, and we have some of those coins on display in that museum; they were known to be one of the purest gold coins the United States ever produced; it was produced by the Bechler Brothers in North Carolina.

Herbert Evison: Well, the result of all this is that you have a very wide variety of exhibit along that Parkway. We have mentioned four of them, but there also was a series of museums developed – museums and displays – I think very largely during your time, such as the mountain farm museum that you put there at Humpback Rooks. I wonder if you wouldn't like to talk a little about the various kinds of exhibit along the Parkway.

Sam Weems: Yes, I would. That was developed during my time there. I guess Les Arnberger was more helpful to me in the early stages of getting this part of the operation set up.

Sam Weems: What we decided to do – you know, when a park is one big piece, you can tell the story in one place. But with the Blue Ridge Parkway spread out for nearly 500 miles, we had to tell the story in different places. So, what we did, we would tell the story here, and then down the road we would tell some other story, but all pieced together when you got through, but each individual story in itself is interesting.

Sam Weems: Now, we started with a mountain farm up in the north end. In there we told how the mountaineer lived, where he came from, not only from the United States but from Europe; how these cabins were developed, – the German influence, the Scotch influence; and a display of the crude working tools that they had had to do their mountain faming with. And we pulled in authentic buildings and put into this group that is there now. So, we tell the story of the mountaineer there – where he came from and how he lived.

Sam Weems: Then we go down to our next interpretive place, and we tell the story of transportation by canal, at the James River. Here we restored an old canal lock to show how produce was moved before the railroad, from the valley to the coastal section, for shipping through these barges up and down the canal.

Sam Weems: Now we go on to the Peaks of Otter and we tell the story of ecology there. We tell the story of – we have a real good display of wood, the forest, the

trees, and the animals, and the whole story of the environment and the ecological balance in the mountain forest.

Sam Weems: Then we skip from that and go down to Mabry Mill. There, where we have restored old man Mabry's mill, with water-ground meal which is sold to the visitors to help the concessioner to operate the mill. We tell the story of the mountain industry. Here Simon, the tanner – we show how he made shoes, all the way from the back of the animal to the button shoes he used to make. We bought all of his implements, as you know, before he died. We paid him for them and said, "When you die, you leave them to us." So, when Simon died, they delivered all his shoe-making tools. So, we tell the story of mountain industry there: how they made mint – there is a mint still there. There is even a liquor still there to show how they made moonshine. There is a smith's shop, showing how they made wagon wheels. And the whole story of mountain industry is told right there. Then in the fall we have demonstrations of how to make apple butter and sorghum molasses, which is one of the most popular things on the whole parkway. Then as I say, we tell a different type of story as we go along.

Herbert Evison: I have made the observation from time to time, I and I think it is a sound one, that the sellers of cameras and film ought to endow Mabry Mill very heavily, because I would hate to try to guess how many hundreds of thousands of film is spent on that one structure during the year.

Sam Weems: I wish I had a small percentage of it. Well, let me tell you a little story about that mill. This is a funny thing, I give Mac Dale, my first chief ranger, credit for saving that mill. We had an agreement with the States of Virginia and North Carolina that they would clear all buildings off the right-of-way before they would deliver it. Anyway, it was their responsibility to get rid of all buildings on the right-of-way. Well, Mac Dale went by one day and here were some people beginning to tear the mill down. And Mac got on the radio real quick and called in and he said,

Sam Weems: "They are about to tear the Mabry mill down," and I said, "What in the world are they doing?" And he said, "They say they are hired by the Highway Department." And I said, "Tell them to stop this minute," and I got on the phone and called Richmond, and they said:

Sam Weems: "We are following what you told us to do – clear the right-of-way." And I said:

Sam Weems: "Well, for gosh sake, don't clear this one. We have got to leave this."

Sam Weems: Well, this kind of thing – I could probably cite other instances, but it is about the same all over. And I said, "Will you give me authority to pull them off it?" So, he did, and so we saved the mill, but it was just about

gone. Had it not been for Mac Dale coming along there at the right time with the right interest, we would have lost it.

Herbert Evison: It almost gives you the shivers to think how close that was, because that is really one of the most picturesque features of the whole Parkway from end to end.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes, there is another not very far from Mabry Mill, too – another old cabin with an interesting story that you must know something about – the old midwife's.

Sam Weems: Yes, Orlean Puckett's cabin. That Orlean was living there when we first started to put the Parkway through, and she was still living, and she was crazy about the park, and every time the ranger had to go by he would be sure to bring her a bottle of soda pop. She was a great old gal; and there is a case where we weren't going to bother her, but let her live there if she wanted to. But she died before we got the Parkway visitation built up to any degree. But that was one of our preservation projects that we were really interested in keeping and telling the story of.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, fortunately that is a story that can be told, unlike the spinning story and demonstration, without having to go inside the cabin – that is a contrast with the Brinegar situation.

Sam Weems: Yea, it is entirely different.

Herbert Evison: But that is one of the very interesting stories of mountain life – miles and miles on foot, that the midwife had covered during her lifetime.

Sam Weems: Well, you see, that wasn't so long ago. It wasn't so long ago compared to that part of the country. As I said, when we started in there there wasn't any paved roads in that country, and those people were really way back, even in the mid-30's, I remember at Hubbard's Mill not very far away from there, I pulled up there one day to eat my lunch, and I had a radio on the car, which was pretty new those days among the mountain boys, and two or three of them came up and listened and listened, and one of them said:

Sam Weems: "Do you mind if I go and get Grandpa? He ain't never hear'd one of these things." And I said, "No, you go get Grandpa." So, by golly, he was gone about a half hour, and after a while here came Grandpa. And he listened, and he cocked his head this way and cocked it another, and he said, "Where is this coming from?" And I says, "Cincinnati, this happens to be coming from Cincinnati." And he says,

Sam Weems: "Cincinnati! Where's that – over the other side of the damn river?" Only shows how far back this country was in those days.

Herbert Evison: It is really hard to believe, when you think back on it, how backward a great part of the country was so short a time ago.

Sam Weems: In that area of the Blue Ridge was the last foothold of the mountain part of the east, along that ridge.

Herbert Evison: Now, there is another very interesting phase the Blue Ridge Parkway story that I know you were primarily concerned with, more importantly than anybody else, and that was the matter of resisting the clamor to put advertising signs and a multiplicity of direction signs along the Parkway, and with some later specific reference to Hugh Morton's special devices.

Sam Weems: That is how it started out, I guess. Well, the people who were in business along the way, particularly the tourist business, had a resentment against us because we had not allowed them to put boards along the Parkway. And they kept coming to us and saying, "How are these people going to find their way off the Parkway to our places of business in these small towns and crossroads and villages if you don't allow us to put up signs there?" And hard as we tried to explain it to them, they still resented the fact that we weren't cooperating.

Sam Weems: So, we finally devised a scheme of putting at every main junction a sign – for instance, "Galax. Elevation so-and-so. Population so-and-so. Gas approved and lodging." And this quieted down for a while, but they still weren't very happy about it. They wanted to put photos up. They said, "Why can't we put photos up in your visitor centers and gas stations and concessions? Why can't we put a rack up there?" And we said, "We can't do that, because you get all kinds and sizes, and if you have one guy putting a folder in you have got to let everybody put a folder in – it is public property – so we have got to treat everybody alike."

Sam Weems: So I went to the Chambers of Commerce, to the tourist associations and organizations, and we finally came up with a scheme whereby we would put a folder rack – and we allotted districts all down the Parkway, and using an example, we would say: This is Galax, District 6, Hillsdale, Mt. Airy, – all the towns, all communities around this district, all the towns around and the communities that are in this district can have a district folder, but you people in this district can get together and get up a district folder in which each one of you has a space that can advertise; and to keep one from outdoing the other, we are going to limit you to 7 lines.

Sam Weems: And we got the Chambers of Commerce and the local people to sponsor this volume. And sure enough, we put up racks we allotted a space to each district, we established; and this is working today, and everybody seems to be happy about it and nobody complains, and it is moving along very nicely.

Herbert Evison: But Mr. Morton wasn't happy with that arrangement, I believe.

Sam Weems: Mr. Morton wanted a sign for Grandfather Mountain, and we said, "Mr. Morton, we can't put a sign up for Grandfather Mountain unless we it a put a sign for everybody else. We can't give you privileges that we can't give to everybody else." But he felt that he should have privileges that other people couldn't have, for some unknown reason, so he put his signs up anyhow. And as fast as he put them up, we took them down. And this is what started the war with Morton.

Herbert Evison: Well, you have just uttered a sentence that just cries out for a little more flesh on it. About this war with Morton – I think we need the story of the Grandfather Mountain Yonahlossee Trail section.

Sam Weems: Well, it is a long story. You haven't got enough tape for it. I am not sure everybody would be interested in it.

Sam Weems: When Hugh Morton came back from the war, he was a photographer in the Army during the war, and when he came back, he did a lot of work around the state. He was an excellent photographer, as you know, so he decided that he and his brother would divide up the Linville property, and for his share he would take the mountain itself, and his brother and the rest of the family could have the low-lying land around the lodges and places down below, but he wanted the mountain.

Sam Weems: This is the way it was split up, but after he got the mountain in his own right, he decided to put in this great promotion thing. And this is when he started putting signs up. Then he ran Governor Hodges campaign for him when he was running for Governor (and, incidentally, he is running for Governor himself in '72,) so he got in pretty well with the Governor, not only with Hodges but the others who followed him – Terry Sanford and some of the others – and it got to the point where he said he was not going to settle with the Parkway around the mountain unless he could tell us where it should go. And we said:

Sam Weems: "Where do you think it should go?" And he said,

Sam Weems: "I think it should go much farther down the mountain near the Yonahlossee Trail." And we pointed out a number of reasons why we couldn't put there and still maintain Parkway standards.

Sam Weems: He said, "Well, you either put it there or you are not going to put it in at all."

Sam Weems: So, we said, "All right," so we went on with other stuff and we finished up everything else. Every time we would threaten condemnation he would go to the Governor and the Governor would just politely tell the United States

government that they weren't going to condemn Mr. Morton's land. So, in a nutshell, that was our problem.

Herbert Evison: And up until the time you left the superintendency, it was still unresolved?

Sam Weems: That is exactly right. So, after I went to Australia they reached a compromise: They didn't take our line and they didn't take his line, but they worked out a compromise line between the two.

Herbert Evison: Are you well enough acquainted with it to feel that it is a satisfactory, arrangement?

Sam Weems: Yes. I think Hugh Morton came a long ways. He wouldn't even talk about a compromise before I left, so he came part way, I would say, and we came part way.

Herbert Evison: Well, I remember, if I am not mistaken, the State actually took possession of that land at one time, and then it was returned to him.

Sam Weems: That is exactly right. When R. Getty Browning was right-of-way engineer of the Highway Department, he posted the maps, which you can do under North Carolina law – posted the maps which gave the State of North Carolina possession of the right-of-way. And Hugh Morton raised so much hell, through the Governor and his contacts with the State, that they had to withdraw it.

Herbert Evison: I would think that is almost a unique event.

Sam Weems: Yes, it certainly was.

[END OF INTERVIEW]