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



T. Sutton Jett
Circa 1962

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

- Herbert Evison: We were talking about the responsibilities of your office to the White House, and I wonder if you wouldn't sum up for me what the responsibilities are and how they have been changed recently.
- T. Sutton Jett: Well, for many years, as you know very well, Herb, we have had certain responsibilities with reference to the White House. It is Reservation No. 1 in the park system. We have traditionally consolidated responsibility for the inventory of the furnishings: we handle the financial accounts of the White House: appropriations relating to the actual operation or the living quarters of the White House itself. Just this past year, however, the Congress passed an Act which drew the White House even closer to the National Parks, and legislation was passed which made the management and the operation of the White House subject to the provisions of our organic Act of 1916. Since that time the present administration have been inclined to draw even closer.
- T. Sutton Jett: For example, where there was once a maintenance crew reporting to a foreman on the grounds, these men have now been included in our own maintenance crews, and now our own people are there supervising the maintenance of the gardens and the shrubs and the grounds.
- T. Sutton Jett: Also, of course, the Park Service has been involved in the White House Historical Association. As you know, Mr. Wirth is a director, and I am a director: Nash Castro is active in it; and we have, with the help of the National Geographic, produced in the tradition of Park Service cooperative organizations this new booklet, which now has sold over 100,000 copies.
- T. Sutton Jett: So it is a fact that the White House is more and more the responsibility of the Park Service. We look upon ourselves as responsible for the old section of the House, in contrast to the office wings. In other words, we think GSA should still have the responsibility for what are really the office buildings, the East and West wings.
- T. Sutton Jett: I am going to send you a copy of this Act. I know I showed it to you, but I think you would like to have a copy of it.
- Herbert Evison: I would, but I think I will have to dig down into my jeans and pay a dollar for one of those White House books, too. I noticed a stack of them in your office. Well, that is all good; I like that.
- Herbert Evison: I have this question to which you have given me a partial answer, on this Roosevelt Memorial. I read your answer and you say design has been approved by "all concerned" and you mention Mr. Gugler proceeding with final drawings, specifications, etc., but I take it that this is not the design

of this extraordinary hollow sphere, but that it has been changed; and I take it also that Mrs. Longworth has gone along with the new design.

T. Sutton Jett: That is right. Well, I might say you perhaps remember that when we had the great big publicity on the sphere, and you will also recall that Mrs. Longworth and other Roosevelt children were critical of it and this was published in the newspapers. Well, the Congress then amended the Act to require the approval of all the living children of Theodore Roosevelt for the design. So we got together with the children and with Eric Gugler and have come up with a completely different concept, and we have a drawing of this. Paul Manship is doing a traditional figure, a 19 ft. bronze statue of Theodore Roosevelt. I think that is it, but I will get you the actual figure. But at any rate it is a traditional pose of Theodore Roosevelt speaking with his right arm raised, and it is going to be on the center of the island. In other words, you will visit the trails and the wooded concept in the main, and as you walk about the island you will come in the very center to this Memorial feature, which is one of some considerable dimension. Its cost will be over a million dollars, and it consists of a plaza with a moat around it to give a transition from the woods to the formal memorial concept. In the center the figure of Roosevelt, and four tablets which will carry inspirational words from his writings or his speeches, and it will be very attractive. I think you ought to see the design. And we do have money, and in a few years we ought to have this new memorial.

Herbert Evison: I am interested, and I must say I am a little sore to hear that it is anything so elaborate, because my feeling about it still is that there should be something over there memorializing Roosevelt of a much more simple character.

Herbert Evison: I have here this question about the George Washington Parkway which is answered, and this we won't bother about. And now we have this one on which I just want you to turn loose, if you will, and that is this question or this statement: I would be glad if you would discuss what appear to you to be the distinctions between the National Capital Parks Region, or the National Capital Region, and its organization, from the other regions, and the responsibilities which are peculiar to the Region.

T. Sutton Jett: I will be glad to do that. Of course you were a regional director and so know more about the traditional regions than I would. My only experience has been here with the nation's capital since the Park Service was regionalized. But it seems to me, Herb, that the principal difference between the National Capital Region and the other five regions is that we are both staff and operational. In every aspect of our work you will find this difference very essential part of our decisions and organization itself. I know when we discussed this up at Shenandoah this Region was the

subject of a subsequent meeting with the Director, because we were so different from the others.

- T. Sutton Jett: But we have, as you know, four assistant regional directors. I believe the other Regions have three. We moreover have an associate director, and I think the reason for this is that you simply cannot break down the categories of our work, remembering that they are both operational to produce and staff, an organization that conforms precisely with the organization of the Director's office, and certainly not with the organization or the other five regions.
- Herbert Evison: It has got to partake really of the character of a regional organization and of a superintendent's organization, the organization of the superintendent of Yellowstone, let's say.
- T. Sutton Jett: Exactly. We have, for example, an assistant regional director in charge of advance planning or for advance planning. The work of this individual relates to a very substantial degree, to our relationships to other political and government organizations in the Washington metropolitan area. In other words, this man must work with the D.C. government; and to a very considerable extent with the D.C. Highway Department. He also works with the citizens' organizations; he works with Arlington, Fairfax, Montgomery and Prince George Counties on related problems; as you know, the park system here, the metropolitan park system of the National Capital Region, does extend outside the D. of C. and must be coordinated with the park system which are ___ to ours of these other both planning bodies and the administrative organizations just as we are. Every time, as you know, a road or a power line or a sewer goes thru a park this is a matter of constant meeting, consultation, to come up with an understanding and an agreement which will both preserve the park values for which we are responsible and at the same time meet the needs of this urban community.
- T. Sutton Jett: Likewise of course, let us say Region One, where you worked for so many years, isn't directly concerned in an operational way with interpretation, but we have the staff functions in the way of interpretation, and our people also must be out in the parks actually conducting interpretation programs, participating in it. And in our administration we are different, – our administrative duties. We have, as you remember, 3 budgets to defend. We are in the U.S. budget; that is, regular Park Service budget. We are in the D.C. budget. And we have to defend the White House budget. So we prepare three budgets; we defend three budgets; and I am telling you it gets pretty rough to remember what is in which budget and all the details that are required in such an operation. And again, as you see, in the other Regions the Regional Director doesn't have to sit himself to defend in a

mild case really two budgets – the White House and the D.C. – the director generally handles the Park Service budget just as he does for every other region.

T. Sutton Jett: And then too, we have a staff of 1300 people. Our personnel office has to actually recruit and employ these people, many times as great a number than every other regional office. So you see our personnel office is different. And our purchasing is different. It boils down to the fact that we are both operational and staff. But I know – I read what you said about this Region. I don't have to tell you that it is properly in the National Park Service. Some people have said over the years that we are a strange region, for these parks to be in the park system, but surely you understand as I do that if there is any place of national significance, national historical significance to the country, certainly it is the park system of this city which has been the seat of government for 160 years; major events of this country have transpired in public buildings and monumental parks which make it.

Herbert Evison: I was just looking at this rather brief statement that I have framed about it, and you have read this. Is that a reasonably satisfactory statement?

T. Sutton Jett: I think it is, Herb, I did, as I told you, make a copy of it, because I took it home and read it, but I would like to read it more carefully and I would also like, with your permission, to have some members of our staff read it.

Herbert Evison: I wish you would. That is the kind of help I am after.

T. Sutton Jett: I am certainly going to do that.

Herbert Evison: But anyway, as you look back on it, you don't remember that you found anything objectionable, that I was off on a wrong tack?

T. Sutton Jett: No. Mostly I thought – I was pleased that your understanding and concept of this park system paralleled my own, especially since you have so long been associated with another aspect of Park Service work. Of course you were with us so many years here in Washington and know the Park Service well.

Herbert Evison: Now here of course is one of the differences which you barely touched on, but I would like you to develop a little more at least in 3 or 4 of the most important aspects of this thing. I made as an addendum a 12th item. I almost forgot the head of the National Capital Parks has a great variety of official relationships not characteristic of other regions – Fine Arts, Planning Commission, D.C. Commissioners, and others – and I wonder if you can't tell me a little bit more about what those relationships involve in demands on your time, and on your thought, and on the National Capital Parks organization.

T. Sutton Jett: Well, I did make available to you, Herb, a list of the organizations, but there are about 25 of them on which I serve as a member and represent the Director. There is the Planning Commission, of course, the National Capital Planning Commission. Mr. Wirth is a member of this Commission. Now there are occasions, you can understand, when he is unable to sit with the commission, and on those occasions I am his alternate and I have to. This takes really a week of each month, for it meets once a month and there are committee meetings prior to the full Commission meetings which go almost the entire week. And of course since people from out of the city come and are members of this Commission and are on the Commission's committees, so you must be there, wither yourself or the Director.

T. Sutton Jett: Of course also I am a member of the D.C. Recreation Board. This is the group, as you know, that manages and supervises the D.C. active recreation program, the playgrounds, that kind of thing – organized play. Once-a-month I must serve and meet with this committee of this Board, and of course there are committee meetings and other assignments, as you can understand, to be made for you with this group.

T. Sutton Jett: And there is the President's Cup Regatta Committee, the Cherry Blossom Festival Committee, the 4th of July Committee, there is the Christmas Pageant of Peace Committee; there is the Zoning Commission of the District – Mr. Wirth is a member of this, but on occasions I have to represent him on the Zoning Commission. And then you know we have more than 400 special events in the course of the year here. Almost always the Supt. – now the Regional Director has to take some part in those. If the Park Service is contributing something to it, then as a matter of public relationships you have a duty as much as you can to be a part of these things yourself and not always have one of your assistants do it substitute for you. And so as you have indicated there are meetings after meetings, and you get very little time to do your paperwork, and as it works out you have to take it home to get it read. But I did give you a list of those.

Herbert Evison: But what you have said just now has put flesh on that list, and that is what I want.

Herbert Evison: Now you probably read this segment from the over-all outline of my book that deals with the National Capital Parks, and you have made copies of all this, and I am sure that when you read over this copy of what I have written you will also read this and combine your comments between the two to unify them in some way or other. Actually you have made it necessary to spend much less time as we are doing here, because of the fact that you have got so much of this information for me that I have from you in a written record that I don't actually think of very much more that I want to ask you, unless there are aspects of this operation that haven't

been touched by any of my questions that you think would illuminate this discussion of National Capital Parks.

T. Sutton Jett: Well, Herb, the Park Service has now launched another program which it calls the long range requirements. Naturally we are thinking about this, what it should be, what is in the future for the National Capital Region.

Herbert Evison: Is any one or you - do you have a representative in that group?

T. Sutton Jett: No, we do not have a representative, but Howard Strickland has indicated that he will give us a day – he had an hour with each of the other regional directors last week. He is going to give us a day next week, during which we want to show him and to try to convince him of what we think are the important things for the future of this city. We have enjoyed a lot, as you know, thru Mission 66. We sometimes forget the great improvements that have been made as a result of this program. It seems to me that it was primarily here at least, a capital improvements program, and you have lived here long enough to know that there are hundreds – 766, as a matter of fact - of units in this so-called National Capital Region. Many of these are small triangles, small plots along the principal avenues which approach the central area of the city, and many of them also, Herb, are areas which we have never had the money to develop as at Shepherd Parkway. You probably never even heard of it, in southeast Washington; as at Oxen Run Parkway, which perhaps you never heard of this, but there is a beautiful stream down there, the area bought under the Capper-Crampton Act, which we have had for many years and yet they are undeveloped in the sense that Rock Creek Park and even Ft. Dupont Park. And so it seems to me that one of our principal objectives for the future should be to develop in an attractive way, using some color in the small areas along the streets, which would give additional beauty to the city; and also to develop some of the larger areas like Oxen Run and the Shepherd Parkway. And I say this because I find that as shown you have a plan even – you have much less danger of encroachment. In other words, you can get more public support for the preservation of the beautifully landscaped park than you can of one that you haven't done anything with. And so in my judgment what we should try to do is to give some attention to these many areas which we have never touched.

T. Sutton Jett: And the second thinking - make this the third - is that we need better maintenance. Now I am going to take Howard Strickland out and show him some of these areas which we are simply not able to maintain, and I think that it looks very bad for the capital city not to have all of its park areas pretty trimly kept. And the third of course is service and interpretation. I know you would expect me to say something about this, and it is strange having me put it third, but I do think that we need to step

up and improve our interpretive program for the 6 million people who come here every year. So that in a general way is what we are thinking about and hoping will be emphasized in our program.

Herbert Evison: Two questions come to mind from what you have said. You refer to several projected or prospective parkways which you haven't done anything about. Now these are stream valleys – Oxen Run, and you mentioned some other—

T. Sutton Jett: Shepherd Parkway, yes.

Herbert Evison: Now do you feel that it is necessary in connection with those lands – and I noticed them marked on that big map on your wall – the Shepherd Parkway – do you feel that it is necessary that you run a road thru those?

T. Sutton Jett: No, we don't, Herb. As a matter of fact, I think that this term "parkway" as it is used here in the metropolitan national park system is a misnomer. I don't think we ever had any intention of putting in a roadway. It is a long narrow strip or stream valley, and we have many of them that we have applied this name to. There is Archibold Parkway, and we are fighting now, as you know, tooth and nail to keep a road from going thru it.

Herbert Evison: Well, there is a road thru it now, of a sort, isn't there?

T. Sutton Jett: There is a – the District holds a 100-ft. right-of-way thru it, a paper street, and there is no road thru it. Now the District wants us to authorize an expressway thru it which would use not only the 100 ft. right-of-way but would in addition occupy 49% of that valley; and of course you know Senator Mansfield has introduced a bill to transfer this right-of-way to the Park Service, which would then settle once and for all whether or not a road would go thru that park. We don't have it is a very natural question for you to ask. We don't think a road should go thru most of these areas that we now call parkways.

Herbert Evison: Don't you think that it might be well gradually to work away from the use of that designation?

T. Sutton Jett: I think maybe you are right. As a matter of fact, we have a new man on our staff who is working at the moment on a classification of the different types of units, both large and small, we have in the system. And this is one of the points we are thinking about, whether or not we shouldn't rename them. I think the term "parkway" Herb came from terminology in the Capper Capital Crampton Act. It was a park and parkway program; it had to do with buying, acquiring, lands for playgrounds and parkways, stream valleys, and for the recreation – active recreation – of the District of Columbia.

T. Sutton Jett: I think actually the term had its origin in the legislation itself, but there is no reason now why it couldn't be changed. I think you are quite right that it might well be—

Herbert Evison: It seems to me that would be a protective sort of thing. If you don't think the roads ought to go thru, I think as long as they are designated “parkways” and people's concept of a parkway is of a road running thru parks or park-like lines, there is always a danger that somebody is going to come along and think that it has to be done.

T. Sutton Jett: I think you are right.

Herbert Evison: So I would certainly like to see those designations changed, and Oxen Run Valley or Oxen Run Park, Oxen Run Valley Park or whatever you want to call it, it seems to me is just as good a designation as "parkway." That is very interesting.

Herbert Evison: You might be interested to know that I had four hours with that long-range planning group the other day, one of the liveliest sessions that I have sat in on in a long while.

T. Sutton Jett: Well, that is good, Herb. I am glad to hear that. You were here long enough to really make a very substantial contribution to this program, and it is as important a part, I like to feel, as any other.

Herbert Evison: I think it is wonderful that they are starting to do their thinking now, so that they don't find themselves rushed into something at the last minute when it has to be handed out on a platter; and one of the things that I like about it very much – this is some stuff that we don't need to—

[END OF INTERVIEW]