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Dorothy Huyck's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1942-1987



Diana F. Skiles
September 4, 1978

Interview conducted by Dorothy B. Huyck
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Dorothy Huyck: 00:02 The date is September 4th, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Diana F. Skiles, spelled S K I L E S who is the assistant chief of interpretation at Point Reyes National Seashore.

Could I ask you how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service?

Diana F. Skiles: 00:27 Actually, I really just sort of happened into it. I decided after I graduated from college – I'd majored in history and spent a year teaching. And decided that, that wasn't what I wanted. And felt that I wanted to go into government service at that time. And when I looked at the possibilities of all positions in which I could use my history background National Park Service seemed most attractive to me at that time.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:56 Had you traveled to national parks at all before this?

Diana F. Skiles: 01:00 I had been in a few National Park Service administered areas, but I didn't really have a concept of the National Park Service or National Park System as such. They were just sort of isolated areas as far as I was concerned.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:19 And once you had decided that you'd be interested in this kind of employment, how did you go about getting into the Park Service?

Diana F. Skiles: 01:26 I took the federal service entrance examination and applied specifically for the Park Service. And then waited and got a phone call and was asked to come in for an interview and that was pretty well it. I did get a job and went to Albright.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:47 What year was this?

Diana F. Skiles: 01:48 This was 1968.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:51 Were you among the people in the first class of women at Albright?

Diana F. Skiles: 01:57 There were some classes before that had women in them. There were three in my particular class. I think the class before had two.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:05 Three out of how many?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:07 Originally 45, although the one man was only there for a couple of days, so then I'd say really a class of 44.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:15 Have the other two women remained in the Park Service, do you know?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:19 The last I heard they were both still in.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:21 Would you want to tell me who you were?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:23 I'd be glad to. The one was Lucia Guminski, and I believe she's married now. I'm not sure what her married name is. The other was Julia Holmaas and she's at Harpers Ferry now.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:37 And where were you assigned after Albright?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:41 Lucia and I were both sent to Colonial for the remainder of our intake year.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:48 And did you remain there?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:50 For 13 months.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:58 What were you doing at Colonial?

Diana F. Skiles: 02:58 It was really a varied experience. The chief of interpretation there was Jim Hasket, and he really tried to give us a varied experience. We worked with each of the divisions a little to become familiar with sort of the total operations. And spent, I guess, a good bit of time, actually in frontline interpretation at the information desk and giving talks and tours to the park visitors. And we worked at both at Yorktown and at Jamestown.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:35 And at the end of your 13 months, when were you sent then?

Diana F. Skiles: 03:37 To Morristown National Historic Park.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:40 And again, you were on the interpretation side?

Diana F. Skiles: 03:44 Yes.

- Dorothy Huyck: 03:46 Were you working at the battlefield or no?
- Diana F. Skiles: 03:50 It's actually there isn't a battlefield there. It's a winter encampment area for the Continental troops. I worked for the most part--the office was in the museum, and I spent most of my time there and working sort of between there and the Ford Mansion, Washington's headquarters itself. Occasionally, I would get out to the Wick House out in the other side, the Jockey Hollow section of the park, but that was fairly rare.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:24 Were you there when either the museum or the Ford House was in the process of being revamped?
- Diana F. Skiles: 04:29 No, that was before that time. They just--most preliminary of plans were going on at that time, particularly for the museum.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:40 You've seen the museum since then?
- Diana F. Skiles: 04:42 No, I haven't. I'd really like to get back to see it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:46 And what state was Ford House in at that stage?
- Diana F. Skiles: 04:50 Nothing really was going on there at that time. Oh yes, it was furnished. We did give tours of the house, or actually it was pretty much self-guiding tours of the house. But we weren't involved in any restoration work on the house. I'll have to take back what I said about the museum, because while I was there, they did get some new exhibits for the one room, but that was just the very beginning.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:18 I was at the museum, not too very long. I'm sorry, let's talk about the Ford House. I was at the Ford House not too very long ago, and in particular case when I was there, the interpreter was by the front door and simply welcomed people to the house. And that was rather it. It was a pretty skimpy form of interpretation. I take it normally you did more than just that
- Diana F. Skiles: 05:40 I would say, the regular visitor got that kind of interpretation at the house. Even when I was there, we again, sort of sat inside the door and collected the money and sort of talked with them a little. Told them about the tour. Then walked around on their own and if they had any questions when they got through, they would ask us the

questions. They only people we actually gave tours of the house to were scheduled groups. We had a lot of school children who would come in September through June. In fact, we just about every weekday, we had at least a couple of groups scheduled, and we did give them actual tours. But we didn't the regular visitor.

- Dorothy Huyck: 06:29 So, apparently what I saw was quite normal. And when did you leave Morristown?
- Diana F. Skiles: 06:38 November of 1972.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:40 And you went where then?
- Diana F. Skiles: 06:42 To Delaware Water Gap, National Recreation Area.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:45 What was going on there at that time?
- Diana F. Skiles: 06:50 They were pretty much involved in the same projects that they, to my knowledge, still are. Oh, we were trying to restore Millbrook Village to approximately the 1860 period. And Slateford Farm over in Pennsylvania to about 1880. There was the Peters Valley craft village that was in operation at that time. And we were just a little bit involved in the interpretation of that. We opened the visitor center up there while I was there. And in summers gave guided tours of the village. Let's see there's a geologic overlook, the Point of Gap Overlook, and in summers we would have an interpreter on site there. Those really were the main aspects of the park's interpreting program that I was involved in. They did have other things going on as well, which I wasn't as directly involved in. Like canoe trips down the river, concerts at the Watergate, and they have an active environmental education program there. But I only was just slightly involved in those.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:13 And you stayed there until when?
- Diana F. Skiles: 08:19 Until February, 1975.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:23 Is that when you came here?
- Diana F. Skiles: 08:24 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:26 So you've been here for more than three years.

- Diana F. Skiles: 08:26 Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:32 And what are you interpreting here, that's historical I mean?
- Diana F. Skiles: 08:38 All right. We have here, our main historic resource is actually the lighthouse, the Point Reyes lighthouse, which dates back to 1870. And since I've been here, the Coast Guard has turned that over to us, and last summer we opened that to the public. That's the only actual historic resource that's open to the public at this time. There are some other historic resources that we hope to do something with in the future. One is a lifeboat station, which we'd like to open as a museum in time, but that's not in the immediate future. We also have a lot of historic ranches in the area, and we would like to interpret, at least, use one of those to interpret the ranching history of the area. But again, that's not something we're doing at the moment. A historical program that we're involved in, which doesn't deal with a specific historic resources, are Coast Miwok Indian village replica, which we started back during, when 1976 as a bicentennial project.
- Dorothy Huyck: 09:54 How do you spell Miwok?
- Diana F. Skiles: 09:56 M-I-W-O-K.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:04 Thank you.
- Diana F. Skiles: 10:04 And in that particular program we're trying to interpret--well, the Coast Miwoks inhabited the Point Reyes Peninsula for centuries. And there are a lot of actual sites on the seashore. We're trying to interpret that history without actually using one of the original sites. We didn't want to disturb an actual site. So, we tried to choose an area that sort of met the quality, say, that they were looking for in a site. And we're building it using the same type of technology that they would have used, the same types of natural materials. And it's a visitor involvement project, whereby the visitors, if they want to, can actually get involved in the activities that are going on up there.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:59 What kind of activities for instance?
- Diana F. Skiles: 11:02 Well, actually, we're still very much involved in the construction of the structures themselves. We have, several

of the coaches, are single family dwellings and Grand Reyes sweathouse is the largest structure we have at present that's completed. All the largest structure that will be in the village, and which is in the process of being constructed now, is the dance house. And so, they can get involved in those activities. For instance, weaving tule mats for the smaller structures, or putting in – for the, both the sweathouse and the dance house, there were semi subterranean structures and digging four feet down. We use just fire-hardened Manzanita sticks and abalone shells the scoop out the dirt and baskets to haul it away, and then they could get involved in those types of projects.

- Dorothy Huyck: 12:05 So the visitor could actually do some of this work alongside a Park Service person?
- Diana F. Skiles: 12:08 Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:09 And do the visitors in fact enjoyed doing this sort of thing?
- Diana F. Skiles: 12:11 Yeah. Those who have the time and get involved really seem to enjoy it. In fact, we've had visitors who come through the park maybe to hike on one of the trails or something and just make a visit up to the village and get so involved that they come back again to the work on the project. We also have a lot of volunteers involved in the project. And we also have certain amount of – at different times we'll have activities like making of arrowheads, or baskets, or the skinning of animals, which we get from road kills. Making of mortars and pestles and all the different types of, or parts of their material culture. In time we'd like to do even more of that type of activity than what we're able to do right now.
- Dorothy Huyck: 13:04 Are you also into natural interpretation in this particular location?
- Diana F. Skiles: 13:10 I'm not too much involved in that, a little bit. For instance, I was recently working on an exhibit for Sea Lion Overlook. So, that got me a little into that, but I'm not really heavily involved in the natural history.
- Dorothy Huyck: 13:27 Can I ask where and when you were born?
- Diana F. Skiles: 13:30 I was born October 26th, 1944, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:40 Was your father by chance related to the Park Service then?

Diana F. Skiles: 13:43 No. Actually, my hometown is about 13 miles from Gettysburg.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:48 Where did you grow up?

Diana F. Skiles: 13:49 In Taneytown, Maryland.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:55 And are you by chance an only child?

Diana F. Skiles: 13:58 No. I have an older brother and a younger sister.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:07 Are your parents by chance college graduates?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:10 No, they're not.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:11 And what was your father's occupation?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:14 He's a funeral director.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:15 And your mother?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:18 She works and stays at home.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:20 And you went to high school and Taneytown?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:23 Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:24 And then where did you graduate from college?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:26 Gettysburg. Stayed pretty much in that area.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:29 Yeah. Having majored in history?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:32 Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:34 Where did you teach for them when you were teaching?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:36 At Taneytown.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:41 And have you done any graduate work?

Diana F. Skiles: 14:43 No, I haven't.

- Dorothy Huyck: 14:46 During the process of going through high school and college, who was it that encouraged you? Were there members of your family, or your parents, or teachers, or church, or community leaders who – or maybe no one – who encouraged the educational process?
- Diana F. Skiles: 15:07 Well, my parents. I'd say most strongly my dad, because sort of one of his real goals or desires when he was younger was to go to college and he wasn't really able to go. And so, he wanted the three of us to have to have the opportunity to go if we were interested. And encouraged us to do so.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:33 And while you were in high school, did you, by chance take math and science courses that normally might've assumed to be for boys?
- Diana F. Skiles: 15:46 I guess not really. Because in the academic program there, all the students, girls or boys had to take them. The algebra, geometry, and trigonometry and so on.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:57 So you've had three or four years of math?
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:00 Right, four years.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:02 And science also?
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:04 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:07 Were you considered at all a tomboy?
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:11 When I was younger I was very much a tomboy.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:14 And as you grew up and entered the teenage years were you expected to become something more of a lady?
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:19 I think the expectation was there. I'm not sure I really did.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:27 Maybe you rebelled against it. Did you?
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:32 Well, I don't know. I just wasn't natural for me at that time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:34 MmHm. Were you active in any extracurricular activities in high school or college that would be helpful now that you're in the Park Service? Camping for instance.
- Diana F. Skiles: 16:48 No. No, I wasn't.

- Dorothy Huyck: 16:52 Since you've been in the Park Service these some years, have you found your supervisors encouraging, or discouraging, or possibly some of both?
- Diana F. Skiles: 17:02 I've found some of both.
- Dorothy Huyck: 17:05 In what ways have you been encouraged?
- Diana F. Skiles: 17:10 Well, some of my supervisors have really, I'd say very influential, especially some of my early supervisors in encouraging me, I think to really move ahead in my career. Some of them saw me, I think, going farther in the Park Service then I saw myself at that time. From that standpoint, it was very helpful. And again, all from the very early stages, some of them also tried to introduce me to people like, took me into the regional office and things like that. Doing what they could to help get me acquainted with the other people in the Park Service, and again, helped my career.
- Dorothy Huyck: 17:59 Did any of these persons act as a mentor for you?
- Diana F. Skiles: 18:07 Well, I don't know that I could really say that they did to that extent.
- Dorothy Huyck: 18:12 And what about those who have been discouraging?
- Diana F. Skiles: 18:22 Well there are some who really are still coming to terms, I think with the concept of women in professional positions. It's just something that you have to work with on an individual basis.
- Dorothy Huyck: 18:45 Have you found a particular way to do that?
- Diana F. Skiles: 18:53 No, I think – well, I find that supervisors like everyone else, are individuals and it's sort of, you really have to work on an individual basis with them. There's no set formula or whatever that works every time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 19:09 There are some people who think of the National Park Service as a rather male-oriented organization. Do you?
- Diana F. Skiles: 19:19 I would say to an extent that is true. I think it's – we're getting away from that. And I think the organization, as such, is trying to get away from it. There are, again, some individuals in the organization who are supervisors who do

make decisions that affect women, either hiring or not hiring and so on. That again, still haven't maybe caught up with the times or come to terms with that. And tend to be a real barrier. And again, it seems like it's in some fields more so than others. But I think that in time that that's all going to change.

- Dorothy Huyck: 20:11 You're optimistic about the longer range?
- Diana F. Skiles: 20:13 Yes, very definitely.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:14 If you were to look ahead, say five years, how do you suppose the park service would look as far as the opportunities for women are concerned?
- Diana F. Skiles: 20:23 I think they'll have improved considerably. I really do.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:27 Do you see evidence of that going on right now?
- Diana F. Skiles: 20:30 Yes, just within – again, and I don't know that many people in the Park Service really, but then the people that I do know I've seen attitudes of some of the individuals change. And it's not a matter of forcing them into doing something. But they're beginning to see that women can capably handle some of the positions that previously they thought were maybe only men could do. And, then they're, open-minded enough to change their attitudes and approach the job and the women in the job from another standpoint.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:06 That's exciting.
- Diana F. Skiles: 21:06 It really is.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:10 Are there any jobs you think really should not tackle with them?
- Diana F. Skiles: 21:15 No. Again, it's really an individual thing. There are jobs that I might personally not want to tackle, but other women could tackle them and do a beautiful job.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:30 So speaking of other women, have you given information to other women about job opportunities in any way, or have you received any help from other women about job opportunities within the Park Service?

- Diana F. Skiles: 21:46 I'd say that's been minimal really. I don't believe I've ever received any and I'm not sure if I've ever given any. I, for instance, if sometimes seasonal employees will come and want advice on how to get into the Park Service or suggestions that might help their career. But actually, as far as my actually say, alerting another woman that there's a vacancy and they may want to apply or something. No, I haven't done that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:16 Do you encourage that seasonal woman who comes along to think about a career in the Park Service?
- Diana F. Skiles: 22:20 Yes, very definitely.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:22 You think the opportunities for her would be there?
- Diana F. Skiles: 22:25 I think so, yes. There was, of course a lot of the seasonal employees today are discouraged because it takes so long to get into the system. But I think the women has as good a chance getting in as the men do. So, it's really, again, a matter of individual abilities and determination and all the factors that go into it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:49 Have you been able to take a variety of courses since you've been in the Park Service? Additional coursework pertinent to your various jobs?
- Diana F. Skiles: 22:58 Yes, I have.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:58 Such as?
- Diana F. Skiles: 22:58 You mean, for instance, that the Park Service sponsored?
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:02 Yes, mmhm right.
- Diana F. Skiles: 23:08 I've taken, for instance, like the communications writing course, interpretive operations, curatorial methods, program management. There was a kind of a unique course I took back in while I was at Delaware Water Gap, that was called I think it was like 18th century domestic or 19th century, domestic arts course, it was offered at Harpers Ferry. Taking the managerial grid course and the supervisory courses.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:45 Would you say that your particular talents and abilities are being well used by the Park Service?

- Diana F. Skiles: 23:52 I think it varies at the, again it's varied with the jobs and from one time to another, even one day to another. There are times when I feel definitely that my talent, and my particular skills are being used. And then there are other days when I feel that, what I'm doing well, just about anyone could do whether they had my particular background or not.
- Dorothy Huyck: 24:16 In the overall, do you think that this goes well?
- Diana F. Skiles: 24:20 I think yes. In the taking, say the past 10 years in total that they have been used.
- Dorothy Huyck: 24:28 Do you attend any professional societies, such as the history association?
- Diana F. Skiles: 24:32 No, I don't.
- Dorothy Huyck: 24:40 We've been talking about women's opportunities. Do you think that in your particular case being a woman has in any way affected your opportunities pro or con in the Park Service?
- Diana F. Skiles: 24:57 I'm not sure to what extent that it has. I really don't know. I think it may have helped in some instances and hindered in others. I think though that probably my, for instance, my personality, my ability and so on have made more of an effect than whether or not I was a woman.
- Dorothy Huyck: 25:23 May I ask, if you've been married at all?
- Diana F. Skiles: 25:25 No, I haven't.
- Dorothy Huyck: 25:26 If you were to marry, do you see a possibility of combining marriage with a Park Service career?
- Diana F. Skiles: 25:35 I think probably not. I think that, well, I think I would probably continue on the Park Service for a period of time. But I'm fairly traditional from that standpoint. And I think that, just because of the nature of the job with the mobility that's required, that I would probably choose not to.
- Dorothy Huyck: 26:05 Have you currently any responsibilities for any members of your family?
- Diana F. Skiles: 26:09 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 26:12

I certainly been asking you quite a collection of questions. Is there something we really ought to have included within this discussion that I've not asked about, but that comes to your mind?

Diana F. Skiles: 26:24

No, I can't think of anything off hand. I think we've covered a lot of territory.

Dorothy Huyck: 26:30

Thank you Diana.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]