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Nancy Haack
June 16, 2010

Interview conducted by Michele Hartley

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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

Interview with: Nancy Haack

Interview by: Michele Hartley

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Nancy Haack:	00:00	Good, because I was just telling him that I have a loud voice, so if you like it, that's good.
Nancy Haack:	00:04	Okay, I'm talking to you.
Speaker 2:	00:05	Okay. We're ready.
M. Hartley:	00:06	We're ready? Okay. So, I'm here with Nancy Haack, and I just want to confirm that you're all right with us recording our interview.
Nancy Haack:	00:13	Yes, it's fine.
M. Hartley:	00:13	Thank you. So, if you wouldn't mind telling us your name, and your position here at the center.
Nancy Haack:	00:20	I'm Nancy Morbeck Haack, cartographer at Harpers Ferry Center.
M. Hartley:	00:25	And how long have you been here?
Nancy Haack:	00:26	32 and a half years. I came in October 1977.
M. Hartley:	00:31	And you're still here.
Nancy Haack:	00:32	I'm still here. World's greatest job.
M. Hartley:	00:35	Why is that?

- Nancy Haack: 00:36 Because of the people, the parks, every project is different. It's never boring. There's always a challenge. I've learned so much over the years, working with designers and writers.
- M. Hartley: 00:49 So, cartography. When you envisioned, did you always want to work for the Park Service? Or how did you find your way here to the Park Service and the center?
- Nancy Haack: 00:58 When I was kid, traveled all over the country, picked up all those brochures, they were all different. Some of them had terrible maps, some of them had good maps, so it was obvious to me they didn't come from one office, which was the case at the time. After I graduated, worked, went back to graduate school, I was looking for a job, and a friend of mind who did map contracting work for Vince Gleason, head of the publications office, suggested I contact him. So, I wrote him a handwritten letter on a sort of beige paper with brown ink. I don't know if that turned him on or off. He called me up and invited me to come out for an interview, which I did, and then I got the job. So, I was thrilled, because I thought they needed my help.
- M. Hartley: 01:51 And how is ... Could you describe cartography? The role of cartography at the Harpers Ferry Center and in the Park Service? What do the cartographers bring to this center and to media?
- Nancy Haack: 02:06 Well, I've always worked on publications, on print maps, and what I would say is visitor use maps, so I look at myself as a visitor advocate. Many, many people cannot read a map. Almost all our park visitors want the map, the park staff wants the map, our printers call it a map, even though it's a brochure, and I thought I could bring a clarity and simplicity to many of our maps so they were usable.
- Nancy Haack: 02:35 When I go to a park to prepare for a map, I try to be a stranger. I don't want a tour by the ranger; I want to try to find my way around. Some parks a map cannot help at all, because the layout and the signage is so horrible that those things have to be solved before the map is useful. I can make a map, but it's not going to solve the problem of people getting lost.

- M. Hartley: 03:00 We just talked to Dave Wright, and he talked a little bit about Vince Gleason. I asked him to talk about Vince. So, you worked for Vince-
- Nancy Haack: 03:10 I worked ... He hired me.
- M. Hartley: 03:12 And at that point, was the Unigrid ...
- Nancy Haack: 03:17 I and the Unigrid appeared at the same time, in October 1977. The first Unigrid, which was Clara Barton, was produced. That was part of the big initiative. Larger maps, four color maps. And I was academically trained. The people working on the maps here at the time came up through the technician level, so they technically could make a map that could be printed, but perhaps wasn't the best map for a visitor.
- Nancy Haack: 03:47 Now, that's why I got interested in mapping. Before I went to college, I always loved maps, read maps, loved geography, was a nerd about facts. It never occurred to me that anybody made maps. I thought they just existed. When I went to college, I discovered you could study that, so I immediately did.
- M. Hartley: 04:07 So, if you came in at the same time as the Unigrid brochure was taking off, was there a certain amount of tension, issues around the Unigrid and adapting that across the board?
- Nancy Haack: 04:20 I would say it was more excitement, because previous to that, all our folders were different, one, two or three colors. They were different pieces of paper, they folded differently. We spent a lot of time working on the mechanics of the project, which now we could just forget about. The Unigrid gave us a choice of paper sizes. The fonts were set, the colors were set, so we could really talk about the interpretive brochure by the three-part team of the writer/editor, designer, and cartographer. And that's what makes this work, because each of us brings something to it. When I make a map, I'm not the only influence on that map. I work with a designer for not just the appearance of it, but the hierarchy, which drives how somebody reads the map. You can have a map that looks beautiful, but if it doesn't function, it's no good to anybody.

- M. Hartley: 05:14 So, 32 years. Do you have any idea, ballpark, how many maps you've created for the Park Service?
- Nancy Haack: 05:22 Oh, no. Hundreds or thousands maybe, I don't know. Because, of course, every year, we update them, so that I've touched a lot of maps over the years. We have done contracting maps, maps in-house, maps that are actually paintings that we put labels on top of. Everything you can think of has happened. All different sizes and scales. It's not a series like USGS. The map is custom made for each brochure. That's what keeps it interesting.
- M. Hartley: 05:49 And you make these ... These maps are available for the public to download.
- Nancy Haack: 05:53 Right. They're up on the web. Anyone can download, if it indeed is in Adobe Illustrator. There are a few maps that are pieces of art; we can't download those. But they're used all over the world. Every once in a while I'll open up something, and there's a map I made, which just is a big thrill to me. And people say, "Don't you want royalties?" I say, "No. That's not the point." I want a good map in people's hands, something that is accurate. And boy, there's a lot of bad maps out there, as anyone who's been led astray by a bad map can tell you.
- M. Hartley: 06:27 Well, 32 years is a long time, too, but do you have a favorite project or a couple, top 10, or top three, or-
- Nancy Haack: 06:36 Oh, no. Oh, no. I can't think of one off the top of my head, because there are a few that have been bum, because a rocky road to get them finished, but ... Oh, that'd be interesting.
- Nancy Haack: 06:51 Okay. Olympic National Park is probably the most complicated map I ever made. One side of that brochure is a very complicated painting of species, and the other side is a very complicated map, which I even took away a lot of the stuff the park wanted to include on there, because I felt the visitor would not be able to read it. But that was a real challenge to make that map and also to satisfy the park's needs for that. And it's still, essentially, the same map as it was when we produced it. In 2001, I think, is when we made that. So, that's a real highlight. Sure.

- Nancy Haack: 07:30 And then all those war maps. I can never convince any Civil War guy that they need a video to show troop movement, so those have been really interesting over the years, to work with those people. Some of them are not enlightened. Some of them will listen to what I say, that you have to strip it down, down, down, down, because the visitor doesn't need to know everything that ranger knows about the war. And the Civil War buff already knows it, and he can get something other than the general brochure to satisfy the fact that he knows things. So, those are two instances of really a fascinating challenge.
- M. Hartley: 08:14 It seems like Harpers Ferry Center employees often to have to be a little bit like amateur psychologists with park people, as well as diplomats.
- Nancy Haack: 08:22 Right.
- M. Hartley: 08:23 Do you find that to be that the case? How do you communicate or what are your strategies for communicating your craft, and as it relates to the effectiveness for visitors?
- Nancy Haack: 08:36 Well, one of the things I always talk about is the question, "Do you need a map?" Parks always think they need a map. If you can see everything, you don't need a map. You just need decent signage. And people often want parking lot maps. I've had people who say, "People can't find the visitor center." I usually have to go there in person and walk around with the park superintendent for them to understand. They have to experience it. Talking about it doesn't solve the problem.
- Nancy Haack: 09:09 Then we have the big discussion about GIS printouts. GIS is a fabulous system of data storage, but the machine just prints out the layers that you've selected, so it isn't edited for information. We always say the genius of the map is what is left out. If I can get the park to understand that, then we're on the way to a good visitor use map. Some people just never will, ever will, understand that. And we move on. I mean, I have to provide a map, which I sometimes will think is not successful, and I always want to get feedback. It's hard to get feedback from visitors, because it's filtered through the park.

- M. Hartley: 09:59 Well, you've been here not quite since the beginning, but could you speak to the evolution of the center at all? Any observations, insights?
- Nancy Haack: 10:17 Oh, I think that the ... That's hard to ... Since I've really only worked in publications, I don't see what's happening in the other areas.
- M. Hartley: 10:28 Well, you could talk just about publications, actually.
- Nancy Haack: 10:30 Yeah. Well, the big thing, and Terry mentioned it during the picnic, was when computers came. That changed our lives and publications. We then had complete control over our product. We can have a production-ready package that goes to the printer, and when I say all they have to do is print it, that's simplistic ... But previously, they had to provide film separations from our materials and they could be poorly done, and we had to spend a lot time correcting them. And now, if it's lousy, it's our fault in the production.
- Nancy Haack: 11:06 So, I got a whole new job. The thinking is the same, but the advent of the computer to create the map and also to create the layout and all the images just has made it very satisfying, because things can happen faster, and you can see the result of your work. You know you did it right before you send it off to the printer or wherever. So, that's the change that I appreciate. But I always tell kids, the thinking's the same. Doesn't matter what the tool is.
- M. Hartley: 11:40 That's true.
- Nancy Haack: 11:42 Yeah. And then-
- M. Hartley: 11:42 It's good technology doesn't rule the story, yeah.
- Nancy Haack: 11:46 Yeah. And they pay me to think. Is what I ... when I talk to school kids.
- M. Hartley: 11:50 Do you talk to school kids about your career?
- Nancy Haack: 11:52 I haven't lately. I did a few years ago. We had some kids come in, but I haven't probably in the last four years or so. Yeah.

- M. Hartley: 11:58 Well, aside from your cartography contribution here, you've also served on at least one committee that I know of. Is that-
- Nancy Haack: 12:06 I've been on the diversity committee and EEO committee, federal women's committee. I'm trying to think ... may be other ones. I'm not sure.
- M. Hartley: 12:13 So, those are sort of the back end of the center, that's more to do with the administration, but why are those important to ... Or do you think those are important committees to have?
- Nancy Haack: 12:26 They're important to someone like me, as a woman, because as a kid, it never occurred to me I would be working in a professional job. Maybe a teacher. Always saw it in the view of, you were a minister's wife, or a doctor's wife, or something like that. People today just can't believe that. I think it's important to keep on with that idea that everybody should have the same opportunity no matter where they came from, what they did. Here I am, preaching to the choir. But that's something really important to me.
- Nancy Haack: 12:57 I have two sons, and they know better than to say a lot of things that you might think, looking at these two blond, blue-eyed boys. A lot of people make assumptions about what they think, and they don't think that way. In fact, they were tired of hearing about not to think that way. So ...
- M. Hartley: 13:17 Well, do you think the center brings value to the Park Service and beyond?
- Nancy Haack: 13:25 Oh, absolutely.
- M. Hartley: 13:27 Could you maybe say a few words?
- Nancy Haack: 13:29 Well, once again, just bringing to mind, they mentioned Manzanar during the picnic, and I was there on vacation last year, and that, indeed, was one of the best exhibits I've ever seen in my life. It put the whole story out. The ranger said my husband and I spent more time there than anybody, because we read everything, because we wanted to know. And it was very clear that it was a case that the visitor would make their own judgment about it. For that to be out there for people to experience, it's a tremendous

contribution. So, that's just ... Because it was mentioned today, I'm thinking of that.

- Nancy Haack: 14:09 But overall, the parks, of course. I'm very proud to work for the Park Service and all those ... When Vince hired me, he laughed. He said, "I don't have to send you to those places because you've been to so many." Which rang true, because he didn't send me to very many places for a long time. But, yeah.
- M. Hartley: 14:27 Well, there are a lot of people, I think, who work for the center and the Park Service who vacation in the parks.
- Nancy Haack: 14:34 Absolutely. That's a destination for us always, because we know it's going to be a high quality experience. And to get that great brochure, going to see that movie.
- M. Hartley: 14:44 And you won't get lost.
- Nancy Haack: 14:44 Won't get lost. Right. Right. So, no. I mean, I laugh because I don't consider that I work for the government, or that I work for Interior. I work for the Park Service. I know that sounds very elitist, but that certainly has been our attitude all these years. So ...
- M. Hartley: 15:03 Well, thank you, Nancy.
- Nancy Haack: 15:05 You're welcome. I wish I could think of more things.
- M. Hartley: 15:07 You're good. This is perfect.
- Nancy Haack: 15:10 So ... It's wonderful. Okay. Good.
- M. Hartley: 15:12 All righty.
- Nancy Haack: 15:13 We done? Thank you.
- M. Hartley: 15:14 Yes.
- Nancy Haack: 15:14 Thank you. Okay.

END OF TAPE