5-30-2014

Interview with Bob Ward (FA 1098)

Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)
Field ID and name: #0027; Bob Ward interview
Interviewee: Bob Ward
Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman
Date: 5/30/2014
Location: Cave City, KY
Others Present: N/A
Equipment used: EOS 70D DSLR Camera
Microphone: Rode, VideoMic Pro Compact Shotgun Microphone
Recording Format: .mov (converted to .wav audio file)
Recorded Tracks in Session: 1 audio track (compiled from 13 video files)
Duration: [00:59:13]
Keywords: Percy Priest Lake, Jean LaFitte, Stone's River National Battlefield, Mammoth Cave, Seasonal housing, creation of Mammoth Cave, cemeteries at Mammoth Cave
Corresponding Materials:
Forms: KFP2014LOCRP_0027_BBms0001 - KFP2014LOCRP_0027_BBms0003
Audio recording: KFP2014LOCRP_0027_BBsr0001
Video files: KFP2014LOCRP_0027_BBmv0001 - KFP2014LOCRP_0027_BBmv0013

Context:
Technical Considerations: Audio file was created from the compiled video files for the purpose of transcription
Transcription prepared by: Jennie Boyd

Transcribing Conventions:
Use of square brackets [ ] indicates a note from the transcriber.
Use of parentheses ( ) indicates a conversational aside.
Use of em dash — indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.
Use of ellipses … indicates a discontinued thought.
Use of quotations " " indicates dialogue within conversation.
Use of italics indicates emphasis.
Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.
Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.
Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Note: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.
[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]

BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Okay. Today is May 30. And this is Brent Björkman—May 30, 2014—the Folklife Program, with the Folklife Program, and I'm continuing my work with the occupational folk culture of park rangers project I'm doing with Jon Kay at Traditional Arts Indiana. I'm interviewing people that are connected to the National Park Service here in Kentucky. And I'm here at the home of Bob Ward. Bob could you intro-, could you say your name and, and tell us about your connection to the, the National Park Service. Or you first, your last job a the Nat-, National Park—

BOB WARD: Yeah, my name's Robert Hatton Ward, my full name, and I go by Bob Ward. And my last job at the National Park Service was at Mammoth Cave National Park. I was the Chief of the Science and Resource Management Division.

BB: Okay. Well I've been asking people, I've done several of these interviews and it's been just an enlightening experience. One of the ways that we start out the interview is to talk about, you know, maybe your first connections to thinking about this as a career. You know, some people have had other careers prior to it, but it's really the origin story of, of the person that I'm, that I'm interviewing.

BW: Right.

BB: Could you, could you speak to that to begin with? I know you've had a lot of—

BW: Yeah, I know you mentioned earlier about people's first encounter potentially with national park service rangers was on a vacation or, or something like that, and the guy in the flat hat and you know. My experience is quite different. I grew up in middle Tennessee in what's now part of Percy Priest Lake. So my family farm was acquired by the US government when I was twelve years old. And so my first

encounter with people in ranger-like uniforms and flat hats was with the Army Corps of Engineers. And my dad would say that, you know, there were people pulling in the driveway to appraise the property and he would say, "The dam people are here." And 'damn' was the only cuss word I was allowed to say growing up because it referred to the 'dam,' the Percy Priest dam as opposed to the cussword 'damn.' So my first encounter with people in uniform was through that ex-, that whole experience of land acquisition. So I was on the sort of receiving end of things from the government in that sense, rather than, than the more, potentially more positive encounter of the ranger helping you out of the car, helping you with a guided tour or something like that. So I sort of went from that experience to my father talking about, ironically during the Memorial Day time period, growing up, the Yankee cemetery in Murfreesboro. And in my childhood was regarded more as a Northern holiday. And African-American folks went to, to decorate the graves of Union soldiers. Of course, a lot of them were in the, what was known as the US Colored Troop. You know, a lot of them were African-Americans who had fought in the Civil War and died in some cases in, in the Civil War, so that was an experience. And then for some reason, and I'm not quite sure why, at, at the age of seventeen, I started working as a volunteer in the park at that same Yankee cemetery, at Stone's River National Battlefield. And from there I worked through—that was 1971—and I worked through really the Bicentennial in 1976. And in 1977, I got a seasonal job at Stone's River National Battlefield. And then on a lark of all things, in the, I guess January or February of 1980, I came with two ladies from Stone's River National Battlefield to a women's conference scheduled at Mammoth Cave. And the, there was supposed to be a speaker fly out of Atlanta on a park plane, park service plane, and land in Glasgow and come do this women's conference thing. And I just kind of went along for the ride. Well, the guy didn't show up because the weather was bad, and so we spent the whole day touring the surface and the subsurface of Mammoth Cave National Park, courtesy of the other folks, you know, that were here, the Chief Ranger and, and other people. And I said, "Well, hey, this looks kind of neat, you know. I mean, I enjoy the Civil War stuff, I'm really into the history of the Civil War.

But I really, this is kind of a neat place. It's got history and all the stuff. How do you apply to get a job up here?" So I applied that year, barely got in under the deadline to get my application in and got a seasonal position at Mammoth Cave National Park and started in, in June of 1980 as a seasonal park guide. So, and then I worked '80, '81, '82 and the spring of '83. And again another sort of lark circumstance for me, I was at a, I wasn't employed during the winter, but I was up here on a, some kind of training thing that the park was having, and even though I wasn't scheduled to attend it, I was here visiting, they said, "Well, you can join in this training session if you like." And I did, and there was a guy there from, I knew his name for years and I've forgotten it now—John Hiscock, I think may have been his name. But he had a, had an announcement for a job at Jean Lafitte [0:05:00] in New Orleans. And he said he had thought about applying for it, but really wasn't going to be able to apply. And so I put in an application for this job at Jean Lafitte National Historic Park in, in New Orleans in the spring of '83. And lo and behold, got the job. So I worked there from June of '83 to October of 1984 as a living history ranger, which is really what I'd been trained at, trained in at Stone's River. But I wanted to come back to Mammoth Cave. My parents were elderly and I wanted to be close to home. This was a hundred and ten miles away from, from home, so I applied to come back to Mammoth Cave, applied actually for a part-time job, even though I was full-time in, in New Orleans. Well, Bob Deskins was the superintendent here of Mammoth Cave at that time, and he had just been appointed to a regional office position. And in transition of me going, coming back to Mammoth Cave and him going to Atlanta, he made all the part-time people full-time. So even though I had stepped down to a part-time job just to be able to get back close to my parents, I actually came back to a full-time position. So, you know, it's just amazing how things, it, I reflect on it quite a bit. It's just, it, life is a game of inches, and it's a game of, you know, doing, doing something at the right time and sometimes not even realize you're doing it. You know, it just happens for you. And some would say providence and some would say luck and some would say some combination thereof. But, so at any rate, I got back to Mammoth Cave in the fall of, of '84 and then the very next year, I became a summer

seasonal supervisor for the, the guides, and you, you know, have a certain group of park ranger guides and you'd go on tours with them and audit them and things like that. So I did that '85 and '86, and somewhere along in that time period, and I don't actually remember exactly when, but sometime during that time period, because of some impetus from the park and impetus from Ed Bears who was the chief historian for the National Park Service, they started wanting to hire what were called 170 series historians for the parks. In other words, have the expertise of the historical research in the park rather than having the park having to go either outside totally or having it to go to Washington or Atlanta or wherever. So the park advertised for a GS-170 series historian position that was a GS5/7/9. So if you got it, you didn't have to compete for the seven or compete for the nine, you would move up incrementally as you gained the skill level that the park assessed that you qualified for the next level. So I was very fortunate in, I think it was August of 1986 that I got that position and was the park's first historian, 170 series historian. There have been certainly other historians connected with Mammoth Cave in other capacities, but the 170 series was really near and dear to Ed Bearss' heart because to him it said that you were a positive degree person, you had a history degree, at least at a Bachelor's level, and you were going to be duty-stationed in the park and connected with the other historians. There were several historian positions hired in Southeast region along about the same time. And I forget everybody's name, but there was Terry Wenchell down at Vicksburg, me at Mammoth Cave, the guy at Chickamauga will kill me because I can't remember his name, but at any rate, there were several of us hired along about the same time in the same program. So I worked in that capacity for about two years. It should have taken three years I think to complete the program. We changed superintendents along about that time, Dave Mihalic came in the park, actually he was hired in the fall of '87 and started in the park in January of '88. And he had sort of a different view of things. He wanted more of what was being termed a cultural resource specialist. He wanted a cultural resource manager, or a program manager. And then under that person would be historians, archaeologists, folklorists, all of the disciplines would be sub-disciplined in effect under that, that

cultural resource specialist program manager. So he, he, I was transitioned from a 170 series back into what's called 025, which was the original park ranger series in the National Park Service. So I was transitioned to that which wasn't the positive degree requirement position, but that's all kind of bureaucratic kind of stuff. And so I became the cultural resource spec-, cultural resource management specialist for the park, I think was the full position title. And that would have been, I think that would have been January of '89, if I remember right. And then I worked in that capacity, [0:10:00] and, and we were, I was in interpretation at the old position of, of the historian position, was in interpretation. And when I became cultural resource specialist I was moved over to the new division. Actually it was an office at the time, of the science and resource management. It wasn't even a full division until probably '91, I think, when Jeff Bradybaugh got here as chief, it became a full division. So for roughly from January of '89 to probably the spring of '90 I served in that office, in that office of science and resource management. And then that chief, Steve Cheney, left to go out west to be, I think a superintendent, or he may at first moved to be a, you know, a chief or something and eventually became a superintendent. And during the interim period between the time he left and the new chief of the new division was hired, Jeff Bradybaugh, I actually served as acting chief of that office and eventually that division. And so when Jeff Bradybaugh got here there was again some look at specialization, you know, we were trying to get an ecologist hired and people back in the positive degree requirement positions. And my position title was pretty much left the same but I was put back in the 170 series, and it resulted in a grade increase. So I moved not just from the 5/7/9 that I'd applied for, but non-competitively moved into a GS11 position. And through the experience that I'd had as the acting capacity under Dave Mihalic in the office of science and resource management, I moved into more or less a quasi-assistant chief or deputy chief role. I was never designated that during that time period. Eventually Jeff Bradybaugh moved on to Zion National Park. He's the superintendent out west now and eventually did some other acting chief ca-, you know, stints and would get a temporary promotion at times to a GS12, so I had that going for me. And then

eventually they did, under Jerry O'Neill was chief here from 1998 through 1999, and he had come out of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. And he was used to the sort of traditional chief, deputy chief, and then everybody else, you know, under, under that person. So the park service, the Mammoth Cave National Park did create a position called Deputy Chief of Science and Resource Management. And I was moved into that position non-competitively at a GS12. So I feel like I'm leading a charmed life at this point in my life, you know, to—

BB: And that would be what year all this is taking place, about a ten year—

BW: That was taking place about 1999. So from—

BB: Fif-, fifteen—

BW: From roughly '86 to 1999, you know, I kind of led a charmed life from moving from a GS5 to, to a GS12 in 1999. And then in the year, I think—

BB: Did you feel grateful during that, I mean—

BW: I said, I just—

BB: Did you, did you know about that, did you know this feeling?

BW: Oh, I, I knew the feeling then, and I still feel it, that it's just another, I say life is a game of inches. It's a game of just un-, unbelievable, you know, just stuff happening to you and you don't always account in, within yourself as to why, you know how, you know, I'm just, I feel extremely fortunately, extremely benefitted. And of course, in a strange sense, in the park service, you know, the, the greatest job on earth in the National Park Service is that front line, visitor contact person. It, it's probably the most important position in the National Park Service. You know, you're leading,

you're leading walks, you're doing nighttime bat counts, you're doing, you're doing all this kind of front line stuff that's generally lumped under, you know, park, the park ranger concept. You know, you're, you're doing a little bit of, of all of it. You're not really doing the specialization that was called for in sort of the modern era, but you're, you know, you're, you're really doing the work of the National Park Service, you know. You're protecting the National Parks. You're providing for public enjoyment, you know. Those, those two driving ethics of, of the National Park Service is what you're doing. So as you move up in the National Park Service in terms of rank and pay and all that, ironically you're sort of moving away from those jobs. You're moving more into trying to get the money, trying to supervise the personnel, trying to ultimately carry out that mission. But, but you're missing the, the nighttime bat counts. You're missing the, the river walk with the, with the public. You're missing the campfire programs. You're missing those things that are maybe the original reason that you saw benefit to this job and to your life and this job in the first place. So, so yeah, from, from roughly '86 when I applied for the 5/7/9 job, to, to 1999 when I got the GS12, [015:00] yes, I felt extremely blessed and fortunate and was grateful for the position. But, but sad in a sense that you're moving away from what you got into it for in the first place.

BB: And that's about the time, that's right, because I was here from, as part of the graduate program from '96 to '98, so that's the latter part leading up to that part—

BW: Right.

BB: That's when I first met you.

BW: Right. Right.

BB: Briefly, and, and you were in that position. Yeah.

BW: Right. Yeah. And in, and in 2000, the year 2000 was the hiring of another chief from another agency, and that was Mark Duploy. He came out of the Bureau of Land Management. And he was okay seemingly. He at least tolerated the deputy chief. He was kind of used to doing it his way, and, and not wanting a lot of help with it, even, even from program managers with a lot more experience and skill than he had in, in some areas. But at any rate, I served as the deputy chief under him until he left, and then by that point in time, Pat Reeve was the superintendent at Mammoth Cave National Park, and I got to know him quite well. And, and he was a, very much a, very much a people person. Nearly always talked about at meetings, about, you know we're there to help each other succeed. And, you know, he was concerned not only about us, his employees as people but even concerned about our families. He was really a buck ranger that had come up through the ranks, and moved all over the country. I forget how many different park service areas he had worked in. He and Derrick, you know, he had worked out west as a search and rescue ranger, and he had been at, prior to coming to Mammoth Cave, in—what year would that have been? God, I, I lose track of years here. Somewhere around two, Ron Switzer left in 2005, so probably 2006 is when Pat got here. And, but he just brought a very sort of people-friendly persona to the job of superintendent. And when the position was advertised for the chief job, for the first time in its history, it was advertised not just for the natural resource series, but the cultural resource series as well, which I would never qualify under natural series, even though my, my second major was actually in a, in a human geography, kind of parks/recreation type of, of major, second major. But I really would never qualify under the natural resource series, but because he advertised it as both natural and cultural, I was able to qualify successfully, compete, in a national application process, and I got the, the chief job in the fall of 2008. And was, again, grateful. That was a GS13. So for a guy who started out seeing people in uniform, running all over their dad's farm, through hearing his dad talk about the Yankee Cemetery, to doing living history a couple different places, and you know, working my way up through the ranks, and probably having a career

aspiration of no more than a GS9, which is really kind of full performance in the old 025 series, I was a GS13 in August, or Oc-, excuse me, October of 2008.

BB: Um-hm.

BW: I'm quite humbled by that. I still keep the, the announcement for that job down close to my chair here in the den, so. So I worked in, they always say to get your high three at your highest grade level. That was fall 2008. But honestly, the bureaucracy of, of trying to keep programs like you work with going, you know, trying to get grant money to run those types of programs, I was just worn out with it. And so in August of 2010, I, I retired with a total of 31 years, 30 years active service, and another year of sick leave, which counts towards your retirement, and all that stuff. And, and but I gave the park a year's notice, because I knew the position, not me, but the position was important enough not to just come up one day to say, "I'm out of here," you know. I, I was too grateful, and still am, for the privilege of service. You know there was a guy years ago who was a deputy director of the National Park Service, and I, I forget his name. But, but he said the park service was not always a pleasure, but it was always a privilege. And, and that's very true. Those, those jobs are very privileged, and I was very privileged to have the career that I had. So, and, and on September 18 of the year—what year did I say?

BB: 2010?

BW: Yeah, 2010. I retired and have moved on to doing other things, but never, ever forgetting, and never, ever not being grateful for my career.

BB: Yeah. Well, I can see, just around your house, I mean, you know, we talked briefly about getting back to collecting a few, getting back to some Civil War things.

BW: Right.

BB: And you are, like myself, [0:20:00] like our, our undergraduate degrees, historians, and I was a social studies person.

BW: Right.

BB: And trying to be able to relay that kind of information, and you laid out a lot of great things when you were giving your chronology about how you did, and, and about how different people operated, and how they wanted to instill maybe a people kind of feel, or, or caring about the—and I know that's part of the draw to this, is the camaraderie, and that's one of the things that I'm interested in with this project is, what is the working culture like, and, and I was wondering maybe the initial interpretive qualities of your early years. I know you had people connections, both with the general public and increasingly as a supervisor and things, but can we step back to, I know it was evolving, you, some of your first experiences, maybe that first week or that fir-, of, of the first time you had that job, what that was like for you.

BW: Yeah, it was extremely exciting because I came out of a very rural Southern small farm background, with not a, I was an only child, not a lot of interface with people. And all of a sudden, there were people around you just doing fun things, you know. I mean, I started in 1971, as I mentioned, as a volunteer in the park at Stone's River, and I worked on an environmental study area trail, Isa Trail, one of the, actually in a battlefield ar-, setting. They were doing an environmental study area, so, you know, not, not to disturbing much as you went along, but creating a pathway for people to walk and see plants and things like that. And I got to work with environmental education specialists. I thought, heck, this is fun, you know. And people would get off work, and they'd all kind of hang out together, and, and there was, you could call it a culture, a sub-culture, ever how you classify it, within, you know, occupational folklore, but it, but it was just a group of people that worked together, had fun together, were at times like a family, sometimes a dysfunctional

family, you know. They fought some, and you know, and, and recovered and all that, but it was just, it was just such a dynamic, fun thing to do, you know. And my first supervisor in the National Park Service was from upstate New York, and he was a Korean War veteran. His name was Don Adams. And I got almost adopted, kind of like, by his family, because I was, I was always the youngish looking. I'm sixty now, and I still don't probably look my age. So I was always just kind of boyish, you know, looking, and, and was adopted by the Adams family, and they were a little more progressive in some ways than my own mom and dad, you know. I'd go to their house for dinner, and even though I was 17 years old, you know, they'd serve Scotch. And so I'd have a drink of Scotch. I thought it was the most horrible thing I'd ever had in my mouth, and still do, but, but I enjoyed it, and it was, it was just the camaraderie of working with people doing things, social things outside of the job with those same people, and you just, that just became your friends and, and what you did, and it was fun. And, and you know, intellectually stimulating for a, for a kid that had really not thought a whole lot about where the heck he was going. Most everybody went into a factory, quite frankly, or if they were, you know, privileged enough they went in to a big farm. But I grew up on a, you know, really small farm, and it was taken away by the government anyway, so we, we moved to town, and there really wasn't just a lot to do. So, you know, it was just something that was really fun and, and sent me on a pathway toward getting a degree in history, eventually, and, and eventually the career that I've described to you.

BB: Right. And because of family, you know, working your way back to this area after you went to—where was it? Jean LaFitte?

BW: Jean LaFitte in New Orleans. Yeah.

BB: Yeah. Well, what was that like, to be that, that far away? I mean that, it sounds like that, if I remember correctly was about a year before you put in a, a request to transfer.

BW: Yeah, I stayed, yeah, that's about right. I stayed, I got that job in June of, of 1983, and got here, back here in the fall of '84.

BB: I, I guess one of the things I, I was thinking about, I've talked to a lot of Mammoth Cave people, and the interesting thing about that park is a lot of people have just been here, and never left, and, and they have certain feelings, so we can talk about that, that later.

BW: Right. Right.

BB: There are people like, oh, David Wyrick, who's just come on, and he's been in a lot of places. He's been in DC and, and, and all these places.

BW: Right.

BB: So I've asked people about, kind of comparative, maybe about the battlefield compared to Jean LaFitte, and then maybe we, you could lead me back to coming here, and, and the working culture of, of Mammoth Cave, but the New Orleans culture down there, did you have enough time to experience it, or can you—

BW: It was a different, little bit different and crammed up into an urban environment. It was, it was a little bit, there wasn't quite the same thing I'd experienced at Stone's River, or at Mammoth Cave, where you kind of hung out with the same people. I mean, Mammoth Cave was bigger than Stone's River, obviously, so when I got here as a seasonal, it wasn't like everybody got [0:25:00] together every night, you know. You were, they were in different groups. But there wasn't so much the, what's called clique stuff or rivalry. There wasn't bad feelings out of it. It was a real positive, you know, thing, but you would have a group of people that you would socialize with, but when I got to New Orleans, it was a real different

environment. You know, you, it, first of all, it was very expensive to live there on a GS5 salary at the time. And then people were nice. A lot of people that worked in the park, kind of a similar thing to what you get into at other parks, a lot of your facilities management folks are locals. You know, there are people in other, in the other divisions that are locals. You got some mix of locals versus people from outside. But it wasn't quite the same feeling of camaraderie at Jean LaFitte that I'd had at Stone's River and Mammoth Cave, so I wanted to come back to Mammoth Cave, not only for my parents, but I wanted to get back to what I'd experienced there as a seasonal, even though I was coming back as a permanent. So, and it was kind of a déjà vu experience, as you might imagine. You get back, and you get handed the same post office box key that you handed in when you left, and that's kind of fun, and, and I lived in seasonal quarters for a while, as I had right before I went to Jean LaFitte.

BB: Yeah.

BW: But of course, you, as a permanent employee, you can't stay in seasonal quarters very long, so I ended up getting a small apartment in Park City, and lived there for about five years, I think from about fall of '80—well, actually, December, I think of '84 to, I bought this house in the spring of 1990. So I lived there, you know, a little over five years, roughly, so.

BB: What was seasonal, what was the, the seas-, the makeup of seasonal quarters? That's been an interesting thing. I've talked to a lot of people who are, I don't have a lot of people that talk to me about, about that particular thing. There's just a handful, as—

BW: Well, it's almost a thing of the past, in a sense. The original concept of the National Park Service is that you had people who worked the, in the park, living in the park. And then along comes James Watt, in whatever years those were, I think he

was Reagan's Secretary of Interior, if I remember right, and that would have been sometime between 1980 and '88. So along comes James Watt, and he pushes to get people out of park housing, and I, it stemmed from something, I think maybe in California, or something. I don't remember the whole deal. But, but park service housing was never a, it wasn't a penthouse. It was never, you know, real super nice places to live, but you accepted it because you liked living in the park, you didn't pay, you know, really high rates for it. But what James Watt did is he tried to make those places competitive with private sector market, you know, housing. Well, the problem is the, the price went way up, but the quality of the housing didn't sort of keep up with it. So you're paying real high rates and not getting the, the housing experience that you might could get outside. So people began to move out. Houses became vacant, including historic houses, unfortunately, that were built by the CCCs, and the, the maintenance of those structures went down. So you had some, you had some impact on a lot of things from that, you know, seemingly sort of, I don't want to call it a progressive move exactly, but it was a move to ultimately, to get people more into the commu-, it succeeded in getting people into the community. I don't know if that was really his intent or not, but, but it, it had some good parts, but it also had some extremely bad parts to it. So, so I, you know, when I moved back here, I, I stayed in seasonal for a while, but then moved out and got the apartment in Park City, and eventually bought a home here in the community. And there was good parts to having people out in the community. They call it 'flying the flag,' you know, you're, you're getting up of a morning with your ranger hat on, and your uniform, and you're, you're heading off to the park, and people see you, and, you know, you're just one of them, kind of thing. You know, it's almost a little crazy in a sense, but, but you become part of the community more if you're living out in the community, than if you're isolated with-, within the park, so.

BB: And that was a good—in your mind, is that a good thing?

BW: As I said, it's a real positive thing. Yeah. The downside to it to some degree is if you have an emergency or something in the middle of the night, you don't have anybody on duty. I know, one time I was living in seasonal quarters, and I think, I think it was actually after I had moved back from New Orleans, and I was living in seasonal quarters. And actually, it was Dave Lyons, Joy Lyons' husband, that knocked on the door late one night, and said, "We're going to need some help." And I thought, well, I'll help, but I'm not, I'm not a law enforcement person. I'm not, at that time, I wasn't a, an EMT. I was eventually an EMT, but I wasn't at that time. I thought, okay, I'll come help, but apparently had some crazy guy running through the park, and everybody, you know, was called out to help in some way, and we all pitched in and helped in some way, which is a service, [0:30:00] you do what you can do, you know, to help each other out, and help carry out the mission, whatever time of day or night it is. But, so, you know, that, that, that's the good part about having people in the park, and so therefore the downside of not having people in the park is you don't have that same thing, but, but, you know, eventually the park service law enforcement has become so professionalized, and so specialized, that you've got at least a 24/7 availability of people, albeit a small number of people at Mammoth Cave, anymore. Probably not an adequate staff to do what really needs to be done. And if they're not living in the park, then they can get there quickly, because they usually go home with their vehicles and all that stuff, so.

BB: Um-hm.

BW: So that's, my seasonal ex-, seasonal housing experience is somewhat limited compared to some of the rest of them, you know, but it, but it is another place where people can both, you know, work together during the daytime, and then gather socially at night, you know, so. And some of it gets a little wild and crazy, I think I've heard, but I tried to at, by the time I kind of was out of seasonal quarters, I was working my way up the ranks, and I, I didn't particularly go over to seasonal

quarters that much to participate. That's kind of that fraternization thing that you got to try to avoid if you can, so.

BB: Right. Right. Your trajectory through the park, and working your way up, and, and, you know, part of it, you said, was you missed, you have things by inches. You know, you, you have these opportunities and there's luck, and there's right place at the right time, I think is what your getting at.

BW: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: But it seems there must be a flexibility, because you're a, a person who always to me seems like a thinker and a go-getter. You must have had some influence on, did you have an influence on, okay, how'd that worked, and I'm trying to work my ray, way around to saying, you didn't create your own jobs there, by any means, but you seem to use the opportunity at hand to play on your own strengths, or—

BW: Yeah, I'd say, I think that's fair. And I, and I think it's also one trait that I feel somewhat proud of having. I don't want to get prideful about it. But I know at times, even as a seasonal, you know, things would get hard. I mean, you know, there was a time at Mammoth Cave when I was still a seasonal that they cut us from 40 hours a week to 39 hours a week, and the whole concept was, if you got 40 hours a week, you earned annual leave and sick leave I guess, or whatever. If you got cut to 39, I don't recall that we did. And a lot of people, frankly, wasn't going to do that, and moved on, and I stayed with it, either because of my circumstances, or desire, or whatever, I was able to take a lot of stuff. At least early on as a younger person, I was able to sort of have the patience and just take it, you know, eat it, so to speak, and keep going with it. So, and, and of course managers see that. You know, that, that I worked at Liquor Barn in Bowling Green right now, and whenever Darryl Blair posts the schedule up there for us to work, there's a lot of guys going "Aw, god, Darryl, I can't do that." You know, and they're in his office, going, "Aw, come on. You know,

what's going on here?" I never say a word. Some of the schedules I don't like, but I don't ever say anything. And, and Darryl said to me one day that he really liked the fact that I didn't say anything, that, you know, I said if I wanted off, and he tells this to everybody, if you want off, you know, let me know, and we'll, we'll work something out. But I don't bitch at the manager all the time about this and that. And the managers like that. I mean, and I know it as a manager, you know. You don't like the squeaky wheel getting the grease thing. You want to throw the grease bucket at them, some of the time, you know. So, that, when managers saw as I sort of moved up the ranks that, that I could take it, be a team player, you know, do what it took to get the job done, and, and basically have their back, you know, then, then I think that counts towards helping you move your way up, up the institution or whatever that institution is.

BB: Right. Because I think they're indoctrinating you into that larger culture, especially as you progress, because you do have to take a lot of stuff.

BW: You do.

BB: And there are a lot of mandates that come down.

BW: Right.

BB: Is that fair?

BW: Yeah. That's fair. And a lot of things you don't, don't agree with. And you just, you know, try to, try to make the old bad cliché of making lemonade out of lemons. You know, you just try to do the best you can with it. But you know, and, and you, you, the park service, overall, for me, well, it's very much a positive experience, but there were some negative experiences too, all along the way, as there are with any profession. You know, you, you make a few, I don't want to call them enemies, but,

you know, there's a couple people at the park that won't speak to me anymore, which is, you know, the, a pro-, direct product of having been the deputy chief and chief of the division, you know, and, [0:35:00] and that happens, I assume, to everybody. I hate it. You know, I hate to be out in a restaurant somewhere, you know, or in a small town environment, like around here and run across somebody at the post office or the bank or something, and you know, particularly if they're in uniform, and people know that I'm a retired employee, and, and somebody's a little rude to me, or a little curt, or doesn't speak to me, it, it hurts. I mean, it does. But, you know, it's just a, the nature of the game, so, it, it's just what, I made decisions at times that maybe some people didn't like, and, and maybe I made bad ones, or maybe I made good ones, or maybe some combination thereof, but I don't, I don't come home every night from the liquor store getting all worried about it anymore. I think about the park service, but I always think about it in real positive ways. I don't come home and, and stew about, you know, various things. So I enjoy job at the Liquor Barn, and I enjoy wine, and, you know, one of the main reasons I went back in the work force was, was really to still be around people, because I, I like that. I like the interplay in the park service of people in the resources, and the interplay at the Liquor Barn of people and the resources of, you know, what we sell there, so.

BB: Let's go back to something that you and I, we both, we both enjoyed the historical aspects. And you mentioned when you were s-, talking about your career in the first part of the interview, about the movement to the idea of not having history dictated from outside, but having a historian from within.

BW: Right.

BB: And that, I think that's an interesting thing. I talked to one of your former colleagues, who is also retired, Joy Lyons, who I've heard that, and maybe it's a direct result of what you were laying out, that let's, let's, let's celebrate our, our, our working rangers who have an interest in a certain area and, and, and push them

forward to investigating, and learning on their own, and—can you speak to that culture?

BW: Well, I think one of the great things, really, about it, and maybe this is true in all parks, but I found it really true at Mammoth Cave National Park, is the, particularly the guide force, the park ranger guide folks, or park rangers interpreters. I don't know what the right terminology is for it, and I don't even know what it was in the day, you know, when I worked there, but the people who are invested, they're, they're really invested in the history of, of, of Mammoth Cave and how it, you know, came to be the National Park that it is through the, the early tourism. And, you know, the tourism of Mammoth Cave goes back to, you know, the, right after the War of 1812, you know, in 1816, and so there's, there's a whole cadre of people that have invested themselves. I mean, look at Chuck DuCroix and all the research, you know, that he's done on the—again, probably the name will, will, the guy from Germany that did the, the—Kemper, Max Kemper. Look at all the work that he's done on Max Kemper. Just on his own, you know. I mean, people get in-, in-, invested in Mammoth Cave National Park in a very personal way, and they do great professional work. I mean, they're, they may not come necessarily out of the positive degree requirement position, but they're basically doing the historical investigation, and they're also then doing that application of that in the interpretive context, you know, which, which really was what Mammoth Cave created the historian position to do, was to investigate that history, get accurate information together and then, and then interpret that to the public. I mean, that, it's really, and, and that's very much been done at Mammoth Cave, both directly from what Ed Bearss was wanting to do, and what Joy has done, what Chuck DuCroix had done, and, and many others over the years have done. And just making it their personal mission to interpret that, research and interpret that just magnificent resource, both the cave and the, the surface. So it, it's just an important, this is what makes, this is what makes Mammoth Cave a real special place, I think.

BB: Yeah, and I think about learning more about you all through the interview process, and how even on days off, people are back to the cave—

BW: Yeah.

BB: Doing different things. And I don't know, is that an experience that you certainly have seen it, but is that something you did in your own life there? Did you, part of the—

BW: I did early on. It's one of those things that, that you, you do early on, but as, as you sort of, or at least, I sort of, I can speak for my own experience, sort of grew in my experiences with the park, where I felt like I was working 70 hour workweeks anyway, doing the work, which at times became for me more and more bureaucratic, I didn't particularly want to go back into the park and take a, a late night tour or something. I did that to a degree for a while, but eventually, it, you know, it eventually gets to a point where you're just saturated, and you're not, you're not fresh, and you need to be. You need to really come into [0:40:00] work at Mammoth Cave National Park and all national park service areas with a big grin on your face, and expressing, you know, that you're proud to be there, and, and you don't need to be tired and all that. So I, it eventually, with me, kind of dissipated after some period of time.

BB: Sure. What was your favorite part of the job—jobs? Did you have a certain period where—

BW: Well, almost, almost the drive to work every morning, you know, where you got the radio on, and the DJ in Louisville's talking about the back-up on I-64, or something, you know. Or somebody in Nashville's bitching about the, the, you know, whatever, something overturned, you know, and you're driving through the, through the park, and it, it, from here it was about a 15-minute drive, you know,

when you're driving down through Doyle Valley or driving in the, the, the area from Cave City there out by the elevator. I mean, it's just the, just the, it puts you in the right frame of mind, you know, just you're driving through the most beautiful creation on earth, or one of the most beautiful. And so that, I enjoyed that. I enjoyed working with people on the cemeteries, even though the cemetery stuff at times was contentious.

BB: Tell us a little bit about that in, in the context of what that means to somebody who's just learning about how parks were created.

BW: Yeah, but—yeah, you know Mammoth Cave National Park was, was part of the 'Parks in the East' movement. It was, it was an attempt to have the big Western area type park east of, of the Mississippi River. And it was both an economic reason to create it, and, and it was also, you know, a protection, protection of a place. But, but it, the whole creation of Mammoth Cave was, was, you know, you've got basically 80 square miles of surface, 30 plus communities that have homes, and churches, and therefore you've got cemeteries. You've got all the sort of infrastructure. I mean, if you took that map of Mammoth Cave, that outline of it, and plunked it down anywhere in Kentucky, and just counted everything that's in there, not just historically, but now, just say you created that boundary, and you went over here somewhere in Bullitt County or wherever, and plunked that down, that would be interesting in and of itself as a study, and just count how many churches you got, how many schools you got, and all that infrastructure. The impetus was, was to make it the, the natural area. And therefore the impetus was to get everything that was anthropogenic of the footsteps of man, or people, you know, the visibility of that out of the way, and let it go back to nature. So when the C-, the four CCC camps were here in the '30s, you know, a lot of their work was to go out and raise barns, and, and you know, get rid of the vestiges of, of the, the cultural area. Well, anybody like yourself, and like I, and like anybody knows you can't just rip out the structures and rip out the culture. The, it's more than, than the physical built environment. Culture

is more than just something that's, that's created. It, it's there. It's a, it's people. And, and their recollections, and their oral histories, and it's everything. So, there's over, I forget the exact number now, but I'd say probably 70 cemeteries identified at Mammoth Cave National Park. And those are places that, they've sort of become a challenge from a management standpoint, in a park where you're wanting it to go back to nature, and as people age and still want to go back to those cemeteries, how, how do you do that? So that is one thing I did spend a lot of time, all through my career, up through the very end of it, in going out, not on the fun tour on the weekend, but on going and getting the old guy out of the nursing home, or going and getting his grandson who would take me to his house and getting him in a government vehicle, and hauling him out to where his grandpa was buried. And, and even park service managers at times pushed back on me taking a government vehicle and doing things like that. Some park service managers wanted the result of the good, the good, you know, neighbor policy you would get out of that, but they also kind of didn't like the whole idea that you were keeping roads open, in effect, you know, to get to these cemeteries. So it was both a very challenging, and at times, you know, very heart-wrenching kind of process. But working with those constituents, I guess, would maybe be one of the highlights of my, my time at Mammoth Cave.

BB: Do you have a, a certain story about taking the old guy out? Do you have anything where you felt satisfaction, or there's probably a lot of bittersweetness, or giving somebody [0:45:00] a good—

BW: Yeah, there's, there's bittersweetness. There was one guy, actually his niece, niece lived in this vicinity, I will say, and of course I've talked to her about this so I'm not telling stories on her necessarily, but her uncle was quite a curmudgeon, and no matter what you did for this man, he invariably would write his Congressman that you didn't do enough. So that, that's kind of a, a bittersweet thing. I'm trying to think. There was one gentleman I went and interviewed, did an oral history interview

with, Mr. Hogan, in a nursing home in Bowling Green. Seemed like he was in his 90s, maybe, he might have even been 100. I can't remember. That's where I think his grandson came and got me, and we went to the nursing home. But I don't remember if we actually took him physically to the cemetery. But a lot of times, you would get an old person, I remember George Sturgeon—I guess I can tell these stories without getting arrested—but George Sturgeon would show up on the hottest day in the, the fall of the year, you know, usually in August, walking on, on two canes, wanting to go to, I think it was White Oak Cemetery out in the Northeastern end of the park. And other people took him. I, Kathy Profitt that works in interp took him, Ken Kern took him, I did. There, you know, there were other people, probably even people that I don't know about that did get him out to, to that cemetery, but he was, he was kind of a curmudgeon, too, but, but he, he did get some satisfaction out of that, because the fact that he was so lame physically, still so bright, you know, intellectually, and so very interested in getting back to, to where his family grew up, and to the cemetery. And those things, just when you can accomplish something like that for somebody, and see that reaction that they have, whether it's tearful, you know, or whatever. It's just, it's a real gratifying thing. And the one other story that brings to mind is Mr. Gibson. I think he lived in Auburn, Kentucky. And I've always been kind of a skittish kind of person, a little bit. You know, I'm a people person, but I'm, I'm kind of almost a Barney Fife kind of guy in the sense that I get scared fairly easily of somebody. And I had this man approach me, Mr. Gibson, that wanted, wanted me to meet him somewhere on the North side of the river, and he told me where, I've kind of forgot where. I can picture it in my mind, but I forget the name of it. And I got a little scared of this guy, because I'd, I'd heard some stories about various people, not necessarily Gibsons, but, you know, I'd heard some stories about, you know, somebody asking you to meet them somewhere. And this is kind of strange, you know, but, so I, Max Vincent was the ranger on duty that night. And Max, I guess, knew the guy. But I just asked Max to kind of, can you go with me or follow me over there and meet this guy and see what this is all about? And he did, and we met the man, and he seemed okay. But what he wanted to do is he wanted to walk me out

into the woods, and he has his, I think maybe a son with him, or some other relatives. He said, "I want to show you where—" I think it was his little brother and somebody, a little brother that had died when he was two years old. And some of these facts may be a little bit off, but it, it was basically that he wanted to show me where this cemetery was. And what became so, and I'll probably cry trying to tell the story, but what became so important to me was that he was one of the people who had so despised the park taking the ground, that he would never talk to the park rangers. But he knew he was advancing in age, and getting close to leaving here, and he wanted to talk to somebody about this cemetery and where it was located, and making sure it was on the park maps. I was just very, and still am, obviously, very touched by the fact that for whatever reason he picked me to, to talk to. And the, you know, the flat hat is both inviting and at times intimidating to local folks and, and he wanted, he wanted just somebody to know where that cemetery was, and pass that information on before he passed on. And that was an extremely gratifying personal thing to me, and that I went into it with such fear, and that he had had such fear of park rangers all these, or dislike for park rangers all, all these years, and that whole thing came together to take me and show me where that cemetery was and to get that into the park information. So that was, that's one of the touching stories. I haven't thought about that in quite a while. It's, you know, but I, I still have those things in my head, and they come up every now and then, depending on the conversation.

BB: That's a beautiful thing to think about those great things. Yeah. Cool. Now that story, you just derailed everything I was trying to think of, because you touched me so much.

BW: (laughs) I'm sorry.

BB: No. No. It's, that's the great part about this job. You've been away from, for awhile now, almost four years or something.

BW: Yeah, some-, that—

BB: It's unbelievable really, probably.

BW: It is unbelievable. You know, you, [0:50:00] I've still got the pictures on my desktop computer, and people put together photo albums for me of things, you know, and it's just strange at times to think about how you, you sort of look forward to that retirement date, you know, when, there, I don't know if you're going to talk to Mary Jo Veluzat or not, I hope you do, you know, because she basically grew up in the park. Her dad was a CCC employee, a CCC person. He met his wife and Mary Jo's, you know, mom there. She was a, and she can tell the story far better than me, I maybe just leave her to tell the story of how they met. But his last name was, was Calisa. And he was down here from Indiana working in, in the CCCs, and this lady, I guess, was taking messages for him, and kept misspelling his name, and he finally went over to see her, and sort of straightened it out, and he ended up dating her and marrying her, and, and he eventually was a ranger at the park, and eventually became superintendent at the park, as he requi-, retired as the superintendent. I think he retired from Mammoth Cave. Mary Jo will get this straight, and I'll get it all messed up. But at any rate, they lived in Park City. So, you know, where was I going with this story. I forgot where I, where I was going with it. What was your question?

BB: Well, it was talking about you're retired, and it, I mean, just it's been, we were talking about it's been four years already, and—

BW: Yeah, it's been four, four years. And it, and it, I guess where I was going with it is you're, you work up to the, to the thoughts of retirement, and, and that's just going to be the greatest thing in the world, and then all of a sudden, time starts flying, you know. It just, it literally starts just flying away from you, you know, when, and you maintain contacts with some folks, like, you know, Phillip and Mary Jo are my good

friends, and Mary Jo would be somebody really for you to talk to, because not only did she grow up in the park service as a child, but eventually became a park service person herself, and retired as the deputy of facilities management chief at Mammoth Cave. Married Phil Veluzat, who worked his way up through the ranks and retired as the chief ranger. So they're, they were the embodiment to me of a, of a National Park Service family. So, and, you know, you don't ever lose some of that.

BB: Right.

BW: You know, it just, it doesn't ever go away.

BB: What do you, do you have hopes for the, the park service? You know, you leave with, with, I'm sure it's, like you said, it's kind of bittersweet, and you have, you have all the good memories. What would you, what are your hopes and, what would be your hope or your dream for Mammoth, let's just use Mammoth Cave, for, for park workers, and how might it spin out into the future with, with your hope?

BW: I hope that it's always a, a pleasant place for people to come, and for whatever reason they're there for, to find, to find that. I've got a friend that is always saying I, she's never seen, she grew up in the city, and she's always said, "I've never seen a waterfall. I'd love to go see a waterfall somewhere." She lives close by. You know, I hope it's a waterfall for somebody. I hope it's a, it's a first time experience with seeing a flat hat, and that the person wearing that flat hat is nice to them, and that they have a very positive experience out of, out of that. And I just hope it's, you know, just a positive, happy place for, for somebody to, to go and learn, and, and that that resource, that precious resource is so protected. You know, it's a tough place to protect, because it's not just within the boundaries. Not, not that any national park is just within the boundaries. But the vast majority of what influences that precious resource is really outside. It's the sinkhole plain. It's all the, the railroad, I-65, it's all the corridors, and stuff, you know, that carry so much stuff that can do such

dastardly damage to it in, in a short period of time. And, and Mammoth Cave has been excellent at building up great partnerships through Western's help, you know, the, the whole cave land environmental authority thing, the whole regional service system really came out of support for Mammoth Cave National Park. And never would, probably never would have happened without that, so I just hope that precious resource is protected and, and that people are still able to go there and have their positive experiences with interacting with that environment for whatever reason, whether it's to see a waterfall or to hear a bird sing or whatever it is, so.

BB: Exactly. That's great. Do you have any, we've covered some ground. Do you have anything? I think you may have mentioned at the beginning before we started interviewing that you have a story. Is there something you wanted to share, because, you know, I, I'm grateful that you're here with me, that I'm here at your home, to be able to share your experience, and this collective interview project has really shed light on so many things. Is there anything that, you know, you'd like to, to say, or, or to tell me a certain thing, or—

BW: Well, I probably said, said as much, I, I'm, [0:55:00] I am an emotional person as is obvious. You know, I have, I'm not quite as bad as the Speaker of the House, but I, you know, I kind of like him in a sense. You know, I feel, I feel a great deal of, I identify with him a lot, you know, because you're kind of going into a serious subject matter in some way, and then you end up all emotional and I don't, I don't know why that happens, but I guess, you know, it's a profession, but it also becomes so personal to you, and it's both the personal that makes it good, and it's the personal that makes it hard. You know, there's, there's one line that's always quoted from "The League of Their Own," about there's no crying in baseball. But the line I really like the best is when the, Dottie starts to leave to go out wherever it is, you know, to get married, and, and she tells the Tom Hanks character that it's, it's just too hard. And he says, "Hard is what makes it good." And, and the park service is not easy. You know, to, I was, I remember it now. It was Denny Galvin, when he retired, that said

that the park service was not always fun, or not always pleasure, but it was always a privilege. You know the park service is not easy, but it's not always the easy that makes it good. It's the hard that makes it good.

BB: Thank you.

BW: Thank you, sir.

[INTERRUPTION—RECORDING STOPS]

BW: In New Orleans, I know I loaded up, I had, I'd always driven Volkswagens, and so he helped me load up my, my, I think I had a '74 Super Beetle at that time, and it was dragging the ground with stuff, you know, of trying to get to, to New Orleans for my first permanent job at the National Park Service. And he just said, he said, it was a couple stories about Daddy, said, "Just," said, "Just go down there and take each day as it comes, and don't look back." You know, just don't look back over your shoulder to us. Just, just go down there and do what you need to do, for as long as you need to do it. And, let's see, how old, my dad was born in 1906, so at '83, he would have been, what, 77 years old? Is my math right on that?

BB: Um-hm.

BW: And he was always kind of the, I don't know, strong farmer kind of guy that would never show you any kind of emotion, much. You know, he was, I don't want to say emotionless, but he, he was, you know, he was, you know, in the Lincoln movie, Lincoln talks about his dad not, not teaching him kindness. He had to learn that from somebody else. And maybe that's true about my dad too. Maybe it's true about men of several generations. And so I never really saw him cry, or saw him emotional, or, or anything like that. But at 77, my mother would have been 74, they wanted to drive their old Chevrolet down to New Orleans to see where I lived and where I

worked and all that. And of course, I was scared to death. It's like, good Lord, you know, there were a million and a half folks in the greater New Orleans area. You're used to driving in rural Tennessee and you're going to drive your, your old Chevy down here to where I'm living and working, but they made it. They made it fine, but as, as they got ready to leave and go back to Tennessee, it was the first time I'd really seen my dad cry, you know.

BB: Because he was so proud of what you had accomplished?

BW: He was proud, and he didn't want to leave me. And I never knew that up to that point.

BB: That's beautiful.

BW: So it was, it was a revelation in a family way, you know, that, that he loved me enough to—and I knew he loved me, but I, you know, if you don't see guys cry, it will, except for me, I leave handkerchiefs all the time, but, but, but they came back to Tennessee, and I eventually came back to Kentucky. And I have loved this place. And I still do.

BB: Yeah. And he was so proud of you. I mean, just, and that's probably influenced your thoughts about your whole career, because—

BW: Oh yeah. I mean, and, and you know, growing up in the environment that became Percy Priest Lake, and having the family farm lost, and losing all that, that stuff, and, and sort of could have had a real negative view of the government out of that, and a real negative view of people in flat hats, but you know, I even, I can halfway tolerate the Corps of Engineers now, you know. Don't particularly like them, but I can at least tolerate them. So.

BB: Right.

BW: But I certainly love the National Park Service.

BB: That's great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]