

DISSERTATION

1982 STRUCTURAL FIRE AT THE HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT:
AN ORAL HISTORY

Submitted by

Wendy Schumacher

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2007

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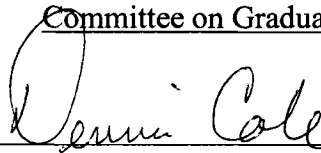
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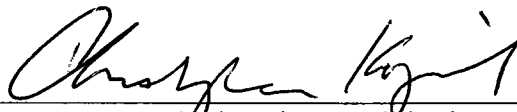
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY WENDY SCHUMACHER ENTITLED 1982 STRUCTURAL FIRE AT THE HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT: AN ORAL HISTORY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

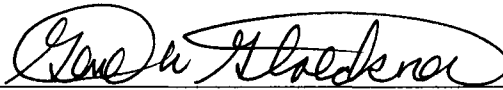
Committee on Graduate Work



Dennis Cole, Ph.D.



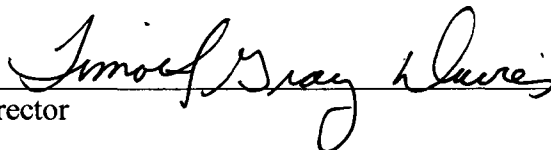
Christopher Koziol, Ph.D.



Adviser Gene W. Gloeckner, Ph.D



Co-Adviser Lenora Bohren, Ph.D.



Director

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

1982 STRUCTURAL FIRE AT THE HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT: AN ORAL HISTORY

The purpose of this oral history was to explore the impact of pre-planning on the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt National Historic Site by interviewing Park staff and fire fighters who responded to the fire. The Home is part of the National Park Service and is located in Hyde Park, New York. The 1982 fire is considered to be the event that started the National Park Service structural fire program.

The analysis utilized the zoom model which was developed for interpreting life histories (Pamphilon, 1999). The zoom model's analogy of a camera lens allowed the researcher to change focus from a broad or panoramic view to a micro level. The interviews revealed how the participants saw themselves in the larger context of the historic fire.

Historic house museums have unique needs. Recommendations from the study included arranging site visits for local fire fighters so that they are familiar with the facility. Parks should develop a disaster plan that is shared with all park employees. Finally, the study suggested conducting oral histories since they can capture the stories of the underrepresented. Oral histories should be maintained in the park archives.

Wendy Schumacher
School of Education
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523
Summer 2007

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I am grateful for the participants in this project who so freely shared their memories of this stressful time. In addition, Anne Jordan, Chief of Museum Services at the Roosevelt Vanderbilt sites served as the gatekeeper and handled the logistics. The staff of the Roosevelt Vanderbilt sites made me feel welcome although I took over one of their conference rooms for two weeks!

Finally, I would like to recognize the unofficial members of my committee. Dr. Tim Davies taught my first class in qualitative research methods and later showed me how to anticipate the concerns of the Human Research Committee during the application process. Dr. Barbara Pamphilon developed the zoom model that I used for data analysis. We began an email correspondence through a Colorado State connection and her personal encouragement got me through preliminary exams and the proposal development meeting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
<i>Significance and Purpose of the Study</i>	3
<i>Research Questions</i>	5
<i>Sub-questions</i>	5
<i>Definition of terms</i>	5
<i>Delimitations</i>	6
<i>Limitations</i>	7
<i>Researcher’s perspective</i>	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	11
<i>NPS enabling legislation</i>	11
<i>NPS structural fire program</i>	12
<i>Roots of oral history</i>	14
<i>Oral history in the NPS</i>	16
<i>Oral history and the built environment</i>	18
<i>Other qualitative research and the built environment</i>	19
<i>Pre-planning at the global level</i>	21
<i>Pre-planning in cultural institutions</i>	22
<i>Pre-planning in the NPS</i>	22
<i>Pre-plan contents</i>	24
<i>Putting it all together</i>	25
Chapter 3: Method	26
<i>Qualitative research</i>	26
<i>Oral history</i>	27
<i>Participants</i>	27
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	28
<i>Procedure</i>	30
<i>Data analyses</i>	32
Chapter 4: Results.....	35
<i>Research Questions</i>	38
<i>Research Question 1</i>	38
<i>Working with fire fighters</i>	38
<i>Park planning</i>	40
<i>Research Question 2</i>	41
<i>Working together</i>	42
<i>Emotional impact</i>	43
<i>Rebuilding effort</i>	45
<i>Research Question 3</i>	47

<i>National interest</i>	47
<i>Artifacts</i>	49
<i>Home in perspective</i>	51
Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion	54
<i>Overview of the Study</i>	54
<i>Summary of Findings</i>	55
<i>Macro-zoom</i>	56
<i>Meso-zoom</i>	57
<i>Micro-zoom</i>	60
<i>Interactional-zoom</i>	62
<i>Recommendations</i>	63
<i>Suggestions for Further Research</i>	64
<i>Conclusion</i>	64
REFERENCES CITED	66
APPENDIX A.....	71
APPENDIX B.....	72
APPENDIX C.....	73
APPENDIX D.....	74
APPENDIX E.....	76

Chapter 1: Introduction

Shortly after midnight on January 23, 1982, the fire detection system at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt (HOFR) in Hyde Park, New York triggered an alarm. A short in old electric wiring under renovation by a contractor caused a fire between the third floor and roof. In addition to the emergency response from the local fire department many National Park Service (NPS) staff and the public responded to the alarm (Brown & McTernan, 1986; H. Van Brookhoven, personal communication, September 25, 2005).

The quick response saved the structure and its contents with few exceptions. The damage came from fire, water, and smoke. The Park and local fire department undertook pre-planning activities that told respondents how to prioritize their tasks and which artifacts required special treatment (Brown & McTernan, 1986). In addition to the contents, the house itself was important. The NPS administers the program that registers structures of meaning to our nation's history. The Secretary of Interior set the criteria in the National Register of Historic Places. This house, listed in 1966, qualified as being worthy of National Register status as the home of the only four term American president and events that shaped our nation's history like the fireside chats and hosted important visitors to the Home during FDR's presidency (National Register Information System, n.d.a).

This study focused on capturing the stories of NPS staff that worked for the Park at the time of the fire and participated in the initial response using oral history which allowed the participants to tell these stories in their own words (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000). Although case incident and other reports were properly maintained in the files, the Park never gathered a collection of interviews from all involved. The Park wanted an oral history which Yow (1994) described as an interviewer asking questions that “inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator’s words” (p. 4). Some participants’ memories required jump starting since the event took place 25 years ago. Present and past NPS staffs were interviewed as well as two local fire fighters. In addition to recording and transcribing their stories for future researchers, the study looked at whether or not the pre-planning efforts minimized the loss of artifacts and structural damage to the Home.

The impact of pre-planning for a structural fire continues to be an obscure topic and not studied within the NPS. In fact, so little data existed on structural fires gathered by qualitative researchers that John Watts, Jr., Chair, National Fire Protection Association Section 914, personally endorsed this project (J. M. Watts, Jr., personal communication, May 14, 2005; J. M. Watts, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2006). The majority of literature on structural fires in historic structures focused on material strength or retrofitting fire detection equipment and was not relevant to this study. On the contrary, the topic of wildfire was the subject of a 2005 oral history project contracted by the NPS (Rothman, 2005).

Although not a topic for funded research, NPS policies and procedures addressed structural fire. The Management Policies (2006) outlined a requirement to keep current and on file with internal and external fire response organizations plans for historic structures and buildings containing museum and library collections. Furthermore, the plans needed to address any special requirements for the care and protection of cultural

resources should a fire occur. Director's Order #58: Structural Fire Management (2001) explicitly outlined who is responsible for what activity. The Cultural Resource program put forth detailed guidelines in The Museum Management Handbook (NPS, 2002).

Significance and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this oral history was to explore the impact of pre-planning on the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt National Historic Site by interviewing Park staff and fire fighters who responded to the fire.

Miles and Huberman (1994) advised researchers to develop a graphical depiction of the conceptual framework to assist the selection of key factors and clarify the relationship among them. In this study pre-planning guidance came from three major sources.

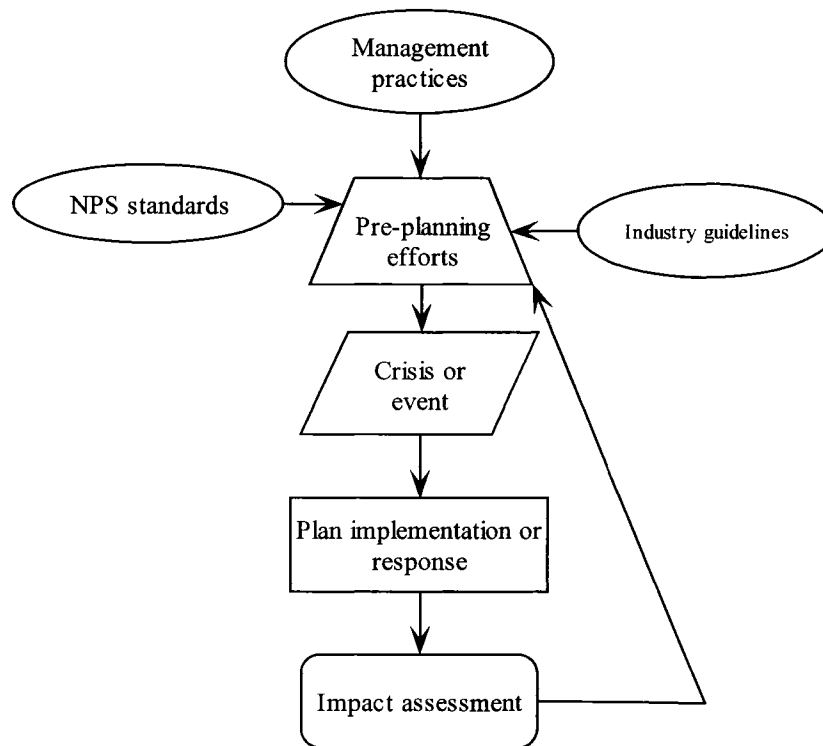


Figure 1. Impact of pre-planning activities.

This research added to the field of knowledge in two ways. First, literature using qualitative methods to collect data about structures or the built environment was meager. The studies included two articles that used basic qualitative research about inner city Melbourne (Fincher, 2004; Fincher & Costello, 2005). Dalton & Rowe (2004) used grounded theory to study public housing in Melbourne. Fincher's (2004) article tackled gender based ideals of life in high-rise buildings. Details about why gender issues were a constraint on this study is discussed in the Limitations section. Research projects specific to structural fire issues were also sparse. Three dissertations used qualitative methods to research structural fire. Two focused on the sense of community after church fires (O'Foran, 2003; Wharff, 2003) and one on a mine fire in 1972 (Cullen, 2004). One dissertation collected data on a disaster, the 1946 tsunami in Hawai'i (Nishimoto, 2002). Digital Dissertations and Theses database (<http://proquest.umi.com/>) did not show any oral history dissertations on file for Colorado State University.

Second, the effects of pre-planning were addressed. Since the 1982 fire many organizations published guidelines about how to pre-plan for fires and other disasters in historic homes, museums and archives. Butcher-Youngmans (1993) outlined the additional challenges with historic house museums like HOFR because both contents and structure can be destroyed in a fire. An international intergovernmental organization known as Blue Shield helped with program promotion, technical transfer and emergency assistance (Jokilehto, 2000). The study revealed information about a real life application of NPS cultural resource and structural fire protection practices in place in 1982.

The interview questions covered pre-planning although not all of the participants either took part in this activity or recalled their involvement. Data analysis uncovered

two additional research questions. One considered the impact of structural fire on the participants. The other addressed the significance of the Home in a larger framework.

Research Questions

What do stories regarding the 1982 HOFR structural fire communicate about pre-planning efforts?

What do participant stories say about responding to a structural fire in a historic home?

What do stories about the 1982 structural fire say about the significance of the Home in a larger context?

Sub-questions

How did the participants learn about the fire?

What were the participants' experiences the night of the fire?

How did the participants' duties change in the weeks following the fire?

How did the process work to get the park back to normal?

How did the participants take part in the pre-planning for a structural fire?

What artifacts/photographs did the participants have to describe before/during/after the fire?

Definition of terms

Built environment – manmade locations for human activity ranging from homes and dwellings to public spaces.

Case incident report – one of several NPS reports required after any disaster, accident or other event taking staff away from their regular duties.

Constructivism – a philosophical perspective where the participants' position is constructed in their mind rather than based on the "facts."

Director's Order – Director's Orders, which articulated new or revised policy on an interim basis between publication dates of NPS *Management Policies*. They also provided more detailed interpretation of Management Policies and outline requirements applicable to NPS functions, programs and activities, and were a vehicle by which the Director may delegate specific authorities and responsibilities. The main target audience for Director's Orders was superintendents, for whom they serve as an "executive summary" of important policies and procedures (National Park Service things to know, n.d.).

Gatekeeper – the person(s) who provide access into an organization ranging from making introductions to establishing the interview schedule. In this study the gatekeeper was also a participant.

Management policies - set the broad framework, provided direction, and prescribed parameters for making management decisions in the NPS (National Park Service things to know, n.d.).

Pre-planning activities – documentation that established procedures for emergency response and short term recovery activities after a disaster.

Structural fire – fire impacting any man-made structure which was broadly defined in the NPS to include dumpsters, vehicles, boats and aircraft in addition to buildings.

Delimitations

The impact of the fire on the visitor experience was not addressed. The primary reason for public visits to HOFR was the house and garden tour. One week after the fire the Park celebrated the 100th birthday of FDR. The recovery activities caused the

relocation of some events. In particular, the living room/library became the focus of events due to its size, lack of damage and overall importance to the Roosevelt family and other guests. The fire meant changes for visitors to the first floor public rooms for three years and five months. The second floor rooms required refurbishment that took several more years (Brown & McTernan, 1986).

The fire rendered about 30 of the 8,000 cataloged objects useless (Brown & McTernan, 1986). One chair went missing and assumed stolen the night of the fire (H. Van Brookhoven, personal communication, September 25, 2005). The study did not investigate the related area of lost value of the objects.

The delimitations of visitor experience and artifact loss were fertile enough to justify separate research projects. Since the transcripts became part of the Park archives any anecdotes about these issues are available for further research.

Limitations

Cresswell (2003) said that it is difficult to anticipate all potential limitations before conducting research. Data on the role of gender in the post-fire decision-making process was a limitation. Since the establishment of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union in the 1850s, women took the lead role in the historic preservation movement until World War II when government priorities changed to post-war growth. In 1966, the establishment of the National Historic Preservation Act (Act) brought a second wave of women's active involvement in historic preservation (Bluestone, 1999; Howe, 1990).

The fire occurred about 15 years after the Act, so it was reasonable to believe that women involved in the recovery and restoration efforts benefited from the increased

acceptability of women studying previously male dominated disciplines. Enough time passed for some women to rise to management levels within the NPS (Howe, 1990). While both men and women responded to the fire and immersed themselves in the recovery efforts, only one of the two women participants was present the night of the fire.

The researcher was restricted to interviewing whoever was still living, could be located, and was willing to participate. Having clear recollections of the events was not a requirement because even a short passage of time can alter one's memory. Sometimes the memory loss is unavoidable. Gardner (2001) made the point that people are not computer media where data is permanently etched and retrieved on demand. Norquay (1999) described memory as a social construction and what is remembered and forgotten was collectively determined. Other times, narrators had selective memory as they chose which stories to share either because they were trying to please the researcher, the account reflected negatively on them or brought up harmful memories (Andrews, Kearns, Kontos, & Wilson, 2006; Gardner, 2001; Norquay, 1999). Gardner (2001) suggested that triangulating the participant's stories with those of others and documentation from the administrative record made up for the researcher having to use data that may be unreliable.

Researcher's perspective

My interest in the built environment goes back as long as I can remember, most likely influenced by my only uncle, the architect. I look at buildings as giant file cabinets for keeping our library and record material and museum objects secure. This viewpoint joins together my graduate work in library science, work experience in records management and volunteer activities in museum archives.

Structural fire is perhaps the biggest hazard to libraries, resource center and museum collections. Protecting contents, in this case, from fire, water and smoke damage ties together my personal and professional interests. Working for the NPS gives me access to one of the largest collections of libraries, resource centers and museums in the world.

After doing some quantitative research on fire detection and suppression equipment I introduced myself to the NPS structural fire community. Through these networking opportunities I received support to conduct a qualitative study. A few additional calls led me to the park curator at HOFR who was planning an oral history project. NPS legend says that the 1982 structural fire at HOFR led to the servicewide structural fire program. Since the research project would be used both nationally and locally I thought it was a great opportunity.

Encouragement for research is a great ego boost, but is not enough to make such a big change in how one sees the world. Qualitative data is messy by definition so I needed to rely upon what I learned in class to get me through the process. First, qualitative research or constructivism says that each person has their own reality. I liked that idea because each interviewee will bring a different perspective to the oral history project and they are all appreciated. Second, as a researcher I have the opportunity to give voice to people who worked at the park at the time of the fire who may not otherwise have their stories heard. I'm thinking about support staff that wouldn't be part of the official record. This is important to me because I learned as a Peace Corps Volunteer that some people, especially women, only have their stories and the clothes on their backs. Third, a class reading interpreted life histories with an analogy to a camera's lens (Pamphilon, 1999).

This article reawakened my interest in photography and gave me a possible framework for interpreting the data. Personal growth is great, but knowing that I have at least one way to interpret the data gives me the confidence to move forward with the project.

In the Methods section I also acknowledge my position as a NPS employee. Specifically I am assigned to the Washington Office although stationed in Fort Collins. This may be a complicated situation because I am both insider as NPS staff, but outsider as a non-park person. If the park curator introduces me in my role as researcher I will have the opportunity to clarify my status with the NPS. Sometimes there is conflict between the local and national offices, but my organization does not do work in this park so, hopefully, my employment status will not be an issue.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A comprehensive search of the literature revealed a gap in the area of how pre-planning efforts were applied after a disaster. The researcher performed electronic searches on the Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Compendex Engineering Village, FEMA Learning Resource Center online card catalog, FireDoc, Google Scholar and Web of Science databases. The searches included the terms used individually and in combination: building, built environment, disaster, fire, narrative inquiry, oral history, planning, polyvocal, structural fire and structure. The search revealed a few studies in the areas of the impact of a disaster with insufficient pre-planning and the use of oral history for exploring building and other built environment issues. To look at why pre-planning impacted NPS facilities it was necessary to investigate the enabling legislation and how oral history drew out the stories to provide the data for analysis.

NPS enabling legislation

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed The National Park Service Organic Act (16 U.S.C. Secs. 1, 2, 3 and 4). The Organic Act set forth the founding of the NPS as part of the Department of the Interior and dedicated funding for the employees. The original purpose declared that parks should be established to conserve “natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them

unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (16 U.S.C. Sec. 1). Almost 100 years later this clause still motivates NPS staff.

The first National Parks consisted of eleven parks previously established through individual legislation. In 1872, Congress announced Yellowstone National Park as the first national park and started an international movement for national parks in over 100 countries. Now new parks are added by act of Congress, but the president can decree a national monument if it is already on federal land (National Park Service, n.d.a). Of the original group Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, Mount Rainier, Crater Lake, Wind Cave, Mesa Verde and Glacier remained part of the National Park system.

In 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt signed an Executive Order moving management of 63 parks, monuments, and national cemeteries under Forest Service and War Department control to the NPS. Despite this change, the focus stayed on natural parks until the 1960s when Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and Director George Herzog recognized the preservation of cultural heritage as being as important as natural heritage. The standards for cultural parks were less tied to biological standards, but still needed to have unique characteristics and be worthy of study by researchers (Riordan, 2000).

NPS structural fire program

Maintaining parks can be a complicated business. The Organic Act focused on natural and cultural resources, but the infrastructure faced risks, too. The 1982 structural fire at HOFR was arguably the event that led to the development of the NPS structural fire program (J. Mazzeo, Jr., personal communication, February 27, 2006). Five years after the fire the first NPS management document regarding structural fire became

available. Those guidelines were called NPS #58 – Structural Fire. A few years later the NPS hired the first Structural Fire Specialist who established the Structural Fire Steering Committee prior to his retirement in 1999. About the same time the General Accounting Office (GAO) conducted an audit of the structural fire program and issued a report in 2000.

Another driving force behind the Structural Fire program was the 2000 GAO Report (General Accounting Office, 2000). In addition to their own findings, the Report quoted from a 1998 internal report that stated “sooner or later the NPS stands to be seriously embarrassed (at a minimum) by the catastrophic loss, either of an irreplaceable historic structure or collection, or of human life, from a structural fire” (p. 14). A year earlier the Director conveyed concern about the risk of the NPS museum collections to fire.

The Report was a summary of the inspection of six park units. These were: Ford’s Theatre National Historic Site, Prince William Forest Park, Olympic National Park, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, Shenandoah National Park, and Yosemite National Park. These parks confronted issues common to almost all units including lack of paying attention to items ranging from inoperable smoke detectors to insufficient training for the fire brigade, if one existed. Even when conducting proper inspections the deficiencies were not corrected. Nearly ten years before the GAO audit, Yosemite National Park assessed the condition of their museum and library collections. By the time of the audit most problems remained uncorrected. Though not unique to Shenandoah National Park, the staff relied upon local fire departments for emergency response. To save a building the response time needs to be between four and six minutes.

Because of distance the response time could easily exceed 45 minutes (General Accounting Office, 2000).

One of the weaknesses identified in the Report centered on the lack of a system to identify needs and flaws in the building inspection program. In response, NPS developed the Fire Protection Condition Assessment. The program helped identify the highest risk structures with the lowest available funding. In addition to the more common issues like checking equipment the inspectors paid close attention to the egress issues in older buildings (National Park Service, 2005). This helped meet the structural fire program mission statement (2006) that said,

“[T]he National Park Service enabling legislation, as well as other statutes, charges the Service with preserving and protecting human life and the resources entrusted to its management. These resources include buildings and structures, irreplaceable cultural resources, valuable property, and infrastructure”.

Roots of oral history

Thucydides is widely considered to be the first oral historian having collected stories for *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Everett, 1992; Yow, 1994). An established definition of oral history was hard to locate as it can range from reminiscence (Shopes, n.d.) to intentionally gathered stories around an historic event (Everett, 1992). Shopes (n.d.) considered the interviews conducted by Abraham Lincoln’s secretary and law partner as the next milestone in the timeline of oral history. The two gathered stories from others who knew or worked with Lincoln. After that may be the Federal Writers Project when workers assembled life histories about how average citizens experienced the Great Depression (Shopes, n.d.). That effort was in keeping with the concept that oral history values the stories of the underrepresented (Murphy, 1986).

The biggest turning point occurred in the 1940s when Allan Nevins from Columbia University began recording interviews (Shopes, n.d.; Yow, 1994). The development of the tape recorder changed the way information could be collected. Researchers in areas like folklore, ethnography, sociology and psychology now had a convenient way to record (Yow, 1994). Nevins was credited with the idea that the written record could be supplemented by interviews. This came to mind when working on a biography of President Grover Cleveland. New technology meant that more information got documented in the form of telephone messages and memorandums than in the personal correspondences of the past. Nevins thought that the next logical step would be capturing the tales of those involved in recent history while their stories resided in recent memory (Shopes, n.d.).

Despite the availability of portable, inexpensive recording equipment the early interviews focused on “white male elites” (Yow, 1994, p. 3). Nevins first study centered on George McAneny, a civic leader in New York, in 1948. At Columbia and other universities the initial projects concentrated on the lives of leaders in business, politics and society (Shopes, n.d.). In the spirit of the social movements of the 1960s the experiences of ordinary people became a way to capture the voices of people not usually represented in recorded history (Shopes, n.d.; Yow, 1994).

Oral history was not the sole domain of researchers. The United States Army long recognized the chance to gather material not usually found in the official record. This effort began in earnest during World War II when the Army wanted to prepare their official history of the War. The President, Franklin Roosevelt, supported the effort. The head of the program, a former journalist, hired professional historians who found

themselves in the theatre of battle to obtain the most detailed information. The program evolved to capture stories of retiring officers and it continued in the form of *Oral history techniques and procedures* (Everett, 1992).

Another convention of oral history followed the telling of life histories in the oral tradition. Murphy (1986) talked about both the Aboriginal and African practices. The Aboriginal “style harks back to the social function of oral narrative as the instrument of cultural and social continuity, that is, to narrative’s historical function” (p. 163). The African tradition, practiced over millennia, also developed to fill the need for cultural continuity. The narrators became experts in storytelling to keep the audience engaged. The idea of memory was always a question with participants, but to keep the audience engaged in the oral tradition required some alterations. In a society where people are literate, the narrators do not converse with the same richness in their communications as their counterparts from the oral tradition.

Oral history in the NPS

Oral history was the logical choice to augment the Park archives about the 1982 fire. The Office of the Chief Historian spoke about oral history.

“[I]t has been used to document the history of the parks as well as the events and people the parks commemorate, and it has provided important information about properties and structures within park boundaries” (McDonnell & Weible, 2002, section 1, para.1).

A 2001 survey from that Office showed 118 of 385 units housed some sort of oral history project ranging from deteriorating tapes to complete transcripts housed in climate controlled facilities. Despite the high percentage of projects, park funding was inconsistent. This meant lack of training, proper recording equipment and archive facilities (McDonnell & Weible, 2002). To elevate the importance of oral history, there

is currently a Director's Order under review to ensure that existing collections and future projects meet professional standards. The Director's Order points out that oral histories can be used as a tool for the consultation requirements for other laws like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. Secs. 3001-3013); and the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. Sec. 470). The Director's Order cautioned NPS managers and staff to get a signed release or deed of gift and follow copyright law (C. Fagan, personal communication, August 8, 2006). For parks wishing to move forward a draft Handbook is available on the NPS website (National Park Service, 2005a).

The NPS has a long tradition of oral histories. As mentioned earlier, in 1933 the NPS took charge of battlefields including Gettysburg. The transfer included the life work of John B. Bachelder who interviewed veterans from the North and South (Rath, 1993). The Ellis Island Oral History Project included about 2,000 interviews of people who passed through Ellis Island. Beginning in the 1940s, San Francisco Maritime National Historic Site sponsored the longest running project. At the National Park of American Samoa it pleased the staff to keep the oral tradition of the native Samoans alive since it was at risk of being lost. At Mount Rainier National Park the local community benefited from this source of local genealogy (McDonnell & Weible, 2002).

Partnerships were encouraged for oral history projects (McDonnell & Weible, 2002) and this study could serve as a model for future collaboration between a park and academic researcher. The tradition at HOFR included oral history. The Park most likely holds a place in NPS history as the site of the first recorded oral history on tape. The superintendent, George Palmer, interviewed William A. Plog on October 15, 1947. Mr.

Plog had charge of the grounds and gardens since 1897. George Palmer and park historian Frederick L. Rath, Jr. conducted over 30 more recorded interviews over the next four years. In addition, the staff conducted numerous interviews before the acquisition of the recording equipment. These included other members of the Roosevelt staff and Eleanor Roosevelt (Rath, 1993). Like the earlier oral history project, this study contained interviews of Park staff from many positions and grade levels. These staff responded the night of the fire and experienced changes in their work environment in the following months. Yow (1994) encouraged interviewing narrators from a variety of levels of power and experiences to illustrate different vantage points.

Oral history and the built environment

Jacobs (2001) appealed to housing researchers to conduct oral histories since it could be useful in their research. Oral history encourages the participants to look back and reflect upon their experiences. As in most disciplines, stories about housing taken from multiple levels did not appear to be linked unless examined closely. Topics, or news items, that seemed important at the time they occurred may have limited value later. On the other hand, lesser matters may become elevated when viewed through the lens of today's concerns. Without reflection, only one side of the story was captured for future research. The tale not recorded was most likely to be that of the underrepresented. Jacobs said that "[I]t is most appropriate in seeking out the views of tenants and those whose experiences don't often find expression in traditional housing histories with their focus on legislation and written documentation" (2001, p. 131). He stated that the written record was directed to a specific audience that made assumptions or presumably did not care about those living in the housing units.

Other researchers were also encouraged to use non-traditional methods like oral history. For geographers broadening how they analyze architectural space became necessary. The rich, thick descriptions from multiple, and sometimes contradictory, voices made this research helpful in describing a more complete story of a building. The traditional method was to secure the voices of the producers of the buildings like the architect or developer. Oral history was a vehicle to get the contrasting voices of the building occupants. This was how Llewellyn saw colleagues looking at spaces as they were “encountered, lived and negotiated” (2003, p. 266). Llewellyn (2003) used interviews and document review to investigate the effectiveness of a club in a housing project in building community. The developers imagined a self-governing place, but in reality the residents did not see the club as a primary part of their home life. In some decades the managing residents only provided activities they supported and years later the responsibility fell to one person who organized programs until no longer able.

Klaebe and Foth (2006) attempted to give interested persons the tools to conduct public history projects to improve the well-being of their communities. They defined interested persons as librarians, archivists and educators in addition to public historians. By capturing people’s attention in using new media to develop oral history projects they sought to show that there was a greater good for the area and its residents. Building upon the recognized relationship between an interviewer and participant (Yow, 1994) may have started a long-term sense of community as members worked together.

Other qualitative research and the built environment

From chapter 1 the term “built environment” referred to manmade locations for human activity. Using that broad definition this section looked at how qualitative studies

added to the literature on buildings and community. Llewellyn (2003) talked about the importance of giving voice to the community. The author described the community as consumer that had a different perspective than the producer of the architectural space. Capturing stories about community was rare and few tools existed for researchers interested in doing so. If the researcher wanted to apply academic studies into everyday practice they must figure out how to do so on their own (Klaebe & Foth, 2006).

Based on Llewellyn's (2003) appeal to geographers, Bailey and Bryson (2006) used qualitative methods to delve into stories of the suburb of Bournville, UK. Past research put forward the tale that George Cadbury of the chocolate company developed and built this suburb of Birmingham, England. Bailey and Bryson (2006) used interviews and document review to dispute the long accepted history shaped by journalists 100 years ago about Bournville as an economic model and the silenced of the voices of the professionals who really developed the project. They reviewed diaries that disagreed with the perception that Bournville did not have crime since all residents presumably followed the conduct of the Cadbury family as teetotalers. The authors asserted that it was not unusual to have sanitized descriptions of an organization's history as the official record, but it need not be the only version (2006; Jacobs, 2001).

Two studies from Melbourne, also from geography publications, used interviews in the generation of data. First, Fincher and Costello (2005) chose qualitative techniques to make meaning of what happened in the redevelopment of Melbourne's riverfront area and steered actions for further changes. That study focused on how the developers divulged their thoughts on marketing the housing type by focusing on ethnicity. Here ethnicity was "something you have if you are a migrant to Australia, and something you

do not have if you are of Anglo descent and were born in Australia” (2005, p. 203). The researchers wanted to show how ethnicity was not the only thread in this story by gathering stories from all involved in the redevelopment process. The data analyses made known the dominant theme of ethnic composition of the desired building occupant.

The second study from Melbourne concerned gender and high-rise housing. Through interviews with high-rise building developers Fincher (2004) elaborated on their preconceived notions about who should occupy these buildings. The developers presented the idea that these high-rises were good for women because of the low maintenance lifestyle and overall security of this building style. Fincher’s (2004) interpretation of the interviews showed that the stories focused on male clients with the exception of tales about security. The reader learned about high-rise development because the interviews produced an equal amount of data in the silences about other reasons women would choose high-rise living as compared to what the transcript contained (Fincher, 2004).

Pre-planning at the global level

Attention to the losses of cultural resources due to disaster was common throughout the world. One of the most widely known groups founded to mitigate losses was the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in response to the great destruction of cultural properties during World War II. In the 1980s, the organization’s focus turned to natural disasters like earthquakes and political unrest at the end of that decade. In 1995, in conjunction with the International Council on Monuments and Sites and the International Council of Museums, they started Blue Shield. An objective of Blue Shield was to protect cultural property in the event of

armed conflict. A long-term outcome of Blue Shield showed it as an example of informal collaboration and cooperation among groups with common goals (Jokilehto, 2000).

Following Blue Shield's ideal, the East Midlands Museums Service in the United Kingdom developed the Regional Emergencies and Disaster Squad (known as REDS). It pulled together trained responders in the specialty of museum, library and archive disasters (Matthews, 2005).

Pre-planning in cultural institutions

Organizations like Blue Shield and REDS proved necessary because individual museums, libraries and archives do not make disaster planning a high priority (Eden & Matthews, 1996; Pickard, 1994). Pickard (1993) listed the top three aims of a plan to protect historic buildings from fire. These were: life safety; preventing the fire's spread; and protecting property. Of these, protecting property or contents received the least attention although there is high risk of fire and smoke and water damage. Protecting contents should be a higher priority because it is the reason that visitors come to see these cultural institutions. Studying the cost of artifacts lost in the HOFR fire is identified in the section on further research. "Reducing the probability of loss becomes even more crucial when 'irreplaceability' is a prime consideration" (Tizkus & Dressler, 1980, p. 18).

Pre-planning in the NPS

In addition to pre-planning guidance on a global level, the NPS also addressed the issue. The Management Policies (2006) specified the need for pre-planning for historic structures and buildings holding museum or library collections. The plans will "identify the floor plan, utilities, hazards, and areas and objects requiring special

protection” (p. 99). The plan should be available to both park and local emergency response. In addition, park staff on fire units must receive cultural resource protection training. The ultimate goal covered protecting, without compromising, the integrity of the resource.

The Cultural Resource program put forth detailed guidelines in The Museum Management Handbook (2002). Topics ranged from the obvious, security systems and fire protection plans, to protecting collections during transportation.

“Fire can destroy a park’s museum collection in a matter of minutes. While a stolen or damaged object might be recovered and stabilized, burned objects, and sometimes even those just exposed to smoke and heat, may be lost forever. Human error, arson, deteriorating electrical and mechanical systems, and congested storage areas are only a few of the conditions that can increase the threat of fire” (p. 9:11).

The Handbook then directed staff to consult the park’s structural fire plan.

Director’s Order #58: Structural fire management (2004) gave greater detail in the area of structural fire in reference to the NPS Management Policies 2006. The document acknowledged that structural fires in the NPS led to death and injury in addition to the destruction of property. It defined structural fire management as protecting people, property and irreplaceable resources. In the section outlining program requirements, it gave the specifics as to what each organizational unit was expected to do. The cultural resources list was long. The Director’s Order specified that cultural resources included historic and prehistoric structures, collections in museums and archives and their related records. In contrast, the natural resources program needed only to coordinate when initiating a controlled fire or when handling a wildland fire.

Pre-plan contents

Organizations were encouraged to write plans to be reviewed by the local fire department for their recommendations including details about how to handle specific artifacts (Butcher-Youngmans, 1993; Pickard, 1994). Staff should receive a copy of the plan and be provided with training (Butcher-Youngmans, 1993). Muir and Shenton (2002) suggested that the old plans be collected to guarantee that only the most current plan was used. Butcher-Youngmans (1993) set forth some common sense strategies for reducing fire risk including keeping collections “scrupulously” clean, making sure exits and stairways were clutter-free, and ensured that, in this case, historic home museums had a sufficient number of smoke detectors.

To be effective, the plans must be written clearly. In a time of crisis time there is not time to read a lengthy document. Since all disasters are different the plan should be flexible, too (Muir & Shenton, 2002). Eden and Matthews (1996) stated that the planning process has four stages. First, prevention included a risk assessment of the building, its equipment and contents. They said that regular inspections were key and staff should know how to correct any deficiencies. Second, preparedness was the section for the plan which needed to be reviewed on a regular schedule and the subject of staff training. Preparedness covered contacting recovery firms and suppliers in advance of an emergency. Third, involved reaction or implementing the plan. Ensure that everyone knew their duty and made a record of what worked or did not meet expectations. Fourth, comprised recovery which usually takes longer than anticipated. Since many artifacts may require temporary storage this can impact both the time to return the item to service when it is off-site and cause users to find a work around due to its inaccessibility.

Finally, include staff counseling which is often overlooked, but necessary to return to normal.

In times of stress otherwise competent staff may not perform well or at all. When selecting staff to implement the plan in a crisis make sure that they can handle tasks under pressure (Eden & Matthews, 1996; Rusch & Herro, 2000). Dynes (1993) addressed the social dynamic of natural disasters which the author considers to be trigger events. The assertion that planning for a disaster was not a search for a technical solution, but was about how people work together. Without the technology factor the emphasis was on being proactive about finding a solution to the emergency. Muir and Shenton (2002) felt that a people centered plan should be general and flexible because too much time can be wasted trying to determine the line of authority in a detailed and complicated plan.

Putting it all together

Due to the gap in the literature and the need for models of pre-planning efforts, a clear need presented itself to study stories about pre-planning for a disaster. Oral history was rarely used when studying the built environment so this study showed that interviews with participants at all levels can generate data as it did for geographers and housing researchers (Jacobs, 2001; Llewellyn, 2003). Since the story of record told only one account, oral history with its focus on interviews opened up the discussion. Collecting stories about the built environment was not easily accomplished because nearly everyone lives in a space influenced by humans. In other words, there was no way to limit the project to only those with a story to tell (Llewellyn, 2003).

Chapter 3: Method

This project used oral history inquiry, a strategy of investigation of the qualitative (also referred to as constructivism) approach. The methodology for constructivism is hermeneutic/dialectic which means that the researcher asked participants about their experiences by using questions prepared in advance as a guide. Constructivism explains the nature of reality or ontology as having no external reality. Lincoln and Guba (2004) brought up the term “antifoundational” to depict the constructivist idea that there is no absolute, single truth. This concept showed how people determined their own truth based on their experiences. By looking for internal consistency in the interviews and checking other sources of data like the interviews from the Park administrative history project and the fire administrative record, the researcher had a basis on which to judge if the participants were giving their interpretation, trying to please, or providing an dispassionate account in the interview (Candida Smith, 2004).

Qualitative research

Oral history uses the participant’s own words as the main data source (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Riessman (1993; 2004) said that a narrative approach looks at the telling of the story including the sequence of events; the resources, both linguistic and cultural; and the way in which the participants tried to convince the interviewer of their stories’ authenticity. She said that participants told stories as their ideal selves when stating that “informants negotiate how they want to be known by the stories they develop collaboratively with their audiences. Informants do not reveal an essential self as much

as they perform a preferred one, selected from the multiplicity of selves or personas that individuals switch among as they go about their lives” (2004, p. 337; see also Gardner, 2001).

Oral history

Oral history is not just about recording the narrator’s story. It is about having an equal power relationship between the interviewer and narrator (Overcash, 2003). The narrator, who had control over how to respond to each question, going on a tangent or balking at those that may reflect the researcher’s personal agenda, is as much a part of the research process as the interviewer (Lincoln & Guba, 2004; Yow, 1994). In this case, gender, age, and status as a NPS employee provided the researcher with preconceived notions about the local experience. Her status as a Washington Office employee may have caused questions about her motivation in the eyes of the participants so it was important to emphasize taking on this project as a graduate student (D. Cole, personal communication, September 12, 2006; Yow, 1997). To get fuller answers it was critical to develop a rapport, but it was difficult due to the logistics of some interviews taking place on the telephone. In that case making the oral history an event helped bridge that gap (Errante, 2000). January, 2007, marked the 25th anniversary of the fire, an “event” that captured the attention of the participants (A. Jordan, personal communication, September 8, 2006).

Participants

The Park curator developed an initial list of six present or former Park staff and two fire fighters. These participants were the ones most likely to have stories that addressed the research question about pre-planning. This form of purposeful sampling

was based on the criteria of who was still living, can be located, and was willing to be interviewed (Creswell, 2003). After arriving the researcher agreed to add three staff from the Regional office who spoke about the recovery effort which was of interest to the Park. Some of the six previously identified participants suggested others in a technique known as snowballing. The two fireman and participants from session #11 wanted to be interviewed together. Finally, a session with the Park curator who served as gatekeeper brought the total to 14 interviews with 16 participants. Only one participant dropped out. Scheduling around waiting for her to feel better proved impossible. The Park curator set up the interview schedule.

Trustworthiness

To promote the validity of the project the researcher: 1) triangulated the data by comparing interviews, newspaper accounts, and documentation from the administrative record in the Park archives; 2) member checked by sending the transcripts to the participants; and 3) was honest about her position as researcher. This study reached saturation because many of the participants took part in or had knowledge of pre-planning activities (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). Based on newspaper articles about the fire clearly pre-planning took place, but plan details were not provided in the articles.

For the constructivist approach reviewing documents is part of the three standard data gathering methods comprised of interviews, document review and observation (Merriam, 2002). While in Hyde Park the researcher reviewed the administrative record about the Park's history for references to the fire in documents not already copied by the curator. These files produced several trip reports and photographs that corroborated the participants' stories. The

researcher copied a telephone list to ensure the correct spelling of names in the transcripts. Although the FDR Presidential Library already sent a copy of the 1982 fire file she visited that facility to see if they have any additional documents pertinent to this study. The visit did not produce any new material.

The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts. Each person reviewed a form on which they designated whether or not they wished to review the transcript. Prior to the interview all participants received the consent form as approved by the Human Research Committee (HRC). It suggests reasons why they would want to review the transcript. Those being interviewed by telephone got a copy of the consent form by email, fax or regular mail. The researcher reviewed the consent form with these participants before starting the tape and then recorded their verbal agreement to take part and their promises to return the consent forms. All the signed consent forms are on file. The transcripts became available to the public in the HOFR archives and make no attempt to protect identity so the participants were cautioned not disparage their own or someone else's reputation. The transcripts were sent by email or regular mail to each person who answered affirmatively. Only one participant declined the opportunity to read the transcript. Reviewing the transcripts gives narrators a final opportunity to influence the research process in addition to having selected the details and length of their stories (Overcash, 2003).

The key to showing reliability on this project directly related to the researcher. The audience must be able to see that the study was conducted in a thorough and structured manner. This process is known as leaving an audit trail. Since oral history is widely accepted in the NPS it will be important for other researchers to be able to review

the procedure. As introduced above, revealing the trail allows others to look for possible gaps or follow the researcher's methods to capture the stories of structural fire, or other events or topics of oral history projects, both within and outside the NPS. The basic strategies included semistructured interviews where all participants heard the same questions, but not necessarily in the same order which increased the probability that the transcripts reflected similar tales of the night of the fire from participants (Merriam, 2002).

Procedure

The process began with a call to Park curator who was identified after conversations with NPS regional structural fire officers. The acting chief of the structural fire program did not have the institutional knowledge to advise the researcher to go straight to HOFR, but the regional structural fire officers knew the local history. Since the 1982 fire at HOFR is notable in NPS structural fire history it seemed appropriate to follow the recommendation to call this Park first (J. Mazzeo, Jr., personal communication, February 27, 2006). By coincidence, the park began an oral history project in 2005 so the staff clearly supported researchers.

The Park curator developed the list of participants. The researcher provided a short questionnaire and interview questions to distribute to the participants after the study was approved by the HRC (see Appendices A and B). The questionnaire contains demographic questions. By gathering the demographic information in advance researchers can limit the actual interview to questions about the event to save time. Since the questionnaire was not distributed in this study, the researcher asked the demographic questions during the interview. Only one participant asked to see the questions before

starting the interview and they were shared. Also, the questionnaire invited the participants to bring a memory aid to the interview. This could have been an artifact or photograph. One brought a scrapbook with newspaper clips and personal photographs. The fire fighters carried framed photographs that usually hang on the fire station walls. Because the fire took place 25 years ago some participants wanted to review the event. This can be risky since they may rely on sources that did not accurately report the fire in the first place (Thelen, 1989).

The Park curator served as the gatekeeper for this study. The gatekeeper selected who was interviewed in addition to arranging the room and recording equipment and scheduling the interviews. Allowing someone else to choose the participants can impact a study if that person does not include potential interviewees reflecting his or her own bias. The gatekeeper arrived at the park almost 10 years after the fire, but knew most of the potential participants. She acknowledged her own perspective when choosing who to invite and overcame her own issues for the good of the project. Many days into the study the audio visual specialist mentioned someone who fit the criteria, but was not called. Since the gatekeeper never mentioned this person it was unclear if that was an intentional omission.

The researcher traveled to Hyde Park, NY to conduct the interviews. They were recorded on the Park's recording equipment. Her digital recorder served as back-up and made a convenience copy to develop the written transcripts. The interviews took place in the natural setting of an office in Bellefield (Creswell, 2003). Bellefield houses the park's administrative offices and served as the warming station after the fire. The park curator secured the room which was located on the second floor. The transcribed

recordings were donated to the Park archives. Since the raw data will be available to the public the researcher emphasized this point with the participants. The consent form stated that the objective of this study was to collection individual participant stories. Fortunately the participants did not start to talk about the involvement of others which would have caused the researcher to stop the interview and refocus them on their own story. Those choosing to review their transcript had the opportunity to edit any text that may harm themselves or another person.

Each interview was scheduled for one hour and left open the option to follow up with questions over the telephone or email for clarification. To minimize the number of follow up calls the researcher prepared a checklist or probe list to ensure that she got the data necessary for analyses. Because the gatekeeper did not send out the demographic questions she included them in the interviews. Since no interview exceeded one hour the questions were appropriate for length and content. No follow up calls took place.

Oral history requires discipline on the part of the researcher to prevent falling into a conversation. The researcher kept a journal to capture her feelings during the process. This allows researchers to off-load their thoughts and emotions. The journal served as a reminder of what transpired because even the passage of a short period of time can diminish one's memory (Gardner, 2001).

Data analyses

Merriam (2002) said that qualitative data analyses begin with the first piece of data collected. Qualitative data analyses are inductive which means looking for common patterns by comparing units of data. From there the researcher sought broad patterns and finally developed an overview of the event (Creswell, 2003). By waiting until all the

interviews were complete and the administrative files reviewed to begin analysis researchers could miss opportunities to gather data in unforeseen areas.

The researcher made meaning of the data by interpreting the interview transcripts of park staff and fire fighters and the documents from the Park archives. If HOFR did not want the oral history for its' archive then a case study would be an appropriate approach. A case study tries to describe a phenomenon in depth. It is also a bounded system and time, or the fire and recovery period, was an option. Because only one incident is addressed in a case study there are difficulties with generalizability. Since rich, thick descriptions help other researchers understand the event, the interviews from this oral history project could provide data for a case history (Merriam, 2002).

For data analyses, the researcher used Pamphilon's (1999) zoom model. Using the analogy of the zoom lens on a camera, this is a framework that shows "how transcribed material can be interpreted from different angles" (Godfrey & Richardson, 2004, p. 151). Although Pamphilon developed the model for a life history project in Australia it can be applied to other studies using the constructivist approach. Specifically, researchers utilized the zoom model for an ethnography (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005), basic qualitative study (Eakin, Cava & Smith, 2001; Smith & Sparks, 2002), and oral history (Godfrey & Richardson, 2004). Pamphilon said getting accurate material can be challenging for any of these studies because the participants have had a long time to reflect on the stories finding that "the life histories were overwhelmingly positive" (1999, p. 394).

The zoom model was appropriate for this oral history because it allowed the researcher to treat the data from each level equally. The researcher developed a second

analogy that the levels were like equally sized shelves in a book case instead of settings on a camera. Each shelf could hold books covering different subjects, but no subject was more important than any other. In this study no participant's story was more important than any other despite the diversity of positions within the organization from management to laborer. The model consisted of four levels: macro-zoom; meso-zoom; micro-zoom; and interactional-zoom. Briefly, macro-zoom established how the dominant discourse related to individual experience. The heart of meso-zoom is narrative process, narrative themes, and key phrases that told the interviewer about the narrator's interpretation. Micro-zoom concentrated on how the stories were told with pauses and emotion. Finally, the relationship between narrator and interviewer were the center of interactional-zoom (Pamphilon, 1999). The transcripts from this project revealed levels as the individual roles the night of the fire, corroborated stories from the collective memory of the fire, and discussed the significance of the house in a local and national context.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of pre-planning on the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt National Historic Site by interviewing Park staff and fire fighters who responded to the fire. This was a qualitative study using oral history. Oral history allowed each participant to tell the story in their own words (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, oral history offered an opportunity to give voice to ordinary people who are not often represented in the documentation of an event (Shopes, n.d.; Yow, 1994). In this study superintendents, housekeepers, regional officials, and laborers received equal time. The researcher taped and transcribed the participants' stories and coded the transcripts to organize the data.

The researcher received permission for twenty participants. Prior to the interviews, the gatekeeper identified four participants who participated in the recovery effort bringing the total number to twelve. After the researcher's arrival at the Park three more potential participants responded to the gatekeeper's invitation to take part in the study. Two participants brought another person to the interview bringing the total to seventeen. Despite the last participant's willingness the gatekeeper and the researcher decided to cancel the seventeenth interviewee due to her failing health. During the interviews participants continued to mention names of others who had involvement in the fire recovery. Due to time constraints the potential participants identified during the interviews were not contacted. Although the research proposal identified eight participants, sixteen were included in the study.

Two of the interviews included two participants making a total of fourteen interviews with sixteen participants. The first two person interview consisted of a married couple where one spouse worked for the park and the other accompanied the spouse the night of the fire and assisted in that night's efforts. The two fire fighters also elected to be interviewed together. They told the gatekeeper that this was their preference. The gatekeeper asked if the researcher had any objections and there were none.

Identifying all potential limitations before conducting research was not easy (Cresswell, 2003). Prior to beginning the interviews the researcher decided not to include participants who only took part in the recovery effort thus keeping with the scope of the study. Since the tapes and transcripts became part of the park archives, the researcher agreed to conduct those interviews so that the oral history of the fire would be consistent with the research questions and methods. Upon arrival it turned out that everyone contacted by the gatekeeper expected to be part of this study, which they earnestly supported. Since they met the other criteria of still living, can be located, and willing to participate, the four involved in the recovery effort were added to the study which brought the total to 16.

The original idea to distribute a questionnaire by the gatekeeper prior to the interviews was not accomplished. Therefore the interviews included both the demographic pre-interview and the interview questions. Both sets had received HRC approval so the only change was posing all the questions during the interview session. The researcher asked the questions in a slightly different order or skipped some questions depending on the participant's background or role in the fire. For example, the fire

fighters did not answer questions about employment with the NPS. The four whose participation was limited to the recovery did not provide information about assisting the night of the fire.

After transcribing the tapes, coding the transcripts came next. Since Merriam (2002) said that qualitative data analyses begin with the first piece of data collected, the analysis began long before the first interview by reviewing materials in the park files on the fire. Qualitative data analyses are inductive which means that the researcher looks for common patterns by comparing units of data. In this study, the transcripts provided rich, thick descriptions, along with reports and memoranda in the files and newspaper stories about the fire. Broad patterns that shaped an overview of the fire and recovery helped to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2003).

Pamphilon's (1999) zoom model was used for the data analyses. It allowed the researcher to focus in and out of the story and select details for further analysis. There were four levels: macro-zoom; meso-zoom; micro-zoom; and interactional-zoom. Briefly, macro-zoom established how the dominant discourse related to individual experience. The heart of meso-zoom included narrative process, narrative themes, and key phrases that told the interviewer about the narrator's interpretation. Micro-zoom concentrated on how the stories were told with pauses and emotion. Finally, the relationship between narrator and interviewer were the center of interactional-zoom. Discussion and analysis follow in chapter 5.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

The study began with one research question dealing with pre-planning efforts for a structural fire. The question was: What do stories regarding the 1982 HOFR structural fire communicate about pre-planning efforts? The responses to the interview questions followed two tracks consisting of working with fire fighters and planning at the park.

Working with fire fighters.

Butcher-Youngmans (1993) and Pickard (1994) promoted the idea that cultural resource organizations should review plans with the local fire department. These organizations should be proactive about how to handle specific artifacts. In this situation the local fire department took the initiative. The Hyde Park and Roosevelt Fire Departments were both staffed by volunteers. Park rangers often became members of the Hyde Park Volunteer Fire Department. One of the park rangers described the situation.

Well, the pre-planning is in a way what brought me to the fire department. Our, when I got there, my boss was the chief ranger. He was already a member of the fire department and encouraged me to join as well. Part of, one of the biggest reasons was to facilitate pre-planning. The fire department simply did a pre-plan.

The volunteer fire fighters from the neighboring Roosevelt Fire Department knew about the relationship with the park rangers and other pre-planning efforts. They said,

Hyde Park had had rangers here. Had given tours so we knew what was inside the building...They would take us and show us where the power supplies were so we shut the power down. Also, configurations of the rooms... But that all helps because when here you're familiar. When you're at least somewhat familiar with, know where you've been.

Although most of the participants would not have been in a position to help with pre-planning for this structural fire some shared their knowledge of planning activities.

These participants discussed the relationship between the fire fighters, park staff and the Home.

[w]e had through our, through our then chief ranger, [name withheld], who was a member we had an excellent relationship with the Hyde Park fire department. And that was ongoing. And then of course particularly, particularly (emphasis) helpful since they immediately participated in the Roosevelt Vanderbilt fire.

[name withheld] had had some training sessions with these folks in which he familiarized them with uh with the buildings. You know, all the buildings including Val-Kill. He familiarized them with it and he also located sources of water for fire suppression. And he knew about the alarm thing and so on. So those folks, he and those people had a very, had a very good relationship. In fact he had close friends in that, in that group and they were familiar. That's one of the reasons why I think we got the help so quickly, you know, from them. They were prepared to roll.

And also the fire company was very good about having pre-drills. Fire drills and that. I think that helped and that saved a lot of, prevented a lot of the damage.

They had done an excellent job of working with the fire department, the local fire department. And so everybody knew what to do when a fire occurred so the park was able to get most of the contents out.

[t]he fire department knew how to work with the park and so they didn't exclude them and the park staff was able to get in and take things out while the fire department was going in also. And that made a big difference.

The park's recent efforts included working with the two volunteer fire departments servicing the entire Roosevelt Vanderbilt site. The study participants were from the Roosevelt Volunteer Fire Department which covered Val-Kill, the home of Eleanor Roosevelt. The Hyde Park Volunteer Fire Department territory included the Home. Early in the week the acting chief ranger conducted a walk through of the Home with members of the Hyde Park Volunteer Fire Department. Noting the interview

schedule there was a short interruption during the session to give the Roosevelt Volunteer fire fighters a key.

[W]e have keys for the gate and for the buildings of Eleanor Roosevelt's place over there. Now so the fire department has keys. We now longer have to wait for the ranger to show up. We can get in right away to see what the problem is.

A member of the cultural resources staff brought up additional reasons as to why a close relationship with fire fighters is critical. Not only does the park benefit, but information the fire fighters gain during a walk-thru could save time and energy.

I think one of the things that we're working on now in the park again is keeping up the good relationship with the area fire departments in terms of offering tours and so on. Number one you get the fire company to maintain a proprietary interest in the site and number two. So in cases like that. Like we had one fire truck and a crew waste a better part of half an hour trying to chop a hole in a fireproof wall... A tour and the knowledge in one of those men's heads would have allowed that crew to be some place else doing something more productive during the fire. I'm mean, they were, they were doing the right thing based on the information they had. They should have had better information. That's one of the things every Park Service should be doing with its area emergency people. They should they should know the building as well as we do. Know where the closets are, where the dead spaces are, where the staircases are and so on. What leads to what. 'Cause when the smoke gets thick and the pieces start falling on you that's knowledge that you want. Not knowledge that can acquire.

Park planning.

The plans need to be flexible enough to use at the time of the crisis. It ought to be direct and easy to read (Muir & Shenton, 2002). A plan should focus on general principles and not contain a lot of details so that it can be utilized by anyone (Dynes, 1993).

I mean you can't write a plan that somebody can access in time. If somebody pulled down our panic book and stopped to read it they would have lost an hour, an hour and a half salvaging stuff. It's very situational.

You can plan all you want as to what should go where but it is really based on the nerve of the people um that are there on the spot. And half the people that came in and helped me on the outset of the fire were people that wouldn't be part of any planning, any panic plan. Maintenance guys, office workers, things like that. And the people that should have been there directing that were standing out front, watching it burn. And um you know talking about how horrible it all was. So when you when you build a plan that incorporates a very strong personnel structure and it you need to be damn sure that the people you're putting at the top of that structure have got the presence of mind to be directive when they need to be.

Contrary to Butcher-Youngmans (1993) and Pickard's (1994) advice the park cultural resource staff had not prepared any formal pre-planning documents for a structural fire.

[T]here was no disaster plan. There was no thought that anything like this could ever happen.

I think we had, you know, had some tentative plans. Where, what. You know, if something happened in the Home what would we save first. Blah, blah, blah you know. Yeah, I considered the ideal the ideal situation, but nothing really serious, nothing really serious. We talked about it from time to time which is, you know, normal. But uh we didn't really, as I recall didn't do anything serious about it.

But I will say when I came we didn't have a very good emergency plan. Surprisingly because you know with all this experience we you know you might expect that we would have had the best one going, but it wasn't. You know there hadn't been a lot of of uh pre-planning done as a result of that... That's my impression though that that there hadn't been a sort of follow up effort to get a really good plan in place.

After coding two additional research questions emerged from the data.

Research Question 2

A second research question arose from the data regarding participant experiences.

What do participant stories say about responding to a structural fire in a historic home?

The participants talked about working as a team, the emotional impact and moving on to rebuild the Home.

Working together.

Dynes (1993) asserted that a social dynamic exists in natural disasters. The dynamic was that disaster planning is more about people working together than solving a technical problem.

And [name withheld] initially directed, you know, us, but we all just reflexively grabbed things and, and worked together. And got things out of there as best we could.

Everybody worked together. I mean no one, we all, you know, pitched in with one another to do things. I mean and, and we had that and so that was definitely nice.

And, just about everybody, was at one time maybe the whole park pulled together. [laughing]

I think the way everyone pulled together. There was no more complaining about anything or anybody or work or anything. Everybody every division worked really hard to help put it back together.

[i]t was too bad I mean it was a sad thing that happened, but I think it maybe showed the Park Service in a in a very good light 'cause everybody worked together very well.

We all worked together that night... I was kind of an older fire chief then. Newer fire chief and they we just you know. And then we had help from paid fire chiefs that'd come up and say you know. This this is a big fire for use, okay. And the decision makings made in a group.

I mean even firemen were helping us. 'Cause they knew it was a historic place. FDR's Home you know.

And, of course, that was the oldest part of the house. It was really traumatic, but the adrenalin was really pumping with all of us. And we all sort of pitched in, you know, all us that were able bodies that could to it as best we could.

The main thing was everybody (emphasis) worked together. The rangers uh village people. Kids wanted to go in. The firemen wouldn't let 'em.

And our wives worked, everybody. They all chipped in. Yeah, that was a big thing. That's what saved a lot of the stuff.

The participants talked about teamwork to save the artifacts, but the effort required some coordination. Sometimes the obvious leader may not rise to the occasion (Eden & Matthews, 1996; Rusch & Herro, 2000).

And [name withheld] initially directed, you know, us, but we all just reflexively grabbed things and, and worked together.

And you know, like I said, the people who would have been at the top of the plan were the ones that were least effective when, when the crunch really came. And people you wouldn't think [emphasis] would would react were were in there like good troops saving the artifacts and saving the tax payers tens of thousands of dollars of restoration costs. So you never know whose going to come through for you.

And one of the employees, it was [name withheld], taken the bowl off the table wanting to save the bowl and said what do I do with the water, what do I do with the flowers? And she was just focused on that because, you know, she wanted to do something, but she kind of got locked in a loop like a do loop on a computer. So I had to stop her, grab the bowl from her hand, turn it upside down on the oriental carpet, put it back in her hands and tell her to carry it outside. After that she was fine [dulcet tone]. It was like, it was like the spell was broken and she was just absolutely aces from that point on in terms of focusing on most important artifacts first and so on 'cause she was a member of the curatorial division.

And then we had the people that were there that night and then the rest of the evening was basically getting people organized to take this here and take that there and so when I caught my breath I went back in and helped with things.

Emotional impact.

The transcripts revealed how stress and adrenaline impacted the participants' responses the night of the fire and during the recovery. The comments ranged from observation to personal expression.

A, a completely frightening experience if I could tell you. And people already buzzing around like bees moving things, out. If I could say, if you could say that's one of the most thrilling in the midst of an awful thing like

the fire that was certainly thrilling. And without any concern for their own safety at all, people were moving everything.

This is a heart breaking thing to me. Not only have I always felt very strongly about historic preservation but I feel particularly close to the Roosevelts and uh my family when I was growing up were strong Roosevelt supporters. So I, I almost felt as if this were something happening to our family, the park's family. And, and so we were about as close to grief stricken that night.

And I even break up sometimes now a little bit when I think about it. How upset I was to see that house burning. And some of the people said to me well you, you was always a tough guy. Yeah well tough guy I'm not when you see a house burning you love. A national treasure burning it's a very emotional.

And I just remember going home from Bellefield here that that morning and when I got home my wife had to literally break the jacket off my back. 'Cause I didn't realize I had so many layers on I was soaking wet from all the water and the outside was frozen, but I was still warm underneath it all. It was quite an experience.

And like I said, you know, things were chaos, things happened so fast and you're trying to be careful and trying, you know. And of course the firemen are, you know, thinking something's gonna fall so you hear people saying things so you wanna keep, you know, safety is, you know, the main thing so that was, that was pretty interesting. It's like, you know, you don't think about it because you're adrenalin is going so fast.

I went back were we put 'em [portraits] and I asks them was everything all right, nothing was damaged. They so no, everything was fine. They're getting ready to package. And I said would you really mind if I went in there? I'll tell you the next day, and I could even feel it that next morning. I was sore, but it was the adrenalin that gave me the strength to lift those things off 'cause I went back there I sez you know I don't know how I did it, to walk down those with that many times going back.

The fire company was just pouring water into the upstairs. And I remember the fissures that sprang up in the ceiling in the Dresden Room. I mean water starting went down the walls and so we didn't have. We knew we didn't have much time.

I mean it'll be a night that I'll never forget forever (emphasis).

And since we didn't have any tools or flashlights the only thing I could tell them to do was to rip as much as they could off the wall. And just get it out of the building.

But we were told we weren't going home until the building was secured. So we were to call our wives and families and tell 'em we were not coming home and as I remember it took us about two and a half, maybe three weeks to secure the whole building.

The fire fighters also found the situation difficult.

[i]t was a tough night, tough night had by all I guess. I mean and and we're not used to that. This is a volunteer department. It's unusual to go from one third alarm fire to another one.

Rebuilding effort.

If disasters were viewed as social phenomena then recovery was really a developmental process (Dynes, 1993). The Park Service staff recognized the chance to rebuild and even improve the Home with the funds allocated by Congress to get it open to the public again.

In one way it was a blessing in disguise because things that hadn't been touched since the Roosevelt family turned it over to the Park Service in 1945 hadn't even been looked at.

I think most of our attention before the fire was on, on the Mansion collections. And most of the money was going to the Mansion. Even though, of course, the, the collections in the Home were deteriorating, too. We that the, I think that at the time the Home we thought of as sort of the stepchild to the Mansion as far as collections attention went. So, that the fire drastically changed that. I mean we really had throw our, devote time and energy into that, the aftermath of the fire.

And um, but I mean it had it's positive side, too, because I mean the collections in the Home did need attention and they were deteriorating and uh it's a heck of a way to, you know, try to right the situation.

And so as staff that were already on on-site started to identify the items that were from that space and did a basic cleaning of surfaces. Just because some of them didn't have, if not fire damage, they had the accumulation of of decades of of dirt and various waxes and uh and

cleaning agents that had not always been properly applied or or removed or what have you.

What we thought of in conjunction with I think with park officials at that time was that it would be better to have in-house capability in Hyde Park which would be cheaper in the long run than uh hiring contractor conservators to treat each and every piece. So we we eventually, we proposed building a temporary conservation lab at the site and hiring a conservator who could treat the artifacts. And so the building that was envisioned was one that had had storage space for the damaged artifacts. It had a work area and a dark room area. And eventually the conservator was hired to staff that facility.

To recover original textiles that had been water damaged, probably were dirty [emphasis], were you know damaged in some way. That a certain amount of that work could be done in the park if we had the facility. And that probably the most efficient and least expensive way to deal with that conservation work would be to hire at least temporary staff and have a facility here in the park.

The folks that we had hired did some work for other parks did very good work. And they were well received by those parks that they did work for. But the region didn't like the encroachment if you will of a park doing work for other parks and so basically at a point in time we were told that, that was not something that was our responsibility and we should not be doing that. Whereas initially we had been encouraged because there was not another source of that kind of support.

But I know that the park was interested in that lab because it had done a good job. And because it was considered to have some potential for doing conservation work for other parks since it was already set up and in in motion. You know it had been you know successful. So the park had a desire to start working for other parks and keep the lab in tact. And keep the staff. And then do work for other parks at some at cost kind of or lower let's say lower than normal conservation work costs. So that they could recover their salaries.

Not all of the participants saw the opportunities in the same positive light.

We went to Congress, begged, grabbed buckets of money and then just threw fists full of money at everything without sorting out what was appropriate. And they actually didn't have anybody supervising the restoration work. You had a bunch of people supervising. You had somebody coming in and saying oh you need a building for this stuff. We got a building and the design of the building cost more than what those buildings cost in the private sector. I mean just one thing, the money was

spent on stuff like that rather than the collections and rather than on the Home. Things were done on the quick and cheap on the crucial stuff because we were spending it on all the window dressing and infrastructure that didn't need it.

Research Question 3

A third research question was: What do stories about the 1982 structural fire say about the significance of the Home in a larger context? The participants told tales about national interest, the value of the Home as an artifact in addition to holding artifacts, and putting the importance of the Home into perspective.

National interest.

[i]t seems to me that uh that we got a great many expressions of genuine concern from all over. And surprisingly some of those calls that came in came from as far away as San Francisco. Of course we heard very quickly from, from the Hyde Park papers, from, from the New York Times, from the Washington Post uh we heard very quickly from them. I heard early on from the offices of uh of uh Congressman Ham Fish who, of course, that's his district, he was vitally interested in it.

It seems to me, yes, there were there were people from the FDR Centennial Commission of which I was a member. People such as Arthur Schlesinger and uh Frederika Goodman who was chairman of that Commission. And of course from uh Frank Roosevelt... And other Roosevelt children we called them. They certainly weren't children. Other members of the family if you will called.

I was the only person who had the National Park Service, David Brinkley and somebody else, I forget who it is at the moment on hold at the same time. Roosevelt family members it was.

But we actually had President Clinton here in I think it was 1993. Is that right, Bill, (A: inaudible) the first time? Yeah, 1993 he came here and Senator Moynihan was here as well. And the then superintendent [name withheld] went through the Roosevelt Home. It was the main one I remember. I don't remember if they went to the other sites, but they went through there and [name withheld] did a good job of describing the needs of the park and particularly the needs of the Roosevelt part of the park. And as a result of that we got a chunk of money which was. We first had. Well what happened was Clinton you know directed Moynihan to see that some of these needs were met.

We, of course the Library would have conferences from time to time and there would be family members coming and of course the gravesite commemorations people would be here. And early on family members didn't even want to come to the Home. They, they sort of because of what they might see. They, they wanted to remember how it was before this happened. But I did have the opportunity to take James Roosevelt through, Jimmy Roosevelt through one time. Just through the first floor and he was quite pleased with what was going on. He said I know you're gonna restore it back as it was before the fire. I said I have faith it was gonna be just fine when we're through with the work. And then I also had the pleasure and privilege of, of taking Mr. and Mrs. Armand Hammer through the first floor.

I know we had David Brinkley here and Robert Shroud. PBS was here and uh videoing, video taping, among others.

The fire fighters also received attention.

And I know when we were there that BBC called from England. They were looking for any type of video they could get their hands on.

The international community shared an interest in historic home fires (Jokilehto, 2000; Matthews, 2005). One park staff member provided an international angle when contrasting the value of the Home with Windsor Castle. This conversation with Prince Andrew of Great Britain about the 1992 structural fire at Windsor Castle took place during his visit to the Home a few years later.

We talked about the implications of fire in a historic home because Windsor Castle is considerably probably bigger and more important the Franklin D. Roosevelt Home in Hyde Park, New York is my guess. Certainly to history.

The Home hosted many notable visitors. Some came to pay their respects, others conducted research and a few checked on the post-fire recovery.

[i]t was just basically that President Nixon at the time was coming for a site visit to see how things are going. As you can see by some of the pictures we still have the entrance way, the scaffolding up to protect the public when they would go in to the first floor and see. And so he came

and his secret service man. Basically he was he's out here in front signing autographs. He made a site visit and said everything looked fine to him.

Geoffrey Ward who's a primary writer spent a lot of time here... Doris Kearns Goodwin...It was David Brinkley and it was Charles Osgood...And over the years Jonathon Alter and Jon Meacham. If you look at any of the Roosevelt books from the middle '80s until now...eventually they all came through the house 'cause they had to come look at the house, too, besides all the material in the Library.

He said well we're gonna have to put some plywood down in the garden so the dignitaries and them won't step in the Rose Garden and get all mud on their feet. So they had to go out and get all that three-quarter inch plywood and put it down. Level it out so nobody would have to walk into the Rose Garden. Sink down 'cause it's wet. All that rain. So we did that and the day of the funeral. Everybody got in there. They had to get in there and get on the plywood so they wouldn't get anything wet or anything. But there was one spot. Was cut in a little bit of a gap and Jackie Kennedy she had to step off the side of that piece of plywood and went down about this far [gestures]. (I: That's about four inches.) About four inches! That's our Rose Garden... Eisenhower and all of them here. JFK, you name it, they were here. Quite a day.

Artifacts.

The realization that the artifacts were irreplaceable became an universal concern when trying to mitigate the losses (Tiszkus & Dressler, 1980). Eden and Matthews (1996) talked about how many artifacts may require temporary storage. The restoration of the Home and artifacts had to be balanced with keeping them as accessible as possible to the public.

The house was quite an original artifact.

And he made this huge cut-away map and you could just drop each page and it shows the progression of the house. And so, and they cleaned up the front hall so you could do sort of an intro talk in the front hall to the visitors. They dropped these pages down on the easel and you got a really good view of the house.

And how we were going to do this without interfering with the public.

And of course we had contractors up on the third floor, up on the roof banging away, knocking things down and so the dust was just all over the place. Couldn't keep up with the dust. Everything had to be covered. We had to make sure that the public wasn't involved in any of that stuff.

We had Roosevelt family members who were who were expressing their concern both to me and I think to others in the National Park Service with the very slow pace of getting the Home reopened to the public. So even though we were successful in putting the the first space the library back into operation so people could at least get into one room. It was not the, there were Roosevelt family members who were truly not happy campers with, with the process. And so I was able to persuade folks at the regional level that what we needed was, was an appropriate facility that could accommodate the work that was needed, necessary.

Washington was very stubborn about just get that house done! Get that house ready to go!

Participants not assigned to the park recognized the value of the artifacts during the interviews.

You can have all these rules but what do you gotta do to preserve what you've got. Okay and you know. You gotta take all the authority problems out of it to get the job done... there's stuff down there that can't be replaced... But here [pause] every stick is worth something.

[name withheld] had to make a decision and the fire department told him we don't know if we can contain the fire right here and at that point he made the decision. Take the books rather than lose them.

'Cause I didn't even want to lift those portraits up off, that uh, I didn't want to take them down because God forbid they'd fall apart and it's, you know, you don't know, but. And I said to [name withheld], you know, we don't want to damage these things because it goes, you're going to lose it anyway because the water is coming down now on that. So I said well I'll take a chance, you know, to go with it. Luckily nothing got damaged. We got it all out with no problems.

In describing the efforts of the fire fighters one park staff person said,

And the folks in Hyde Park had a real appreciation for, for the FDR Home. I think FDR himself was a honorary member of the fire department. And they had a sense of history there. They had an interest in seeing the Home taken care of and protecting it I think.

Regional staff made this comment about the fire fighters.

The fire department was very familiar with the historic nature of the buildings, where things were, Park Service philosophy on preservation and protection of historic artifacts.

Home in perspective.

These stories brought into perspective the significance of the fire at the Home.

The park put considerable effort into preparing for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Franklin D. Roosevelt the following week.

And I, I know you all know that one of the most heartbreaking things was that we were preparing for the 100th anniversary of, of the president at that time. And we had hoped to be absolutely spick and span in time for the president's 100th birthday which was coming up, it seems to me in not very many days following the fire.

And I remember how gracious people were. And of course they had to sit outside on that cold, snowy day. And of course all the, all the, the people who could. The old New Deal gang, you know. Including, including the folks from New York. And that includes show business people like uh well the, the playwright who just passed away, Green, and hmm don't remember the other name. But they did Broadway plays. So many of those people were there that day. And, and uh and were and were totally supportive, totally supportive and understanding which I thought was really, was really a uh an amazing thing.

Some of the park staff needed to turn their attention away from the fire recovery to open a new facility, Val-Kill, the home of Eleanor Roosevelt. The participants recalled how the reallocation of resources impacted their duties.

We were also putting together Val-Kill for the opening for the fall of '84. And we were all over there in [name withheld] office. They brought [name withheld] in and introduced him. I'll never forget if because he looked at me, he looked at [name withheld], he looked a [name withheld] and [name withheld] and he goes and you will open the first floor rooms at the Roosevelt Home at the same time.

I honestly include in this whole scenario while we were doing work at the Home of FDR we had the Eleanor Roosevelt site, Val-Kill, um and it was not open to the public. And we had some original material and the, the

intent was to open it to the public on the occasion of an anniversary and and so we started that process as well. So that that was a separate tract but that was ongoing even at the same time that that work at the Home of FDR was ongoing. There was, there was monies available specifically to that project activity as well. So the work that was accomplished on furnishings for Val-Kill was very similar to work that was accomplished on furnishings for the Home of FDR. So there was there was a a larger workload and additional goals that needed to be met at the same time with things going on with the Home of FDR.

Well, we had wound up as a result ignoring a lot of work at Vanderbilt and we also had the whole preparation of the Eleanor Roosevelt site 'cause that was being rehabilitated during this time period. And I had virtually no involvement in that. Normally I would have been into it up to my eyeballs.

Looking at the fire through the lens of a personal crisis acted as a reality check for a park employee who would have otherwise been totally involved in the short term recovery effort.

As I had mentioned earlier my wife was quite ill and the next day I, I took her to Northern Dutchess Hospital and she was examined and the doctor said [pause] told us that she had a serious abscess, staph infection, quite deep and that she would have to stay in the hospital. I had to go back to our apartment, our flat, and get clothing and things for her and it turned out that she was at Northern Dutchess Hospital for two and a half weeks. After the fire. And I was left with two infant daughters [laughing]. A little over two months old (I: oh my) whom we had just, because of my wife's problem had just weaned them to formula, baby formula. And that was, that was to me that was just as traumatic as the fire... And it was quite a, quite a time for me. Quite a rough time. But very edifying [laughs]. And uh we're really thankful that my wife pulled through all right. But it was a dangerous, dangerous. We didn't know how dangerous it was for her health at the time.

This study was based on the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, but the interviews revealed much more than facts about the source of the fire, extinguishing the fire, and the restoration process. The first research questions addressed pre-planning for a structural fire and the stories focused on working with the fire fighters and internal park planning. The second research question captured tales of participants

working together and their feelings about the event. The third research question talked about the significance of the Home in a larger context. The data revealed the Home as artifact and the fire's connection to other issues in the participants' lives.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this oral history was to explore the impact of pre-planning on the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt National Historic Site by interviewing Park staff and fire fighters who responded to the fire. The data revealed two new research questions. These dealt with the participant experience during a structural fire and the Home as a cultural artifact. The researcher used the zoom model (Pamphilon, 1999) to analyze the data which is presented in the summary of findings section.

Overview of the Study

The intention of this study was to see if the NPS had a policy on pre-planning for a structural fire and, if followed, did it work. To answer the research question the researcher interviewed people who might have been involved in structural fire activities. Calls to current staff in the structural fire program led to the chief curator at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt, the scene of an important structural fire in the history of the Park Service. The Park was in the process of an administrative history and suggested the oral history to supplement the other project.

The oral history originally targeted people who worked for the park at the time of the fire and those responding the night of the fire. The category of those responding also included fire fighters. Participants falling into one of these groups would be the most likely to have knowledge of planning activities. Under the broad category of planning, the chief curator expressed an interest in determining how priorities were determined for

the recovery efforts. The chief curator served as gatekeeper and identified additional participants who addressed this question. The researcher agreed to interview and type the transcript of anyone who agreed to participate in the study whether part of the original group or not. This decision turned out well because some of the additional participants had knowledge of, or comments about, pre-planning activities.

The fourteen interviews took place over an eight day period in January, 2007. Five of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and two of the sessions included two participants each. The participants were assigned a number based the order of the interviews. The shortest session ran about 15 minutes and none exceeded one hour. In addition to the researcher and participant(s), the park audio visual specialist attended the sessions to record the interviews and photograph the participants who appeared in person for the park archives. Most of the participants knew this person or accepted the explanation of his role in the process. The researcher informed those on the telephone of the specialist's presence in the room.

Summary of Findings

After transcribing the tapes the researcher used Pamphilon's (1999) zoom model to analyze the data. The zoom model put forth the idea that stories can be viewed in the same way that one sees through a camera lens, from panoramic to close up. Like in that study most of these stories were very upbeat. Pamphilon noted that the participants knew how things turned out because enough time has passed for them to reflect on the events. The participants in this study had 25 years to think about how they would represent themselves in their story (Riessman, 2004). The concept of identifying ones preferred self was particularly important in this oral history project because tapes and transcripts

became part of the park archives. By using the zoom model the researcher focused on both the wide and close angles of the stories in an attempt to answer the research questions.

Macro-zoom

Macro-zoom is the broadest level and it showed how the stories fit into the big picture. Dominant discourse was found at this level. Pamphilon (1999) described how discourses can change over a lifetime since her study concerned life histories. In this study the discourse did not change, but at least one participant struggled to fit his or her experience into the dominant discourse surrounding the fire and its aftermath. The participants helped define the dominant narratives, but their stories could be corroborated by newspaper accounts (Gardner, 2001). The fire started in the attic in the early morning hours of January 23, 1982. Work to upgrade the electrical system made the environment favorable to starting this electrical fire. Some participants were involved in determining the fire's source and subsequent restoration work, but others may have read about it in the media (Crotty, 1982; "Faulty wiring," 1982). All but one told the same story. Participant #3 shared a tale that a squirrel chewing through the wires started the fire. Since no other participant told this story nor did it appear in the files it was hard to consider this as a valid explanation although this participant would have had first hand knowledge. Based on this anecdote and the repetitive nature of the story telling the passage of time may have impacted this participant's memory.

The age at which a participant experienced a historic event is called the cohort effect. In the case of the Home fire some of the participants were at the beginning of their careers and others at the end. The few comments that introduced the idea of a

cohort effect centered around the superintendent who was preparing for retirement.

Participant #1 provided a timeline of when the fire occurred which was in the middle of the superintendent's three year tenure. He or she stated that the superintendent authorized the contract electric work to reduce the fire risk due to poor wiring.

Participant #1 described the situation as ironic because this effort made the conditions right for the fire. Participant #9 took on the responsibility of handling the media supposing that the superintendent did not want to deal with such negative publicity so close to retirement. Participant #6 recognized the psychological impact of having the event transpire on his or her watch.

Meso-zoom

Meso-zoom directed attention to the process of how the participant told the stories. It included narrative process and themes. The narrative process dealt with which parts of the story flowed and when the stories were hard to recount. When asked for any other stories to share, participant #9 straightforwardly told the intimate story of his or her spouse's health crisis. But the same participant had trouble finding the words to describe the removal of artifacts the night of the fire. Participant #9 went back and forth trying to illustrate how the grandfather clock was taken out of the house. One time the participant carried it out in one piece with assistance and another time he or she broke it apart. Then participant #9 stumbled over the right words to depict an anecdote regarding financial assistance from Congressman Hamilton Fish III. The transcript did not conceal the pauses and retractions. The participant settled on "adversaries" to describe the Congressman's father's relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Years later the son led the effort to get funding from Congress to rebuild the Home. Interview #11 consisted of

a park employee and spouse who assisted the night of the fire. When simply asked to get the voice on tape, the spouse effortlessly launched into his or her participation the night of the fire. The park employee also spoke quickly and with ease. The two fed off each other to keep the discourse flowing with minimal interaction with the researcher.

Narrative themes examined what was told and more importantly what was not divulged. Most of the testimonies were predictable like all those present on the night of the fire spoke about throwing on clothes to get to the Home as quickly as possible and removing artifacts. The value of the Home and its artifacts clearly weighed on the participants' minds. Participant #5 tried to get in the front door without keys, but went to the side door because of the potential damage to the front door's elaborate wood panels. The spouse of participant #11 thought about the risk of removing large paintings and taking them down the icy steps. The excitement of the event produced expected comments. Participant #4 described how adrenaline caused him or her to focus on the immediate task without distraction. Watching the early stages of the fire participant #9 wondered aloud what could be done until participant #4 came out of the Home and provided instructions.

The most unpredictable aspect of the narrative themes was the stories told that were repeated by more than one participant. Since the researcher asked the same questions to all participants the probability increased that they would tell similar tales of the night of the fire (Merriam, 2002). Participant #4 shared stories with several others present the night of the fire. With participant #9 they both gave details about this participant slapping participant #4 on the back after emerging from the burning Home with smoke filled lungs. After catching his or her breath participant #4 asked the

assembled group why they stood watching the activity. Participant #9 corroborated the story by stating participant #4 asked that question. Like participant #4, participant #11 recalled seeing a teddy bear washed down the stairs from the third to the first floor. Participants #4, #9 and #11 revealed their role in taking down the Dresden china chandelier and talked about the assistance of the others in ensuring its safe removal from the house.

Narrative themes looked at what was not told. Unexpectedly, participant #6 did not talk about what he or she did on the night of the fire despite being asked the same question several times (Lincoln & Guba, 2004; Yow, 1994). Participant #6's responses were told from the perspective of an observer, not a partaker although he or she was clearly in a position of authority. This participant talked about pride in watching others who rose to the occasion. At the end of the interview a possible explanation was provided for the behavior when participant #6 talked about the long time it took to get over the psychological hurt of being in charge during a disaster. It did not appear that any of the other participants held back. When asked how he or she heard about the fire, participant #9 gave a detailed explanation of the spouse's personal health crisis before mentioning having received a telephone call announcing the fire. Participant #13 described the Roosevelt family's displeasure with the speed of getting the Home reopened to the public. The same participant reviewed the effort it took to get the \$300,000 earmarked for the recovery released from the regional office.

Pamphilon (1999) included key phrases in the meso-zoom level. She suggested some phrases like "you know" can be part of a participant's speech pattern and not a request for validation. The transcripts reflected this use of "you know." Seeking and

receiving approval was complicated by the fact that some of the interviews took place over the telephone so the participant could not read the researcher's body language. Saying "uh huh" regularly helped to keep the participant talking. The transcripts showed more questions and requests for clarification in the telephone interviews. Several participants tried to involve the researcher in the story. Specific questions about the condition of the Home arose from participant #6 who asked if the researcher had toured the building. Participant #7 asked why participant #5 did not open the front door with a master key when the researcher let slip having spoken to him or her. In the middle of a story participant #2 asked the researcher if she was stationed at the location under discussion. Other participants brought the study into the interview. Participant #12 said, "but your bend is on structural fire itself. Right?" Participant #4 inquired if he or she should keep talking or wait for another question. The researcher responded positively when participant #3 asked if the last question was answered. A comment about hoping the replies helped the project closed session #11.

Micro-zoom

Micro-zoom took the closest look at the oral aspects of the interviews focusing on pauses and hesitations. Since the transcripts lose the rich texture found in the telling of stories this level acknowledged the emotions not found in the written version of the interview. Pauses were indicated in the written transcripts along with the length. Pamphilon (1999) said that researchers can find individual meaning or larger patterns in the pauses. Participant #2 provided the most obvious silences by thoughtfully pausing before providing a count of the construction cranes and a list of materials for the initial recovery effort. Unable to answer some of the questions, participant #10 required several

short pauses to a few questions ahead of a long pause before stating that too much time had passed to recall some of the events. Participant #5 paused frequently when asked about pre-planning activities, but never said anything about the length of time passed as did participant #10. This participant took a long pause before depicting the Home's condition as a reason the Roosevelt family did not visit for a long time.

Short pauses were equally noteworthy. Twice, participant #12 quickly paused to transition from a retelling of his or her duties to recognizing personal growth in the opportunity.

The micro-zoom level included emotions. Sometimes emotions were predictable. Participant #6 said watching the water freeze as it flowed down the stairs was "frightening." Participants #14 talked about being tentative walking on the thin layer of snow covering the ice. Arriving the morning after the fire, participant #2 laughed in exasperation when thinking about the difficult conditions the crew faced working in a snowstorm on the roof. After being selected to lead the recovery effort participant #2 described being nervous, but having good support from management and the workers. Unexpected emotional reactions to the fire and recovery efforts infused the transcripts. Participant #2 explained that working on the recovery effort required relocating and described that as great because it "got us off of Long Island." The transcript revealed a softer side of participant #4 when talking about breaking the spell of participant #11 in dulcet tones. Presented as a "tough guy," participant #3 showed his or her feelings when breaking down talking about the fire. Participant #10 heard about the fire from participant #3 and remembered the emotion in the voice of someone who was very upset to see this beloved Home on fire. Prior to leaving the firehouse one of the fire fighters

(interview #14) described having a “feeling” that this was not another false alarm. The other fire fighter arrived from another fire and recounted being eager to join the effort at the Home.

Interactional-zoom

The interactional-zoom level is not like the others because the researcher identified herself in the process. The responses to the research questions were not found at this level, but this section established which stories fed into the answers. Pamphilon (1999) stated that she noted any subjective experiences that effected how she presented the data. Keeping a journal allowed the researcher to record feelings during the data collection process. In a few of the interviews the researcher encouraged certain tangents. The researcher told participant #12 that she was a librarian and shared an interest in the tools he or she used in cataloging work during the recovery effort. The researcher coaxed participant #7 into repeating stories about famous visitors to the Home that were shared before the tape began. Despite frequent reminders about the objectives of the study and having an approved list of questions there were points when the researcher became frustrated when the audio visual specialist asked questions or filled in blanks for the participants. The participants knew this person who had worked at the park for over 20 years and wore a NPS uniform. Taking an assertive posture to return to the discourse would come across as pushy and not likely to get the participant back on track. A few times the researcher pretended to sneeze hoping the participant would refocus. This ploy failed with participant #7 so the researcher stopped the interview. Telephone interviews were free from this conflict.

The last matter incorporated the interviewer's reaction. Keeping with the idea that oral history is about the participants' stories this researcher tried to suppress her responses. Pamphilon (1999) introduced three types of emotional reactions. One was responding with understanding. The researcher could not suppress "oh my" when participant #9 shared personal details of balancing the fire recovery and home life with a critically ill spouse. Emotions overtook participant #3 when talking about the initial telephone call announcing the fire. The interview took place on the telephone and the researcher softly replied giving the participant time to collect his or her thoughts. Participant #7 described the difficulty in getting the fire trucks around big piles of snow to hook up to the fire hydrant. The researcher exclaimed "whew!" Second were reactions that could be out of accordance with the participant. The transcripts did not reveal any moments of discordance. Third, concerned moments of confusion. This could have either indicated a gap in the participant's historical knowledge or when the researcher thought the story should have lead in one direction, but the participant went off in another. Participant #3 told tale of a squirrel eating through wires. Although this participant spoke with authority, the story did not correspond to any of the others about the source of the fire. Participant #4 acknowledged making "bad judgments" the night of the fire. In an unexpected turn, this participant who had no supervisory authority or responsibilities accepted blame for mistakes he or she made.

Recommendations

Comments from the participants who served as volunteer fire fighters or interacted with them tracked with the Management Policies (2006) requirement to have fire fighters review pre-plans and become familiar with NPS facilities. Some of the other

participants talked about advantages of knowing that the fire fighters had visited the Home. Therefore, parks should do a walk-thru with local emergency responders (Butcher-Youngans, 1993; Pickard, 1994).

Park staff should develop a disaster plan and provide staff training in its implementation (Butcher-Youngans, 1993). When park resources are integrated into the local community, parks can benefit from teaching the public to value its resources. Several participants attributed the speedy and fervent response to the fire fighters' understanding of the importance of the Home to the area.

Oral histories ought to be conducted for park archives because they can capture the stories of everyone involved in an event whether or not they filed a case incident report (McDonnell & Weible, 2002).

Suggestions for Further Research

The body of qualitative research dealing with issues about the built environment is meager. Two areas for further research brought up in the Delimitations section were impact of a disaster on the visitor experience and the loss of artifacts. Also, oral histories should be conducted to provide the rich, thick text of stories to supplement quantitative studies. Oral histories are a good way to add a human dimension to research and are a worthy way to remind us why we should care about the built environment.

Conclusion

Oral history interviews were an excellent way to hear the unofficial story of this disaster. Because an objective was to catch the stories of those from all levels who are not often part of the official record, the interviews filled in blanks to complete the picture of what transpired (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, interviews from

participants whose testimonials were part of the official record captured their emotions and the personal impact of the disaster. In the case of the Home fire, the newspaper accounts and case incident reports told the undisputed story of the source of the fire and extinguishing it. What these official documents did not talk about were the background stories of balancing the care of a critically ill spouse or having to relocate families in order to take part in the recovery effort or hearing a “tough guy” tell you that he was still choked up after twenty-five years of thinking about that night.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions

Tell me how you heard about the fire.

Please explain what you did the night of the fire.

How did the fire impact your duties for the weeks following the fire?

Please tell me about the impact of the fire on your duties after things started getting back to normal.

Describe your participation in the pre-planning for a structural fire.

Tell me how your role in planning for a fire change after the 1/23/02 fire.

(if bringing artifact)

Please describe the artifact/photograph you brought.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name

Position (now)

Position (January 23, 1982)

Number of years with HOFR (now)

Number of years with HOFR (January 23, 1982)

Education/training for your position in 1982

Will you be bringing memorabilia to the oral history interview? Y/N

If yes, what will you bring?

Is there anyone else you think I should talk to? Y/N

Who?

APPENDIX C

HUMAN RESEARCH COMMITTEE APPROVAL



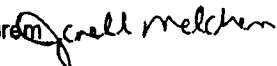
Office of Regulatory Compliance
Office of Vice President for Research
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
(970) 491-1553
FAX: (970) 491-2293

Notice of Approval for Human Research

Principal Investigator: Lenora Bohren, Construction Management, 1584
Co-Principal Investigator: Wendy Schumacher, Education, 1588
Title: An Oral History of the 1982 Structural Fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt
Funding Source: N/A

Protocol #: 06-308H

Number of Participants/Records: 20 participants
Committee Action: **Approval Date:** December 11, 2006 **Expires:** December 7, 2007

HRC Administrator: Janell Meldrum 

Consent Process:

The above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. *NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee.*

Investigator Responsibilities:

- It is the PI's responsibility to obtain this consent form from all subjects.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research.
- It is also the PI's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo describing the changes and submitting any altered documents.
- Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators must obtain PI approval for any changes prior to submitting the proposed changes to the HRC for review and approval.
- The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.
- A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of review. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a courtesy, a reminder will be sent approximately two months before the protocol expires. The PI will be asked to report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary continuation form (H-101) is available from the RCO web page www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/.
- Upon completion of the project, an H-101 should be submitted as a close-out report.
- If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.
- **Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.**

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's OHRP Federal Wide Assurance 00000647.

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee.

Attachment Date of Correspondence: 12/18/06

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *An oral history of the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: *Lenora Bohren; Senior Research Scientist; Department of Construction Management; 970/491-1805*

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: *Wendy Schumacher; Doctoral Candidate; School of Education; 970/225-3548*

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? *This study is to collect stories about the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt National Historic Site on an audio recorder.*

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? *Wendy Schumacher under the direction of Lenora Bohren at Colorado State University.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? *The purpose of the study is to conduct an oral history project about the fire for the park archive.*

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? *The study will take place at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt and will take between 30 and 90 minutes.*

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? *You will be asked to tell your story about the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt. You will not be asked to talk about other people and their roles. If you start to talk about other people the interviewer will stop you and bring you back to your story. Your story will be recorded and the recording will be transcribed. You will be asked to come to the Home of Franklin Roosevelt in person or on the telephone for an interview. Before the appointment you will be given a copy of the interview questions and a short form to gather basic information about you. You will also be given a form to tell the researcher if you would like to look at the transcript from the audio recording. If you would like to read the transcript then it will be sent to you by your choice of email or regular mail.*

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
There are no known reasons that you should not participate.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

- *The only known potential risk is if you say negative things about another person. Since the transcript will be available in the Home of Franklin Roosevelt archives anybody can read it. If that person reads the transcript and becomes upset they may want to sue you.*
- *It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.*

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *There are no direct benefits, but it is hoped that sharing stories for an oral history project will add to the body of knowledge about the National Park Service and the Home of Franklin Roosevelt.*

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? *Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.*

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? *There is no cost to participate in this study.*

Page 1 of 2 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E
TRANSCRIPTS

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #1

JANUARY 19, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: This is Wendy Schumacher. Today is January 19, 2007 and I am here with *name withheld*. *Name withheld*, please uh give us your name and uh your position here at the National Park Service.

P: Okay, I'm *name withheld*. I'm the Chief of Museum Services for the Roosevelt Vanderbilt sites and have been here since July of 1991.

I: And we are here to take an oral history of the 1982 structural fire here at the Home and you've mentioned that you've been here since 1991. How did you, tell me about how you heard about the fire.

P: I've been in the Park Service since 1978 and so, um, I knew about the fire just very very superficially actually you know from being in the Park Service at other parks actually in the North Atlantic Region. And so I heard about the fire I knew the House you know had been closed for a period and that a lot of work was going on. But I had no personal involvement in the response to the fire or the recovery work.

I: What type of people would be talking about the fire at the time when you were at other parks?

P: Well I've been. Since about just shortly before the fire I started in being an interpreter when I first entered the Park Service. So from about 1978 until about 1980 or so I was an interpreter. But since that time I've been mostly involved in curatorial work and so it would have been either curatorial or conservation people that I would have been hearing about this from. So mostly from collections people.

I: Do you think that stories about the fire here impacted your role or your work at some of these other facilities?

P: Not to my knowledge. Uh, let me think about that. Um, some of the people that I worked with and an example would be *name withheld* who was a paper and ethnographic materials conservator for the North Atlantic Region. *Name withheld* did some work with the park following the fire. And she also worked with at the Olmsted site in Brookline Mass at the time that I was there. And so she was pretty aware of it. I also took training courses with Janet and with *name withheld* who was the metals conservator for the region. And so I knew about some of their experiences through those training courses.

I: Soooo *name withheld* and *name withheld* would have had first hand experience with the fire?

P: Yes. They had at least from an advisory, I don't know *name withheld's* real how hands on whether he had hands on involvement. But he at least advised and and came here and helped with damage assessments I think with *name withheld* the Regional Curator. Um, *name withheld* though did some treatment work. The one thing that I'm

aware of and I'm sure this is a limited view but she worked on some birds that Roosevelt had uh collected and saved you know that are at the house. I don't believe they were damaged by the fire, but this there was a number of things done at the with the collections following the fire that uh you know she would she actually did hands on work.

I: Would what types of hands one work would somebody like that be doing?

P: Um, in that case that was you know mounted mounted bird specimens that were not so much a natural history collection as a cultural collection because they were from his childhood and he hunted them here in Hyde Park. Well, the story goes that he worked on taxidermy early on and then others other of the birds were mounted by other people, but so she worked on that. She mainly focused in the park on paper and and the birds were probably considered more like an ethnographic type collection. But I don't know if she worked on paper materials or you know framed objects or anything like that though. I'm not sure. She is still around and uh we can ask her if we want to [chuckle].

I: When you got to the park in 1991, uh, tell me what you heard about the fire.

P: Yeah. Well the fire you know I think everyone would agree was a major event in the history of that house. You know in terms of attempts to preserve the house ever since we acquired it in about January 1946. I can't think of anything else that was more effecting to the you know the original fabric of the house and the original character of the house. It's quite an intact house and so it was a heart breaking thing to have the house damaged to that kind of extent so and I think of all the. Since I've been in the Park Service I can't think of anything more, in this Region, that was uh a larger disaster than um except that we, in the Region now has changed and it includes some sites that were damaged in hurricanes. Where the collections were very involved in though the Region's changed a little bit, but

I: What are you what is a Region?

P: Well, the Park Service is divided. I think it was originally, at least when I came into the Park Service it was divided into maybe ten regions. And they have been re described so that now like when I first came in the Roosevelt Home would have been in the North Atlantic Region. But now the North Atlantic Region and the Mid-Atlantic have been joined and I think it's called the Northeast Region. So some of those were re described I think there's fewer regions now then there were when I first came into the Park Service.

I: So a region is a geographic grouping or organization from the National Park Service?

P: That's right. Each one has a a centralized staff headed by a regional director so and that's still the case.

I: Uh, you mentioned the term original fabric. Tell me what original fabric means.

P: Yeah. Um, in relation to the fire let's say. The fire damaged. The house was quite an original artifact. The structure itself up until that time. And the Park Service had done you know as little as possible to change the original fabric of the house meaning all the every original material was retained. I'm not being very articulate here, but whenever possible the original fabric whether it's plaster or wood or [pause] any kind of structural you know thing that you know holds things together like nails or bolts or anything those would be retained as much as possible. And of course things like roofs have to be replaced, but they would always be replaced in kind and um. But I think it had a high degree of of integrity and you know it had been it had been very little had been

done. Like the heating systems were fairly original. Not a lot of, for example, no no sprinklers were in the house just a fire detection system. And there was a high degree of authenticity and integrity to the materials in the structure. And then in the collection if you compare it to other historic houses it's quite original in terms of the furnishings that were there. Uh, the Roosevelt, the story is additionally interesting because FDR himself is the one who decided it would become part of the National Park Service and that it would be open to the public so that people could see how he grew up and what he cared about. And um so it's unusual for that to happen where somebody has that sense of history and, and [pause] he donate, he arranged early on to I think in the late '30s, he started thinking about giving it to the government in some form. And eventually it was in his will this that once his family had stopped wanting to live there that it would revert to the government. And he asked the family. The family was allowed to live there as long as they wanted to and use it as long as they wanted to and when they left he asked that they leave it as much as possible to to sort of convey the appearance of how the house was used by the family. And they did do that. Quite a bit of material was removed from the house by the family, furnishings and things like books, you know treasures that like photographs or paintings or that kind of thing were taken by the kids and by Mrs. Roosevelt who moved quite a bit of material over to Val-Kill. But it's still, by most accounts, resembles the way it was used by the family. And Mrs. Roosevelt in the early days of the Park Service worked with the Park Service to fill any gaps that you know. Let's say if books was removed we we understand that she brought other books over to replace them so that the library, the family library looked like like it did you know. And she worked with the Park Service to get it to look correct, historically correct. And so on [sigh] A lot of detailed little things were in that house. I mean like everything from pencils to paper clips to you know just a wonderful little things that make a house um evocative and interesting to people who come to visit. And so the original fabric in the case of the collection would be all that original material. Nothing that I can think of at the time of the fire had been replaced in the house except that rugs that the visitors might walk on were you know replaced with what we call service carpet um looking as much as possible like the original rugs, but something that was expendable and could be used and beat up over the years. And then some of the, a lot of the things like draperies and curtains and things like that were replaced and some upholstery. But other than that and I think actually some of the wallpaper also had been replaced. And that had been done quite a big project shortly before the fire. But other than that really everything was things that the Park Service received with the house from the family so a very high degree of integrity again. And then during the fire you know some of that was lost, but a surprisingly small amount.

I: You arrived at the park about ten years after the fire took place. Were people who worked at the park at the time of the fire still working here?

P: Yes. Some of the ones that you are going to be interviewing are still here! Even after the 16 years I've been here um some were gone. An example would be *name withheld* who had left the park. *Name withheld* n who I replaced. These were curatorial people who had been here for a long time and were no longer here at the time that I came.

I: If you had the chance to talk to some of these people before they left the park what types of stories or what stories did they tell you about the fire?

P: I had when I first came here I had I had dinner with *name withheld* who was kind of an assistant curator. I don't know, you might say, a museum curator who supervised all of the technician staff and she talked to me bef when I first came and invited me to her house and talked about her time here and I think she had a lot of affection for this park and for most of the people who worked here. And so from her I learned a little bit about about the fire and about other you know significant things that had come up. Projects that she'd been involved with. And two that come to mind are a lot of reproduction projects, textile reproduction projects at Vanderbilt and then also maybe the biggest other one other than the fire was the acq when Val-Kill was acquired and then getting Val-Kill ready to be opened to the public which happened basically at the same time as the fire. And so this park was um I I am thinking back. If I had been here I think I my guess it was an extremely busy and difficult time for people.

I: What makes you say that?

P: Well, because these parks are hard to take care of under normal circumstances. I mean 'cuz there's so much we have so many exhibit rooms open to the public. We have a lot of problems maintaining collections in storage because there has never been a real good facility for that. Um, so just keeping the houses open. Keeping you know getting rid of the bugs that are eating the Vanderbilt textiles. Just trying to maintain them, do research on the collections. Have the types of documentation we should have. The the records um museum collections records, the catalog records and so on still need a huge amount of work even after 60 years now. So even if you didn't have a major calamity plus a new opening. Val-Kill was a site that had no collections when when it was acquired and so all of that had to be planned and all of those things acquired. And that project went from about 1977 when the site was designated up until it opened in 1984. And then you just had to maintain it. That's again hard enough to do so it's hard for me to imagine how they dealt with that um disaster at the same time they were doing all this other work.

I: Did they share any stories with you when you started here?

P: As I say I have, I had that particular opportunity to talk to *name withheld*. I also other opportune. A couple of other times I called her. She moved away from the area and I called her a couple of times with concerns that I had about this or that. She was very helpful. And *name withheld* who was the chief curator here I think for as much as 17 years. He had gone to Springfield Armory as their curator but he still lives lives even now in Rhineback and he uh he and I used to have lunch on occasion and talk about the history of things and his experience here. I'm not thinking off-hand of particular subjects. Certainly we've talked about the fire. And talked about other work that was going on. And an example would be the laboratory work that went on here in the park following the fire.

I: What type of laboratory work?

P: A decision was made and I can't say too much I don't really know much about who made the decision, but because of all the fire. The water, mainly water and smoke damage that had occurred at the time during the fighting the fire. The decision was made that given all of that work that needed to be done on, to recover original finishes on wood let's say. To recover original textiles that had been water damaged, probably were dirty [emphasis], were you know damaged in some way. That a certain amount of that work could be done in the park if we had the facility. And that probably the most efficient and

least expensive way to deal with that conservation work would be to hire at least temporary staff and have a facility here in the park. And I believe even early on before there was a facility the park staff did some of the textile work using kind of homemade large homemade sinks and that kind of thing to do washing and of certain types of things. And then other work of course had to be contracted out. Some of the more fine arts type collections and so on, but there was so much damage just to the let's say wood furniture um that a great deal of work could be here and that's what they ended up doing. Building a laboratory building behind the headquarters and acquiring more staff so that they could address that uh furniture work primarily. Some textile work and then at the same time try to improve the records on objects that came through the lab because they weren't, they were pretty subpar a lot of them. And so they were trying to improve those records at the same time so that we'd have better documentation. One story I heard that was kind of pervasive was that there had been so much um so many layers of treatments on some of the furniture at the Home that they were actually able to clean it down to the original finish. And it was fairly well protected by some of these layers of of maintenance that had been put on over the years and so they were able to recover mostly, very very little refinishing had to be done. And um so you know in a way almost that maintenance protected some of the furnishings from the damage of the fire. That's kind of a fun story. But uh

I: The cataloging that you spoke about uh in your current position it seems like that would be a good thing to have. Uh when you got here, almost 10 years after the fire, was the cataloging completed?

P: No, it's still not completed. Um, no [emphasis] it wasn't completed, but I would say that quite a lot of work had been done by people that were in the park at the time of the fire then by people that were hired to work on that. *Name withheld* is someone who um I believe was not in the park at the time of the fire, but she was hired to do some of that record keeping work that was very badly needed and um and so a lot of improvements were made on portions of the collection. But the records still need you know it wasn't enough and it wasn't a primary focus of the post-fire work. Because the focus was really on on the physical condition of the of the artifacts. So no, it's still not done, but a great deal of progress was made.

I: Sooo, can you talk a little bit more about how the physical condition of the artifacts was restored or if there's ongoing work? To restore the artifacts.

P: Yeah, [pause] when I came the lab out back which was staffed with NPS people. A combination of of short term people or temporary people and permanent people was no longer doing any work on Roosevelt Home objects. But it had taken nearly 10 years to complete that. Shortly before I came, the lab. The park was interested and I mean by that, the superintendent although I know I can let him speak for himself. But I know that the park was interested in that lab because it had done a good job. And because it was considered to have some potential for doing conservation work for other parks since it was already set up and in in motion. You know it had been you know successful. So the park had a desire to start working for other parks and keep the lab in tact. And keep the staff. And then do work for other parks at some at cost kind of or lower let's say lower than normal conservation work costs. So that they could recover their salaries. Have the facility here to deal with Roosevelt Vanderbilt material that were mediums that they worked on. And at the same time provide a service to other parks in this area. And so

they were working on materials from other parks when I came and one of the projects that I think that actually Bill who is sitting in the room with us, worked on were the benches from the Great Hall at Ellis Island which were original benches that they elected down there to have the public sit in. And these were benches where you know immigrants had come and sat and waited for their turn to be you know have their paperwork completed and get through the process. So quite wonderful. They had done work for Saratoga, ummm they had done work for Campobello, Roosevelt Campobello, and several other areas that I may not recall. And um did you want to say one Bill? (Bill: Saint Gaudens). Saint Gaudens, right. Yeah, so that's what was happening at that time. The fire work was basically done and they had they were sort of experimenting with this new role that they might have. And then the decision was made I think with the park and the region's input that we wouldn't [pause] proceed with that idea. And that basically we'd stop using that building as a laboratory except for things that came up here when let's say for the more rudimentary type repair work that we always need here. And which we don't which is not necessarily um efficiently done by contract, but rather that we have people here. And Bill's one of the people that has done work us over the years with wood pieces particularly and. So we started using the laboratory more as a central storage area and as a work space and for some of the work that Bill did on oral histories and other documentary. Bill has been involved with documenting cultural resource work in the park for years and so his operation was out there as well. It was basically packed to the rafters and every inch used for basically collections management activities. And then about, in the early, shortly after the turn of the century, it was, the building. We emptied the building putting everything back into the historic houses and the building was demolished to make way for the parking lot of the new Wallace Visitor Center. So the building is gone and we're now building, thank God, a new centralized collections building that'll be. That building was never very good as far as maintaining a decent environment or really it was never big enough for what we needed and we hope that this new one will help us with those problems. And it will have a small laboratory in it. We hope to have some level of of capability here to do treatment again. On a very small scale.

I: Do you think that the new building would be built had the fire not occurred?

P: Um, do you mean the one we're building now? (I: uh huh) Yes I do. I think it was recognized. Now when I came I started lobbying for it right away because we've had the houses full of stored materials for well since the park was created. And it's not a very good situation for that. There's not space to build the correct kind of supporting equipment. There's not good ways of going up and down stairs. There's not. It's not an efficient way to manage a collection so. And then a collection management plan was done for us in 1995 that emphasized that this park needed to either renovate either the uh the uh lab building that was here because of the fire and make it a better work you know collection management facility. Or to build something new or another option that was considered was using the Vanderbilt Coach House and renovating spaces so that we could have a collection management operation there. And the new construction was was how we went.

I: Who made that decision?

P: Well the National Park Service has something called a value analysis system where you bring together a group of people which usually includes park people as

regional advisors either structural, usually. In this case structural people as well as collections people and then park structural and collections people. And and you hash out all your options to figure out what all your options are and you try to estimate costs and give them rankings for other factors like efficiency and effectiveness and you know public relations with the town. All the different factors you might have and then you come up with a a decision and that in this case we decided that we would build a new facility rather than let's say rent storage space or whatever. But I sort of think that would have happened anyway because um even you know the fire did not effect our need for long term permanent collection management area. It just would it created a temporary need for much more intensive work space.

I: How do you think or how does management portray or perceive the need for something like this when you probably have many things to decide upon.

P: You mean all the competing priorities at the park (I: right). [sigh] Well that's a long story and probably more than you want to hear. But we actually had President Clinton here in I think it was 1993. Is that right, Bill, (A: inaudible) the first time? Yeah, 1993 he came here and Senator Moynihan was here as well. And the then superintendent *name withheld* went through the Roosevelt Home. It was the main one I remember. I don't remember if they went to the other sites, but they went through there and *name withheld* did a good job of describing the needs of the park and particularly the needs of the Roosevelt part of the park. And as a result of that we got a chunk of money which was. We first had. Well what happened was Clinton you know directed Moynihan to see that some of these needs were met. And so the region came in here and did a big like a a assessment. A needs assessment of of everything. I mean we need a maintenance facility. We need a curatorial facility. We need to patch up this poor house. The roof leaks um this is wrong this is wrong. They put all these needs together and one of the things was (I: you want me to be quiet, Bill?)(A: just stop) okay [flipping tape] Okay I was droning on about that needs assessment and um they added up all the needs of the park and we got a certain amount of money in response to that from uh I believe like a line item type add-on. And from that we we ended up because of all the planning needs and everything we ended up certainly not having as much money as we needed to do all the work all the things on that list and it so some of them were done and some were not. The Roosevelt Home again today is in tremendous need of a lot of structural work. It needs to be painted. It needs to have plaster repaired. It needs to have many, many things done. But um another thing that didn't get done is the mainten the construction of a maintenance facility. But we did have a space that was big enough to build at least a basic collections facility and so it's under construction right now. It started about three weeks ago. The construction. So it's not as big as we need, but it is 9600 square feet and it's a very very good start for us. So, those decisions were made. Basically we wouldn't probably be getting that facility if it weren't for that visit by President Clinton. And I'm sure the fire was discussed as part of that. And there was there was work done in the house following the fire that again this is prior to my time, but they put in Halon system. And this was all before Clinton came and everything. But I I kinda jumped to something else, but they did put in a Halon system after the fire.

I: And what is a Halon system?

P: It's a a gas um sort of I believe a smothering system whereby a gas is emitted into the house and it basically suffocates the fire I think. And it it was at that time considered

to be a real solution to um an alternative to to water because it's. You know water does its own damage. And um but that was later removed and it was actually after I came. I think that we took the Halon system out of the Home and out of the laboratory. Just a change in the thinking of the field that that isn't a good solution. Especially in a home like the Roosevelt Home which is not at all air tight. It's unknown whether it would even solve the problem if there were a fire. But that was just the evolution of thinking and you know. I forget why I jumped to the Halon because that certainly pre-dated Clinton's visit, but um. With Clinton with the money that resulted from that we did put in a sprinkler system. We did a new HVAC system. So work was done as a result of that and I think you know some of those things may have had to do with the fact that the building had burned, but I don't know for sure. I wasn't on that tour. [all laugh]

I: What um do you hear from your colleagues who are still here at the park about what happened the night of the fire or how their work was impacted after the fire.

P: Well I've talked to you know quite a few people in the park who were there on the night of the fire and how heartbreaking and horrendous that experience was. When you've worked, when you work every day basically to take care of a place and you're very gentle and you try not to be a factor in the deterioration of a place. Everything is done you know with great care and attention to detail and then you see something like that happening in the house and it's unimaginable how you would feel uh you know. I've talked to people who were who came were in the response of the rangers who called. Tried to round up people to help that night. I'm including *name withheld* who worked on our staff many years. She's only recently retired. And she was one of the people who who helped carry things out of the house. So I have certainly heard some of her stories. I talked quite a bit about it with *name withheld* who was a museum specialist here at the time and then is now our chief of maintenance in the park. So he you know he actually had background from both a collections point of view and from the structural point of view. And you know it's a major event in a person's life to participate in something like this. So and you're let's see I was at Harpers Ferry. Well I worked for WASO. I worked at Harpers Ferry from 1986 until 1991 when I came here. And one of the things I did a few years was do a class in emergency preparedness from a collections point of view. And because I knew about the fire even before I came here I had contacted Roosevelt Vanderbilt and asked them for people who had been involved. And I invited one of the classes we did was in [pause] we sort of divided it into before, during and after and I had someone from the Harpers Ferry park talk about how you prepare for floods that you know are cyclic. You know they're gonna come. You know you're gonna have one every so often so you have an opportunity to get ready for the next one based on the last one. We had someone speak on that. And then we asked *name withheld* who had been one of the responders for the fire here. Come down to Harpers Ferry and talk about the immediate response to the event and then I spoke about a smaller disaster that we had at the Olmsted site where we had a flood and we didn't even know there was a potential for a flood. And so everything there was focused on recent you know the after part where we managed to get the photographs and files frozen and then freeze-dried. And then so on so. We kind of divided it that way and we invited *name withheld* to join us so you know it was a chance to use this fire as a teaching tool. Does that answer that question?

I: Do you recall what *name withheld* spoke about?

P: I don't. But we are going to interview him as part of this project I'm glad to say and he'll have a chance to tell us what he does remember. You know I think I probably had access to the incident report. I also had quite a while ago before I came to Olm to to Roosevelt Vanderbilt I had a copy of of *name withheld* and *name withheld's* article about that they wrote in the Dutchess County periodical. Dutchess County Historical Society periodical which you've read that talked about. Gave kind of a a outline of the whole of the event itself and then some of the early recovery work. And so those were things I knew about at the time. But I remember Bob you know talking about it as his his role in all of that so

I: Uh huh. Did you have any concerns about the fire when you made the decision to apply for this position?

P: Um [pause] I don't think it was you know I don't think it played a factor a role in in that. I knew that this was a complicated park and a very interesting park and challenging, but you know, but I don't think I ever thought we'd have another one [laughs]. Um [pause] unfortunately this park has had not one but two big fires. The building. There's a sort of a carriage house behind. It's just sort of northwest of the Home and it sort of was used to house carriages and that kind of thing originally. And it was kind of an exhibit building at the time. But and maybe Bill remembers, but it was in the 1970s that building burnt to the ground and was completely lost and had to be completely reconstructed. And so you know that's I think quite unusual for a park to have two separate major fires at such an important site. But I I don't think it effected. You know I just. I thought this place would have a lot of interesting work to do and it did so you know.

I: What do you think the impact of those two fires is on your position? What do you think is different about your position here (emphasis) than it would be at another park without that history?

P: Well certainly this park doesn't have any illusions that this kind of thing can happen. I mean we sort of lost our innocence I imagine at this park. Because you know a lot of I'm sure it's easy for humans to say you know we're so careful that that would never happen you know. And that's not true here. But I will say when I came we didn't have a very good emergency plan. Surprisingly because you know with all this experience we you know you might expect that we would have had the best one going, but it wasn't. You know there hadn't been a lot of of uh pre-planning done as a result of that. And I I think it's something you might want to ask other people. I think you're going to because that could be I could be mistaken about that. That's my impression though that that there hadn't been a sort of follow up effort to get a really good plan in place. And of course that may or may not help you in a disaster, but I think a lot of work was done after the fire to [pause] prevent (emphasis) it from happening though. Not so much maybe respond to it happening again but I think a lot was done to try to prevent any fire from happening. At that structure and at the other structures. It doesn't hurt to have your chief of maintenance go through something like that just because they know what the issues are. And they can probably apply them a little better. And I think, *name withheld* was the superintendent here and I talked to him just briefly the other day. Basically, when he came he had the unhappy fortune to be here for only three years and the fire was right in the middle of it. And the reason that that we believe you know. If it's true that the fire was caused by something related to the construction work that was

going on. Which was basically a re an electrical improvement. They were trying to get uh basically I I think there were trying to you know reduce the risk of fire when that happened. And the risk of of you know because they felt the wiring was inferior. And he walked in and and caused that to happen. And this happened a result of it. Which I guess it's quite common in structural fire that it occurs during some kind of an upgrade or improvement. So something like that happened that Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I mean these are Park Service sites but I mean it's everybody knows that that's your most vulnerable time. But it's kind of ironic that what they were trying to do was see that that didn't happen. So but I'm sure that you can talk to him more about that.

I: Will do. What other impacts do you think the fire had on your duties here?

P: I guess you would say that because of all the work that was done. You know. I mentioned the conservation work. Treatment of most of the wood pieces in the houses occurred after the fire. A lot of the wallpapers that had just been recently installed were had to be redone. Some of the replacement carpets like in some of the guest bedrooms and I think maybe in FDR's room. I'm not sure. The Pink Room, the Chintz Room and so on those had been damaged to the point where I think they were just replaced. So you know that had done a lot of work. They they there were problems at the Roosevelt Home. I think *name withheld* could speak to this when you speak to him, but the Home had always had sort of a sagging problem like a structural problem where it just you know trying to hold up all these masses of people that come in as well as just the size of the house had caused some problems that still are there actually. But they did shore up part of the central part of the building with lolly columns. I think the fact that the roof had been basically taken out probably effected the structure, too, because you know it was no longer kind of held into a three dimensional box. It was it didn't have a roof for a while and probably caused additional damage. I think the structural people can do a much better job of describing that. But because some of those things were addressed. You know at least from a collections point of view the house was pretty you know pretty spiffed up. I mean with all that work done. You had a situation where you didn't have a lot of stuff lying around that needed to be treated. There were some things that were on the third floor that were in tact enough to be saved, but they were really pretty much destroyed by the fire you know. Things that had been in storage on the third floor. I can't quantify that. Maybe *name withheld* can. But I think they were very glad at how little was actually completely burned up. It was really more a matter of you know water damage and so forth. And luckily the Roosevelt family library. Not speaking about the Archives Library, but the family library was not affected. They thought it might be at one point. That the ceiling might get so heavy with water that it might cave in. And they started removing books from the library and putting them on tarps in the snow. But then they did they finally decided oh it looks like this thing is gonna be okay and so you know there were parts. The book collection frankly is one of the biggest things that remains over there you know actually treated. And some work was done after the fire with the lady I mentioned. *Name withheld* oversaw some of this. Some book conservation was done under contract. But we are just now doing a book survey. We have about 3500 books in the house and a pretty large percentage of them need treatment. And some were damaged by water, not from the fire, but from other roof leaks and that type of thing that have occurred. And then mold growth that happened because of poor environment. So we're just now doing survey and then we'll be have some money to do some follow-up

work on treatments under contract on the highest priorities. But I think you know probably you could say I had inherited a house that had had a lot of attention compared to uh let's say Vanderbilt which still has such huge needs. Now the Roosevelt Home. I think there you know there's probably some feeling that some of the structural work done at the Home after the fire was maybe not the best (emphasis) work. Some of the roof work had to be replaced fairly soon after the work that was done. It's not something that I'm aware enough of thought to speak too much about, but um it probably is part of the story though you know. So

I: Do you think the loss or damage of artifacts or objects has impacted your ability to put together an exhibit or display?

P: [pause] Probably not very much. I mean I don't think um. I don't know really everything off hand that might have been actually lost in the fire. But I oh everyone who's every talked to me from the guys who treated you know from the conservators that worked out in the lab and from and from *name withheld*. *Name withheld* could tell you probably exactly what was lost. But I gotten the impression it was very little. We do have a you know we do have a wonderful mirror that used to be in the Home until the Secret Service replaced it with a different mirror. Happened to be up on the third floor at the time of the fire and it got all. It's it's basically a train wreck, but we still have it you know. And we probably wouldn't have used it on exhibit anyway (A: we lost one chair). So I don't think (A: inaudible) we did have a chair. (A: inaudible) Yeah. So that's you know Bill, Bill worked with those guys and he knows, too. So hopefully it will get a better picture of that. But I think it was considering the bad damage to that house it's very little. And you know it's partly a miracle and partly a good response I think. So

I: It's 25 years after the fire now uh how do you think that the visitor experience has been impacted by the fire?

P: At this point I don't think that there's much um. I think the tours are probably pretty much what they always were in terms of their depth and breath as so on. The visitors I mean they see a fairly well cared for collection I think. Right now we're having quite a few complaints from the visitors about the appearance of the house and I. We do get complaints about how dark the house is inside. That's something that my boss is on my back that I need to deal with that. And it's it's a good point. But the structure needs needs painting. It looks a little bit neglected and we're trying very hard to get funds to do to do work on that again. Of course that's something that will always be needed. We don't have enough staff. *Name withheld* will probably tell you about this in detail, but we don't have enough maintenance staff to take care of these houses and so every once in a while you get it gets so bad that you have to do a big project to bring it back up to where it should be and then of course you don't have enough staff to maintain it. And so it starts downhill again. And this is a it's not a good way to take care of things especially if you wanna hang on to the original plaster and the original wood and original important feel of the house. So it's a perennial problem, it's not just this park. We do not have anywhere enough people to you know make sure those protective coats of paint are in tact. Or to be sure that the roof doesn't leak yet again and wreck all the plaster in an area that all has to be replaced then. So, I think the visitors you know they come in and out at some point in that cycle you know and um. But as for the collections I think they see a decent situation. We have textiles. We have rugs over there that really need work. But most of the reproductions that were done after the fire. Of things like let's say upholstery

are still in very good shape. You know we care for them you know to the best of our ability with again a pretty small group of people. Much smaller than these families had historically to take care of the furnishings [laughing]. Either either of the big houses. Certainly we never we never have had as much household staff as they had. [all laugh] So, it probably doesn't look quite as good as Sara might want it to look. Sara meaning Sara Roosevelt, not *name withheld*. So. (I: *name withheld* is the superintendent). Park superintendent. Now um I was going to tell you one other thing. I think some interpreters mention the fire when visitors come through on their tour because again it was a major. It also tied this with a lot of things with with President Roosevelt's life, too. Because he had a lifelong fear of fire. And this huge fire ironically occurred one week before they were celebrating his 100th birthday with a big event. And um that's very poignant I think and very. So it tends to come up because because it was something he feared. And because it was in a house that he loved. Because visitors see things like the fire doors that he had installed when he built new wings on in about 1915, 16. And also he he had fire extinguishers all through the house. And the visitors see these things and when they ask I think probably the fire comes up. But so they hear about that but. As far as what they see I don't think they see much fire damage. Or any simplification of the house that occurred because of the fire. You know like the removal of lots of wonderful stuff or something. Just uh I don't think it's really a problem, visible.

I: So, again, we're 25 years after the fire and we're doing an oral history project. Why is the park interested in having an oral history project on this particular event?

P: Um good question um we've thought for a while that these had never been grabbed in the you know. People that had all different roles in this particular event and the aftermath had never really sat down. Had a chance to write up their thoughts on it. And one of the first things that I was asked when I came here was to do kind of a completion report on on the fire. And um to be honest it never got done. And that was supposed to be probably focused on mainly on the collections work that was done. But there was a completion report of some sort done by the buildings people when they finished their work here. And these are people who came in from the regional office to work on the structures and you're going to talk to, for example *name withheld*. *Name withheld* who oversaw all that work. And I think they did some kind of a completion report, but we never had like a comprehensive one done and the work just kind of ended. And we always thought gee you know this is something we don't want to lose. It's something that you know if you look at how prepared we were at the time of the fire. And you look at you know the response that occurred that night and then all the work that followed. It's something we don't want to do again and it's something that we we wanna make sure is in the park records. The nice thing about yours uh you're coming to us was that it'll benefit your research, but it also will end up in our archives and we'll have all these peoples' contribution to that effort will be documented um maybe better than it is at this point. And uh because it was you know I think a huge labor of love for a lot of people because that house is very. It's an unusually wonderful house.

I: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?

P: [laughing] I have two minutes left so no. I think I've blabbered on long enough. I mean I thought I had nothing to say but not not for a person who wasn't involved so good luck Wendy.

I: Great and thank you very much for inviting me here to do the research and also for your participation today.

P: You're welcome.

I: Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #2

JANUARY 22, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good morning. Today is January 22nd, 2007 and this is Wendy Schumacher. Um good morning, sir.

P: Good morning.

I: And we're here uh on tape at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. And what is your name, sir?

P: *Name withheld*.

I: And what was your position with the National Park Service at the time of the fire?

P: Exhibit specialist and project supervisor.

I: Were you here? Where was your duty station?

P: My duty station was Boston, Massachusetts.

I: And how long had you worked for the NPS at the time of the fire?

P: Since 1973 and the fire was in '82 so.

I: Nine years?

P: Yeah.

I: And what is your position with the NPS right now?

P: Retired.

I: Nice, great. Tell me how you heard about the fire?

P: We were doing a project at the William Floyd Estate in Long Island. I was running a 12 man crew down there restoring the home of William Floyd and we got a phone call. I got a phone call at roughly 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock. Probably around 12 o'clock at night from my supervisor, *name withheld* who stated that he wanted me to get the crew together and report upstate to Hyde Park because FDR Home was on fire.

I: Tell me a little bit about what you did the night of the fire.

P: Ummm, well, I got on the phone and called my crew and got them all together. My crew was not duty stationed at Fire Island. I had guys from all over the East Coast here. In construction. And uh I called them all up. Told them they had to get clothes together and money together and we were heading upstate because of of the fire. We proceeded to come upstate which took us about four hours in the snowstorm. And we arrived here some time early in the morning. And basically that time the fire was out and still smoldering in many, many places. Fire department was still here and there were people all over the place (emphasis). A lot of people from the Park Service and we came into Bellefield here and we had a quick meeting on first [pause] first thoughts on what to do. And it was decided that we needed to get a temporary roof on the building, get rid of all the debris as much as possible and get a temporary roof on the building to stop snow and water penetration from further going into the building.

I: Who decided that, the temporary roof was the first?

P: Again my supervisor, *name withheld*. He was [pause] chief of the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center. I imagine people from Washington, D.C. Herb Cables who was the regional director for the North Atlantic Region for that time. And many, many people were involved.

I: What specifically did you do once you arrived here?

P: [pause] Basically get material lists together. We uh had lots and lots of meetings. I did. We needed things like paint, basic things, hard hats, tools, equipment. We needed to make a plan of attack on what to do first. Supplies, had to call up suppliers who had what material and get it here as quick as possible. And my crew was basically started tearing the building apart from the roof down. And putting up all sorts of safety barriers and stuff like that. And we were told that we had help from the park itself here from the maintenance staff and uh that's basically what we did. Then during the, I guess it was during the first or the second day. I'm trying to think back. It's just old you know. But we were told we weren't going home until the building was secured. So we were to call our wives and families and tell 'em we were not coming home and as I remember it took us about two and a half, maybe three weeks to secure the whole building. Make sure everything was air tight, weather tight and [pause] that was basically it.

I: So, my next question is how did the fire impact your duties for the weeks following the fire. Can you elaborate a little more on what that impact was?

P: It was really rough. [chuckles] It was really rough. Because we were up on top of a roof. Because we had the snowstorm that hit. We had numerous snows following that uh day. And it was freezing cold up there and a lot of us didn't have the proper equipment to be up there and doing work like that. So we had to go out and buy things like that. Uh we had unlimited funds for us.

I: How did that work?

P: Well they just said, we need it, we get it. And that was it. So we had, I can't even remember the lumberyards. But there was Hyde Park lumberyard I think and another lumberyard locally in the area that we just went and bought things. They put us up at the, I think it was called the Golden Manor hotel, motel across the street. Is it still here? (I: still there). Right. And so we stayed there. And we had. They gave us I don't know if we got cards or just again unlimited meals and stuff like that at two restaurants in town. Which was one was the Howard Johnson's and the other was the old Hyde Park diner which is now the Eveready Diner. And so that's were we ate. And we slept at the Golden Manor. And we almost got kicked out of there because the gentleman was very, very upset. I remember at this time that his towels, the sheets, everything in the hotel were black. From us.

I: How? Why were the sheets black?

P: From the, the uh the smoke and the dust from the fire, the burnt, the wood and uh. And just we breathed it in and it was, it was just a mess. And it was very, very cold. I remember that. And slippery. A few of the fellows fell through the roofs at the time. No one got seriously hurt, though. We got through the whole thing without any real big accidents. And I remember it being real rough working you know 40, 50 feet in the air with ice all over the place and sliding. Metal roofs and slate roofs and [pause] but we got through it. And we proceeded again to put in rafters and ceiling beams and plywood on the roofs. And temporary. Covering coated with uh tar paper and lathe and we boarded

up windows. We took out window window frames sashes and stuff like that. [pause] Secured down below on the first floor. At that time, after the water, I think there was a couple of hundred thousand gallons of water that was put on the fire. And the floors started buckling and doors were warping and so we secured things like that. Took things off. Ripped up carpeting to get rid of the moisture off the wood floors. I think at the time we had something like three or four dumpsters out front that we just took everything and put it in the dumpster to be gone through at a later date by people. But my job again was to make sure that the building was secure and safe for our own people. At that time the only thing that was open I think was the library to the public. But during that, during that time nothing was open and it was approximately, I would have to say, a year later all the funds came due. And that's when the plan of attack. Again, I got called up. I was finishing the projects down there. I was working at Sagamore Hill and the William Floyd Estate again finishing up those jobs with my crew. And then the meetings started about the restoration of FDR.

I: So did you come back at that time?

P: Uhhhh, yes. And again I was duty stationed down at William Floyd Estate which is a sub of Fire Island National Seashore. And at that time I was told, well offered the job of exhibit specialist up in this area and uh project supervisor to uh to the whole restoration process of the whole project and was asked if I wanted it. And naturally I had to move so we had to, family had to move upstate and uh which was great. Got us off of Long Island. And then again meetings about FDR Home and what was going on over here. And we needed a place to work out of so we located mobile homes down in Sandy Hook, I think. Sandy Hook. Yeah and they were left over from the floods of 19 [pause] 48 or 1958 or something like that I remember. We went down and picked out three or four mobile homes down there. And that's when the Preservation Center decided to go mobile and so each one of the sites. There was one in Boston and uh I can't remember where the other ones were. But anyway, one of the mobile homes which was a 14 by 70 mobile home was brought up here to Hyde Park out of Sandy Hook. And we tore the whole guts out of the inside of the mobile home and that was our shop and my office. And it was put right behind FDR Home along that fence. Is that fence still there? (A: inaudible) Yeah, and so that's where we set up shop. And we had electric put into it and bathrooms and so forth and that was our meeting place for the next I'd have to say almost three years [exhales]. Two to three years we were there. And then Thompson Construction Corporation out of Albany. They got the bid for the restoration of the roof and their trailer was brought in, construction trailer. And we started. That took probably took a couple of months to get everything set up before we could actually get in and really start work on it and the and the funds coming through. I'm not sure, I think it was two million dollars. And a tremendous amount of meetings. Between contracting and Thompson [whew] and a lot of pre-construction meetings. And a lot of subcontractors on the job [pause] and we went to town. I had a crew of about 14 people. Some hired from up here because some of my crew couldn't, didn't want to move upstate for this one particular project. So they left, but we rehired. And I had a crew of about 14, maybe 16 people. And we handled the total restoration of the first floor and the second floor and then parts of the third floor. But most of the restoration was done by Thompson Corporation [pause]. Alarm systems were put in.

I: What kind of alarms?

P: Uh, fire alarm. Halon system which turned out to be not so beneficial to the Park Service.

I: What is a Halon system?

P: Halon system. Halon gas is a chemical that eats oxygen and so when it's dispersed into the room it eats the oxygen oxygen which can snuff out fires. They first used it in submarines and I know they also used it in small quantities in racing cars and stuff like that. In case of fires. But in this case we had problems with the alarm system. First it would go off and then we had the Halon blows and it was it really made a mess. If there would have actually been a fire it would have been a great thing, but without a fire it was a bad thing. And I'm not sure the money on that, but if I remember right it was over a hundred. Yeah, something like that. Yeah, way up there. And with the new intrusion systems everything had to be reworked and redone and [pause]. And then I was made contracting officer besides my other two jobs of exhibit specialist and project supervisor. I was contracting officer for the Park Service. 'Cuz again our contracting officers were in Boston. And *name withheld* at the time and he left shortly afterwards and then there was *name withheld* who was in charge down here.

I: So you were still working for the region at that time?

P: Yes. Yeah from actually from 1979 until retirement I worked for the region. But was temporarily duty stationed in Hyde Park. After the fire and we did some work at Vanderbilt Mansion. We restored the FDR greenhouse, had contracting work all over this park. There was the septic systems put in and uh (unclear) fields. But after that and everything was pretty well secured here and there was still probably a lot of work that went on for the next year here. I left a partial crew down here and went up and worked started to work at Martin Van Buren up in Kinderhook and restored that whole which took another two to three years. And then back down here to do more work. More money had come in for different things. I guess at that time how you would put it, the temporarily, temporary conservation facility out there. That was another [pause] story. Yeah, another story. And [pause] so that's why I laugh when I say the temporary duty station 'cuz I never really have to leave here 'cuz I retired right from here. And then the superintendent. They decided to move the trailer because they were (whistling noise) so they gave us offered us the building down there in the woods. And we rebuilt that thing

I: Which building is that?

P: Not even sure now.

A: Kessler property.

P: That's right, it was Kessler property. But it was part of the estate at one time. (A: inaudible) It was the carriage, right, Rosie Roosevelt's carriage house. So we moved in there and restored. Actually not really restored it, but we adapted it to modern

A: If I may ask a question. Were you involved when the building was shored up with steel I beams in the Roosevelt Home. Was that one of your contracts?

P: Yeah.

I: Could you talk a little bit about that? Some of the structural aspects.

A: That must have been something trying to get steel through there.

P: No, no it wasn't really. It wasn't really too bad. When you had the equipment. We had cranes here. We had everything. You know and Thompson himself had [pause] one, two, three. He had three subcontracting firms that were in on the job every day. Again my crews had nothing to do with any of that, but I was project supervisor for the

Park Service so I was involved with Thompson. And the steel was brought in. There was a main girder up in the attic that was made out of wood. And it always had a [pause] belly in the roof, a slump in roof. Whatever you want to call it. And they decided at that time that the roof was failing over in that one section because of the weight of the slate. It was part of the slate roof. And um I can't remember that main room. What was the name of the main room up there? Was it the play room? (A: the Nursery) The nursery. Okay, yeah. It was up in that area up there. And so they decided to put steel in there and things like that went very easily. They were very easy to do. Again it wasn't. Some of the things that were really bad were when as far as I was concerned with my crew was like the front doors. The front doors on the Home even though they're painted and that on the inside was zebra wood if I remember. And we had a very hard time locating zebra wood. And I didn't even remember where we picked it up, but special order. And the panels were broken out with the firemen with the unices to get in because the doors were locked. They wanted in quick so that's what they did. They had to break the front doors. And uh so to restore things like that. Moldings, plaster moldings were very difficult for us. So I hired people from this area, but they weren't totally knowledgeable in decorative plastering and stuff like this so part of my job was to train them too. (I: Train them to do) That style of stuff. Train them in this stuff because I had been trained in this

A: And you gave us training in consolidating woods.

P: Right. Consolidating woods using the epoxy systems and stuff like that. Right. Yeah. I mean the whole thing was a training system.

I: Where did you receive your training?

P: Uhhh, in 1970, let's see I was with Fire Island as a carpenter down there and uh in 1970 maybe '70 maybe '75. Yeah, I was only in the Park Service a few years and my supervisor down there asked me if I would like to get involved in preservation work, restoration work. And I said yeah sounds fine and they started sending me to school. So I went to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia for three weeks at a time, couple of times of times that first year. And one in brick masonry plastering [pause]. From there I went to Boston for a few courses. I was trained at Hardwell Tavern which is where Paul Revere started had his ride from out in the Boston area. Back down, oh I was also trained in Washington, Washington DC. God, just all over. I was a Minuteman learning gold leafing. Ornamental plaster work. All over, I can't remember half the places I went to the first few years of it. And then my first big job with the Park Service, total restoration job, was at William Floyd Estate. He was the first signer on the Declaration of Independence. A small country boy out there on Long Island in New York, but he the first signer of the Declaration so he was important. He house was built in 1723 so it was really old. And then again the replace in kind. That was our motto at the time. So we went into the woods. We fell trees. And we let them lay there for six months and then we hand hewed them into beams, posts. And so it was great training period for me and a great [pause] great project to learn. And then so I was really into the restoration preservation work and we were just coming near the end of the project down there when. In fact it was supposed to be finished in May. Grand opening was in May when the fire took place up here. So I guess they felt that I was you know the man to have up here. I had no idea when we were coming up that that's the way it was going to be. But I was handed the white hard hat [laughs] and said you're in charge. So I was very nervous at the time and [laughs] I had to handle that

I: Why were you nervous?

P: Well, I just didn't. I knew what had to be done and I had been on a few other fire jobs. I've been in construction since I'm 16 years old so with my dad and stuff like that when I first started out. But I was nervous about all the biggies [chuckles] out of Washington. This was a big thing. You know it wasn't like the William Floyd Estate where I just say my supervisor and my boss, you know, this was this really big. And so a lot of newspaper people, a lot of publicity. Didn't like that too much. But you got used to it.

A: You were in the spot light for a while.

P: Yeah, it was. It really was.

I: Did, did you do any work in a planning capacity or help the park do priority setting?

P: No. Beca, well, sometimes yes. Sometimes well when it came to safety because I was also safety officer. Even though the park had it's own safety officer I was still safety officer for our crew. My crew and so on and so forth. Every day we had to plan what needed to be done and how we were going to do it. And how we were going to do this without interfering with the public. And so on and so forth. [pause] As far as the planning on the actual restoration and stuff like that. I don't know if they still do, they must still do the historic structures reports (I: yes). Well that first year that again when we were down working on Long Island and Sagamore Hill and them finishing up them projects that's what they were up here doing was getting all of that information together. And I remember. We were into the project probably around about six months when they finally came through with the historic structures report. And that, we always called it our bible, because that's what we had to go to unless we dug into a wall and found out something different from what somebody else found. So we bring it to someone's attention and have it corrected.

I: You mentioned doing your work er or managing your staff so that they didn't interfere with the public. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

P: Well, we were in there and we had to work. And they decided the park decided that they needed to open up the house to the public so that they could actually see some of the restoration and preservation work actually going on. And so all the doors were, I'm not really sure how they were barricaded, pieces of plastic. Guess I'm not sure. [long pause] I guess, yeah, pieces of plexiglass were put up over the doors and stuff like that so they could actually look into the rooms. But there were areas that we couldn't do that with so my crew was working with dust masks, protective equipment. Most of my crew was going around with. We had these white throw away suits just to protect them because uh you know. The old buildings, lead paint, so on and so forth. Cellulose insulation was blowing all over the place. I mean it was just, throughout the whole complete project. And of course we had contractors up on the third floor, up on the roof banging away, knocking things down and so the dust was just all over the place. Couldn't keep up with the dust. Everything had to be covered. We had to make sure that the public wasn't involved in any of that stuff. You know, uh

I: So how did that impact the way that you normally do your work?

P: Oh, it definitely made the job go much longer. The job took much longer than what it should have only because of that.

A: That seemed to be a conscious decision to do that because I know when work in the lab was set up people could come and see work that was being done in the Home. Somebody made the decision to (inaudible)

P: Yeah, I don't know exactly who, but I'm I'm sure it was done here in park.

I: The decision

P: Was it *name withheld*? (A: *name withheld*)

I: *Name withheld* was the superintendent at the time.

P: Yeah, he was involved in that. And probably also *name withheld* and *name withheld* because they felt it would be a good idea for the public to see where their money, these emergency funds were going.

A: It must have been a very good training to the rest of the Park Service to see the magnitude of this problem you know.

I: So, um you (P: Yeah, I agree.) mentioned *name withheld* being *name withheld*. What is Herb's last name?

P: Uh Cables.

I: [long pause] What other decisions were made here at the park or at the regional level that impacted your ability to get your work done?

P: There were a lot of controversy over things. Again like what type of systems to put into the Home. And that went back and forth. And again there was so many meetings about money. Money was a big factor. Yes it's always a big factor I guess in these things. But uh the alarm systems that the Park Service wanted at this time. Again, the monies weren't available for some of these things so it just. I can't really think off hand

I: What was your participation? You mentioned you attended a lot of meetings. What was your role in those meetings?

P: Well again, I was project supervisor for the whole complete restoration so I had to attend every meeting. I also I was a contracting officer for. Not really contracting officer 'cuz we had a contracting officer, but I represented the, I was the COTR. Contracting officer's technical representative. And so I had to be at every single meeting that was on. And just everything that needed to be done in that Home. Everything that had to be discussed or needed to be done. Nothing was done without going through me first because I represented the restoration part of it and I also represented the contracting part of it for the Park Service. So again like I say I was very nervous in the very beginning because that was one heck of a job to be put into you know. But uh I thought it was great after a while I mean I really enjoyed it.

I: What were some of the things you particularly enjoyed? (P: Uhhh) And if you can hold that thought we're flipping the tape. [flipping tape] Great. So the question is what were some of things you particularly enjoyed?

P: Being in charge. I mean it was again it was new. I'll say that at the very beginning I was nervous. I had a lot of good people behind me. My boss *name withheld* who was was a super man. He was just the greatest boss that I ever had while I was with the Park Service. And he understood that I was new and he let me do a lot of things that [pause] I felt were right and he must have felt that they were right at the time and he just let me go with them. And uh so it was good. Again I was nervous in the very beginning with the press (emphasis) things like that. All the publicity but uh and so were my crew because they weren't used to this, you know. But we had some good times and and fun

times on the job. And there were times it wasn't so much fun especially with contractors and subcontractors. A lot of problems with subcontractors that would come in and try to get away with putting putting down the materials that were not ordered or specified in the contract. So we had to have a lot of meetings. I had one contracting firm that came in. It called for turn coated stainless steel on the roof in two or three sections. And I was going away on vacation and I had approved the turn coated stainless steel from (unclear) Steel Corporation in Pennsylvania. And when I came back off of vacation there was a product that was put down on one whole roof and one of the hip roofs and started on another one that just didn't look right to me. And um I uh questioned the GC on the job, general contractor, Thompson. And they said no they were putting down the right materials and I got the old magnet out and put it all over the roof. True turn coated stainless steel does not hold a magnet and the magnet stuck all over the roof. So we had meetings and contracting people in here and there were things like that. And we made them tear it off and start all over again. And there were things like that, that you know, take the hair out every day. They were trying to do something like that. We had a painting contractor that, again, we called for a certain type of paint, Benjamin Moore paint. And they brought in Glidden paint and I remember them putting it into Benjamin Moore cans with Benjamin Moore labels on 'em. So I had to be totally on these guys at all times. You know

I: What were some of the things that you learned either directly or indirectly while you were here that uh you were able to take on to other jobs?

P: I learned a lot with contracting. Because again my years with the Park Service down on Fire Island and the William Floyd Estate didn't have much to do with contracting. I didn't think I even knew anybody from the contracting office at that time. Again so this was my first where I had to deal with all these people from contracting and Washington, DC. I made a lot of friends and a lot of people that carried through the years with me. So in that respect, after this job when I went up to Martin Van Buren and had to deal with contracts up there too because we were putting in new alarm systems. It seems at the time that every project we went on the first things that we did was attack the alarm systems because all of the alarm systems were not up to par. Fire, intrusion, so on and so forth. And because of this fire [pause] you know

I: Can you get into that a little bit more? That sounds like a pre-planning activity that you learned um some of the problems about uh the need to plan for a disaster that you took with you to Martin Van Buren.

P: I'm not sure about that question.

I: Were there things that you learned from this experience that then helped uh mitigate future problems at parks that you worked at in the future

P: Oh yeah! But again when I left here the Halon system was up and running. And that particular instance with the fire, fire detection system and everything was somewhat smooth with it. A few little things had to be worked out, but it seemed that it was going to be worked out. And when we went up to Martin, by the time we were into Martin Van Buren's work and that they decided that the Halon system wasn't what it should be. So then therefore up in Martin Van Buren they decided not to put in the Halon system in up there. And course again this took a few years after we left here to get going up there. Things like that in in our everyday preservation work, restoration work there there wasn't much that I could say that I took out of here (emphasis) to bring up there because it's

actually what I brought up to here (emphasis) from the William Floyd Estate and from all my training you know that just carried on.

I: Can you talk a little bit about the lessons learned from your training and your experiences at the William Floyd Estate that helped in your efforts here.

P: Uh, basically what I said before. Had a lot of training in plastering work had a lot of training in painting and uh masonry work. We didn't have much masonry work here. I was a carpenter since I was like 16, 15 years old and I had uh a lot of on hands training myself working with my dad in construction and so on and so forth so. Coming up through the years you know I basically had all the construction training that I needed. I was on a few fires. Like I said small fires before. Working with my dad. Burn outs in people's homes and stuff like that so that's where I got my training on that and you know. Whether it's a small fire or a big fire, small house or a big house it's the same. Same principles that that hold. The training again that I got with the Park Service still holds to this day. You know I still talk to people about it and they still you know ask me, oh how would you do that and stuff like this. Especially when it comes to plastering because everybody feels that well, you know, we've got a big hole in the wall let's just put a piece of sheet rock, you know and stuff like that. So that uh still holds to this day. So my training, I guess, I will take to my grave. You know and it's also helped my son. You know he's in construction and so he looks up to me as far as you know my knowledge of all of that stuff. But I will say the last four. I've been retired now since '03, guess '03 and that it's a. Like sitting here with this is uh it's coming back in, but it's coming back in much slower than it should you know. What, four years so you don't remember a lot of things. So

I: You did bring a book with you, an album. And we're not sure where we left it. Here it is. Do you think that looking through this album might jog your memory or add a few stories that we haven't heard already?

P: To tell you the truth I I found this when *name withheld* first called me which was probably two weeks ago and I looked through here and then I looked through through it again last night and uh I mean I remember all of this.

I: So we're looking at a newspaper article from the Poughkeepsie Journal and there's, January 24th. There's a photograph of the fire department and a hook and ladder.

P: And this shows that it was still on fire that night. Flames coming out of the, which would be the north.

I: And I see that you clipped out the weather, windy and cold.

P: Yes, uh huh and then

I: Here's another article. At Roosevelt Mansion all can be restored and it talks about the crew work. And this must be your crew.

P: Yes, right.

I: And there's not a date on this article. Maybe we can make a photocopy of it.

P: Yeah this is the main section where the big beam, the steel, the steel was put in.

I: So that's the sagging in the roof you spoke about?

P: Uh no, that's the fire that did that. This was a, we had this sagging way before that and again then there's another picture of it.

I: Here's an article from the New York Times. And there's photographs of some people, oh there's a photograph of you. Project manager supervising restoration work in the Dresden Room.

P: Yeah, most of these things in here. Well I felt like a celebrity so most of these things have my name in here somewhere.

I: Well that's understandable because this is your album. It's interesting that some of these articles are not in the park archives (P: really) or in the Presidential Library records as well. Here's another photograph of you.

P: Yeah, that's with *name withheld*. Do you remember *name withheld*?

A: I didn't know him well, but I know him.

I: *name withheld* will also be interviewed as part of this process. As will *name withheld*.

P: Oh really. Well, he's going to say that that guy didn't know what he's talking about. He probably doesn't even remember *name withheld*. [all laughing] (A: inaudible)

I: Uh let's see. So this article is called rebuilding FDR's birthplace and it's by William F. McTernan. And was he related to *name withheld* do you know?

P: William F.? No. [flipping pages]

I: That's a coincidence. And let's see. This is a continuation of the article where workers are repairing the ceiling of the roof. And let's see. It's hard to tell, but this looks like the grave marker.

P: That's the grave site [flipping pages]

I: Here's another article. Uhhh this looks like from the local paper. FDR Home getting a face lift after ruin of last year's fire. So this is from '83 and uh there's a photograph of the living room which was not damaged. Let's see, July 3rd 1983 from the News Star. And then why don't you describe these photographs. These look like personal photographs.

P: Uh, yeah, it was just basically that President Nixon at the time was coming for a site visit to see how things are going. As you can see by some of the pictures we still have the entrance way, the scaffolding up to protect the public when they would go in to the first floor and see. And so he came and his secret service man. Basically he was he's out here in front signing autographs. He made a site visit and said everything looked fine to him. I don't think he was here, couldn't have been here too long. They say in this article. I read it here last night, they say he was here for a couple of hours, but we didn't see him here on-site so he might have been off to other sites. He might have been here at Bellefield and stuff. At the time I thought it was pretty pretty decent to meet the president.

I: Did you have the opportunity to meet other dignitaries or honored guests?

P: Um, let's see, no one I actually. Well a lot of the Roosevelt family through the years. I think at one time at Vanderbilt I met Gloria Vanderbilt was there for a site visit. And also (A: inaudible) no, I don't think so. Might have been (A: inaudible)

I: Were other, did you find that, you spoke about the press interest and that there was a lot of political interest because of this particular site being so integral in American history? Did you have the relationship or the opportunity to um uh to talk to local congress people or senators or people like that.

P: No, no. Not that I can remember. I don't think I talked to anybody, from local. This was, wasn't handled or dealt with on a local scale too much. This was everything from out of Massachusetts, Boston, and everything out of Washington. You know and after the first few meetings I mean there wasn't very many people from Washington up here. That I remember everything again was dealt with, with North Atlantic Regional

Office and the Preservation Center. Now we're not even called that any more I don't think. Now we're called the P Lab at one time, the Preservation Center. A lot now, now I don't even know if it exists

I: I don't think it exists.

P: I don't even know if there's still any exhibit specialists around. Well Tom's still around, isn't he? (A: inaudible) That's that's all. So no there wasn't I mean again this is why I took a few pictures and got his autograph 'cuz I thought it was pretty good. I'm surprised you don't see my guys hanging out the windows 'cuz I told 'em [all laughing] don't hang out the windows.

I: But as you pointed out earlier, before we started the tape uh you are in one of these photographs.

P: Yeah, I was there and I think that's *name withheld, name withheld*, we were coming out.

I: Thanks for sharing that and then the last entry is your invitation to uh the 100th anniversary celebration of the birth of Eleanor Roosevelt.

P: The post office had come out with a stamp and stuff like that.

I: So were you duty stationed in Hyde Park at the time?

P: Uh, yes, yeah. I think we were also working in that cottage, Eleanor's place, Val-Kill. Now I had that project to go on to, too. We did a couple of rooms over there. There were so many jobs that I was involved with that it's hard to remember exactly where I was at that time. But again the I was around here for a long long time that's why I was temporarily duty stationed here and that went on until. So I probably put on from '82 to '03 some 21 years.

I: Was that unusual for somebody from a regional office to be duty stationed at a park?

P: Uh, no. No [pause] all the exhibit specialists, project supervisors, whatever you want to call them, us. We were temporarily duty assigned to different parks as the projects. Depending on the length of the project. Sometimes the project would be a two month project or a four month project. Others would be the total restoration from the ground right up to the roof. And like in Martin Van Buren's case or the William Floyd Estate and therefore you could count on a two year project or a two and a half year project depending on on the crew size and the funds the fundings and so on and so forth but uh. So we were basically all on the travel, we were on the go, the exhibit specialists, but it wasn't anything to where we couldn't travel weekly. For a while, it was probably about seven years. A good seven years that we just, we lived out of motels. We were constantly on the road. Constantly on the road. We were down in Washington's Headquarters, we was just all over. Statue of Liberty, Sagamore Hill, so we were all over. And again I would take my crew with me who wanted to travel. And if people couldn't travel and they had to leave, they left. And we would hire new people. Most of the people that we had on with me were called seasonals at the time. They weren't permanent employees. We tried to keep them on. We'd get them intermittent positions I think it was called at the time. (I: I think they're called terms now) Terms, okay. And uh but all the exhibit specialists were were permanent. And I think at the time we had three or four for the whole North Atlantic Region. And at that time also we had DSC, Denver Service Center, which had exhibit specialists too. And then again I'm not sure if DSC is still around. (I: DSC is still there) Still, okay. Is that where you work at?

I: No, I'm WASO detached.

P: Oh, okay. So, again, we had a construction trailer which we took out of here. We got the other building we used it as a work work area. Sometimes if the project was going to go on for a couple of years and that then we'd take the construction trailer and move it to site. And then we had a base that we could work out of. That was the hardest thing when we were doing these projects is because we would come into a park. If it was a large park they could hold up with us, but if it was a small park they didn't have the facilities. They didn't have the equipment, the machinery so on and so forth we needed to get a project done. So this was definitely advantageous to us to go in and bring our own equipment in. Also the fact that sometimes you know we would come in to a project and the park staff. Not maintenance there of course at the time would get upset because we were coming in kind of like taking over. You know again because we would need the equipment and the facilities and the room and the storage and so on and so forth so you know there was a lot of controversy. That, that's why *name withheld* and everybody up top decided that we needed to be totally on our own. Not dependent on the parks so that when we come in we do our own thing. So the first thing that I would usually have to do would be to come in sit there with the superintendent. Sometimes *name withheld* would be there, sometimes he wouldn't, but we would set up the the pattern or the pace for what was going to go on in the future. How we were going to do this. What facilities were needed. Which was basically nothing 'cuz we would bring our own trailer in set up shop. Usually within two or three days we were up and running if the mobile home delivered. We'd have the port-o-let delivered. We'd have electrical wiring to the shop and telephone hooked up and we were on a roll. So it was a good system. And *name withheld* introduced that. So [pause] at that time we had a lot of restoration preservation projects going on in the region. You know the big push was for all of these projects to get done. So [pause]

I: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?

P: Uh no, I miss the Park Service. (I: that's nice) Yeah, I do, but uh life goes on.

A: I don't know. I guess I shouldn't interject as much as I have, but I had a question for you. You said that you were nervous and you had a lot of people and the spotlight, but it must have also been very rewarding to you to know that you're bringing back a site like this.

P: Oh, absolutely.

A: And not only for yourself, but it very rewarding for your crew (inaudible)?

P: Absolutely. There were some some of my crew members which were brought on and weren't too happy with the way things were. Again because I was safety officer and you know how the Park Service is about safety. And then they did not want to wear the safety masks and safety shoes or hard hats during the. Things like this that went on. They didn't want to wear dust masks or respirators or gloves and stuff like this you know. Then again when you bring a guy off the street who's in construction and when fills out an application. Or when you get him off unemployment or he just comes in and fills it out they have no idea what this is all about. And they have no idea that they just can't pick up whatever it is or tear the painting off the wall you know. And you know so you have to really teach these guys.

A: It must be quite a challenge instilling that feeling that this is part of a national archive. This isn't something that's just a wall.

P: Right yeah. We had many, many, many meetings about this. Sometimes actually I had group meetings all the time. We'd have safety meetings once a week and we'd also have just meetings about how to handle things in the Home. Especially when it came to Vanderbilt Mansion you know how things that are up there. And try to instill in them that you know this is the way it is and uh but there would good rewards afterwards that you know that you had a hand in this. And I tried to pass down the publicity that was handed to me which I really didn't, again I was nervous at the time, but I tried to pass that down to my crew. You know and and get them in as much as possible into the limelight.

I: So do you have preservation or restoration aspect of the work as part of the work help set priorities. Or how did that impact the priority setting of what work gone done first?

P: I'm not sure again about the question. What is this?

I: So I'm just (P: Sorry about this but) trying to tie in Bill's question uh with the idea of priority setting or planning activities that would have taken place at a management level. Do you, well you talked about the roof needing to be shored up immediately. How were some of those priorities set? That was obvious because it was collapsing, but after the roof was shored and and was stable

P: Well, again the uh after the roof was done and the windows was blocked up and that we had to maintain and ensure that even in the fire the heating system never went out. It ran constantly. So this is why we had we had to make sure this, the the building was totally uh uh secure to the weather. Because they were afraid if they shut down the system that would lose the heat in there and then you'd have worse damage because everything was so wet and that it would just freeze. And if I'm not mistaken and I think it says so on the album somewhere you know the temperatures was like in the teens and the low twenties during the daytime. And at night were going way down low. And I remember again there were a few times that we were up on the roof working and and we'd see white coming down the river and all of a sudden we'd be in a blizzard within 15 to 20 minutes of that. And we'd have to you know knock off work, close up. So yeah uh after we did the things like that we started on the first floor ripping apart walls moldings [pause] taking samples of paint throughout the whole Home. They come in with the, I can't think of what you call it, the camera (A: boroscope). Boroscope and they would look into the holes. All the nooks and crannies to see what damage was done in there. So again we had many, many meetings, but [pause] when it came time, when the actual work started and I can't remember the exact date of the work that got started the historic structures report was there. And we went by that. I remember I would take that home and read and read that so that I knew what was going on. See again with my crew they expected me to know everything. You know and with the contractors, they expected me to know everything. [all laugh] So it was rough for a while there. Really rough for a while. So wouldn't wish it on anybody else. It was just tough. You know I needed another I would say another five or six years under my belt before I coulda walked into that job smoothly. But everybody says that I did decent so that's the main thing. So the job got done and it got done for the amount of money that we had. Actually we were under and the restoration come out great. A few changes later on that we found out. Mostly color, paint colors and stuff like that. [pause] That's about it. Can't think of anything else that

I: Well, thank you so much and uh you will be receiving a copy of the transcript and uh if there's something that comes up later we can certainly either chat on tape over the telephone or you can drop me a note.

P: Sure, you've got my number.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #3

JANUARY 23, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good morning, *name withheld*, uh today is January the 23rd 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm the researcher. And here in Hyde Park, New York with Bill Urbin from the National Park Service. And today is the 25th anniversary of the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt. And we are interviewing *name withheld*. *Name withheld*, uh let's get your voice on tape.

P: Okay.

I: And, uh, I just wanted to mention to you that I have a consent form. This project is being done jointly with the National Park Service and with Colorado State University. And I'm serving as the investigator for Colorado State University and I have a consent form. So just

P: That's fine.

I: I will send this form to you, but I just wanted to get your approval on the tape.

P: Right. That's fine.

I: Okay, great. So we'll be sending this out to the address you gave us in Clearwater, Florida.

P: Okay.

I: Thanks. So, uh, let's get started. And, *name withheld*, um what was your position with the National Park Service back in 1982?

P: I was an exhibits specialist.

I: And were you here at the park?

P: I was stationed at the park, yeah from the Boston Historical Lab, yes.

I: Was that part of the regional office?

P: Yeah, part of the regional office, yes. *Name withheld* ran the historical lab. Yes.

I: Okay, great.

P: It was more of a cultural lab really (inaudible).

I: Mmm. Thank you. What is your position with the National Park Service now?

P: I've retired. I retired in 1986. I retired. I was facility manager and I ended up at the Boston regional office as a facility manager.

I: Did you ever work specifically for the park here?

P: Yes. I worked from 19, 1964 until 1977. And I left to. I was I was then promoted to the regional office as a exhibit specialist.

I: And um how long did you work for the National Park Service at the time of the fire? So back in 1982. How long had you

P: I had been in well, I came in 1964 and so I was almost 18, 19 years at that time, yeah.

I: Thank you. So, *name withheld*, tell me about how you heard about the fire.

P: [pause] Well I was home at the time [pause] I have to try to remember all this. [makes noise] (I: okay (soft voice). I was home at the time and and my my wife had called me and said that the Washington Office was after me to call. So I called the Washington Office the next morning. And in the meantime I went down to the house and the house was burning. 'Course we all stood there with tears and we all started to take all the furniture out we could. *Name withheld* was leading was leading the crew to take all the furniture out of the house. And so we was taking the furniture out of the house all we could save. And we could just see the firemen were doing everything they could. It was a cold night. And they poured water on the fire. And there was a point that was freezing because it was so cold that night. [pause] And so uh and so uh it it was like just like you know it was just like your own house burning after you put so many years there. I stood there of course with tears in my eyes. [pause] It was a very emotional, even today it bothers me emotionally when I speak of it. 'Cuz I liked the house so much. But then uh we thought we thought everybody got their thoughts together and uh *name withheld* called me the next day and said he was flying down. And *name withheld* flew down and met me and we went over who was going to be in charge. So Washington at this time said I'll be in charge of restoring the Home and replacing taking the third floor off and putting the old structure back as best I could before we had any more damage to the house. So this was on a Saturday. On a Sunday I then proceeded to get all the stores open. And I sent trucks up and we loaded up two by sixes, two by tens and everything we could get. Three quarter, half inch (unclear) plywood and then I had a crew out of Long Island and I knew they was on Long Island and told them that they were to get up to the Roosevelt Home immediately. And that they was to work there with me all night long. So what we did was that night the crew landed up there some of the cars. We hired (unclear) and we begin to take off half of the half of the plywood on a roll. We began to look at the structure and by then hire two cranes. The cranes had come in and the next morning on Sunday we begin take the whole structure apart. We seen what was fire, I think I had about seven-five people there and *name withheld* was there, too. Luckily for us. *Name withheld* was the the. We were bringing everything out in boxes putting them in on the cranes and unloading. And then as were taking them out I had two students there measuring all the everything the urns up to the top. We saved the urns. We saved we saved all the doll stuff, all the doll stuff from the top because some of it had not burnt. And then we begin to take the whole structure apart. Immediately I began to see that the that we needed to do more now. So we took two by tens and we started in the basement. And we put two by tens in each room to shore up the ceilings and everything. And we went ahead and we shored up all the rooms and all the floors through the center all the way down the hallway. We was afraid that the third floor was gonna go in. So that evening while we were still working the third floor crashed in. Luckily that we did that day because if we hadn't did that during the day why the uh all the upper we woulda lose everything. So then we I I got the crew together and we made a plan how we was gonna attack the top, how we was gonna put it back together. *Name withheld* had said that he wanted to start by five. And him and I got into a discussion at my house. I didn't think I could do it. But anyway, got the crew together and said that he thought we could do it, but it was gonna be a rough task. So we immediately we begin to that day we. We started to work it was on a Monday we started to work and then uh *name withheld* who

(unclear) the whole staff. And then we had a whole staff of people helping us and we brought everything out and piled it in there. And then we. *Name withheld* had a crew there and we were staying in there. And all the stuff, the burnt stuff or anything that belonged to the Roosevelts we piled it up. So then we began to look at the the (unclear) had come in and we realized that we could go ahead and we could send a lot of what was beam. So we took the uh the beams were two by tens. Most the beams. The structure was two by tens. The side walls were still in good shape and that on the Monday. So I called *name withheld* at uh the regional office in Boston. And uh he told me. He said I want you to get yourself I want you to get and I want you to get that house going.

I: Why do you think he said that?

P: Because everybody was under orders from Washington. Washington was very stubborn about just get that house done! Get that house ready to go! We don't want no more damage to that house. Probably because of the political attitude that was there was about the Roosevelt Home with the family. So he said right away you gotta get that furnace going. So I got a crew there. I hired somebody and they came looked at the furnace and got the furnace going. And so the reason why we got the furnace going was it was going to put humidity back in the house and take the moisture out. So the crew and I started uh. We we then started to open the ceiling up. Cutting holes in certain places (unclear) in the ceilings. So the water would come down. And when we were bringing the water down there was crews sweeping out. Sweeping all the water out. Mopping it out, sweeping it out. Sixty five people I had. So we we got we just got water come down from the second floor and just let it come right through all the flooring and and all the floors had had came up. So the wood floors had came up and so we said well *name withheld* and I had talked about it and that the floors would go back down after we got the moisture back out of the building. So that day we took in the got the furnaces going and we shut the house up. We begin putting the putting the structure the second floor back up 'cuz the third floor is gone. And by the third day of the job the uh all the stuff on the third floor was gone and all we had was the second floor. So then the crews got together and they decided that we would take the uh old all the firebeams we could for the time being and then later on we would spray some kind of asbestos or something on 'em that was fire retardant to save what we could. And so what we did was we cut a hole in the two by tens and we strapped them along side 'em. And we put bolts in. Uh three bolts in each place where the beams were. And then we uh then we did this. And then we took out the beams that was still there. The two by sixes was so bad. We took them out and then we put uh we put in between each beam a heavy (unclear) to make sure that the what was left of the structure was going to be solid. So then we did this and we were still having crews going through the house. And we was trying to get the house back to normal. So we decided to go into the wallpaper and we cut holes in the wallpaper to let the moisture out. A brick wall. We didn't we tried not to do any damage to the historic value of the house. So by cutting the ceilings we got most of, we cut ceilings in places to get most of the moisture. And we had a moisture reader and we got the moisture out before it begin to go back down. By Wednesday the floors had gone back down and by Thursday. By Thursday night we were working night and day. We beginning to put the roof on. By Friday night by Friday night we had all the the roof back on the whole house. The second floor, the third floor was gone but the whole second floor so we really saved the structure by by putting all that the roof back on. So

we we took and we we laid uh I I think it was five sixths five sixteenth plywood all over the second floor and then we took and the afterwards we took the fourteen south on all the plywood and so the stuff didn't blow off or nothin'. So what blew off we took a two by two by fours and nailed it on top of all that felt in places so nothing would blow off the house. So I mean by Friday we had a cold day. It was snowing and everything and we was very fortunate to have the roof on by Friday. And that's about it. I mean you know. Any questions about the the fire was was caused by. What they said was caused it was. There was a squirrel and the squirrel had got into and had lodged in there and had chewed through one of the wires and it had started a fire inside the walls and that. But um I I think by putting on the uh. *Name withheld's* suspicion was to get the heat to get the heat going and by putting the heat on immediately we we got moisture back into the building and that. But it was a real mess. We had we had some type of firemen's (unclear) because they had ice inside the building but by putting the heat on we got all the water out because we made holes in the floors so the water went down to the cellar and then in the cellar we vacuumed everything out. And that was my first experience in the structural fire like that, but it was a very terrible experience.

I: Did you have other experiences with structural fire?

P: No that was a. Well I had it I had a garage fire one time in a. That was at William Floyd, down there but uh I wasn't there. No that's the only structural fire. I do basically between finding out and uh *name withheld* was a great architect. He was very famous in Park Service for being a great architect. And he had a very lot of common sense ability to see something and was able to grasp what you were seeing and made it very simple for you. Such as we was discussing. I have to think back because some of we were discussing we was discussing how to how to go about to shore up the building you know.

I: That's you and *name withheld* would discuss how to shore up the building?

P: Yes, after that fire and uh I said to him. I said well I don't really I can't think whether I really (unclear) to him. Just got to think back a minute.

I: Do I have a piece of it?

P: He said get a piece of paper. So I got a piece of paper. Here's what I want you to do. Want you to take a two by fourteen on the floor and a two by fourteen on each floor (unclear). I want you to draw it on the baseline. All of the rooms. Luckily that was a smart thing we'd done because when the floor, when the second floor. When the third floor dropped into the second floor you wouldn't believe what it sounded like. I mean it's terrible what we had left. The walls that we had left on the third floor. They dropped right into the second floor. And it was just like a boom. It sounds like a whole mess of troops went over a bridge and the bridge was shattered. And it was out of step as the engineers would say.

I: Was anyone at in the building at the time?

P: Well yeah we was working we were working in the building. We were working in the building when uh when uh yeah the second floor went in. We was working in there. My crew was working in the building. Nobody was hurt because we've already had you know what come down was so. The partial roof we had so when it dropped down it dropped on that partial roof. So we just cleaned up the debris with a. Well *name withheld* was there and *name withheld* did a fabulous job. I didn't want to talk to the reporters. There must have been 17 to 20 reporters from all over the world. So *name*

withheld took that job. He talked to all the reporters because they were just a pain in the neck [laughing]. We we tried to uh we I I said I don't have time for that. So course I was accused of being pushy and bossy you know and that. But um uh my men knew that if we had a job to do we did it. And but uh the porch was pretty pretty much the last of it. And I think that getting the water out and putting the the two by tens through there in each each floor in each room which everybody laughed. And then when we went to do it everybody accused me. Well then again everybody accused me. Now that's not the proper word. The proper word is is that that everybody said that I overdid it. Well, when the contractor came to give us an estimate. To give an estimate to rebuild the structure well he his his architects that and his firm said that who every did this was really (emphasis) knew what they were doing because that's what you do to (unclear). Immediately it's a big building you immediately shore up the floor and the structure if you can save it. And there was a lot to be saved you know so. By our method we we saved the uh we save the house. So on the, I think it was the following Monday then *name withheld* had come down and him I had begin to look at the cost of repairs. So we had three days. Congress gave us three days.

I: Three days for what?

P: Three days to get it an estimate in.

I: Okay, thanks.

P: So we we got working on an estimate. So we had to have an estimate in for the fire alarms system and the rewiring and the [sigh]. And we had to have an estimate in for the all the repairing of the third floor. And all the ceilings. How they had to repair them. Had to have an estimate of the wallpaper. Repairing of the wallpaper. And repairing all the floors and putting the house structure back and everything to the way it was before. So we worked, I think it was three days on it. And uh we just made it so I I if I can remember I don't remember completely, but I think it was over \$1,300,000 some dollars as the estimate. Yeah, I think. Anyway, we we came close to what it was. We came close to the original. I think we was off by they said three or four hundred thousand dollars which is good on the bid. So that kind of sums up. What else do you want. Do you have any other questions you wanna ask me?

I: Yes yes I do. I'm interested in knowing kinda what your job was like before the fire and how things changed for you shortly after the fire and kinda in the long run after the fire.

P: Well, my my job was to do at the time I was at the Roosevelt Home I was the lead painter at the Home. And I I went into historic preservation. I went back to school in historic preservation and they had our own school and then I went to work at Harpers Ferry, different places to learn all about restoration and finally in in '77 I was promoted to the Boston Historical uh Cultural Lab under *name withheld* as a exhibit specialist because I finished by training. And I went up there as a GS-11. And I had been assigned I had been assigned. And I was up there and my mother-in-law had got kinda bad and I asked to come back to New York. See he put me down at Roosevelt Vanderbilt and we had some projects going down there at that time. We was doing work at the Vanderbilt Mansion restoring the Vanderbilt Mansion when all this. And restoring the Vanderbilt Mansion uh porticos and all that up there at the Mansion. So that's the reason I was down there for that that job. And you wanna know about my own feeling about that time? (I: sure). It was it was very tremendous even now. It was very emotional thing.

You put all them years into that Roosevelt Home and you knew all the family. You knew Franklin you knew John you knew Elliott. You knew all the, Mrs. R. You knew all the You you learned about them all and you lived and you you breathed that and you uh there wasn't such a thing as as forty hours. Sometimes you worked fifty hours! You sometimes you'd get ready to go home and you don't go home. You have emergencies. So it wasn't it wasn't it wasn't a job like Park Service a forty hour job working for Park Service as you know. It's the need of the park and it was very emotional that night coming in there. And I even break up sometimes now a little bit when I think about it. How upset I was to see that house burning. And some of the people said to me well you, you was always a tough guy. Yeah well tough guy I'm not when you see a house burning you love. A national treasure burning it's a very emotional [pause]. And then I went on to. I went on to to be. I went on and and I went with *name withheld*. I stayed with *name withheld* for three or four years and then I was promoted to. They sent me to different (unclear) and I was promoted to facility manager. I was facility manager on the Mall and then was finally was promoted to the regional office. Where I worked for the engineering department up there in the regional office as a facility manager. Is that it? Did I answer your question? (I: Thank you.) I'm trying to keep it as sweet as I can without rambling. I hope I'm doing all right.

I: You're doing wonderful. Uh did, you spoke about after the fire and um Congress' interest here. I know that you retired in the '80s but while you were here after the fire did you meet any dignitaries or any of the uh um uh folks who came through to uh to tour the Home?

P: You mean when we were there after it was restored or after the fire?

I: After the fire.

P: No there there was so many dignitaries they were coming up in cars and. And uh we set up a space for *name withheld*. Set up a space so you could talk to the public. So he was on national tv two four times a night day. Talking all over the world about the burning of the Roosevelt Home and I I let him (emphasis) do all the questioning to the people because I felt I had enough problems just getting the house back together by Friday. [pause] It was quite a job you know. I mean they they tell you you gotta have a roof on by Friday. And and that was like five days. It put everybody under strain you know. Everybody was under strain but everybody did good. You know and they we all mainly loved the Home. So they knew all about the Home 'cuz I spoke to 'em so much about the Home. That it so. They worked I mean we worked in ice. I mean the roof had ice on the night that we were trying to take off the (unclear) off and pull the roof apart and get all the important parts. With cranes to get it off and save it and measure and photograph it. It was ice like six seven inches ice up there from . The whole place, the whole house had ice. It was just terrible. I was a terrible. They were working under conditions that were intolerable they were. It was a cold night. It was like in the twenties and your hands were cold. And (I: did) we just kept pushing. I kept pushing. Sometime uh sometimes they even mention it now. I was kind of pushy, but. Even being retired I've talked to a few of them over the years and they said well you were kind of different on that job.

I: How was that?

P: Well they said I was kinda doing this 'cuz a little bit tougher a little bit more disciplined and a little bit more planning. I hadn't. *Name withheld*, *name withheld* did

name withheld told me what to do and how to do it and then him and I made the plan. And then it was up to the specialists to execute that plan. See? And so he stayed up nights planning how things, the house and I stayed up nights planning how to execute his plan.

I: Can I ask you to hold off for one moment? We're going to flip the tape over (P: sure) because I'm very interested in what you have to say about planning. [flip tape] So uh right now Bill is flipping over the cassette tape aaannndddd.

P: I hope I'm not rambling on.

I: No, it's wonderful. Thank you. And we're back on tape. So we were just talking about *name withheld* doing the planning and you doing the execution. And can you talk a little bit more about your experiences there.

P: Um yeah well that one night that *name withheld* flew down we we sat in my house and we begin drafting up a plan and talking about what we going to do about the wallpaper. How are we gonna get the moisture. We gotta get the moisture out of this house. How are we gonna to get how are we going to get people. How are you going to get open. How are you going to get the stores open. How are you going to get people to get there on a Sunday. How are you going to do it. And his idea was you have to be pushy. [pause] You have to be firm. You gotta be pushy and you can't worry about what people think of you, *name withheld*. The thoughts of me later you don't plan. The main thing is you're here to execute my plan. And so he left. So we we planned it out on a Friday night. We planned it together how one two three four what's the steps we're gonna take. The first step was to get the very first step was to get was to get all of the stuff off the top of the roof and save anything we can. Photograph it measure it and then get all the stuff off and then not only have a crew have a crew on the inside to shore the house up. Hire somebody to come in there and get that heat get that furnace back on. And to get the moisture out of that house. And so we we planned on a Friday night at my house and then [pause] we executed. And we got into some really tough situations that if we hadn't been friends we would have probably never spoke to each other. Because it was very trying. Congress said to him that before we shore up the roof you get down there you get the house saved. This is a national treasure. And this is a treasure of Park Service that we can't afford to lose. So *name withheld* was under the gun and I was under the gun so we executed the plan. We planned on Friday night exactly what to do. We talked about getting the stores open. We talked about I needed to be pushy. We talked about that you I was have to be over overbearing sometimes to get the stores open so I just did that. I called up the stores. Some of the stores say that they couldn't open. I said the hell you can't open. The (unclear) [pause] get your store open. And I'm gonna take all your two by fours two by tens and I'm gonna send trucks up there. I'm gonna take all your lumber and then we're gonna give you a uh requisition and we'll pay for all that afterwards. But for now we're gonna get it. I called up the two crane crane companies that worked for me before. And I told 'em to get cranes there. And I said well it's gonna be cost you a lot of money and it gonna cost you like \$60 an hour for two men with cranes. I don't care if it costs me \$400. Now you get your cranes in here. And so. We planned. We sat down Friday night we sat down. I was on the telephone with the. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I was on the phone talking. And he kept asking me how I'm executing it you know. I said that's how we executed. We planned and then we sat at my house planning the whole thing. Planning how we

were gonna save the building. And for me not worrying about how nice a guy I was. So I wasn't really a nice guy. I was really tough. I was really a miserable, horrible. I was a miserable exhibit specialist and probably other that *name withheld* who really knew me and told people they probably didn't like me. But I didn't care. I was there to to have. We had a plan he planned it I executed. So we we talked about are you how you know we talked Friday night about how are you going to save the beams. What are you doing to the beams. Well you gonna come in and you gonna you gonna put two two by tens along side each other. And then you're gonna bolt 'em in and uh then later on we're gonna spray 'em with some kind of fire resistance to save what's left. What we can do to get the smell down. And we gonna get the moisture out of the house and we're gonna do all this. And you're gonna have to get people open. And you're gonna have to start. You're gonna have to start executing. You're gonna have to be careful that you don't do silly things like pulling things off carelessly. You gotta take everything off, bring it down, mark it and then photograph it and then when I come there with a team we will do the rest. So that's exactly what we did. And *name withheld* was I just couldn't tell you how big a help he was. Because he was a former carpenter you know. (I: I didn't know that) Yup. *Name withheld* was in his own carpenter business. He was in. He knew about furniture restoration so he immediately told me well *name withheld* here's what we should do. We should take all the debris. We should bring it down in piles and then we gotta sift it. So that's what we did. Tons and tons and tons of the ashes and debris. So it was planned on a Friday night. Immediately I called up the minute that we begin to execute a plan. So wasn't think anybody was running around with their head cut off. It was planned right through. And we worked with *name withheld* on the plan. And we sit we sit I'd say we succeeded because of *name withheld* who who is not a very quiet shy kind of little guy who became tough and very disciplined. So uh it took a lot of mental discipline and so were you know and then after that why him and I had a little you know. We were still friends but because of all that it was he had a job to do and I had a job to do and that night we agreed to well you know what. I said we're not friends. You're the boss and I'm your I'm your worker. So that's the way we started off. It worked good that way because in a powerful conversation he'd say well he he was told how intelligent he was. *Name withheld* was really a super intelligent guy but I won't get off on that. But, he was very good at planning. You could call him up and say I'm having trouble. Well, what the hell, excuse my language, well what the hell do I do with this moisture coming through? You gotta cut holes in the ceiling. Now who else would think of something like that? Cut holes in the ceiling and then get the water down and get the moisture down and then you could sweep it out. I didn't think of that. You know so he was very conservative in his plan. His planning actually saved the Roosevelt house. In my expert opinion. Okay? What else?

I: You spoke about working on the plan with *name withheld* who was the superintendent at the park at the time. Can you talk a little bit more about um your relationship with the park staff.

P: I had, because I worked at the park, I had a good relationship with *name withheld* and he he just gave me the run. Him and I talked about it and he says well ha have you been in touch with with the Washington Office, *name withheld*? I said yes I've been in touch with all. And he said we we have a plan and so I can't spend a lot of time here. I said but we have a plan and this is our plan. And I says I ran down the plan with [pause] and his

remark was I hope to hell this all goes off or we're all gonna be in the doghouse. And then we laughed about it. He was really a nice guy. He was really. *Name withheld* was a great superintendent. And then he said *name withheld* I've got all the confidence in you. I got all the confidence in *name withheld* and the Historic Cultural Lab. He said so you go ahead and you execute it and you can have all my staff whoever you need. See (unclear) *name withheld* who was the maintenance chief because he was really busy and too many chiefs is no good. But you can have my men and I'll keep *name withheld* and I'll stay away and then you come and report to me what's happening. So I reported about once a day to *name withheld* what was going on. So he knew basically the whole plan because I laid it out for him. I had most of the plans all in my head you know. I did. I had all the plans of how to do everything 'cuz we talked hour after hour after hour that night. We talked about two o'clock in the morning. So I didn't have any plans on paper, but *name withheld* said go ahead and execute it and I'll be in touch two or three times a day to see how the plans are going. That's what we did. We planned it in our heads and they we just told the men and then the men and I executed. But we had I had a great repoire with the park. I always did. Well all the parks that I was at I had a great repoire. I immediately knew what was needed for the job because I I knew what a superintendent's job was so I I had repoire with the superintendent because I realized that it was their job to keep the park in shape and to do certain things. So I had great repoire with most of the superintendents.

I: So between the fire recovery and uh your retirement what were your duties or how did your duties change for the last couple of years here at the Park Service?

P: Well the last couple of years was (unclear) because I was I was working. For four or five years I was working the maintenance management system FMMS. Maintenance management system and I went ahead to Washington and I made up four or five plans at different parks for maintenance management and went into the parks evaluated quality, quantity needs statements. Need to have (unclear) people weren't doing we put 'em on the computer to see the work and that's what I did for the last four or five years at the Park Service.

I: And then. I just have one or two more questions. Uh just recapping our first question which was tell me about how you heard about the fire. What were the first things that happened. Now that we've talked about the fire and recovery for about a half an hour um. You said that you were at home and that your wife said that the Washington Office wanted you to phone, but um do you recall anything else now that we've been talking about this for a few minutes.

P: Well the only thing that I recall was that was that the uh somebody. I can't think of the gentleman's name who called me from Washington. And that Washington had decided that they needed somebody who was gonna be pushy [pause] gonna be tough and disciplined. And they knew that I could be all the three. But I could be fair. I'm very fair with my men. But I was tough on 'em and I was fair so that's why they assigned me. Of course I worked under *name withheld* and explained that Washington wanted me for the job because of that. They feel that they could tell me that I could plan, execute and get the work done. Just because you you you make a plan. You make a plan and you gotta execute the plans. Sometimes to execute a plan you have to do things you don't want. You have to sometimes raise your voice. And sometimes you gotta act like you're mad and you're not really mad at nobody but you gotta push it. And when they say that

they're tired tired I worked so much you have to say I don't care. I don't care if you worked all night you worked three days. I gotta get this house done. That's what we get paid for. And I don't care if we have to stay up all night for four days you're gonna get it done. And these are the things that take a mental toll on you. Uh you know you have to do it so you do it. And I talked to people. I don't remember who it was Washington Office now because *name withheld* would tell 'em to call me. And I talked to them and they were uh I talked to the liaison office in in Congress. Somebody called me up. I don't remember his name now. He's probably retired. And wanting to know how. What we planned and how we were going to have to deal with it and uh all that. And he wanted to get in touch with *name withheld* and uh the park director of Park Service was in touch with *name withheld* after that. You know if I was cooperating and all of that and [pause] so. It was it was a. It took a lot of teamwork. It was just a lot of teamwork and everybody's hard work. And luckily I had a great historic team of carpenters. 'Cuz I've had carpenters that were unbelievable. I mean that would just look at something and say *name withheld* you don't need to be here. Just go. Do it. And then we'd do it. You would just see that everything was being done right and the would do it and they were fine. [pause] How's that?

I: That's great. So my last question is is there anything else that you would like to tell me.

P: No, I'd like to tell you so emotionally when you talk about it. Sometimes my voice cracks up now when I think of it because it was a very emotional night. And now when I think of it 25 years later you you stand and the tears coming down your eyes as you're watching the house burn. And you don't even think you're gonna be assigned to it because you don't you don't think I didn't think at that time thinking I would be good enough. I'd only been exhibit specialist maybe for two or three years I didn't. I'd never think I'd ever get assigned to a tough job like that. So you're just standing there and the tears are running down your eyes but you gotta remember this is a place that you spent a lot of times working in there as a maintenance man. You know I put a lot of time in there at that home and loved that home. So it was emotional. So it so even today you see on the tape I have trouble at times. But it was emotional then, it's emotional now. 'Cuz once it started burning you take a spot the way it was or never will ever ever look the same. I mean because if you looked at it and if you looked at pictures of the old Roosevelt Home it's be hard to uh. There would be things that you would notice.

I: Well thank you so much for your time this morning and for participating in this oral history project. Um we're gonna state stop the tapes now.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #4

JANUARY 23, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good afternoon [clears throat] good afternoon. Today is January 23, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and here in the room with me are Bill Urbin from the National Park Service and *name withheld*

P: *Name withheld*.

I: *Name withheld*. Thank you very much. Um what is your current position with the National Park Service?

P: Currently I'm the facility manager at Roosevelt Vanderbilt National Historic sites.

I: And how long have you been in that position?

P: I've been in this position, I believe, since February of 1985.

I: And what was your position with the National Park Service at the time of the fire?

P: I was a Museum Specialist here, 1640 is the series for Facilities Managers.

I: How long had you been with the Park Service when you, when the fire took place in 1982?

P: No, I'm not going to do the math. I came here in October, my first day on the job, was October 23, 1977. And this is the only place I've worked for the Park Service. Started as a GS-7 Museum Tech, became a GS-9 Museum Specialist and then in my current facility management position. Soooo, I guess it would be about 7, 8 years from the time I started til the fire.

I: Tell me how you heard about the fire.

P: I was um, uh I was living in the Roosevelt duplex down the hill from the Roosevelt Home. And the phone rang I can't tell you what time of the evening it was. And *Name withheld*, an employee here, a ranger, called up and said I thought you might like to know that the Roosevelt Home is on fire and hung up. [pause] So I put on my uniform, went up the hill, and at that point uh there was a lot of activity and the flashing lights from the fire trucks in the front. Now, I approached the Roosevelt Home from the duplex which means I was coming up the hill to the north. From the north and west side so all I could see was the kitchen wing and the west wall of the Home. I did not circumnavigate the Home. I saw wisps of smoke emerging from the roof and went, enter the Home through the kitchen wing, through the kitchen door. Which would be on the northern, northern edge of the building. I don't know do you want me to keep going or do you want to ask your specific questions?

I: No, keep going!

P: OK, um, I. There was very little activity downstairs. Um, I heard noises upstairs so I followed the noise, went upstairs to the second floor. Water was already coming

through in areas. And I went up to the third floor and at the third floor that's where most of the people were which were firemen. And at that point they were using hooks to rip down pieces of ceiling and wall to try to find the extent of the fire. And I uh basically did not get entirely. I only got about maybe 8 or 10 feet from the top of the stairs into the third floor and there was a cloud of smoke that was basically almost down to the floor line at that point. And I started to lose my breath. They were the firemen all had breathing apparatus on and I did not. And so I wound up, I actually had to get down on my hands and knees and and back off down the steps a ways til I could get into some clear air and catch my breath. At that point I realized there was nothing I could do on the third floor so I went down to the second floor. Immediately to the I saw the Boyhood room was still intact so I went to the other end of the building to the uh to the Chintz room and I stopped there because the ceiling in the Birth room was beginning to bulge and um and the wall was beginning to go on the top of the Chintz room. And at that point I ran into the first Park Service employee, actually the first two. Uh, *name withheld* was there in the room, started moving things and trying to get things up on the bed. And *name withheld* who was at that point a volunteer fireman. I I recall him being in his turnout coat um was there. And we moved as much stuff up as we could. Went over to the Birth room and tried to do the same and at that point people started to filter in. I remember *name withheld* and, oh God I can't, *name withheld* and I think a couple of others showed up asking what they could do. And since we didn't have any tools or flashlights the only thing I could tell them to do was to rip as much as they could off the wall. And just get it out of the building. And that's what we did. We just started grabbing things and they asked where and you know I said the Laundry, the TIC, the tourist information center, it was, now no longer that, but it's still public restrooms. Anyway, these were all dry buildings separated from the Roosevelt Home where I knew that the stuff would be at least out of harms way from the fire or water and that's what most of that was. In the meantime, *name withheld* showed up. I think he I think *name withheld*, *name withheld* carried a few loads down, but then they worked on on setting up a, getting an aluminum ladder and setting up some plastic to relieve the bulge in the ceiling of the Birth room which was the accumulating water from the fire. And I think they set that up and one of the firemen, either *name withheld* or I, and I don't remember who because I was I was paying more attention to the evacuation of artifacts at that point then I was paying attention to what was going on around me. But somehow they got a hook or a pole or something and then pierced the bulge in the plaster ceiling to relieve the water and the ladder and plastic were set up set up to conduit water out the upper story west porch to relieve the pressure on the building. In the meantime, what I learned later, was the firemen upstairs had kicked the toilet off between Anna's room and the Boy's room so that the septic line which is at floor level without the toilet and wax seal would do the same thing, carry water down the old drain system and out of the building. Because we were accumulating a huge amount of water. I didn't realize how much. So I spent as much time up on the second floor. Most of my time was there trying to get that stuff evacuated. And we took it down the kitchen stairs and out the back door to either the Laundry or the TIC or the stables. Just get it, my word was just get it out of the building to everybody. I was the only curatorial person on at that time. And somewhere in there, and I have no idea you know in middle of these things you don't know how much time passes. You just lose your sense of time in the activity of the emergency and

all that. And how much time passed, but after a certain point whatever happened to me on the third floor started to catch up with me. I started to cough, I couldn't catch my breath [clears throat] and so I went down the stairs and out the front door. And what I remember most distinctly coming down the stairs was at the base of the first floor in the entrance foyer was a teddy bear, a little stuffed animal, that was (emphasis) up in the third floor Nursery and it obviously washed down. 'Cause the water, at that point, the water was cascading through the building. I mean it was like a waterfall. And on the first floor ice was already starting to build up in places on the stair railing. And so I went out the front door and I saw most of the staff standing there looking at the building and I was leaned, I leaned over coughing and uh all of a sudden someone started slapping me on the back. It was *name withheld*. He was the chief curator at the time. And the superintendent was out there, the chief of maintenance and most of the staff were out there. And I looked up at *name withheld* and, forgive my Dutch, and I said what the fuck are you doing out here? And the response was well, they said to stay out. And I said, well, you know, a bunch of us have been in there for a while now. The first floor isn't on fire. Let's get the stuff out of the water. And at that point um most of the staff came in. And then we had the people that were there that night and then the rest of the evening was basically getting people organized to take this here and take that there and so when I caught my breath I went back in and helped with things. And probably in retrospect the one mistake that we made was when we had everything out of the way or covered up in the core of the building we went down in the library/living room and at that point the word we got from the firemen was they weren't sure whether they were going to control the migration of the fire. What I didn't realize was that while I was down on the second floor the roof blew out. The heat accumulated and the tin metal and slate part of the roof finally gave out and it was apparently was very dramatic. There's pictures somewhere of big flames shooting up and stuff like that. I missed all of that because I was inside the building while that was going on. And they didn't know how far the fire would migrate. So what do we do, what do we do, what do we do? The smart thing would have been to shut, just shut the doors to the library/living room, but we didn't know where the fire was going to migrate so then I and some other people made the decision to move the contents of the library/living room outside. And of course then snow got on the books and that created a lot of problems subsequently as was one of the one of the judgments that we made that if I had to do it over again I would have been been more patient and stuck it out to the last second before shifting. In the meantime everything else was absolutely soaked inside the building when I left the library/living room to go back through the building. At that point the staircase was encased in ice all the way up to the second floor. There was no roof left on the building. And uh uh the fire was pretty well under control to out. I went back up on to the second floor, took one look through and saw where the Chintz room had burnt through and um everybody was pretty confident that nothing worse was going to happen. So then it was a concern about everything that was soaking wet and I heard later that they said something like 100,000 gallons had been put through the building that night. I don't know. At that point the superintendent called us all over to Bellefield to talk about what we were going to do about the next day. You know I had been pretty much at that point up I was up for 24 hours so I was pretty well beaten up physically from the smoke inhalation. So at that point I went home and realized that I almost couldn't get home because the top of the duplex road was where the nexus of the

old 1880s turn of the century piping came together. When they started to fight the fire we lost ground on the fire because when they started to fight it they were pulling water through a 4 inch domestic main so they basically emptied the main. And when the water pressure from the street hit it, it blew that area apart. So the water came pouring up out of there, running down the hill to the duplex. And of course it, what it was around zero or a few degrees above when we started and by the time I left it was 3 or 5 below zero. I don't recall exactly. So the hill was, the hill was exactly like 6 inches of ice down to my house. And um they lost time on the fire because now they had to stop set it, set intermediate pipe, send pumpers back to where they could get water, keep the pressure boosted to the pumps where they were fighting the fire. And I just remember going home from Bellefield here that that morning and when I got home my wife had to literally break the jacket off my back. 'Cause I didn't realize I had so many layers on I was soaking wet from all the water and the outside was frozen, but I was still warm underneath it all. It was quite an experience. So anyway I wound up sleeping from about 6:30 to about 10:30 when the museum curator, *name withheld*, who didn't come for the fire called me and said well, are you coming to work? [Sighing, laughing] So I put on, cleaned myself up, got some breakfast, put on some clothes, went back in and then basically from that point on it was just a matter of, of triaging stuff. We decided that the stuff that we had gotten out before it got water soaked was in the out buildings we would transport. We turned the Morgan Room downstairs into a storage facility. And it would be a dedicated storage facility. And the office which is now the human resources office was turned into a storage facility. And then the basement of the Mansion was turned into a uh uh storage facility. And so we started shifting things there and uh at one point in the day I went back to the Roosevelt Home because they had everyone showing up and his brother. So I got to talk to a couple of reporters and you know a lot of their baloney that goes on where everybody's interested in what happened. Quite frankly at that point you really don't know all [emphasis] of what happened. [pause] And what was really interesting is going up on the third floor. Going up on the roof area uh there were areas we were walking around that was like. 'Cuz snow had fallen after the fire. We were walking around areas of the roof and there were like jagged burnt pieces of wood sticking up out of the snow. In the meantime, I guess I guess it was part of the BCB crew. Our staff had rewired the boilers and the heating system to get heat back up in the building. The idea was to turn all this ice into water and get it out as soon as possible. And the BCB was erecting a temporary roof over everything. Well we got heat back under temporary roof we realized the area we had been walking on over the third floor was ice. There was nothing there! When the ice finally melted, I mean, they just put so much water in it. It was freezing so hard it was putting out the little rekindles. It was a couple of places we was walking over ice bridges the third floor. When they put the roof up there was nothing except some debris on the third floor. [pause] So um the rest of it is all fire recovery. I don't know how much of that you want to get into. I mean that was what I remember pretty much of the night of the fire. I'm sure you could I could tease out a kajillion little anecdotes. I'm mean uh

I: Let's tease out one or two.

P: Well

I: I'm interested in how you

P: It's interesting how you react. You know what I love is is now we just had another panic plan. And what I love about it is over the last 25 years I've been asked about 3 or 4 times about panic plans and emergency preparedness plans and the thing that I carry that I carry from the fire is that in that sort of a circumstance uh plans. You know they say all plans fail when the first shot is fired in a war. I find the same things with these. You can plan all you want as to what should go where but it is really based on the nerve of the people um that are there on the spot. And half the people that came in and helped me on the outset of the fire were people that wouldn't be part of any planning, any panic plan. Maintenance guys, office workers, things like that. And the people that should have been there directing that were standing out front, watching it burn. And um you know talking about how horrible it all was. So when you when you build a plan that incorporates a very strong personnel structure and it. You need to be damn sure that the people you're putting at the top of that structure have got the presence of mind to be directive when they need to be. And so I think that any plan would have failed that night. Um

I: Had there been a plan in place?

P: They've come up with them and there's been seminars talking about emergency planning and we're the poster child for emergency planning. And you know, like I said, the people who would have been at the top of the plan were the ones that were least effective when, when the crunch really came. And people you wouldn't think [emphasis] would would react were were in there like good troops saving the artifacts and saving the tax payers tens of thousands of dollars of restoration costs. So you never know whose going to come through for you. Um [sigh] the two things that really stick in my mind are the ones I described are. One was we were down in the dining room and there was this bowl that Mrs. Roosevelt, Sara used to arrange flowers. And I think the tale about it was that she was invited to arrange the flowers when she came there as Mr. James' date before they were married. And the tradition is ever after she arranged the flowers. And the Park Service has arranged the flowers. So anyway here's this bowl sitting there. We're ankle deep in water. All the rugs are soaked. Everything is soaked. And one of the employees, it was *name withheld*, taken the bowl off the table wanting to save the bowl and said what do I do with the water, what do I do with the flowers? And she was just focused on that because, you know, she wanted to do something, but she kind of got locked in a loop like a do loop on a computer. So I had to stop her, grab the bowl from her hand, turn it upside down on the oriental carpet, put it back in her hands and tell her to carry it outside. After that she was fine [dulcet tone]. It was like, it was like the spell was broken and she was just absolutely aces from that point on in terms of focusing on most important artifacts first and so on 'cause she was a member of the curatorial division. And the other one I remember was the Dresden chandelier. Uh there was, I can't remember who the other employee was other than *name withheld*, but it was another another woman in curatorial was there on the spot. And we got a ladder out and I went up the ladder and I took the Dresden chandelier and unhooked it and handed it to the two of them and they carried it out. Well, after all was said and done and we restored that chandelier I couldn't pick it up myself and and the two of them couldn't pick it up. It's just the adrenalin of the moment. You know. And I can't believe I just handed it to them off the ladder. It's the crazy things that happen in the midst of some of these circumstances. [sighs] And uh that's actually pretty much it because again you only,

after a certain point it's almost like your vision gets, rather than getting wider in a in a situation like this. It gets more and more focused as you focus more and more on the things you can do. And you just put everything else out of your peripheral vision and focus on what you have to do. So exactly who was elsewhere in the building moving what I couldn't tell you about anybody if they were out of my immediate point. And uh so.

I: So how did you

P: That's it.

I: Wow. Uh, how did the fire impact your duties in the days immediately after the fire, the next couple of days and weeks?

P: Well, I mean [sigh] my I I as the museum specialist I did a lot of the handling of the collections anyway. But basically my job was to set up temporary storage, build racks for everything, basically I became the one man moving service. We had a curatorial van and I wound up moving everything I could move in the van to Bellefield, to the Mansion. And then sat with other curatorial employees uh *name withheld*, but really *name withheld* and uh basically uh going over where we were with the collections. Basically taking the cards and trying to identify stuff with the cards. And match up and figure out where everything was that had gone out helter skelter. And then at the end the third floor when they were working on the Home. All the debris from the third floor, all the charred remains were shoveled up and dumped in a heap. Uh basically where you come in the road now there was a sand shed there and between the sand shed and the stone garage in that space they dumped most of the third floor of the Home. And then *name withheld*, me and I can't think, there was a couple of other curatorial people that worked with us off and on. In and out as did I. Basically sifting through all of that trying to find portions of artifacts. I mean like one that came down that week was like 5 pieces of flat wicker and one of them had the number on that we identify as one of the waste paper baskets that got burned up, crushed and flushed out. Stuff like that. Trying to salvage as much information as we could from that so we pretty well went over that pile. And all this and then the rest of it was you know transporting things. I built some wash tables to take care of textiles. I transported where I arranged for People's Island. They had a dry cleaning plant at People's Island, sort of the New York State Harpers Ferry operation. And so they agreed to take on a lot of that stuff so I took a lot of the draperies and stuff like that up to them for processing. And just, you know, blur, one thing after another after another. You know the next couple three years of my life was just devoted to triage and stuff like that.

I: Who was supervising the triage?

P: [pause]

I: Who was?

P: That was a good question. I don't think anybody really supervised it. There was there was no good overall plan. I think we took it in bits and pieces. You know it was one of those things. Once we had the paintings up on racks down in the Morgan room looking at them and trying to figure out what we need to do about the paintings. And then you'd get somebody coming in from uh from uh either a contractor or calling in somebody from within our ranks, one of the conservators to come in and look at it. [sigh] I don't recall anybody really taking charge of the, of the concept of the overall collections restoration. It was a bits and pieces.

I: Where did those conservators come from?

P: Um all over. I think we had we had objects conservators at Lowell in house. And so, uh *name withheld* I think oversaw a lot of overall stuff in terms of [beep]

P: What's it telling you?

I: It's telling me that maybe my battery or something. First time that's happened. How are you set for time Bill?

P: OK you'll have to change out.

I: Hmmmm, that's strange. Um um

A: Let's stop this for a second and see where we are.

P: OK where were we? I think we were talking about conservators. Yes, so *name withheld* did

I: Can you hold on a second? Maybe, sorry, it's not.

P: Get it off of Bill's. We going? OK. So uh yeah *name withheld* I recall did a lot a lot of active work supervision of other work, supervision of staff doing the work and arrangements. I can't think of her last name, *name withheld*, an object conservator. (A: inaudible) And and we had a lot of uh. All of the New York State people were absolutely aces. The whole People's Island crew came down to help out. Um [pause] and um help us with triage, help us with analysis. They did a lot of work up at People's Island for the Park Service. And then through all of this a lot of private people were hired out to do this that and the other thing. Oddly enough the one group that was absolutely useless was Harpers Ferry. All we got from them the day after the fire was a phone call, can we do anything. And our response was we don't know at the moment because everything was at that point was up in the air. Then finally I think they did we did send some stuff down to them ultimately, but really they uh. It was interesting that the New York State organization was more helpful than the federal government. Then the federal government organization was at the time. [pause] And uh that's pretty much it for the conservation stuff. I mean they built a building back here which I didn't see the point to. I never occupied it. I stayed in my workshop downstairs. At the point they were transitioning to that building I was transitioning to become the facility manager here. So, that's somebody else's story from that point on.

I: How long after the fire did you become the facilities manager?

P: Well the fire was in January of 1982 and I was facility manager in February of 1985 so let's see that's 3 years.

I: Did your job change significantly in those 3 years?

P: Well, what do you mean by change? I mean it was focused on fire stuff where it had been more general. Well, we had wound up as a result ignoring a lot of work at Vanderbilt and we also had the whole preparation of the Eleanor Roosevelt site 'cause that was being rehabilitated during this time period. And I had virtually no involvement in that. Normally I would have been into it up to my eyeballs. And um so in that sense, yeah, I mean it became an all consuming thing to the staff that was left. [long pause]

I: Let's see, earlier you talked about these emergency plans and things like that. Did you personally participate in the development or the testing of any emergency plans?

P: Well, I've I'm trotted out as the uh talking parrot for the, for the dog and pony shows about these things and I get up every time and say my little piece and everybody thanks me for my input and they go out and develop something that doesn't resemble what I talked about so I don't know. Again, everyone wants to focus on a chain of

command and on what to do when in fact you really can't do that. You have to focus on process because who knows? the fire started on the between in the ceiling and the roof of the third floor of the of the house. What if the fire had started in the kitchen? Or what if the fire had started in the library? You know, I mean, totally different things. What if it was was something else other than a fire? I mean you can't write a plan that somebody can access in time. If somebody pulled down our panic book and stopped to read it they would have lost an hour, an hour and a half salvaging stuff. It's very situational. Emergencies are very situational and uh and to frame these plans the way they do is very useless. It's like wetting yourself in dark pants. You know you feel warm for a second and nobody notices. [giggling] But uh you know it's it's. You know, if it makes some people happy to spend their professional lives grinding these things out well so be it. But I don't, you know beyond really basic information like here's the list of the five top phone numbers to call to alert somebody. And here's where you cut off the water, here's where you shut off the power so there's really nothing to an emergency plan. And when I was with the State of New York we were in the process of receiving a lot of bomb threats. This was during the Bicentennial and you know our emergency plan was we had a dime and a card taped to the door. And um you know the your plan was you get everybody out of the building and the last person leaving take the card and the dime and go to the phone booth on the corner to call the State police. Don't be in the building where the bomb threat is trying to figure out what a package looks like. Because you know, now that's an emergency plan that works! You know when you start to go into painful details of well you think it's a satchel, you think it's a package. It could be, did this person look suspicious. Write down the particulars and then by that time your visitors are chop suey by whatever, whatever it was. You know and and that's why we take these things too. Well, should we take this portrait first. Should we do. No, no, no, no, no all plans fail. I said first shot in a war all the war plans fail. It's the same thing in any other emergency. So it's a process you know. Um, where are the shut offs. Where are the phones. Where are the phones just outside the building so you can get a hold of somebody. You know, um. Had on the way out did you check for people along your route? Those are, those are emergency plans. So, I get trotted out to say the same thing periodically. Now I'm saying it once again at the tail end of my career, but uh you know. That hasn't changed.

I: Earlier I asked if uh you brought any artifacts or photographs and so I see that you didn't. But is there anything else that you'd like to share with us today?

P: Share with us?

I: Well, Bill Urbin is here in the room [all laugh]. Don't want to ignore Bill.

P: The throngs of thousands assembled here. Words of wisdom, no. Um [long pause] I think um I think what I wish somebody would do which was never done because uh nobody wanted to be red faced about it was we should be willing to stand up to a certain amount of very close scrutiny as a lesson to other historic sites. And close scrutiny because I cannot, I can't prove it. I wouldn't want to at this late date, but the fire occurred though a series of poor decisions coupled with circumstance. And errors were made during the fire due to the same thing, poor leadership and series of poor decisions. And the follow-up was not done cost effectively due to some other decisions and a lot of them were made by well meaning people trying to do the right thing, but we really need, do need to look at and hold it up. Just like I made bad judgments that night. I made bad

judgments after the fire. Everybody should be willing to put that part of it up to learn from 'cause that's where the real learning takes place. I mean, the fire occurred in a in a box that was being fed by some Edison reflex cable up in the ceiling of the third floor. The first bad decision was they didn't want to put any penetrations in the ceiling of the first floor from fire alarms. So the fire alarm system wasn't up where the fire started. If the attic had a system up there, the first bit of smoke it would have caught it and it would have been restricted to a section of the roof rather than the whole third floor blowing out and destroying the building. That night uhhhh the the ranger answered, that might have been, this is my understanding, I did not, I was not directly told this. This is stuff that I heard later that the ranger answered of fire alarms calls to that building and probably what it was was part of the wiring cooking through 'cause it's a constantly monitor circuit fire alarm. Nobody ever followed up more closely on that and should have. Because we have had false alarms in the building. So again people didn't make unreasonable decisions, they were just poor decisions. And they all came acropper at once to us. That the electricians were in there working on the electrical system. There was a piece, like I said, there was a piece of old Edison reflex cable, a forerunner to BX cable feeding a box. Nobody knew where it came from, where it was feeding to. It was live. The decision was uh, the chief curator and I went to the superintendent and the power be disconnected to the Home while this was going on. And it just would feed the alarm and the heating system. And they said no, we were rebuffed saying no we have to stay up for the public. We have to have passage lights on. [pause] That was a less than optimal decision when you're dealing with with wiring. Well, some of the AC wiring turned out to be Army signal corps telephone wire, Edison reflex cable. Also, all sorts of things going on. And so that should have been a red flag to to to take another course, but it wasn't. It was a Friday afternoon. The foreman of the union crew lived in Massachusetts. He left early. He wasn't down the road before the guys left early and left everything in place. Left the line hot and the rest as they say is history. We've already discussed some of the things during the fire and fire plans and so on that should have been better. And in the aftermath um we did the typical Park Service thing. We went to Congress, begged, grabbed buckets of money and then just threw fists full of money at everything without sorting out what was appropriate. And they actually didn't have anybody supervising the restoration work. You had a bunch of people supervising. You had somebody coming in and saying oh you need a building for this stuff. We got a building and the design of the building cost more than what those buildings cost in the private sector. I mean just one thing, the money was spent on stuff like that rather than the collections and rather than on the Home. Things were done on the quick and cheap on the crucial stuff because we were spending it on all the window dressing and infrastructure that didn't need it. And so the post-fire decisions were very poor. And they were made in the sense of everybody we gotta get it done right now and everybody is pushing and pulling so it should be ultimately dissected critically that way. And what can you learn from what we did wrong so that everybody does it right. And God forbid it happens to them and the one most important lesson is how do you stop it from happening in the future. And again, we screwed up. We uh the big deal was everybody was to put in a gas Halon system. Well, yeah in a leaky old building Halon doesn't work. It predicated on holding a concentration of gas for a certain period of time. And it's dedicated to putting out flash fires. You know the source of ignition comes, the Halon

holds it, drops the temperature, breaks the chain of ignition. In a historic building, first of all you can't hold the concentration of gas because the building's too leaky. And second of all most of these halon systems are good for flash fires, like a Molotov cocktail; but, most historic house fires are slow cookers. So you haven't dealt with the source of ignition you've just dealt with the ignition product. The gas dissipates and then the source of ignition kicks right back again so it's, you know. So things like that. And and course gas systems cost a bucket load of money to put in and they scar up the building doing it so it was a lose, lose, lose situation. All of these are things that need to be taken to heart and relearned and that's something that we as an organization seem to have a very difficult time doing. Drawing appropriate conclusions. You know, it's too much stay the course. This is the way we doing things and this is the way, this is the thought process and we'll keep pushing it so. That's my words of wisdom for what it's worth.

I: Anny other words of wisdom before we shut off the tape and thank you for your time?

P: No, other than, well, I guess you know from the history of the thing. Like I said we were deprived of first line of equipment the night of the fire which also gave the fire a foothold because most of the first line equipment. We worked at a disadvantage because the first line equipment was up at the Anderson school were the dormitory fire. However, there was, the night was so cold the second line equipment was being warmed up to relieve them when the call came in for the Roosevelt Home. So on the good side we had a faster than normal response, but with less than adequate equipment. Because the best stuff was elsewhere fighting a, I mean legitimately elsewhere, fighting another fire. I think one of the things that we're working on now in the park again is keeping up the good relationship with the area fire departments in terms of offering tours and so on. Number one you get the fire company to maintain a proprietary interest in the site and number two. So in cases like that. Like we had one fire truck and a crew waste a better part of half an hour trying to chop a hole in a fireproof wall. That was the second floor of the Roosevelt Home in the bedroom section. That was a fireproof wall but they were trying to chop a hole through trying to find out where the fire was propagated. A tour and the knowledge in one of those men's heads would have allowed that crew to be some place else doing something more productive during the fire. I'm mean, they were, they were doing the right thing based on the information they had. They should have had better information. That's one of the things every Park Service should be doing with its area emergency people. They should they should know the building as well as we do. Now where the closets are, where the dead spaces are, where the staircases are and so on. What leads to what. 'Cause when the smoke gets thick and the pieces start falling on you that's knowledge that you want. Not knowledge that can acquire. OK?

I: OK! Better than OK. Thank you very much for participating.

P: Not at all.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #5

JANUARY 24, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good morning. Today is January 24th, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm here with Bill Urbin at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York and on the phone this morning we have [pause] *name withheld*. And uh *name withheld* can you tell us where you're located?

P: Right now I'm in Prince William Forest Park in the National Capital Region of the National Park Service, Triangle, Virginia as park superintendent.

I: Thank you. We are doing an oral history of the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt and you were here at the time and that's why we've asked you to participate. Can you tell me, what your position was with the National Park Service at the time of the fire.

P: I was the site supervisor at the FDR Home.

I: So you were actually duty stationed at the park?

P: Yes.

I: And let's see. You've already told me what your position is with the Park Service now. How long had you been with the Park Service at the time of the fire?

P: Well, I had been involved with the Park Service since about 1970.

I: And can you give me a little idea of how you ended up at Hyde Park in 1982?

P: Well, I started out with the Park Service through a program call Summer in the Parks around Washington, DC and worked at a camp on the C&O Canal.

I: What type of work were you doing?

P: We were working with youth from Washington, DC primarily. They would bring the kids out to the camp and we would give them a scouting experience at a day camp. After a couple of years of that I started working at the Lightship Chesapeake which was an environmental education center downtown in Washington. And did that for a few years 'til I graduated from college and then moved out to Greenbelt Park and the BW Parkway as a park technician. I lived in the park there and worked the campground and other parts of the park. And after Greenbelt I applied to the intake program and got selected. As a protection intake went to Ozark Riverways in Missouri. Spent two years there as a protection intake, protection ranger. And from there went to Roosevelt Vanderbilt as my first assignment after the intake program.

I: So how long had you worked here at the time of the fire in 1982?

P: I think it was about three years.

I: And what were your duties er can you explain what your duties were?

P: I supervised the protection staff and the interpretive staff at the FDR Home. And reported to the chief ranger.

I: Um let's, let's talk about the fire. Tell me how you heard about the fire.

P: Well, that evening I had reported to the firehouse. I was a volunteer fireman as was the chief ranger. And we had a fire call around 10 o'clock that night I think. Ten, ten thirty and I reported to the fire house for the fire call [pause]. It was a big fire on that call. Everybody wanted to go to the big fire so everybody jumped on the fire engines that were going or at least the first one. And some people were told to stay back in case there was another call. They called for another piece of equipment at that fire shortly thereafter and that piece of equipment left. And there were only four of us left in the firehouse with only one fire engine. And we got a call for a false alarm somewhere, came back, and then we got a call for an alarm at the FDR Home which wasn't all that unusual. Our alarm system frequently had false alarms back in those days. But the four of us took that piece of equipment and went to the FDR Home. Pulled into the front of the building and we could see a glow up in the half-moon window up in the top of the FDR Home and realized this was no false alarm.

I: Hmmmm. Uh let's see. So the next obvious question is can you tell me what happened next.

P: What happened next was we needed to get inside the building and I did not have my work keys with me because I had gone to the firehouse, not to work. A couple guys tried to get in the front door. The front doors were more elaborate and historic and wood had panels and so forth. And I was worried about them being damaged. So I thought I could get in the side door much more quickly. And it was more of a service type door so I went around to the side. The group at the front door continued to see if they could get in without causing any damage. And I eventually got in the side door, but the others had taken a panel out of the middle of the front door that could very easily be put back and they gained in access also.

I: Who made the decision to uh to try the front door? Or is that normal?

P: Oh that's normal. And if I'd been a little quicker on the side door I probably could have met them and opened from the inside. But I ran into difficulties on the side door. I broke a pane of glass reaching in to undo the latches. But there was a foot latch that was all the way down the bottom of the door that you really couldn't access with a key. And so the door had to be forced open.

I: Wearing your fireman's hat, so to speak, can you describe your participation in pre-planning for a structural fire.

P: Well, the pre-planning is, in a way, what brought me to the fire department. When I got there, my boss was the chief ranger. He was already a member of the fire department and encouraged me to join as well. Part of, one of the biggest reasons, was to facilitate pre-planning. The fire department did a pre-plan at every meeting. Might have been monthly, I can't really recall, but it would typically be in a business or organization. Some sort of structure or structures in the town. And very often businesses would cancel when that happened we would say well let's go to the FDR Home, let's go to the Vanderbilt Mansion because we had access and it was easy to do. Those buildings along with Bellefield and Val-Kill got very frequent pre-plans. The fire department was very familiar with the historic nature of the buildings, where things were. Park Service philosophy on preservation and protection of historic artifacts and

I: Do you remember any particular details about the plans?

P: [long pause] Not really. Let's see. Any written plans, that sort of thing would have been kept by the chief and the officers. The most important thing was, I think just about every fire fighter there had a familiarity with the buildings, their importance and the layout. So there weren't any surprises.

I: Thank you. Did this change after the fire?

P: The number of pre-plans?

I: Or anything related to the planning activity at on the part of the fire department.

P: [long pause] Not that I recall. I think that things continued. [pause] Whether they changed things at the level of the chief, deputies uh I don't know. I left the fire department within a year of the fire because I started a Master's degree and didn't have time to do it anymore. I had a lot happening in the fire department in the middle of the night plus alarms happening for the FDR Home as well. And we had 24 hour patrols for quite a while after the fire because the alarms had all been burned out and it was a little bit too much to do that and studying also.

I: Do you, thank you, could you tell me a little bit more about what you remember you did specifically the night of the fire?

P: Sure. I remember when the four of us got there one person stayed with the truck and the pumpers. We brought a hose up to the third floor and [pause] started looking around to locate the fire, locate the extent of the fire. And I remember we applied a fog pattern to a couple of areas. The way I probably remember it was standing on a ladder, applying water to an attic crawl space that was closed. We chopped a hole in the ceiling and were applying the water through the hole in the ceiling. Coals were coming back out and sliding down my sleeve, back and things like that. But I left the attic after about one, one air bottle. After about 20 or 30 minutes the alarm goes off on your air and you have to go back outside and exchange bottles. I think I did that twice. The first time I came out there were a few more firemen. And uh the second time I think there were nearly 100 firemen there. That's when I kind of switched from fire fighting efforts to protecting the artifacts and that sort of thing. There were plenty of firemen on board and. Early on in the fire there were only four firemen for the firefighting effort.

I: Could you talk a little bit about when you switched from being a fire fighter to putting back on your Park Service hat?

P: Sure. [long pause] I just remember moving furniture to the center of the uh some of the rooms. I do remember at one point someone came to me and said we were getting a lot of water in a particular room. I think it was the FDR Boyhood Room. And I located with a couple of other firemen and we, along with the assistance of a couple of Park Service employees, rigged up a, if I remember right it was sort of a plastic ladder to make a chute, sort of, to route the heaviest amount of water coming through the ceiling down the ladder and out the French doors outside of the building. That probably saved a fair amount of water damage. I thought it was pretty inventive of them.

I: Does anything else stick in your mind about the night of the fire removing the artifacts?

P: I [laughs] there's funny things that stick in your mind. I remember the uh the first fireman that started chopping into the wall in the second floor. I mean this is an area that normally would not have been open to the public. We were very protective of the everything there. I wanted to say don't do that. But it was necessary to find out if the fire was coming down through the walls into the second and first floors. So some of that

was done and it was repairable, but still any time there's damage to uh the original building that is a concern.

I: How did your job change after the fire? Your Park Service job.

P: It changed quite a bit. I was close to getting to thinking about transferring. It had been two or three years and that had been my typical uh length of time in a park then. After about three years I was expecting to transfer. And it changed the park so much I stayed another two years. Ended up staying at Roosevelt Vanderbilt for five years all told. We were very limited in what we could open to the public after the fire. I think we had portions of the first floor open. It seems like the library I think was restored or pretty much left the way it was. And perhaps a couple of other things on the first floor, but was, it was quite awhile before the second floor was refurnished, restored and ready to open. And all the alarms that were non-functional so we had to arrange for 24 hour protection coverage. And for me, since I supervised the protection staff, that also meant that if somebody called in sick for the midnight to eight shift I was asked to pop over and cover. I lived in the gardener's cottage at the time as park housing. And so that was easier to do than if I lived 30 or 40 minutes away. But keeping that 24 hour protection schedule until we got new alarms set up was quite a chore.

I: Did any of your other duties change?

P: Well the interpretive side certainly changed. We tried to keep as much of the Home open as possible and do as much interpretation as we could [long pause] of the building, but also of the restoration effort as well.

I: So you were doing interpretation and for the public of the restoration effort?

P: Yes.

I: Could you talk about that?

P: I remember we had displays set up of the fire and what happened. Tried to talk about the fire fighting effort, the preservation efforts afterwards, that sort of thing. Tried to let folks know as much as possible what the status of the restoration was, what the Home was like prior to the fire, what the schedule was getting things back to normal.

I: Did you have the opportunity to interact with any political figures or dignitaries?

P: After occasion or period I remember in particular James Roosevelt coming back to visit and showing him through the Home. It was quite a while before any of the family members would come back. It wasn't until we were somewhat down the road on the restoration efforts because I remember it was just too [long pause] disturbing for them to see it in a state of damage and disrepair. But they did eventually come back for tours. And I remember showing James through the burnt part, talking about the alarm systems that was going back and intrusion protection, fire detection system.

I: Do you, we're on the telephone, sooo I'm just wondering if you have any artifacts or photographs there with you in Virginia.

P: I do have some photographs and I also have some video tape of some of the news spots that were broadcast, done at the time and some of the damage that was taken around the FDR Home.

I: Are you in those tapes?

P: Uhhhh, I don't think so. I don't think so. I haven't looked at them in a long time. But I think they're mostly of empty rooms, documenting the damage, that sort of thing.

I: Are there any other anecdotes or stories that you'd like to tell me this morning?

P: About the fire [laughs]

I: About the fire, about planning efforts, about the fire response, anything.

P: Uh, hmmm [long pause] I think the pre-planning effort was very important to limiting the damage. And really it could have been much worse than it was. And I know lots of articles have been written and reports have been done and presentations here and there, curatorial classes about lessons learned and that sort of thing. So I won't try to duplicate that. But it certainly was a good thing to have everyone so familiar with the Home and its surroundings. And the folks in Hyde Park had a real appreciation for the FDR Home. I think FDR himself was a honorary member of the fire department. And they had a sense of history there. They had an interest in seeing the Home taken care of and protecting it I think. So that helps. Better than a situation where people might not care that much or this seems like another building to them you know.

I: Anything else you'd like to share.

P: Uh [pause] nothing comes to mind.

I: Well, you certainly know where to reach us if something does come up. And, let's see, I'm going to check downstairs on the fax machine for the consent form and also did you return the transcript form so that I know where to send a copy of the transcript? I'll, I'll type up our conversation this morning.

P: Yes, if you don't find that just let us know and we can send it again.

I: Okay. That's great. Well thank you so much for your time this morning and uh we'll either be in touch about the faxes or I'll be sending you the transcript.

P: Okay.

I: Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #6

JANUARY 24, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good afternoon. Today is January 24th, 2007. This is Wendy Schumacher and I'm here at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York with Bill Urbin. And uh can you introduce yourself on the phone?

P: Yes, I'm *name withheld* of Luray, Virginia and I was working at Roosevelt Vanderbilt between 1980 and 1983.

I: And what was your position here at Roosevelt Vanderbilt?

P: Park superintendent.

I: And, I'm sorry, you just gave me the dates. What were the dates again?

P: From May of 1980 to September of '83.

I: 1980 to 1983. Had you worked for the Park Service prior to that?

P: Yes I certainly had.

I: Could you just recap that for me?

P: Well sure. Be glad to. While I was going to school at Colorado A&M I worked in the summers at Yosemite and Sierra National Forest from about '48 to '49 on. And later on at Bryce Canyon National Park. And then subsequent to that a couple of years later I began work at Carlsbad and subsequently Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Colonial at Yorktown and the Blue Ridge Parkway. And then for a short time I was in the legislative area of the Washington office and then I had two duty stations in New York. One of them was of course at ROVA and one at Saratoga. And when I retired, I retired from Roosevelt Vanderbilt.

I: Oh, so your current position with the Park Service is retired?

P: Yes.

I: Great. Congratulations.

P: Thank you.

I: So that was in 1983?

P: Yes.

I: So you had been with the Park Service quite some time at the time of the fire.

P: Yes, as a matter of fact, 30 years.

I: Hmm, and did any of your past experiences in any of those previous jobs help prepare you for an event like the fire?

P: Yes, as a matter of fact I think my I think my protection responsibilities as a park ranger earlier had prepared me ever since I began in the Park Service. Although I hadn't had a, a building fire experience of the magnitude of the Roosevelt fire.

I: How would uh your experiences as a ranger prepare you for that experience?

P: Good deal of training in both forest fire protection and range fire protection and building fire protection. And while I worked at the Colonial Historical Park at Yorktown we had rather intensive fire, building fire training through the Williamsburg, Virginia fire department.

I: Did you have any experiences with the Hyde Park or the Roosevelt fire departments?

P: Yes, as a matter of fact, we had through our, through our then chief ranger, *name withheld*, who was a member we had an excellent relationship with the Hyde Park fire department. And that was ongoing. And then of course particularly, particularly (emphasis) helpful since they immediately participated in the Roosevelt Vanderbilt fire.

I: Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

P: You mean about the participation of the fire department?

I: Yes.

P: Yes, I certainly can. From, from the time that I was alerted to the fire by chief ranger and my arrival there in the evening perhaps around 10 o'clock. Seems to me that the Hyde Park fire department was on the job already. And, and was busily trying to control that fire on the top floor while our employees were carrying things out of the house. So that they'd be safe. And that, that was one of the most, how to put it, the most one of the most satisfying things I've ever seen. I'm so proud. I was so proud of those people for their, for their showing up and participating in the way they did. (I: thank you) And if you know the Roosevelt Home you can just imagine what a job it was it a matter of a few hours to move all that material outside.

I: Yes, so can you tell me specifically how you (emphasis) heard about the fire?

P: Yes, I was at home and it seems to me I had just prepared to go to bed when I got the phone call from *name withheld*, the chief ranger. And his, almost his exact words, which I think I'll never forget are that we have a fire condition as he put it, in the upper floors of the Roosevelt Home. And that the fire department was on the job and I asked if other fire departments had been called and he said yes. And I immediately left and went over there. And my home, [clears throat] pardon me, my home was in one of the gatehouses at the Vanderbilt Mansion so it only took me a few minutes.

I: And when you got here can you describe what you saw?

P: Well, pretty horrific for one thing. Seems to me the temperature, the temperature was around 15 degrees. And it seems to me either on the ground or shortly thereafter a light snow began to fall. [pause] And there were all kinds of people. The sky was lit up. The fire was confined so far as I know to the little nursery on the top floor. I remember it being called the nursery. On the top floor of the building. Park people were arriving right away and began of course right away carrying objects outside and putting them on the lawn. When I went into the lobby, I remember, shining my flashlight onto the staircase that comes down to the main entry and seeing a cascade of water coming down the stairs actually freezing already into icicles. A, a completely frightening experience if I could tell you. And people already buzzing around like bees moving things, out. If I could say, if you could say that's one of the most thrilling in the midst of an awful thing like the fire that was certainly thrilling. And without any concern for their own safety at all, people were moving everything. And I believe, if I remember, an inventory showed that we I think only lost a small coffee table if I remember correctly. It was something I had hoped never to see again. And of course all this water was not only cascading

through the building, but it was also creating an icy hazard outside around the building. And I, I know you all know that one of the most heartbreaking things was that we were preparing for the 100th anniversary of, of the president at that time. And we had hoped to be absolutely spick and span in time for the president's 100th birthday which was coming up, it seems to me in not very many days following the fire.

I: Right, and um what specifically did you do on the night of the fire?

P: Oh! Well after my arrival there I talked of course talked right away with my chief ranger and members of the Hyde Park Fire Department. And with the curators like *name withheld* and, and we wanted to see if we can't couldn't get everything out of course. Indeed and we even talked of prioritizing artifacts which needed to surely go out first. As it was, people did such a great job. Maintenance, interpretation, rangers. Everyone that, that almost everything or everything as far as I know was removed from the house. So my idea my idea was to make sure that we had enough fire fighting help. Which we did, finally. And to make sure that everyone worked safely, everyone was accounted for and, and that there was a thorough and methodical approach, you know, if there can be such a thing during such conflagration. And, and then it occurred to me to, to make sure that someone was outside keeping an eye on everything so it didn't disappear. And fortunately, fortunately someone was already taking care of that as I remember. And so my then thought was that we were going to have to deal with the the public inquiry. And it seems to me that both *name withheld* and *name withheld* I appointed to assist me in dealing with the press. And the inquiries from the, from the local people. And of course many local people joined us to help with the effort even though they weren't the fire department, nor were they a member of the park staff. Seems to me, too, that we got help from, voluntary help from the Roosevelt Library.

I: And those were community members as well?

P: Yes, well, yes mainly the Roosevelt Library employees who were, of course, the Library itself being a separate entity from the park itself. Everyone. Everyone who could be helpful certainly was.

I: Do you have any anecdotes about dealing with the press? Either at the time of the fire or afterwards?

P: If I think back it seems to me that that we got a great many expressions of genuine concern from all over. And surprisingly some of those calls that came in came from as far away as San Francisco. Of course we heard very quickly from, from the Hyde Park papers, from, from the New York Times, from the Washington Post we heard very quickly from them. I heard early on from the offices of, of Congressman Ham Fish who, of course, that's his district, he was vitally interested in it. The Governor, Mayor Cuomo, Governor Cuomo, excuse me, was interested. And everyone, everyone I talked to and everything that was reported to me was that people were extremely supportive and concerned and were anxious to be of help.

I: Were there any dignitaries, anyone besides the local congressman who were interested in either coming up or uh getting information about the fire?

P: I'm trying to remember if. It seems to me, yes, there were there were people from the FDR Centennial Commission of which I was a member. People such as Arthur Schlesinger and Frederika Goodman who was chairman of that Commission. And of course from Frank Roosevelt. Frank Roosevelt, Junior who was a friend of mine. And other Roosevelt children we called them. They certainly weren't children. Other

members of the family if you will called and were almost, so far as I can tell, every one of them were utterly understanding and sympathetic. And, and willing to be, wanting to be helpful. But of course everyone was so shocked, you know, by the fact that this had happened. And that it happened so quickly.

I: Would you talk a little bit about how your duties changed after the fire?

P: [long pause] You know I, I don't really recall that my (emphasis) duties. That is my overall responsibilities as superintendent changed a great deal. Of course we were, we were terribly concerned about being sure that, that we had the assistance we needed to take care of the artifacts which meant cleaning and preservation you know. Then storage. One of the first things we did was to try to arrange for a major storage building to come in. And that happened fairly, fairly soon. I can't give you a time, but that happened and that building turned out to be a, a preservation lab, sort of, and a, a place of storage until the building itself could be thoroughly cleaned and, and restored. And that part of it seemed to work well. But back to my duties I would say that, that my duties might have changed to the extent of doing whatever we could, all of us to get things back to normal and to see that the park had the kind of help it needed to professionally handle the artifacts. As well as the building which was the major artifact, of course. And, and also to take care of the, the public relations end of things. The, the inquiries that were made, of course, by the Washington office, by the Regional office and, and the interest, of course, of Congressman Fish. And to, of course, have the investigation of what as to where the fire might have started. I you all probably know already that, that the preamble to this was the construction project which was correcting a long standing fire hazard situation in the building. If you, shall we spend a moment on that, Wendy?

I: Yes, please.

P: For some years, I was told, the staff had been concerned about fire conditions as, as you might imagine in any of the old buildings, but particularly in the Roosevelt Home because an investigation of the wiring showed that, I am told again, that, that where normally, for instance a, a ceiling a ceiling box where wires come together, a circuit box. If you investigated it, instead of finding four wires free you might find a dozen wires because again I'm told each time, each time things became busier for the president when he was president. Of course he was governor of the state, and later on as he became president and so on more activities took place in the building as more press and others came to the Home more wiring was added to support their needs. Without attempting to to, to manage the overall wiring load, you know. So this was the thing which, which worried us the most. In which, in which the professionals told us we couldn't really do this piece meal as you might with local electricians. It's the sort of thing that needs to be looked at overall. So the entire wiring system needed to be overhauled. And that's what, that's what made us program as soon as possible for a major, a major effort to do this. And so and, and with the help of the regional office who certainly understood. We not only got the money, but we began to evaluate proposals from historic preservation people who were in the business. And ultimately a firm from Boston was chosen. And, and so they began to do the work most carefully. A little bit at a time replacing circuits a little bit at a time. At some point all we, all we know is that at some point the men left work on a Friday night. I believe it was a Friday night and while the men were not past the building we had rangers who were making more or less regular patrols through the building to make sure everything is okay. And one of those evenings after the men had

left one of the rangers suddenly realized that a fire had started and reported that condition. And things, things began to hop right after that. But it was during the effort to try to redo the whole wiring system. And I might add to put in a fire suppression system that this fire broke out. The worst thing that could have happened.

I: Can you talk a little bit more about the relationship of the park to the regional office and that decision making process?

P: The, the, the business of finding and researching and talking with firms that did this sort of thing led us, led us, led the whole group I mean the region and ourselves to speak to several firms and one of those firms was an Albany firm and, and they were very interested in it. But we weren't directly involved in the, in the selection. We, we, we made our recommendations, but I understand from prior experience it was decided that the firm in Boston was the perhaps the most qualified. So, so they were chosen.

I: Thank you (P: uh huh) What about, let's see, earlier you mentioned that *name withheld* was the volunteer fire department here at Hyde Park. Did you have any prior relationship with the volunteer fire department personally?

P: Yes, yes I did, but primarily through *name withheld*. *Name withheld* was both chief ranger and a volunteer fireman and that's just one of those things that Park Service people sometimes do. He participated, that was his way of participating in the community as well as doing his job of chief ranger which he did, which he did beautifully. *Name withheld* had introduced me to some of these people and from time to time I met them in Hyde Park. But, no, prior to his introduction of these people I had no close relationship to them.

I: Do you know if there was any sort of uh pre-planning activity for a structural fire with the Hyde Park fire department?

P: Yes, as I remember there was. *Name withheld* had, *name withheld* had had some training sessions with these folks in which he familiarized them with, with the buildings. You know, all the buildings including Val-Kill. He familiarized them with it and he also located sources of water for fire suppression. And he knew about the alarm thing and so on. So those folks, he and those people had a very, had a very good relationship. In fact he had close friends in that, in that group and they were familiar. That's one of the reasons why I think we got the help so quickly, you know, from them. They were prepared to roll.

I: That's great (P: uh huh). Did you have any role in planning for a structural fire after (emphasis) the fire took place?

P: You mean after that fire was suppressed?

I: Yes, you know, in the weeks that followed.

P: I don't recall, I don't recall having any major duties like that, Wendy, except, except that, of course, the staff and we discussed this and, and talked about having the appropriate people reinspect the wiring in the other buildings like the Vanderbilt Mansion and Val-Kill and, and the, the some of the other old buildings. The delightful old Gothic house on the Roosevelt Home, home place there as well as Bellefield of course. It's because it's also historic. And the gate houses. We discussed, we discussed the situation in all of those. We discussed fire prevention in all of those. But but as to exactly what we planned to do other than get on it, I can't tell you.

I: One of my questions for people who come to Bellefield is if they brought any photographs or artifacts with them to the interview. We're on the telephone so I can't see if you have any artifacts or photographs with you. Do you?

P: You know, I don't think I do. I did find one thing, though, that may be of interest to you, Wendy. One thing that I did keep was a list of our telephone numbers. Our list of people who worked in Hyde Park at the time. Dated 1981 and I didn't know whether that would be of interest to you.

I: I think I may have seen that in one of the files up here at the Mansion.

P: Good. It contains the names and the jobs of, of a good many of the people who were who were there.

I: And I think I did see that document.

P: If you haven't, I'll be glad to provide it.

I: Great! I'm making a note of that. [all laugh] What else would you like to tell me about your experience or any anecdotes or anything you remember.

P: It, it, it was a matter of some time I devoted to preparing the paperwork to see that everyone who participated got re, awards. Special awards from the Park Service for this. And, and I with, with the help of the staff I did do this and so far as I know we didn't miss anybody. Everyone who participated got, got an award. Seems to me it was three hundred dollars award for participating that night. [pause] One of the things we all did to the extent time permitted was to get together as a staff and as a group and rehash all of this to try to see, not only to make sure we knew what happened, but to see what we could do in the future, you know, organization-wise. Although so far as we knew at the time, Wendy, we had we had done absolutely everything we could. But, but I considered everything that the staff did as a special act of, of concern and that's why I said before that's why I was so proud of everyone for their distinguished service, you know. Afterwards we were of course concerned, very concerned about, about the artifacts. And terribly concerned about the building itself. And, and about, about getting started on, on the restoration services which were so critical you know. It's not only that things can dry but it's, it's that they get humidity control situation. And, and conservation specialists begin to work. Much of the time, too, we, we after this besides from being concerned about the Roosevelt house was to be, to make sure we were not ignoring Vanderbilt Mansion.

I: In what way?

P: In, in any way having to do with the safety of the building or the artifacts. And, and so we spend a good deal of time just, just talking that over and making sure inspections were done. I guess if I had. I guess other than that if I had anything to comment on I, I just could not get over the supportive way that the Roosevelt family and the and the and the commission. The Roosevelt Centennial commission, they were so supportive of this as was the Roosevelt Library. And the community was very supportive. If there was a word of, of, of criticism which you'd expect to hear in a thing like this I (emphasis) certainly didn't hear it. So I was very pleased. Now at some time some time after this we were called to Washington to testify before one of the committees of Congress.

I: Who was that?

P: *Name withheld. Name withheld*, my chief ranger and I were, were directed by Russ Dickinson, the Director of the Park Service to come down and testify about the fire

before. And I'm sorry I can't tell you whether it was the parks and recreation committee of the Senate or the House. To come down and speak briefly about the fire and its probable causes and, and, and the follow up. Very, very brief. Very brief testimony. But apparently those committees were anxious to hear from, anxious to hear from us, I guess, from the park.

I: Anything stick out in your memory about that experience?

P: [chuckles] Well it certainly gets your attention. [all laugh] Sort of, sort of, it sort of does that. Well, to me personally, I remember this, Wendy. This is a heart breaking thing to me. Not only have I always felt very strongly about historic preservation but I feel particularly close to the Roosevelts and my family when I was growing up were strong Roosevelt supporters. So I, I almost felt as if this were something happening to our family, the park's family. And, and so we were about as close to grief stricken that night. The thing that amazed me was it was fifteen degrees temperature and ice everywhere and everyone working with without having put on the proper clothing, you know what I mean. (I: Yeah) That so far as I know no one got hurt. And I still can't figure out why not. As many people as were there. But it took a long time it took a long time to, to shall I say get over the, the, the hurt, you know, the psychological damage so to speak of having that happen on your watch if you will. Well, but I'll tell you. Everyone, everyone was so wonderful about it and the, the regional office was supportive as was our Congressional Delegation. And very quickly after I don't remember the timing of this we had a building there at the park. Not far from Bellefield if I recall. You could answer that I suppose. (I: Right, not far) Uh huh were, were this work could take place and then I have to say I don't know how long it took before conservation work was done. And, and, and the artifacts were back in the building and the building was done. What I've heard subsequently from *name withheld* I believe is, is that the house had been completed and that it was prettier than ever and that everything in it looked so nice and so nice and clean. And that was really nice to hear. (I: it is). That was really nice to hear and of course you've seen it so you know (I: Yes). But, but I I don't think I have, I don't think I have much in the way of so called artifacts of, of that. I guess it's one of those things that I really didn't want anything to remember it by, you know. I have a picture, I have a picture taken someone took of, of me and of others on the snowy day on which the ceremony took place, the president's 100th birthday celebration. Which occurred only, seems to me occurred only a few days, not many days after the fire.

I: I think about five days.

P: I think so. Can you imagine how horrifying that was with all the people who were gonna come? And I remember how gracious people were. And of course they had to sit outside on that cold, snowy day. And of course all the, all the, the people who could. The old New Deal gang, you know. Including, including the folks from New York. And that includes show business people like well the, the playwright who just passed away, Green, and hmm don't remember the other name. But they did Broadway plays. So many of those people were there that day. And, and, and were and were totally supportive, totally supportive and understanding which I thought was really, was really a, an amazing thing. Certainly was to me.

I: Anything else?

P: I'm sure I'll think of it. After, after we get off.

I: Right, and you're going to receive a copy of the transcript. Because you're going to return those forms to me, the consent form and the transcript form.

P: Certainly will, certainly will. And of course what I haven't told you of course was there was a great preamble to all this. And that, of course, was years of preparation for the centennial, you know, which was going on. And I and I hope I've painted the picture of how this was going to look to us that this, this great effort was five days away. And here we were in, in having a major fire. And, and it's something you wouldn't forget.

I: I don't think I would ever forget either.

P: No, to see all that light from the fire apparatus inside the building. And to see that water cascading down that staircase and freezing. That's something that you'll never forget, you know. (I: uh huh) But I'm glad that apparently it's all back together and in one piece. I look forward to seeing it.

I: Well that's wonderful. Do you have any plans to come up here?

P: I do indeed. Soon as I can. If I didn't have a trip west to do I'd be coming up there this year I think. But but that's all that's all I can really remember of it. I have so much so say so much of it was pretty traumatic and we, we don't know. One thing I'm sorry about is that some of the principle people are gone. *Name withheld* and *name withheld* for two. But I'm sure people like *name withheld* and *name withheld* and, and *name withheld* and people like that. *Name withheld*, all of whom I'm sure can be helpful there.

I: Yes, we interviewed *name withheld* yesterday and *name withheld* is on the schedule for tomorrow.

P: Oh, very good. Very good. Well, I'd love to hear them, I'd love to talk to them myself. Wendy, I'm so glad you're doing this.

I: Thank you. Thank you.

P: And you have toured the building and you've been up in the nursery haven't you? In the top of the Roosevelt Home.

I: Yes, actually I did a walk through with the Hyde Park volunteer fire department on the night of the 25th anniversary.

P: Did you!

I: Just a coincidence. And we took the volunteer firemen up there and we looked at some of the rafters that are still burned in the crawl spaces and things like that.

P: Yes! Yes! And, and did you, were any of the fellows you went with, did they happen to be around at that time?

I: Well, the chief had been a volunteer fireman, but he was off doing some training for his military stint at the time, but it was clear 25 years later he clearly regretted having missed such a major event in the lives of, of his, his (P: oh) colleagues.

P: Oh that, that made the papers everywhere. It certainly did. One interesting final item if I can mention it. True, I had been superintendent at Saratoga Battlefield. And where we had historic houses, too, and from an earlier, from the early days that I worked in historic parks such as Colonial. We had always speculated about why people used brick nogging in between wall studs and so on in post and beam structures. And we used to be told that was probably for insulation and, and later on when I saw some, some of the burn upstairs in that top floor in the nursery I saw that the that the actual damage to wooden structures were minimized by the brick that was in those spaces. And the brick

drew the heat so much that it removed that combustion from the from the timbers. Not that the timbers weren't charred on the outside, but they still retained their structural, most of their structural strength due to the brick having absorbed the heat. That told us something that some of us hadn't known that it was, the brick was used that way to minimize fire damage as it occurred. Had you, had you heard anything about that?

I: I hadn't heard anything like that. Well that's interesting and that certainly explains what I saw the other night.

P: Yes, yes, yes. Well that's about it I'm afraid. But if I may if I recall something I will certainly add it.

I: Okay. That's great because Bill has just given me the hand sign that the tape only has two minutes left (P: okay). So I think that uh we're going to go off line and I'm going to tell you where to send the consent form and the transcript form.

P: Very good.

I: But online I want to say thank you very much for your participation.

P: And thank you so much for what you're doing and to have met you both.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS #7

JANUARY 24, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good afternoon. Today is January 24th, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm here at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York with Bill Urbin and this afternoon we are interviewing

P: *Name withheld*.

I: *Name withheld*. Uh *name withheld* what was your position with the National Park Service at the time of the fire?

P: I was a ranger, park ranger in law enforcement.

I: And were you duty stationed here at the park?

P: Right. I lived in the top of the garage over there when the fire happened yeah. Before that I was over in the Gingerbread house. My wife and I. Two, three kids.

I: How long had you been with the Park Service?

P: Since 1962.

I: Had you always been here?

P: Yes. [chuckles] Always here at ROVA. And that's seven years in the military that added to my time. It put me over 47 years of service.

I: What is your current position with the National Park Service?

P: Retired [all laugh]

I: And you say that with a big smile.

P: Yeah!

I: Did you have other positions besides park ranger?

P: Right. When I started in '62 I was a laborer [pause]. Got it? Caretaker. Roads and grounds foreman. (I: roads and grounds) Foreman, right. And then eh after my first heart attack I went into the law enforcement division.

I: Were you a law enforcement ranger at the time of the fire in 1982?

P: Yes. I responded to two alarms that night before the fire was found.

I: Oh! Tell me about that.

P: Well we had two alarms and it was intrusion alarms. And I went in. Checked out the building. Basement, the first floor, the second floor, the third floor. No signs of any break-ins. Checked all the doors and stuff. And everything was okay so I come out and reset the alarm, intrusion alarm, went back home. It was about, maybe 45 minutes or an hour later there was another intrusion alarm. So I go back over from where I lived [pause] and rechecked the whole building again. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. And then probably about an hour later it was some time after eleven thirty or close to twelve another alarm. But this time it was uh a intrusion alarm, but also there was a fire alarm. But the problem was there was only one smoke detector up on the third floor. And

that was in the elevator shaft. So the what evidently somebody was up there working, contractors. Do some rewiring and stuff. And I think *name withheld, name withheld* would explain it to you that they seemed to think that the fire started in the corner of the chimney. And it worked its way through. 'Cuz when I approached the building the last time I could see fire coming out of the west windows on the third floor. So it might have been simultaneously an intrusion. But the intrusion was the man went in the back door. One of the firemen who smashed the door in. That's how they set off the intrusion alarm. So two things happening at once. If there'd been smoke detectors before that spread out through that ceiling on the third floor probably woulda woulda got it [pause] earlier. When I was first in there, you know. But uh I was in there with uh *name withheld*. We was moving stuff out, the walls and stuff so it wouldn't get the water damage. So we laid it on the beds and stuff. That saved a lot of problems. And then aaalll the employee's wives and all the employees that was livin' in the Coach House. *Name withheld* was the chief of maintenance. He got 'em all up and told 'em there was a fire at the Roosevelt Home. They came down and everybody pitched in. Their wives and everything. Kids wanted to go in, but the firemen wouldn't let them. Just, the wives and and and employees. We salvaged a lot of stuff. We saved saved a big (emphasis) headache. It was just mostly water or smoke damage you know. And *name withheld* did the restoration work after the fire. Remember *name withheld*? Right. His preservation crew. They did the work above the third floor. All sheetrock and stuff. That was from all the water being pumped in. You know that water was running down the second floor staircase from the third floor and out the front door. That's the way the building was sloped you know. At that time it was the time to put the steel girders and stuff in the bottom. They decided not to go with it.

I: How come?

P: Uh I figured money problems. They coulda they coulda put that building back up level by steel I-beams all through the basement you know. But they didn't. They went with another way so. But uh it was quite a night. We worked aaalll night long. I mean I was up almost all night answering the alarms and workin' with *name withheld* and other ones taking the stuff off the walls on the second floor and laying 'em on the bed. We had canvases in the trunk room that were made up special in case of a fire. We took canvases out and laid it over the beds where all the pictures and stuff were. That was constantly going on and then we had other people. I think it was *name withheld*, right. He was at the Coach House at the time. Staying there in his quarters. Him and somebody else took the chan, the Dresden chandelier, from the room on the first floor. They carried it over to the stable, set it on somethin' and covered it up. Only one little piece you got broke on that one. A little flower on that Dresden chandelier. But they they got the biggest part of it out to protect it from the water and stuff. (I: that's amazing) Yeah! It was quite a thing. You see everybody going. It was snowin', wet, cold [chuckles]. Then we, then I got the day off and I ended up coming right back that night and working all night, too, you know. 'Cuz they had to have the heat, some heat in there. My first thing I did when I seen the fire is I knew they were gonna be pumping water in there. I ran to the stables. That's the main breaker for the power for the Roosevelt Home. Nobody ever knew that. But I shut the power off going to the Roosevelt Home. 'Cuz all the panels and stuff were in the basement. You go in the back door of the the Roosevelt Home, down the stairs to the right is all the breaker panels. And there's one on the south end. But I took the main

breaker. From stable it come off that pole there. Supplied all the power for all the buildings and shut it off [makes shut off noise]. 'Cuz all that water and electricity you know. They ain't getting no more power into the house.

I: What did you do after that?

P: What do you mean?

I: So did you go back into the house after you shut off the power?

P: Yeah, oh, yeah, I went back and started covering up things. And taking things off the second floor walls. And the room where he grew up and all the other rooms. *Name withheld* was up there. I was up there. There was other people. Just covered everything, get it on the bed and cover it up. Not much would not be protected. Rugs didn't get protected because of all the water, but the smoke damage, but. At least most of it was survived. All the paintings, everything, pictures and everything else down the hallway. Everything, yeah. They all did a good job. Freezin', soakin' wet. (I: one of my questions) There was a lot of people there. I mean even firemen were helping us. 'Cuz they knew it was a historic place. FDR's Home you know. Where he was born and everything. And eh there was essential to preserve everything that you could. And we was taught in fire training. We had those canvases on every floor and the trunk room. The fire training said. The first thing you want to do is get stuff off the walls, cover it up, lay it on the bed. Protect them paintings and pictures and everything. (I: where did you) That's what we did.

I: Where did you get the fire training?

P: Right in the park. Well they used to have fire training and fire extinguishers and everything. I could take care of all the fire extinguishers here. Test 'em and everything. Inspect 'em at at Vanderbilts. I don't think anybody does anymore. I don't think they do don't. What do you think?

A: They're. Sometimes they do.

I: Do you remember anything about the fire training or did you help with any sort of (P: well that) pre-planning activities?

P: Well that's one of the things in case of a fire. The first thing you wanna do is preserve the artifacts in the house. And the first thing was was to do was you put it lay it lay it on the bed and cover it up with canvas. And then you protect not only the bed, but the pictures and everything that's underneath.

I: So my first question is usually can you tell me how you heard about the fire. But you are the person who first heard about the fire. (P: right, right) Did you tell anybody else about the fire?

P: I went in on alarm. It went out on the fire alarm. I think the fire. Didn't it. The fire didn't really pick it up until I got over to the old elevator sitting there that went to the third floor you know. That's where the only smoke detector was. And I think the process was. They was up there rewiring. And probably putting smoke detectors in that there. But they didn't get 'em all in. You seem to think. I think when you talk to *name withheld* he'll tell you when they did the investigation. Pretty sure that it started at the base of the chimney up there. One of those old boxes with the BX cable evidently some that got stepped on it and shorted it out. Worked its way through. But the only fire coming out was in the west room. Up on the third floor? Second room, the biggest one. There's a chimney up in there some place. Yeah, yeah. 'Cuz when I went through the building the first first three times I didn't feel anything. No smoke, nothin'. The third

time I went over I mean third time yeah the third time. On the way over the. I ran into by the greenhouse there a fire hydrant had busted. Pipe in the fire hydrant and the water was shooting out of the ground. And then I and then I seen the fire from where I was. As I looked past the stables to see the fire coming out of the west window. I called *name withheld* up I mean uh *name withheld* who was the chief of maintenance. Told him we had a busted main by the greenhouse, a hydrant and there's a fire on the on the third floor of the Roosevelt Home. And I said call everybody you can. There was a lot of guys living in the you know Coach House. They had quarters there you know seasonals. Yeah. And I guess everybody else, notified everybody else, yeah.

I: Was the fire department already there?

P: Yeah, yeah. The worst thing was part of the fire department. *Name withheld*, and he was in charge of interpreters there. He's the one that broke the back door in.

I: He told us that this morning.

P: Did he tell you that? (I: he did). Yeah. What what did he do with his keys. Did he have a key with him?

I: He didn't because he had a. Well it's not relevant to your story, but he had actually gone to respond to another call. He was coming from another fire. (P: fire happened at the same time). And he. Right, the Anderson School (P: Anderson School, right) so he didn't have his key. And he explained that to us on the tape.

P: Oh yeah so just react the firemen who broke the door (I: uh huh). They said one of the rangers who just come back from uh Anderson School fire. I said *name withheld*. Oh yeah, yeah. He said well how do we get up there. And I'm the one that led the firemen up the up to the third floor from the north porch going into the kitchen, yeah. Took 'em upstairs and showed 'em how to get up. Showed 'em up in there. It was kinda smoky up there in the third floor. But no fire. The fire was on that west side coming of the woodwork underneath the eaves and stuff you know. And they got up in there and then I ran back to the west thing after I showed 'em where it was. I said I'm going to go over to the stables and shut the power off to this building and all the other buildings. So they're no electricity. Okay. That's what I done. (I: do you) They always say experts say that's what you want to do in case of a fire like that is shut the electrical power off. First thing, 'Cuz you don't. somebody could get electrocuted. 'Cuz there's a lot of hot uh (unclear) stuff you know. Probably that's probably a 200 amp service that came out of the stable to service the Home and uh the stable, too. You know and I was in there at that one, too. (I: oh, stable fire) The old stable fire. Next to the stable, yeah, in that garage area. Might have been the jiggled at that time. Time I dug Eleanor's grave. Buried her. I've been involved in a lot of things. (I: sounds like it). Had a lot of fun doin' it. I I like work, helping. The only problem to me was was when they started transferring us as an interpreter. Vanderbilts, Roosevelt I had enough time I said well that's it. And that was enough, had enough.

I: What year did you retire?

P: September two oh oh one.

I: Oh so recently. Five years. Was there

P: I've enjoyed it. Retirement.

I: Was there anything in particular you remember about the night of the fire. Any um

P: The main thing was everybody (emphasis) worked together. The rangers uh village people. Kids wanted to go in. The firemen wouldn't let 'em. And our wives worked, everybody. They all chipped in. Yeah, that was a big thing. That's what saved a lot of the stuff. Carry it out, stack it up, cover it up with stuff. That was a great thing, yeah. Mine was only a small part of it. Yeah, everybody else you could still work in shift and have friendship [mumbles]. This is important this place is (A: oh yeah). Not this (emphasis) place, yeah it is in a way. Roosevelt Home was a very important place. To the community. To the nation so it's very important to get everything out as much as possible before it got destroyed. And which everybody did.

I: How did your duties change after the fire? How did your work change? You were a park ranger at the time?

P: Yeah. I was still a park ranger after the fire. I didn't, let's see, we lost our commissions. Wasn't it. They took a lot of commissions away because they didn't bring any, need all those commissioned rangers, you know. And they put us in dispatch interpretator position at Vanderbilts.

I: You mean commissioned as law enforcement.

P: Law enforcement, yeah. [pause] Even, well, *name withheld*, wasn't. *Name withheld* was the chief of visitor services, remember? *Name withheld*, yeah. And *name withheld* did it for a while, too. A lot of people come through you know. All in

I: So uh so your job was pretty much the same before and after the fire?

P: Yeah. Until they changed our positions. No more law enforcement position. Interpretation.

I: What um let's see. You talked about the fire training. How do you think that made a difference between your ability to respond to the fire and the way that you did if you didn't have any training?

P: Well if you didn't have any training you'd be just like a bull in a china closet running around don't know what to do. We had that fire training. I remember *name withheld*, he was chief ranger one time. You remember him? He was uh they used to give all kinds of courses. Fire training. What to what to do when you go into a building that's on fire. That. And the main thing was protect the artifacts and stuff. Get it covered up as quick as possible from the water damage and such. 'Cuz smoke is gonna go through anything. Ya' ain't gonna stop smoke. And if you open up windows and stuff. That's worth checking 'cuz you give oxygen to the fire. That fire right there. I don't think got much oxygen to 'cuz there were only about three foot flames coming out from the west windows. So it wasn't getting' much oxygen. Had those windows up on the third floor and that trap door and that ceiling vent open. That thing would have roared right through the whole top. Had another one *name withheld* was on the preservation crew. 'Cuz he did a lot of the restoration of the work after the fire so he can tell you what condition it was up in there. Did you talk to hi?.

I: We talked to him on Monday.

P: You did? And *name withheld*?

I: Uh huh. We talked to him.

P: There was a lot of people. And now where are they now. Out and around and who else. *Name withheld* is still around. He's retired. [inaudible] Well I liked that everybody worked together. Like in the military. You know you train together and you work together to accomplish your mission. And that's a mission. That's what it is.

I: Were there any artifacts was the uh rescue of any particular artifacts stuck out in your mind? Some people have mentioned that they remember certain things like the Dresden chandelier or something like that?

P: No Dresden chandelier but every a lot of things in the library. Bringing 'em out took 'em out through the screen porch in the south end. You know down on the first floor. But most of it down there. Those rooms didn't get hit that much by water and smoke. Not as bad as the third floor. And the second floor because all the water come from the uh ceiling from above the third floor. Did the second floor right there. You had all that water coming down and coming down on the. And that's why they had to do a lot of the wall (unclear) 'cuz the water didn't have a place to go, but down in between the walls and studs and stuff you know. (I: oh) Yeah, that's the water it looked like a trout stream going out the front door. It came down those stairs. They pumped a lot of water on that. On that ceiling. But they got it.

I: So after the fire did you have the opportunity to take around either members of the public or dignitaries who were interested in seeing the Home after the fire?

P: No, they did. Somebody was doing the tape during the fire up on the second floor. I don't know who who was doing that 'cuz I was on one of 'em showing me walking through the hall with some people. Uh it was on it was on television. Piped down floor all over again. I don't know if the Library has that or not.

A: I think we may have a copy.

P: Yeah.

A: Did you meet Nixon when he came to take a look at it?

P: No, no. I might have been on annual leave. [all laugh]

I: Did did your training change at all after the fire?

P: The fire was fire and that's the most devastating thing that there is. There's that and water. Water. Water is the most devastating thing on the face of the earth. And then comes fire.

I: Do you have any artifacts or did you save any photographs from the time?

P: I didn't have any personally, no. Maybe some other people. I don't know if some of the other staff took photographs or not. There must be some in the files some place.

I: Oh sure we have them (P: yeah, yeah). But some people have brought photographs with them to the interviews.

P: I didn't. No. I didn't have time.

I: Did you help at all with the restoration efforts? Did you work with *name withheld* or anyone else?

P: Nooo. I wasn't charged with the restoration. No. *Name withheld* had help. He had a whole crew. Came out of the region. Was sent down there with the restoration work up there. It was a lot of work. All those all those sheetrock walls up on the third floor. The walls, most of them was plaster and had to be done over. A lot of work going and it was there for a long time. The windows on the west side had to be all replaced. And manufactured and everything special. That's the only place I could see when I entered the Home. The fire coming out and the flames coming out maybe three feet out of underneath the woodwork, over the window. And I guess it's as much (unclear) as over there. But very slow process.

I: Did you see more flames when you went up to the third floor with the firemen?

P: You know they had it pretty much under cover then. Under under control. They opened up that hatch and (unclear) climbed up. 'Cuz the ladder comin' up there that night to check after those alarms. There was still (emphasis) a eight or ten foot step ladder. An orange one standing by the the trap door and and the ceiling. It was still settin' there. But you could tell somebody had been up there workin'. (I: oh) Possibility he stepped on one of those little aaahh that's probably how we got electricity in 1930s. You know and that's a old metal metal boxes and stuff. BX cable. They used a lot of it back then in the beginning. They didn't have Romex they had. Probably somebody might have stepped on it by one of the boxes. Broke it, shorted it out and it worked it's way through til it got to the wood. Some place where there was wood close by. [claps] Hey, that's hot, that's hot. It's 115 or 120 you know. But most the houses back then was all 115, 115 amperes and stuff. [pause] I knew a little bit of that, too.

I: Little bit of what?

P: At my house and garage. Electrical work. (I: Oh) I worked with uh *name withheld* and them doing electric work there. Pulling wires through and

I: Did that background help you the night of the fire and your response? (P: pardon me) Did that background with the electrical work help you know what to do when you were responding to

P: Oh yes! Oh yeah the first thing they say you do when you have a if it's considered a electrical fire. Shut off the power to the place. That way it stops.

I: And what made you think to go to the main breaker versus going into the basement of the house?

P: Well if you got the basement of the house you're still going to have juice coming in from the other buildings. So you shut it off at the main breaker in the stable and you're going to shut it all off. You ain't got to worry about any juice. Somebody putting the switch and coming back through the house again. I thought I went down and shut all them off, but you had breakers at the south end of the Roosevelt Home, too, that was wired to the second floor and the third floor. That box that took care of that part. I figured do the main breaker. And that way you're sure there's no power going to any of the buildings what so ever.

I: So in 1982 you were a park ranger (P: right) but you had been a laborer and you must have been really comfortable with um how the Home was set up and (P: oh yeah!) from all that experience. Were there any uh events in your life since 19 in the twenty years prior to the fire here at the Park Service where you might have come in contact with other opportunities to learn on the job so that when you responded on the night of the fire you were well prepared?

P: Well I uh worked uh when I first come here in '62 I worked with *name withheld* and them on electrical work, too. He could tell you a lot of things you know. It's easy to understand you just and I even when I wasn't with the government I worked with two electricians wiring houses and stuff. On the side you know. [all laugh] But I had a lot of experience in stuff like that you know. The main thing is in a fire you don't want to run to a fire like that in the home with a water type extinguisher. Get yourself electrocuted or something. I mean what's what's the best source. Cut off the power. Then you're sure everything's off in the house. With the main power off nothing that you do downstairs in the basement where that panel box is gonna help. You flip that switch and power it off from the main. That's important. It's like in your own house. I

got a box outside. If something happens in the house I can unlock it outside with a personal lock outside with a key. Shut a breaker off out there and that's 100 amp service and that that stops it. No more power coming into the house. It's outside. I I like electricity. Not the two big 200 stuff or 300 but 100. That'll cook your goose quick [all laugh]. But I worked with guys who were professional. I worked on that three phase and all that. Wiring houses. *Name withheld*, rewired his house. Put service in for *name withheld*. *Name withheld* and I.

I: Did you have interest in other parts of the construction trades?

P: Well, not too much. I'm not too much a great one for building. I can't draw a straight line. I can probably saw close to it [all laugh]. My father helped me. The old timers, he could do plumbing, electrical work, building. All my cousins, my brother *name withheld's* the same way. Up there using bulldozers. He's a mechanic for the state for thirty some years. He he can do all this. My brother *name withheld's* is the same way. Do electrical work, carpentry. Handed down from my father who was an old timer. My grandfather was a village blacksmith in Ashley Falls. He was the village blacksmith. Grandfather *name withheld*. So maybe it comes from there.

I: Maybe? [laughs] So uh what I just wanted to recap. The night of the fire you were the person who took uh the alarm (P: right) or you heard the alarm (P: responded to the alarm is correct) but did you have the opportunity to tell anyone else who worked at park about what was going on before you went up into the Home?

P: No, no I didn't know what I was going to do until I got there and seen what it was. But I I could see it from over by the greenhouse the win the fire's comin' out the windows on the third floor. That's what I did was. And that water. That water was busted that water main there I mean that hydrant called uh *name withheld* told him what we had. I said uh fire hydrant by the ice house and uh greenhouse is busted. It's flying right up in the air comin' down on the road. And we have a fire at the Roosevelt Home on the third floor comin' out the window west windows. I sez notify everybody you can. So I guess he got everybody in the Coach House that was living in the same quarters up and I guess he must have notified other people. *Name withheld* came up and it was *name withheld* come in and him and I started taking stuff off the walls, putting it on the bed and covering it up with those canvases we had stored on the second floor. And we had some on the first floor, too. For fire purposes. (I: Oh you did) Yeah. On the first floor they had a trunk room. Where that locked room is now. They had canvases stacked up in case of a fire you could cover things. The same way on the second floor.

I: Oh, um, can you talk a little bit more about how you knew the canvases were there and

P: During the fire training. And they would tell you. They would tell you where all the fire extinguishers are so you know where they are in case you had to use 'em. That's why we used to have fire extinguisher training here. Uh none left. (I: I don't know). Even the wives took the fire extinguisher training.

I: The wives who lived um (P: worked, yeah worked) in park housing.

P: Park Service yeah. Yeah didn't have to work for the Park Service just had to be the wife of a Park Service. Worked in roads and grounds or something. So everybody was invited to attend the fire extinguisher classes. Chemical fires, wood, paper. Tell 'em an ABC you can use on anything. Don't use the C that's water that's no good. ABC, all purpose.

I: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?

P: [pause] Uh that pretty much covers it. I was like I said it was snowing like uh mad. Everybody was walking around like uh frozen feet and stuff.

I: What do you remember about that? Were you frozen, too?

P: Oh yeah I worked all night long from the time from the time I entered the place after the third alarm all night long.

I: So what time do you think you went home?

P: Oh I didn't go home til the next day. Probably let's see. Went to bed [pause] ten o'clock in the morning. Most everybody was uh there they stayed quite a bit of time.

I: Did you have the right equipment to do what you needed to do?

P: I had my flashlight, my radio and my hat on. That was it. [chuckles] You had to get over there you know. It didn't bother me going out after that. Only to go over to shut the main breaker off at the stable. Other than that I was in there the whole time. *Name withheld* and I and then other people started to come. Some of them the first floor. A lot more on the second floor. I think everyone did a good job of saving everything. Didn't there wasn't really that much smoke damage because the smoke was up higher than the water. It was coming down the walls and stuff and some people wanted to do the water dance on the first floor 'cuz that's where all the water ran to. Out the front door. No it didn't [laughing]. But it was a lot of water coming down those stairs from the third floor. Came down the third floor and the way the building had settled over the years. It came down and it shot over to this side, down the staircase out the front door. That's how much water they shot up in there. But they had those windows open on the east side. The honeymoon, the half moon windows. (I: Right). Because they fed the hoses up through there to get up in there. Other than that they had to drag it all through the house. And this way it was more or less just from the front. Right up. 'Cuz they had a fire hydrant that was out in the front that they could tap right into. One, two. There was one on the south end of the Home. One out by the weeping willow and there's one there by the spruce tree. So had three hydrants to work with. Hot, hot. They had about 13 fire companies I think. Wasn't it? Thirteen or something like that. (I: Yeah, ten to twelve). They was all over the place. And uh problem was they wanted to come in the Home okay. They did alright but they couldn't get all the way up to the Home because there was a big pile of snow. (I: Whew!) Yeah, you remember that? (A: I wasn't here, but I heard about that) Yeah, big pile of snow. They had to take the backhoe down from Vanderbilts or wherever it was clean it out of the way so the fire trucks could get up in front of the house close enough. And on the south side of the Home yeah

I: Why haven't I heard that story before. (I: They had big piles of snow). Can you tell me more?

P: Fire trucks weren't that stupid they got that far. Then they got they got open and they come in close to the Home. (inaudible) by the south of the mansion one hydrant. One by the [pause] just south southeast of the Home there's one. And one over by the spruce tree hydrants. They had access to. And there's another one right on the north end of the of the Home right there by the hedge. The corner of the hedge. (A: inaudible) Oh right, yeah. But the one by the greenhouse. There's two there. One by the shed the tool shed and one across the road next to the big ice house right there. But you could get water from that one, but it ain't gonna do you any good to do 'cuz that water's comin' out the one by the ice house. Comin' out of the ground it was! Had to walk through it so I

had to walk through with it. (A: what was that) Probably um close to the road it was frozen ground (A: and it just happened) Yeah, yeah. (I: wow) But that's all been rewired now. I don't know how many times the Roosevelt Home. The new power lines that feeds the Home that comes south of the service road now. The Home road there's a new line that comes over. Yeah that old fire in the garage, too. That was a hot one. (I: Oh really?) That was. That roof had all slate roof and that scorched the whole side of the carriage house. Remember? You remember that (A: yeah) Carriage house sets here. Here's the garage and stable. The whole side of this building was all peeled. Bubblin up from the paint off that. Hot fire, that. They rebuilt that. Put a shingle roof, wooden shingle roof on. They ain't go back to the original roof.

I: Oh how come?

P: Probably to save money. I forgot what it was. You wanna put it back to its original way it was. Called for a slate roof. That's what was on there.

I: So uh anything else do you wanna share with us?

P: Uh that's pretty much it. I couldn't tell you everything I did every day. But I do I am the man that dug Eleanor's grave and buried her in November 1962. That me and *name withheld*. I got a picture of the house at the time when I retired. I gave me a whole series of pictures. When I was in maintenance blowing snow. The snow was this deep. The snow blowin' up at the Mansion to the visitor's center.

I: Do you want to repeat the story about the uh who stepped in the mud?

P: Oooh. Yeah. Well it was raining that day so *name withheld* who was the chief of maintenance. *Name withheld* ain, great guy. He said well we're gonna have to put some plywood down in the garden so the dignitaries and them won't step in the Rose Garden and get all mud on their feet. So they had to go out and get all that three-quarter inch plywood and put it down. Level it out so nobody would have to walk into the Rose Garden. Sink down 'cuz it's wet. All that rain. So we did that and the day of the funeral. Everybody got in there. They had to get in there and get on the plywood so they wouldn't get anything wet or anything. But there was one spot. Was cut in a little bit of a gap and Jackie Kennedy she had to step off the side of that piece of plywood and went down about this far [gestures].

I: That's about four inches.

P: About four inches! That's our Rose Garden. [all laugh] That was it was nasty. It was foggy. It was raining for about two, three days. It was a mess (emphasis). That woulda been the day do all the robberies you wanted 'cuz all the state troopers and everything was here. Because all, Eisenhower and all of them here. JFK, you name it, they were here. Quite a day. But we had the job afterwards. We had to go out and work in all that mud. Put it back in the gravesite. What we did it though. When we dug the grave we took all the dirt we had back in there on planks and plywood. Shoveled all into the dump truck. That they done there so they didn't mar the grass or nothin'. They put canvas down. Everything. And when it's all done we go back in there the same way so we wouldn't mar it all up. And dress it all up for the next day and unload it into there.

I: Out of the dump truck?

P: Out of the dump truck.

I: Wow. That's a great story.

P: It was like it was like mud, but at the time, 'Cuz anything that's wet packs good. You know it dries up just like concrete. Nobody ain't gonna get outta there. That's for

sure. [all laugh] We used to do that when I was in roads and grounds. You wanna put a drain along the edge of the road or something to run a transect pipe you know. The road. Well we'd go out and dig the hole down deep and put one of those big drains and stuff about this high and that big around and had a grate on the top of it. We'd sink it down in there, level it right up. *name withheld'd* say okay the best way to pack that. You won't move any more. Put the dirt in, a little water, dirt, a little water. He said do that a few times and then come back tomorrow and do the same thing. When that was all finished. Was ground level you you ain't gonna you. If you put a backhoe into it you'd probably lift the backhoe off the ground because it was set in like concrete. Once that all settles and dries up. (I: Wow) We did the bridge over. The caps on the bridge. We did service of them. We did the tunnel going across Route 9 to Vanderbilts. *Name withheld* and I and *name withheld*. (A: *name withheld*) All by hand. Mixing it in a wheelbarrel in a mixing pan [all laugh]. Lot of things we used to do.

A: All by hand?

P: All by hand. And then the time when we couldn't work down in the fields, cuttin' down trees, clearin' the lot we'd be in the stantions stripping paint and paintin'.

A: You used to do a lot of these stantions as well.

P: Yeah I took care of all the mansions, too, yup. (A: inaudible). The ropes, on the stantions. Took care of all of them.

I: And uh sounds like

P: And I think it looks like spaghetti I think when you went over the [chuckles]

I: Sounds like we're gonna get off subject a little bit so I'm gonna thank you on the tape and then I'm gonna cut this off. (P: thank for invitin' me) So thank you very much for your participation today.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #8

JANUARY 25, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good morning. Today is January 25th, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. And in the room with me is Bill Urbin who also works for the Park Service. And on the telephone with me this morning we have. *Name withheld*, can you please introduce yourself?

P: Yeah, *name withheld* um my name is *name withheld* and I am a conservator and I was a conservator working for the North Atlantic Region several years ago especially during the time of the fire at Hyde Park. Do you want me to say any more, Wendy?

I: Uh, sure can you explain how the relationship of the North Atlantic Region and the park works?

P: Okay, uh essentially I came to the North Atlantic Region in 1989. I was transferred from a project at a wildlife refuge that was joint with the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service in Missouri Valley, Iowa. The Steamboat Bertrand. And when I arrived in Boston. I was assigned to the regional curator at that time who was *name withheld*. And so *name withheld* and I put our heads together and decided how I was. Essentially I think that was the first time that a conservator had been assigned to a regional office. And um we put our heads together to decide how we would go about doing, providing conservation services to the various parks in the North Atlantic Region. And we did a number of things. And essentially though my position was to conduct conservation surveys of collections, provide technical preservation assistance to all of the parks in the region. And advise on various treatment strategies and we also conducted a training program. A two week training program for museum technicians in the North Atlantic Region so that they could better take care of collections. And essentially that was my position and I was um. I had a laboratory and an office at the Charlestown Navy Yard. And actually I worked with the staff of the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center I had an office staff. And the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center was responsible for historic structures in the North Atlantic Region. And we collaborated very often on different projects because there was there's a close link between what is permissible in a historic house and what the needs of the collection are. And that collaboration was very successful. Usually we were pretty much in agreement most of the time. We didn't, for example we were not in favor of installing HVAC, heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems in historic houses because of the damage it could cause. So we thought about the passive strategies for collection care. That was essentially my function.

I: Was that a managerial position or a staff position?

P: It was, it was a staff position for I think because I had no other conservators working for me at that time.

I: And I just want to clarify the date because you said earlier it was 1989. Do you mean 1979?

P: Yes I do [all laughing]. I'm sorry. It was 1979. Boy that was a long time ago. It was 1979 and I was there I was there for approximately 10 years. Because I left in 1989 to join the National Ar, excuse me, the National Air and Space Museum where I have served as the Chief Conservator since that time.

I: Hmm, uh, how did your work with the National Park Service prepare you for your current position?

P: It's uh, it's a long story. I've always had a interest in airplanes. I was in the Air Force for 4 years prior to joining the Park Service. Actually, just to give you a little background. I uh after I uh completed my four year service in the Air Force I went to the College of William and Mary where I became interested in archeology. I also worked in uh at Colonial Williamsburg simultaneously in the Getty foundry. And I learned how to cast brass, bronze, silver and pewter. And eventually that, those experiences gave me the capability of cleaning archeological metals and having an understanding of 18th century metals. And uh so anyway from there I was asked to be the conservator for a group that was affiliated with William and Mary and I was a conservator there for two years. And then I joined the staff of what was then the Conservation Analytical Laboratory at the Smithsonian in 1976. And, excuse me, 196, yeah 1976. And I was there for about a year and a half when Vonda Thompson of the Park Service asked me if I'd be interested in working for the Park Service and going out and working up at Bertrand and working with a lot of heavy artifacts. So my background in metals, especially on archeological metals, you know, prepared me I think for eventually coming back to Air and Space. Because I have an interest in or I had an understanding of the artifacts and because I also understood metals. And so I had, my primary reason for coming here was the fact that I wanted to work with modern materials. So I had that opportunity.

I: So let's talk a little bit about the fire. Tell me how you heard about the fire.

P: Well, that was interesting because it was. I believe the fire happened on a Saturday, Saturday evening and uh. Actually it was it was a very snowy a big storm had just come through the northeast and I was with friends having brunch on Sunday morning when we, one of them was looking the New York Times. Well he said, well I guess you're going to be going to Hyde Park. And I said why. And he showed me the picture of the front page of the Times with the flames coming out of the roof.

I: Oh my!

P: So it was shortly thereafter that *name withheld* and I made a trip to survey the damage, the fire damage, and to look at the collections and to participate in developing the strategy for taking care of the artifacts that were damaged by the fire.

I: Can you talk a little bit more about the strategy?

P: Yes. I, there were a number of things that were water damaged. Particularly furniture and there was some paintings that had been, unfortunately a lot of the material had been carried out during the fire and um so what we, what we thought of in conjunction with I think with park officials at that time was that it would be better to have in-house capability in Hyde Park which would be cheaper in the long run than uh hiring contractor conservators to treat each and every piece. So we we eventually, we proposed

building a temporary conservation lab at the site and hiring a conservator who could treat the artifacts. And so the building that was envisioned was one that had had storage space for the damaged artifacts. It had a work area and a dark room area. And eventually the conservator was hired to staff that facility. That was that was a decision that was made by *name withheld*. I wasn't, I didn't participate directly in the hiring of the conservator that was finally selected. So, you know from then on artifacts were, you know, treated. And that's about that about. And of course we continued to provide you know. We'd been at the site periodically. We would look at the progress. We'd look at the artifacts that were being treated to make sure they were being treated properly. The other thing was that, I guess a little bit about the fire. What little I know about how the fire actually occurred. I do know at that particular time they blamed most of the. Most of the contracts were were for historic houses are often handled through *name withheld's* office. And so there was an electrical firm that was working in the attic at the time of the fire. And I believe unfortunately the fire detection system only be extended up to the ceiling of the third floor, not in, there were no fire detectors in the in the attic space. Um, so

I: So how did the fire impact your regular duties?

P: Well, um, we (emphasis) actually, we did as much as we possibly could to provide assistance to the park. Of course you have to remember that we were providing assistance to all other parks at the same time. We held a couple training classes there, too, two week training classes for staff at the Roosevelt Vanderbilt site and related parks in the vicinity of western New York. And then the other thing that happened was the Statue of Liberty. It was about that time, 1982 and 1983, that there was, that there was an incident at the Statue of Liberty that that caused all of our attentions to be focused on, more on the Statue of Liberty at that particular time.

I: Did you participate in any type of planning activities here for a structural fire?

P: Ummm, uh, no.

I: In your regular duties would you have worked with any park about issues related to structural fire?

P: Um, we would often advise. Yeah we would often advise parks of threats to the collection in our conservation assessment, but the actual planning for fires for example would be left pretty much to *name withheld's* office to work with the park. In the regional office as well.

I: Did you have any, keep any newspaper articles or artifacts relating to the fire?

P: No artifacts, but I did I did leave behind in the North Atlantic Region when I left. I had, I had files on all parks as well as photographs. And I had a number of, I believe I had a number of photographs. Of slides particularly of of the building being built. Of the conservation lab being built. Of damage to the building and anything that was related to the, any paperwork, any memos or whatever. I believe I had a ROVA file and that should be with the North Atlantic Region. Perhaps *name withheld* would know the location of those since she took she essentially the position I had after I left for the Smithsonian.

I: Thank you.

P: Uh huh.

I: Uh, is there anything else that you'd like to share with me about the fire or the recovery effort?

P: Let's see, no, I uh not really. I know that there was some, the park the park personnel especially the curatorial department did their best to rescue artifacts and I think

they did an excellent job ultimately in dealing with something that was so unexpected. So I thought that the outcome generally was. My feeling was that the outcome was generally pretty good. Eventually all of the artifacts were treated and the repairs were made to the house. And that's, I guess that's about it.

I: Thank you. Well, as we spoke before we went on the tape you have a copy of the consent form that you are going to fax to me. Hopefully our fax machine (P: Right) is working today. If not I'll just shoot you an email to tell you that it didn't come through (P: okay). And uhh I will be typing up the transcript and I can also email you a copy of the transcript for your review as well.

P: Okay, very good. I put this I'll fax this to you later this morning.

I: Okay, that sounds great. Well thank you so much for your time this morning and we'll be in touch.

P: Okay, thank you very much, Wendy.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #9

JANUARY 25, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Today is January 25, 2007. This is Wendy Schumacher and I am here at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York with Bill Urbin from the National Park Service and uh sir, please tell us your name.

P: My name is *name withheld*.

I: And, *name withheld*, what was your position at the National Park Service at the time of the fire.

P: I was the chief curator.

I: And how long had you been with the Park Service when uh when the fire took place?

P: Well I, I my entry to the job here was my entry into the National Park Service and that was in March, 1972. I came up from the DuPont Museum in Greenville, Delaware. The Hagley Museum where I worked in the exhibit lab there for five years and I became a curator. So I was there for seven years.

I: Did you have any other federal service?

P: Yes, US Army. I'm a Korean War veteran. Served between May 1953 to January 1955. I, I did a one year tour in Korea as a gunsmith and trained in that occupation at Aberdeen. Specialist training at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. And the reason I, I was discharged early was because my father passed away while I was overseas and I was the oldest of four children and my mother sort of had her friends and neighbors um uh discharged early. So.

I: What is your position with the National Park Service now?

P: Oh, I've retired. I've been retired since October 1995.

I: And you had been with the park about ten years, then, at the time of the fire in 1982?

P: Just shy of ten years, yes.

I: Were you always in the same position?

P: Yes.

I: Tell me how you heard about the fire.

P: At the time of the fire I was living in a upstairs flat at the Vanderbilt coach house. I had moved there from, from the uh quarters here at Home of FDR in 1974. And at the time I was married and we had infant twin daughters who had been born in early November in 1981. And so that's where I was at the time of the fire. That night. My, my wife was ill. We didn't know it at the time, but she had a really severe abscess. She had been to our local doctor's office, but she didn't see the doctor. She saw the receptionist there and the receptionist told her that it really wasn't anything serious. And

so when she developed this really nasty staph infection. And that's why she, she was suffering when we were awakened. We were awoken because of the fire. I don't mean to say it wasn't important. But we were awoken by *name withheld* who was one of the rangers at that time and uh. Of course, we uh we occupied one flat upstairs in the Vanderbilt coach house and the other flat, the larger flat was occupied by seasonal interpreters basically. And uh so they were aroused, too. We were all aroused. Threw on some clothes as fast as I could. Came down to the Home of FDR.

I: How long do you think it took you, between the phone call and getting over here?

P: Oh, golly, maybe twenty minutes. Something like that, 25 if that.

I: And then what happened?

P: Well I, I came on the scene and of course the fire apparatus was there. And uh more engines were rolling in at the time. It was very cold. It was close to zero, close to zero degrees and uh it was. When I arrived in front of the home. Course you could see the roof was on fire. It was windy. Fortunately the wind was blowing towards the river and they had. As far as I remember they had an aerial ladder up on the Home. The superintendent and the facilities manager were out front of the house along with the. It was the, along with the rangers, some of the rangers. *Name withheld* being one. And they were just there. Just standing there and the uh the fire, the chief or whoever was in charge of the fire wouldn't let anybody cross the, go into the Home. And so they were just, we didn't know what to do. So I said can't we do something? Can't we do something? And just then *name withheld* came out of the Home coughing. And I ran up to him, and I was banging him on the back. He was coughing pretty dramatically and he said. And he looked at us and he said what are you waiting for? Let's go! In other words he had been in the Home for a while because he had. He lived at that time in the apartments right over here, east of east of Route 9. And he had gotten over there very quickly. And so we followed him and went in. And he had already been upstairs as I recall. And done some things upstairs, brought some things down. It wasn't a lot he could do. And so we started to commence to carry things out in spite of the admonition of the person in charge of the fire, the firemen, not to go in. And I remember going into the Dresden Room and we. There were quite a few heavy things in there. We couldn't carry too many heavy things out, but I remember carrying the, taking the chandelier down and I could feel things cracking in my hands as I was carrying it even though I was trying to carry it pretty gingerly. Carry that out and I think what we were doing was we were carrying them down to the library/living room. I, I didn't think. And some things we just carried straight out the front door. And one of the things I helped carry out was the grandfather clock. And of course we tried to keep the weights from whacking back and forth inside the clock, we tried to, you know, do it gingerly. And um there, we were concerned about the ceilings mainly as far as the hazard went. Because there were just, just this terrific weight of water. The fire company was just pouring water into the upstairs. And I remember the fissures that sprang up in the ceiling in the Dresden Room. I mean water starting went down the walls and so we didn't have. We knew we didn't have much time. So I remember helping to fold the carpeting up around the pieces we couldn't get out. The heavy pieces. And, and just doing the best we could to cover things with the carpeting. And also we, I remember going over a little later to the Library and, and getting some tarps to help protect the furnishings and it took a little while to do that. The Library never wanted to give us tarps, but anyway they did. And I got help

with bringing those over. And then after the Dresden Room we, of course, the grandfather clock wasn't in the Dresden Room. That was in the hall. That's right. But we did carry that out.

I: How did you get the grandfather clock out? [pause] That's quite a large piece.

P: Yeah, I'm trying to remember if we took. I think we carried it out en masse. I don't think we tried to disassemble it. We carried it out en masse. And of course and there were two or three people I think we had gone to work. Yeah, after the Dresden Room and the hall we concentrated on the library/living room. And by that time we had some tarps and we covered as much of the furniture as we could. And that, that center part of the house was most in danger. And, of course, that was the oldest part of the house. It was really traumatic, but the adrenalin was really pumping with all of us. And we all sort of pitched in, you know, all us that were able bodies that could do it as best we could. And *name withheld* initially directed, you know, us, but we all just reflexively grabbed things and, and worked together. And got things out of there as best we could. Uh so then we concentrated on the library/living room. And um I think we also moved some things down in there. But we were concerned about that, too, because of what was going on up above. We didn't know how long the ceilings in there were last. We were concerned about that. Then we began carrying things outside. As cold as it was we began to put things out on the out on the south lawn and cover them with, with tarps. We got more tarps. And uh I think the weather prediction for that night was, is it zero degrees and it was and they predicted snow. So we were concerned about the things we had taken outside. Uh and uh I think we also put things in the old laundry house on the north side of the Home. Uh which is a fairly small building, but it was just to keep it out of harm's way. And we were concerned about people taking souvenirs at the time too. There were a lot of people there. And people came in off of the highway, too. People saw the uh people saw the flames and the smoke and people actually came in. Actually helped. I don't know who, who the people were, but there were people who. Strangers who did come and to uh offer assistance. [pause] Then they had predicted snow and it came right at the, right on time. I think it was like one in the morning. Then after we had done what we could we came over to uh defrost [sigh] here at Bellefield. Came in downstairs and tried to warm up a little bit. [pause] But it was, was quite a, a horrific night. Fire and ice [long pause] Uh as I recall *name withheld* wasn't there that night. Apparently she they heard about, they got word of the fire, someone called. They lived over near, she and her family lived over near New Paltz. And uh they started to drive over, but she was so distraught that. Her husband said no it's not worth it, it's not worth it if you're going to get this riled up over this. It's not worth it. So they turned right back and they didn't come over that night. She came early the next morning. And of course those of us who were there got back to our abodes in the early hours, the wee hours around three o'clock or something like that. We were pretty well wiped out, generally. So, but some people I, I guess stayed, stayed and uh didn't go back home and uh they were here until early morning. I came back fairly early in the morning again after I got a little rest. But it was a real nightmare. And I'm just really thankful for [long pause] the help we got from the fire departments. And it was a multi-alarmer, of course, and the staff and even strangers that helped out. Yeah this wasn't ironic, but Anderson School had a reputation of, of, of unhappy kids up there setting fires. And that very same night there was only one. Because of a fire at Anderson School there was only one engine available at, at the

Roosevelt Fire House. And they, they came post haste, but the other engines were up in Staatsburg at the Anderson School. So it took a while for other apparatus to get over here. And also the fire company was very good about having pre-drills. Fire drills and that. I think that helped and that saved a lot of, prevented a lot of the damage.

I: Can you talk a little bit more about that? The fire department doing the pre-drills.

P: Well, we had a couple of employees here who were volunteer firemen. I think *name withheld* was one, *name withheld*, and I don't know who else (I: okay)

I: Did you, when the fire department came over did you ever interact with them?

P: I didn't uh no. I just knew they were here. It was mostly just our section rangers that were involved in that. And our facilities manager, *name withheld*, who was the facilities manager at that time. Some other maintenance staff I think. But uh that was very helpful. And, and uh one ironic thing was that I think that *name withheld* had had the key or someone had the key to the kitchen hall door at the Home. But it wasn't available at the time the firemen arrived so they, they smashed, you know, they, they broke through the door, damaged that way 'cuz the key was available. I don't remember. But, but I remember out in front of the Home because of all the water it was a sheet of ice. Because it was zero degrees and it was really hazardous. You really had to be careful, you know, carrying things out and of course you have this, this stone patio in front of the Home and then the stone steps going down. It was really hairy. You know, maneuvering with that situation. And it was a lot easier to go down to the library/living room and bring things down there. But even then we were unsure what was happening there. We were really sweating that out. Who know when that ceiling, when those ceilings might come down. It's a miracle more ceiling pieces didn't come down that night. Also, I uh the uh the original part of the house, the early 19th century part had brick nogging in the walls.

I: What's that?

P: That's a brick infill. And it was done as a, as a fire block. Uh back then and also uh helped keep the insect infestation down, too. I believe it was mainly a fire and I think that saved us from a lot of damage. Because they were really seasoned timbers and uh and the posts and sills, the rest of the framework was really seasoned. Uh I think oak, uh I'm not sure what kind of wood it was, but I think it was hard wood. And then the brick infill, brick nogging helped, too. So the combination of the seasoned wood and the brick helped kept the fire from getting, going up. You know, a balloon frame building is really vulnerable because the flames can go right up inside the walls.

I: Let's talk a little bit about uh your duties. Sooo what were your duties like or did your duties change in the early days and weeks after the fire?

P: Oh yeah, substantially. It was, we, such a traumatic situation and we had determined we were. We had benefited from the frigid weather because uh especially with the more perishable materials, the paper, textile and that kind of thing. We, that's why we took things to out buildings to preserve them. Like, like the laundry house and the old garage stable which at that time wasn't an interpretative facility. Because it put, actually put them in cold storage and then we uh I think we moved some. We did move some of the larger pieces actually up to Vanderbilt coach house. To the first floor of the Vanderbilt coach house. And I think upstairs, too. And, and to trying to develop an inventory. We had to go eventually to go room by room to assess what damage had been

done and triage, you know, as far as the objects went. Which, which, which had to be treated immediately and which could wait for treatment.

I: Whooo, who participated in the triage?

P: Well, I think, I think beside myself, *name withheld* and *name withheld*. It was those three.

I: And how did you come to some of those determinations about which objects?

P: Well we, we were very fortunate in we got on the horn immediately and, and tried to find people who could help us who were experts. Say someone who specializes in paper, someone who specialized in textiles, furniture uh whatever. And uh we got quite a bit of help, volunteer help from the State parks and uh Peeble's Island, so. Some of those people. And then we contacted local conservators in the days and weeks that followed our to come and, and do surveys and. Of course the regional curator, the then regional curator was *name withheld*. He got over here very quickly with uh with uh I can't think of his, *name withheld* who was the regional conservator at that time.

I: And what types of services did they provide to you?

P: Well, they, the Park Service had people, too. So, you know, like and the uh conservation center was at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia at that time. They got um. It took a week or two before we, you know, got people to come up from, from there and survey the damage of. I know there's a chap down there. I don't remember his name, who uh was a ceramics specialist so he, he came up. But it took a while. It, it wasn't immediately. And at time as I said, the cold weather helped us. It was quite a cold season. Of course the most traumatic thing or, one of the most traumatic things was, the Centennial of FDR's birth was coming up very quickly. And they put a lot of emphasis on that. And one of the main reasons, the other thing, is that the um electrical wiring in the Home was atrocious. I mean it, it went way back and then it had been uh some work had been done by the Roosevelt family and then when the Park Service took over in 1946 the Park Service had done bits and pieces of, of rewiring, but it had never been carefully and, and safely assessed and, and worked on. So, at the time of the fire ironically the work was being done, professionally done, rewiring. But because of all the hoopla and, and the uh the emphasis put on the FDR's birth centennial we had a lot of media people here and. I know we had David Brinkley here and Robert Trout. PBS was here and uh videoing, video taping, among others. Other networks and the uh that superintendent decided not to de-energize the electrical system of the Home because of that. They and uh they that could have been done. These people, the media people could have been required to bring their own power supplies and generators, but that, it wasn't done. Sadly, I mean that's one of the reasons uh the main reason why this happened because the Home was still energized and mainly because all the media attention the park was getting at the time.

I: Did you have the opportunity to speak to the media or any dignitaries that might have come through?

P: Just, just to say hello, you know. Then I didn't chat with anybody really, but if they asked a few questions. But of course when PBS was here we still had to have control over the collections, while the collections were still in. Er, no, excuse me, that was before the fire. We still had to protect the collections. So we had to get have, have our, our people there. Both our protection people and our curatorial staff to keep an eye on things. And to try to head off any damage that might be done by the media. 'Cuz they

could be, they could be sort of run rough shod over things. I mean they're sort of hurray for Hollywood routine. [laughing]

I: Did you or your staff have any involvement in that protection?

P: Yes, yes. We made sure we were here, you know, when they were here. And there were, there were. Of course there were electrical cables running all over the place. And uh, you know, we had to take care, take care of the rugs and make sure the people weren't trotting on the rugs and move things so they weren't in harms. Especially goods, things being knocked over, broken. We even I think in some cases we even removed things from, from the room. To prevent damage.

I: What uh or how did the duties of your staff change in the period following the fire?

P: Uh, oh yeah, yes, sure. Yeah, we, yeah we really had to get on the ball and uh work quickly to preserve what we had that was damaged and figure out where to where to put things to get them out of harm's way. To get them out of uh uh fairly damaged environments. So we're, we're moving things. And we had to do it carefully, too, because of the potential for damage of objects that were moved to other locations. Uh and uh *name withheld* and *name withheld* were a great help to me at the time. They were really dedicated and uh and uh energetic and uh really competent in helping.

I: How in relationship to your position. How did things change from a priority or planning perspective after the fire took place?

P: Well one of the greatest needs was money to address the uh problems to, to the building and, and the collections. And we were blessed because ironically Hamilton Fish, the III, was the local congressman. And, of course, his, his father had been one of FDR's greatest, I don't want to say enemies, but I'm trying to think of the word. He and FDR were [long pause] were ad adversaries. I'll put it that way. And uh so Ham Fish really came through uh uh working with, with the Congress to get money for, for the rebuilding. I think close to a million and a half dollars. And even more after that to address the damage that was done by the fire. And of course it was, as far as the media went, it was a pretty unpopular thing. Because I mean it happened just before FDR's birth Centennial. And there was so much media attention given to that upcoming event and it was uh sort of a black eye on the Park Service. So I, I think the Park Service tried to play it down as much as it could because of that. That's just my theory and. Also, that same week I think, around the same time there was that horrible plane crash in Washington. The plane crashed into the Potomac River, loss of life and uh there were a couple of heroes at that. Some people did survive and so that [heh] in a way helped to off-set the uh for good or ill what happened here at the Home.

I: Did uh your staff have to make changes in the work that they had been doing, say the weeks prior to the fire and then switch gears?

P: [pause] Oh sure, yeah, big time.

I: What were some of the projects that they had been working on prior to the fire?

P: Well just the routine projects uh the emphasis was really on, on the Mansion because of the nature of the collections up there. Especially the costly fabrics and, and the deterioration to, sun damage in particular to textiles and, and other objects, you know, paintings uh some furniture and. We had a carpet beetle infestation up in uh the master bedroom suite which the Vanderbilts had experienced also so it was an ongoing thing for decades. Uh and that, I think most of our attention before the fire was on, on the

Mansion collections. And most of the money was going to the Mansion. Even though, of course, the, the collections in the Home were deteriorating, too. We that the, I think that at the time the Home we thought of as sort of the stepchild to the Mansion as far as collections attention went. So, that the fire drastically changed that. I mean we really had throw our, devote time and energy into that, the aftermath of the fire. Which took a lot of time and effort.

I: How long did this take to get back to normal? (P: years) Or to redirect your [laughing] Years.

P: Yup, it, it was the most traumatic thing that happened to me in my 24 years with the National Park Service. That is work wise. It was quite a, quite a sight. And um, but I mean it had it's positive side, too, because I mean the collections in the Home did need attention and they were deteriorating and uh it's a heck of a way to, you know, try to right the situation. But it, it helped us in that way and uh uh I'm thankful. Thank God that it wasn't, it could have been so much worse than it turned out to be. It was, it was bad enough, but it could have been horrible. We could have lost, lost most of the Home.

I: Did you or do you have at your home uh any artifacts or photographs or newspaper clippings that you've kept about that time?

P: I have a cousin who works for Long Island Newsday, Bill McTernan, who came up at that time and did an article for Newsday and uh there are pictures of me. I have it somewhere, don't ask me where. I didn't keep a scrapbook or anything like that. Um by the way, as far as keeping records go *name withheld, name withheld* was a tremendous help because she did keep a daily log of what was going on after the fire. And uh the, the core of that article that the two of us put together for the Dutchess County yearbook was based on her notes on her journal that she kept daily after the fire. So that was, that was really important that she did that. And uh we, the three of us got together the day after the fire and, and tried to spec out what we had to do. I mean it was really a rough time. Really uh something we had, had really never experienced before and thank God never experienced again while I was around and won't experience again fortunately for me. Of course I hope I won't experience again, but uh we had to figure out what to do. What avenues to take to preserve the collections.

I: Did any of your past experiences help you make those decisions?

P: [long pause] Not, not I, I think we had, you know, had some tentative plans. Where, what. You know, if something happened in the Home what would we save first. Blah, blah, blah you know. Yeah, I considered the ideal the ideal situation, but nothing really serious, nothing really serious. We talked about it from time to time which is, you know, normal. But uh we didn't really, as I recall didn't do anything serious about it.

I: After the fire did you do anything serious about it?

P: Yeah, uh, after the fire we did.

I: What did you do?

P: Well, we, we tried to uh share the information with, with other museums so in case they had a similar situation they would have more to go by. Uh [long pause] and, and that information. One of the reasons we did the article for the yearbook which was published, you know, several years after the fire. It was a long time coming was for that reason. But, but before that we shared, and of course the people that were from other parks that were involved here, Martin Van Buren staff up there in Kinderhook was uh I think was there at the time. They provided a lot of help to us, too, aside from Peeble's

Island, you know, the New York State parks people. They came down here and they were very helpful, kind, and, and uh offering help. And the superintendent up there, too, was. [pause] I don't really remember exactly what we did, but we did try to promote and share the information we had derived from the disaster here. [long pause]

I: What other stories or do you have any anecdotes that you'd like to share?

P: [long pause] Oh well personally it was. As I had mentioned earlier my wife was quite ill and the next day I, I took her to Northern Dutchess Hospital and she was examined and the doctor said [pause] told us that she had a serious abscess, staph infection, quite deep and that she would have to stay in the hospital. I had to go back to our apartment, our flat, and get clothing and things for her and it turned out that she was at Northern Dutchess Hospital for two and a half weeks. After the fire. And I was left with two infant daughters [laughing]. A little over two months old (I: oh my) Whom we had just, because of my wife's problem had just weaned them to formula, baby formula. And that was, that was to me that was just as traumatic as the fire. Uh I had never, these are our first children and so we got some angelic help from a couple of really, really wonderful people. Let's see, *name withheld* was one who helped us, helped babysit and Ann uh forgot her last name an older woman who had worked for the park. She, she was really great help. And it was quite a, quite a time for me. Quite a rough time. But very edifying [laughs]. And uh we're really thankful that my wife pulled through all right. We didn't know how dangerous it was for her health at the time. But it was quite, quite interesting. Oh *name withheld*, *name withheld*, that was the lady, the friend who helped us.

I: Bill had just given us the signal that he'd like to flip over the tape.

P: Okay.

I: So we were talking about in the days after the fire your wife was in the hospital and how you received support from people here at the park.

P: I, of course, I, I couldn't be at the birth centennial celebration because I was with, with our baby daughters. I listened to it on the radio, the local radio station which is really frustrating but, first things first. But later I did have some nice experiences when we finally opened the first floor. Course we hired new people. I think Bill being one of them. With some of the money that we got to help cope with the fire damage. And I, I when we opened the first floor that was a major milestone. We, of course the Library would have conferences from time to time and there would be family members coming and of course the gravesite commemorations people would be here. And early on family members didn't even want to come to the Home. They, they sort of because of what they might see. They, they wanted to remember how it was before this happened. But I did have the opportunity to take James Roosevelt through, Jimmy Roosevelt through one time. Just through the first floor and he was quite pleased with what was going on. He said I know you're gonna restore it back as it was before the fire. I said I have faith it was gonna be just fine when we're through with the work. And then I also had the pleasure and privilege of, of taking Dr. and Mrs. Armand Hammer through the first floor. And they were sort of comical.

I: Why is that?

P: Well she, she was he was very reticent and she was quite talkative. And she would sort of nudge him along, you know, and they, they went through very quickly, went through very quickly. And then we went out onto the south lawn. He wanted to sit

down. 'Cuz he was quite elderly and sat down and immediately dozed off [laughing] She, she says, smiled at me, and she says he does this often, he takes these little cat naps just she says just for a minute or two and he'll be up. And sure enough woke up and then we'll go on the way again. And she's telling me about their pilot, their private jet. The pilot's name was Bird and she said he looks like a bird, his profile looks like a bird. [laughing] There were other things like that, too. I remember John Roosevelt one of his drinking buddies, and, personal friends, yeah I guess he was his buddy uh having coffee at uh in the servant's room by the, across from the kitchen in the Home. Telling war stories. Apparently he had been, I know what it is. He, I forget the man's name, but he had been in, General McArthur's pilot in the Philippines, during World War II. And they had known each other since, since the War since John Roosevelt was in the Navy in the South Pacific. That was sort of interesting. Wish I had a tape recorder then. [laughing]

I: One of the things you mentioned before we started the recording is that you were on television. Could you talk a little bit about that experience?

P: Yeah, I uh hadn't been in uniform very long. When I first came into the Park Service we had what they called the optional uniform which was a. a green blazer, a green or camel blazer and with brown slacks and a yellow and green diagonally striped tie and yellow shirts. Which was very convenient, and oxfords. So I wore that for a while and then that went out of favor and someone at the top decided we should go back into the regulation uniform with the Stetson hat. I, I really wasn't keen on that. So here and then, we weren't required to wear the, the curatorial staff wasn't required to wear the traditional uniform. It was only later, that, that the year before the fire that the then superintendent asked us to get back into the regulation uniform which we did. And so I was in uniform at the time of the fire and when I was interviewed about the fire I was in regulation uniform. And the superintendent didn't want to speak to the press so he asked me if I'd be willing to speak to the press. I, I this was the superintendent's I it was going to be his last superintendency before he retired so I guess he didn't, you know, really want to have the adverse publicity at the time. So in my brief interview on t.v. It was interesting. I just general questions and general answers.

I: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell uh me?

P: [pause] I think most of the some pretty good pertinent information about the aftermath is in that article. And whatever, I'm not sure, but plenty of other documentation in the files about it. [pause] And it um within short, fairly short time as far as the park went, it was sort of business as usual. You know, after, after we've gotten Congressional appropriation and, and of course we used a chunk of that money to put up a temporary conservation facility behind Bellefield.

I: Who worked in there?

P: Uh, Bill Urbin for one. We hired several people. *Name withheld* was hired. They weren't conservators. (I: Were they on your staff?) These were museum techs and aides. Pardon?

I: Were they on your staff?

P: Yes, all of them.

I: Did you ever work in that building?

P: Uh, did some, did some work, not a whole lot. I have, I have a woodworking background, cabinet making, carpentry. So I did some work on, on some, some of the objects. I remember working on the tall case clock in the hallway. The interior of it. I

don't think, I feel bad now, because I, I don't think it got documented that. I should have. We got on the stick, you know, after the fire and did more of that [laughing] been scientific about. It wasn't anything, I didn't do anything major. Yeah so we had staff there. And of course we had our regional conservator come fairly regularly and other conservators come from the National Park Service come. Conservators, specialists. And we got pretty good advice. And we uh curatorial staff also did research and, and gave direction to our facilities staff the best we could. And, and we started keeping much better records of, of treatment the objects received. Which we really hadn't done that well before. [long pause] And of course the temporary in quotes conservation facility was here for quite a long time and we had originally thought that. I think the price on it was like \$500,000 in round numbers initially. And we had thought that when we were finished with the work on the Roosevelt collection, it would be dismantled and removed and taken to another site that might have use of it. And that never happened.

I: Little tremor in the room here [laughing]. Well we've been chatting for nearly an hour and uh I guess I'll ask you one more time if there's anything else that you'd like to share, but if not you will have the opportunity to review the transcript (I: Okay) and if there's any of the names or details that you want to fill in.

P: I didn't, I didn't in fact I have a copy, I have it in my car right now, I have a copy of the article that in the uh Dutchess County yearbook. But I didn't read it over before this sitting, you know, because I thought that just try to come up with it my own mind by the way I recall and uh I don't think I've been that specific, but it's been 25 plus years. So I'm sure there there's other things too. Maybe I'll think about them, maybe jot down.

I: That'd be wonderful. So thank you very much for your participation today.

P: Well you're quite welcome and it's been my pleasure.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH INTERVIEW #10

JANUARY 25, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good afternoon. Today is January 25th, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I am at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. Here in the room with me is Bill Urbin who works for the park and on the telephone uh this afternoon with have *name withheld*. Good afternoon Mr. *name withheld*.

P: Good afternoon.

I: Thank you for participating in this oral history today. Uhhh, let's see just for the record we have to discuss the consent form which I will send to you by email and you have agreed verbally that you give your consent to my taking this oral history.

P: That's true.

I: Great, thank you. What was your position with the National Park Service at the time of the fire in 1982?

P: I was the regional historical architect and also the chief, or head of the, North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center which was located in Boston.

I: So were you a park employee or did you work for the regional office?

P: I worked for the regional office.

I: And what were some of your responsibilities?

P: Well, specifically, with the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center. It's something I had started when I moved up to Boston and joined the Park Service at that time. I had worked for the Park Service while at other times I was in school. Primarily the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center did projects all over the region as well as some outside the region. Working in the parks restoring buildings, preserving buildings, doing repairs and generally working with the parks and the park the people in the parks. It was staffed with historians, architects and we had three crews in the field. Um basically three preservation specialists. One of whom was Gene Goldsmith who was at that time working, when the fire occurred, was working in Hyde Park.

I: And he was on your staff?

P: Yes.

I: And what is your position with the National Park Service now?

P: I'm retired.

I: How nice!

P: Living up in Vermont. (I: Mmm)

I: How long had you worked for the National Park Service at the time of the fire?

P: [pause] um [pause] let's see. Say when was the fire? What year?

I: It was actually twenty five years ago this week. January 23, uh 1982.

P: In '82, I'd been working then in Boston for ten years, no, eight years. I had worked for the Park Service, as I say, before that when I got out of graduate school. And then when I was in undergraduate school.

I: Thank you. Uh let's get to the heart of the matter. Please, tell me how did you hear about the fire?

P: Well, if you talked with *name withheld* he may have told you um I guess it was like four o'clock in the morning. I remember all this. *Name withheld* called me and asked [pause] he was in tears because Hyde Park was a place that he had worked for, a place he had worked for the Park Service for I don't know how many years, but for quite a few. And then and he had come to work for me and one of the projects he was doing was supervising contract work on the house [pause] and I don't remember the exact cause of the fire. I think electrical is what they assumed in the attic. Was definitely in the attic. Anyway, *name withheld* called. He was upset of course. The house that he cherished very much was on fire. And we talked for a few minutes and we had another crew down on Long Island and we decided to bring them up to Hyde Park to start closing in the roof as soon as we could. As soon as the fire was out. So I forget, I think *name withheld* called down to the person who was the head of that crew and they took. Made arrangements. Those guys got underway probably by six o'clock. Two hours after *name withheld* called me they were on the road. And the park made arrangements to house them and to feed them to get started that way because they didn't have time to get any cash to bring with them. And I suppose by four thirty, five I was on the road heading for Hyde Park. At that time I was living near Concord, Massachusetts, in a place called Carlisle.

I: That was five o'clock in the morning?

P: Yeah, um [long pause] once I was awake. I thought I might as well get going so drove to Hyde Park and stayed with *name withheld* in their house. He had was renting a house across the street. On the main road that goes through Hyde Park.

I: Uh, forgive me. I don't know how far away these places are. How long would it take you to drive here?

P: Oh, [pause] probably three, four hours. Something like that. Not too, too long. Probably more like three.

I: Sooo, what happened once you arrived?

P: Well, we started looking at organizing the work we were going to do. Breaking it down into pieces for small work. By the time I got there the fire was pretty well out as I remember. I think, if I can just make a comment on this, 'cuz you've probably heard this from the park staff. They had done an excellent job of working with the fire department, the local fire department. And so everybody knew what to do when a fire occurred so the park was able to get most of the contents out. And work with the firemen, as they were trying to put the fire out. So there was not as much damage to the contents as there could have been. And so what we were looking at was, you know, what was going to be the cost of repairing it and putting the roof back on, cleaning up the inside and doing all that. So we were working on, you know, breaking that into its component parts. Estimating the costs so we could put something together for getting the money to fix it.

I: Who is we?

P: Well basically it would have been the park, but on the other side of that. I was as regional historic architect I was involved with funding projects. The would have had to

approve it with me in the region and they came up with some money to put the roof back on at least. I think we got enough money to um, as I remember, to put the roof back on in a permanent fashion rather than trying to do a lot of temporary work. Except for closing it in with tarps and things like that which the crew was working on by that afternoon or evening. Which was good 'cuz as I remember there was snow occurred or rain the next day. [pause] I don't remember how much it costs or [pause] what happened with the funding but the park was able to get the funds necessary to uh deal with the problem. I think, as I remember, our crew did a lot of the work, especially closing it in. Um on the outside. And then we hired an architectural firm uh the Preservation Center. And eventually a contract was let to do the work. Most of the you know the major work of repairs and cleaning up the house.

I: Did you spend much time on the site here?

P: Oh probably a couple of days to start with. And then would come back periodically. Especially when the contract was up, but

I: And what types of things would you do on those visits?

P: Generally going over, we'd have a project probably I think *name withheld'd* stayed as the project supervisor for the contract. So sometimes you know questions would turn up as to whether we should do this or that and those are the kinds of things I'd discuss with *name withheld* when I came for a visit. Plus there were some other parks, of course, in that area generally I'd tie to this

I: Oh, like which parks?

P: Kinderhook, the Linden home up there. Martin Van Buren's house. That, we were beginning to get involved at times as I remember.

I: Did you find that you made a different number of trips to this area after the fire?

P: [long pause] No, usually. No it's kind of hard for me to say that. It was long enough ago that I don't remember specifically all the different trips. But I generally tried to get out to the various parks on a fairly regular basis.

I: Immediately after the fire did you find that you spent more time here?

P: Oh probably than I did before, yeah. 'Cuz as I'd said when we had the contract going um I would go there for meetings with the architect when they were involved.

I: So can you tell me a little bit more about what happened or what you did when you arrived here on the day after the fire?

P: As I say we um you know the first step was to look at what the damage was, what had occurred and what, you know, the repairs would be and estimate the costs to doing so. So we did inspections, building looked at that the extent of the damage. The extent of the damage caused by water. What's the plaster condition or is it still tight. We had to determine that. Um as I remember there wasn't a great deal of damage from the water. The fire department was very good about that. There were in a few spots, I forget which room. Generally on the first floor is where some of the heavier damage had occurred to some of the more important areas. Say, I think there was damage back in the kitchen area, too, from water coming down. But nothing, you know, tremendously extensive. So we would look at, you know, was the plaster loose and was it something that could have been readhered because we had techniques that we used for putting acrylic pumping fluid acrylic in behind the plaster and then holding it in place til it would set. And sort of readhering the plaster or in some areas you might have to cut it out and replace it. Now I don't remember how it, how much of that was done in this case. I think it was more a

replacement of plaster say back in the kitchen or service, servant's area. I know on the upper floors which was where more of the water damage and fire damage was. And the areas that where there was extensive fire damage up on the third floor. A lot of that, of course, was destroyed and had to be replaced. In most of the roof, all of the framing um and some of the third floor partitions and such had to be rebuilt.

I: Did you find anything noteworthy?

P: (Hi) Um, excuse me for just a minute. (I: sure) (No, my turn) My granddaughter's visiting us.

I: Oh, how nice! (No, my turn)

P: No, it's not your turn. [door closing] Sorry.

I: No problem.

P: Yeah, we found the remains of what was left of some of the old original electrical system in the house which had been um probably changed at least once if not twice. You know rewiring the house, but there were in the upper floors some of the old system was left. In fact this is what the contract that was underway when the fire occurred was uh was dealing with the rewiring of the house. And I. The contractor was supposedly cutting off all the circuits he was working on at night. And whether he left one of these old circuits on and wires had been moved or something in the process of replacing the other ones and that had caused the fire I don't think was ever determined. But it was an electrical fire. And it started up on that upper floor and they say the remains of some of the old knob and tube wiring and such was there. Which we knew was live and had been turned off for the contract, but it may have been turned back on for something. And even had the old type of receptacle which was more common say in the 1910s, maybe '20s. It wasn't the standard type of receptacle that we have today. There was several different types. And this was the type that had sort of a plug that you, by plug I mean something more solid. Hard to describe. Something like a cube that you put into an aperture to a brass plate that had two little doors that folded around. A porcelain tube that came through it and wires was inside of that. Actually it was a very good way to do it and probably more aesthetic than what we have today. But it was much more cumbersome to plug in and not safe in some ways. In terms of if the doors were open or something you could easily put your finger into it. Maybe an inch by half an inch. Something like that, three quarters of an inch.

I: Did you office have any involvement with this electric work?

P: Yes, I believe we had prepared the contract or had hired someone to prepare the contract. This was the kind of work that we did and then would supervise it. Then as I say that's why *name withheld* was working there.

I: Do you have any um artifacts or photographs or newspaper clippings that you may have kept over the years about the fire?

P: [pause] I don't think so. There wouldn't have been any newspaper clippings. I think any photographs. There may be some slides and such that were taken would have been archived with the Center. Now the Center moved up to Lowell. It's located in Lowell now. And it's name may have changed a little bit. Might be the Northeast Center or something like that.

I: I can look that up.

P: I left the region and moved to Washington in oh probably about eight years after the fire.

I: Did some housekeeping then I guess.

P: Well um as I say any photographs that I would have took. And I'm sure *name withheld* would have taken a lot more. As well as *name withheld* who was the preservation specialist with the crew down on Long Island that came up. They all had cameras and photographed things as they went along in projects that you know that they were working on. And most of their photographs and such went into the files for that project. So I assume that if they're still around, they're up in Lowell. (I: and your) Now I may have taken some photographs and I can look in my slides and such which I will do.

I: Oh, I was just really wondering if you looked at anything to refresh your memory before our conversation.

P: No, 'cuz I don't think I'll have any, but I'll look.

I: [laughs] Since you were at the regional level. Were there any inquiries from any oh important people or Washington Office people about this particular project?

P: Not that I recall. But um [pause] there were other people of course in the regional office that would have been involved with the fire. There was fire safety person and I forget who that was. But they may have looked into it. But there was probably an investigation done to try to determine the cause. It would have been done probably by the park and even some local fire departments and such.

I: Did you, or could you describe your role in the decision making process about the recovery after the fire?

P: Well, I dealt with, as the regional historical architect, with the, you know, the architectural questions. And as I say coming up with an estimate of work needs what work needs to be done and coming up with an estimate for it. But most of the decision making, I'm trying, yeah, as I remember put together a little committee that maybe three or four of us. The chief of maintenance for the park, *name withheld*, myself. I think the curator really looked at what needed to be done. And uh made a list. And then it was look at each look at each part of it and everybody would come up with a cost and I think that's, looking back on it now. Um we didn't have, we had to do something pretty quickly. And I think they took what may be four or five people would say for how much is it going to cost to do something like this. And somebody would say we did something like this two years ago it would cost so much, that's so much we had, you know an estimating guides [pause] and take that and massage it a bit. And taking it everybody's idea of how much it would cost. And then average it and do that for each item. And then you know added it up. And as I remember it came out pretty close. And we had adequate money and stuff to do it. To do the work on the house. Plus there was more to it then what I was involved with. They still had to get money for [pause] repairing damage to the contents. 'Cuz there were items that needed to be cleaned. Probably a lot of cleaning needed to be done on objects. [pause] Plus probably many other things I wasn't even aware of that the park would have to deal with.

I: Well my list of questions is pretty short, but my last question is is there anything else you would like to tell me?

P: Probably not much more I can remember [chuckles]. Um [pause] no it was too bad I mean it was a sad thing that happened, but um I think it maybe showed the Park Service in a in a very good light 'cuz everybody worked together very well. I think on that that incident that happened. Um course the park was taking the lead in the overall picture there and pulled a lot together and and worked well with everybody that was there

to help. And uh [pause] no, I thought it uh was a very good response to a problem. And the damage was less than what what could have happened considering the extent of the fire and the time of year and all of that. I could say a lot of that I thought was because the park staff had been working with the fire department for a number of years. How to deal with situations like this.

I: How did you know that?

P: Excuse me.

I: How did you know that the park and the fire department had been working together?

P: I think one time when I was there within a year of when it happened uh they were talking about it um the rangers and the curator. The curator was heavily involved with this so. You know everybody who had um any kind of responsibility for objects say in the house for the curator. And just for the overall fire protection for the rangers and things like that. They all worked together and with the fire department. So everybody knew, knew what to do to take care of their end of things. And um they were the ones that were there. The first on the scene so to speak. And um I mean there was damage obviously. And objects that needed to be cleaned and things like that, but it could have been far more extensive if the fire department had just said to the park well you people clear out while we go in and put out the fire. Instead of that the fire department knew how to work with the park and so they didn't exclude them and the park staff was able to get in and take things out while the fire department was going in also. And that made a big difference.

I: So I'll repeat my last question. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

P: No, I don't think so [chuckles].

I: Okay [laughs]. Well that's fine. As I mentioned I will send you a copy to review the transcript and if I've gotten anything wrong in the transcript that will give you an opportunity to make that correction. And I'm going to thank you and stop the tape.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS #11

JANUARY 25, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *name withheld*
name withheld

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: This is Wendy Schumacher. Today is January 25th, 2007. I'm here in Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. And also in the room with me are Bill Urbin from uh National Park Service. And this afternoon we are interviewing *name withheld* and *name withheld*. And uh welcome.

P1: Thank you.

I: *Name withheld*, we'll get your voice on the tape.

P2: Okay. Uh trying to figure out where to start off at. My only concern was and the only part that I took to it was when I first walked in the water was startin' to come down from upstairs and they those huge portraits. What they measured I don't know. Probably almost four feet across. They were trying to get them down off the wall and I could see there was struggling and I was the only one strong enough and tall enough to go and lift them off the cables that they were suspended from the ceiling on. And uh I did. And uh my only concern was like I said walking out the front steps. The firemen had already ice going out there. And I was concerned about slipping and falling with those and I didn't want to. And if I went down I was trying to figure out how to hold that picture up without wrecking in [laughing]. And I don't even remember that night how many of them. I took quite a few out. How many were on the wall I don't remember. But I was the one who took them all off the wall. And then from there *name withheld* and I went into the library. And then it was a concern the fire was starting to spread and those books in the library were going to start to be ruined. And *name withheld* was coming up with a plan as to what we were going to do to try to save those books. And it was a split minute decision then we started taking them off the shelves because the fire was coming over there. And at that point we were in the library after taking care of putting all those portraits in the back. That was really the only, you know, that was the part that I took.

I: So how did you hear about the fire?

P2: Through *name withheld*. She got a phone call. She was pregnant at the time. I said I'm driving down there, I'm going with you. And uh I was, I was going to stand around and watch. I wasn't going to, until *name withheld* said, you know, they couldn't get those pictures off the wall. I said here let me give it a try. So I was able to, I had enough upper body strength. I was able to lift them off by myself to take them out, you know. I'd like to have had some help going down those front steps it was, it was getting very treacherous. There was literally a stream of ice going out the front of the, down the grand staircase and out the front steps. You know and I did not want to slip, you know, with a piece of history in my hands. It doesn't even belong to me I know [laughing].

I: So, *name withheld*, how did you (emphasis) hear about the fire?

P1: Actually, *name withheld* had called me. Uh I was just getting into bed because *name withheld* worked the second shift at IBM. So I had started to when he came in. You gotta take me down. We gotta pick up *name withheld*, we had to pick up uh somebody else. I don't know, I think it was *name withheld*. And we all went down. She said, you know, get as many people. So that's what we did. So he came in and I was like and I had to work the next day. [laughing] But anyway um uh he drove us all down and then we got out. And of course we had to wait around because I remember, I remember. We all came around that hedge, I mean I'm getting goose bumps, flames just were shooting up, I mean just, I mean like you know your heart. I, I got goose bumps over it. It's just that night I'll just never, ever forget that night at all. I don't think anybody who was there would ever forget it, but [sigh]. So we waited until the firemen said okay it's all right to go in. I remember we went in the door 'cuz everyone had certain places. It was kinda like you're going to go here kinda and and it worked. So what we did was we came in the door and I remember we looked, we looked over at the stairs where the water was running down and there was a teddy bear from the third floor had come down. And there was stuff that was floating down, down the stairs that was landing (inaudible). And they had in any place. So then we had the, got the go-ahead to go. Okay, in groups they went. So *name withheld* and I actually he and I had gone in to this Dresden Room and took down the uh the valances and the curtains and we tried to move some things over to the side (inaudible) and (inaudible) we could move them on the floor and. I mean everyone was been in and things were being. And people who came that weren't allowed to go into the house. They were being, we were going and getting things and passing 'em out and they were taking them over to the um it's the TIC now, that's where the bathrooms are now. That's where they were loading everything. Everybody was passing things on so people didn't have to keep running back and forth to to do that. And we kept doing all that on, and like we were running into different rooms. Like *name withheld*, I know *name withheld* and I were there. The dining rooms we did some things and uh [pause] then we were in the nursery trying to take some of the little, I'll always remember. I remember now there's a little doggie basket that was in the corner. And I just went in and I was all psst, psst, psst putting them all in there. And believe it or not nothing got broke. I mean it was almost but I think that in general the (unclear) line was going. That was one of the other things I remember very well, I mean it'll be a night that I'll never forget forever (emphasis), you know (inaudible). And, you know, the next day we really, hadda. That morning and of course we ran into the morning and uh then so. *name withheld* had come and uh I said to her do I have to work today? [laughing]

I: What was your job at the time?

P1: I was in, well, at that time they called us housekeepers then. But we really did museum maintenance, technicians and stuff like that. And so taking care of everything in the house, making sure everything was alright and helping out with the interpreters whenever needed. As we all helped each other as much as we could. So, and that was it.

P2: And that was our biggest concern that stuff goes out and like I said nothing gets broken. But as the night went on, you know, things, you know, by the time they were in the library. Things were actually to that point, you know, the house. The firemen at that point thought that they were going to actually lose at that point and it was going to go over into the library. But then they discovered that they had a firewall and I guess that

slowed it down and it wasn't too long after that they started getting a handle on it 'cuz we stopped taking stuff out of the library at that point. But our biggest concern was and everybody's concern was piece of history that we don't, you know, damage it or lose it, just, due to the fire. 'Cuz I didn't even want to lift those portraits up off, that uh, I didn't want to take them down because God forbid they'd fall apart and it's, you know, you don't know, but. And I said to *name withheld*, you know, we don't want to damage these things because it goes, you're going to lose it anyway because the water is coming down now on that. So I said well I'll take a chance, you know, to go with it. Luckily nothing got damaged. We got it all out with no problems.

P1: I mean there was of course a lot of water damage and we all know that that could not be helped, but, I mean of course there was the after recovery (unclear)

P2: I said thank God I didn't slip after I got all them out. I said thank God I didn't slip on that ice. [laughing] I don't know what I would have done. Try to save me before the portrait.

I: Huh. How long had you been at the park at that point, 1982?

P1: Uh well I started in '72. I started working for the Park Service. So. And I was up until uh a year ago. Retired from Park Service with thirty, almost thirty two years.

I: Were you a museum tech the whole time?

P1: Uh huh.

I: Did you have any type of training er prior knowledge (P: no, no, no, no) of what to do?

P1: When I first came here it was just a seasonal job, I started out as a seasonal then on uh, uh a spot came open for a full time person so I of course accepted it and went from there. So

I: How, uh you spoke about the night of the fire, how you went and picked up some other people. How did they know to jump in your car?

P1: Because *name withheld*, the head s' ranger. She called me and I, she asked me to contact these other people because she had to be contacting other people, too. So, and they were on our way from where we lived. They lived just around the corner from us. So I mean it was sort of like everybody was kinda like in that area. So *name withheld* and I or *name withheld*, 'cuz I didn't drive, so *name withheld* picked them up, we picked them up along the way to, to go down with us.

I: So you made those calls to the others?

P1: Yes. Yup, yup. I did that.

I: Do you remember anything about breaking the news to them?

P1: I just said *name withheld* called me. There's a fire at the Roosevelt Home and, you know, wear boots wear some warm clothing and, you know, whatever and and that's what I told them. And gave them ample time to get their stuff together. And I mean, but it was fast. Really like everybody was, you know, like ready to go and stuff. So.

P2: Weren't you overcome by smoke, by smoke that night, too?

P1: No that was much later. That was just because I was tired and stuff, and you know.

P2: I know I went looking for you and couldn't find you so she's overcome by smoke. (P1: No.)

I: Same night?

P2: Same night (P1: same night). Yes, she was pregnant, too. How many months, three? (P1: two) Two.

P1: Two. We just, uh the uh *name withheld* who lived over in the Gingerbread house. We just helped them move to Florida and were on our way back from there. And that was that, that that next week. It was that next week (P2: was it?). Yeah

I: Wow. So when you got here how, how did you not, well *name withheld* obviously you knew what to do first. (P1: yup)

P1: Well he had just got home. He just (emphasis) drove up the driveway. I just got off the phone from *name withheld* and I ran out the doors and said, *name withheld* we gotta get to the Roosevelt Home. It's on fire. We gotta pick up few people along the way and *name withheld* said make it as quick as possible. And that night there were three fires in um uh going on. Anderson School and I forgot the other two. And this one. And I forgot the other one. There were three fires that night. None related of course, but you know. Sorta kinda thought maybe it was. You know, but the

P2: That was a cold one [laughing]. The water was freezing the minute it hit that sidewalk out there.

P1: Well, the water main froze up over by the Gingerbread house. I don't think they could pump any water out. I think they were having a rough time with that.

I: So let's talk a little bit about how your day, well did your job change, your responsibilities change after the fire?

P1: No, because we then (emphasis) we started working out of the lab. Once we got established we worked out of the lab in recovery. Well actually we started at Vanderbilts. We started taking all of the um. *Name withheld* had built a what do you call it, a wet table (I: wet table). A wet table in in down at Vanderbilts over at Vanderbilts basement. And we would hose this stuff down with something that was on a slant like that. And then we'd take 'em out and lay 'em on the big screen that *name withheld* had built. The screening thing out there to let 'em dry and stuff like that. So that was afterwards.

P2: Don't you remember finishing work in the house before you guys started all that stuff. That was much later. 'Member we were doing something in the house. We were all scrapping wallpaper off. And what they were going to save and couldn't save. The wood work and all that?

P1: No. No, we didn't do any of that.

P2: You don't remember doing that.

P1: I don't remember. After we, it was all said and done and they did their inspection. Then (emphasis) we were able to go in and start, you know, doing some stuff. But not wallpaper. I don't remember taking any wallpaper. There was wallpaper damaged.

P2: Yeah, well I remember (P1: well I know)

P1: I know in the Pink Room, pink rooms upstairs were were really nasty. Because they had to chop holes through the walls and stuff. But we didn't go on the second floor. That was the day after.

P2: Oh this was many days after (P1: yeah). We were taking the wood work and stuff off.

P1: I don't remember taking any wood work off.

P2: Yeah, for I don't remember (P1: No, I don't think). So when we were doing it (P1: So, no).

I: Did you have to come in the next day? You mentioned talking to *name withheld*.

P1: Well yeah because I was due to be on (emphasis) duty at work. You know, of course, we were still there actually.

P2: We were there most of the night.

P1: We were there all night and into the next day and that's Su

P2: As a matter of fact the sun was coming up when we were leavin'.

P1: Well *name withheld* had come by then so we were still there. I mean so she I was gonna tell you what happened

P2: An hour or something you had to be at work. Back at work [laughing].

P1: But that's when we went over to Bellefield and they had, you know, doughnuts and, you know, stuff, coffee and stuff for everybody to kinda warm up a little bit. Because there was no (unclear) or (unclear) really. So

I: So did you just stay that day?

P1: No I actually did end up going home, but a little bit later. I think I went home around ten or something 'cuz, you know, people were coming and, you know, they were kinda wanting to ask me a few things and so, but we were all kinda tired. [P1: laughs].

I: So, can you talk a little bit more about what your job entailed. What were some of the things that would be part of your normal duties as a museum tech?

P1: Well I was cleaning the art, cleaning and taking care of the artifacts and making sure the house was open for the day and your normal vacuuming. That's what we would have done had I come in, you know, that day. Then that would have been the sort of things I would have been doing. Getting thing ready for visitors to come through for the day from and for vacuuming and that kind of thing. You know your normal everyday, just so when visitors come in and so.

I: Did your supervisors ask you to focus on different things after the fire?

P1: Well that was a whole plan, game plan after that. They had to figure out who was going to be doing what and you know they had to figure that all out. I mean, you know, you just couldn't hang things up to dry and that kind of stuff so, you know.

I: Do you remember what your duties were?

P1: My duties? Well, we worked like I said with *name withheld*. That's when we started working down at Vanderbilts getting things together, packing things that need to be packed, that didn't get damaged and stuff so [pause] yup. Everybody worked together. I mean no one, we all, you know, pitched in with one another to do things. I mean and, and we had that and so that was definitely nice.

I: So earlier I asked you um if you had come to home with a a game plan as you said and, and you said now you weren't really sure of what you were supposed to do.

P1: No, earlier because we had to wait until, you know, until we said somebody said whoever was in charge and I don't remember who exactly was in charge (P2: the firemen). There were so many people going around. I mean

P2: The fire department wouldn't let anybody in until they decided that where the fire was going to go. (P1: I know because) If we could run in and get some of the artifacts out of the house because they weren't going to put anybody's life in a, and I think they had to wait for somebody to make the decision. I don't know at the fire department who that would be.

P1: I know we were outside for, oh I don't know, for I want to say 20 minutes or maybe because we were all (P2: it didn't even seem that long) It didn't seem that long,

but it probably was. (P2: It was cold). It was cold. But I remember we're all standing there and everybody who was called to come in stayed where, you know, we were right there. Some of the fire trucks and we could see what was going on, but until they could let us go in the doors we didn't. Of course, we're not going to go knock down the doors you know.

P2: And the firemen at that point didn't even know if they were going to lose the house or what was going to happen and it was basically when they were standing and talking to Henry. It was uh if you can get the stuff out of the house before we lose it, you know. 'Cuz it was like a real fast decision (P1: uh huh). Get in, get the stuff and get out (P1: uh huh), you know.

I: So when you went back to your regular job after fire and the days after you rested and stuff did you receive different types of instructions from your supervisors about what to do in case of

P1: Yeah, well they had, they had set that all up. What, what we were gonna do, you know, and so until we had some of the house up. Some things, some things. When we opened up the books a lot of things had to dried out. I mean different things like that had to be, but of course had we had to find places to do all this because you couldn't do it in the Home.

I: So where did you do it?

P1: Uh, well a lot of stuff, some stuff went to Vanderbilts. And stuff, I think stuff went to Bellefield. Now I'm not quite sure, I don't remember all that because I wasn't in on all that. We were just given the duties to do and where we were supposed to be doing stuff so.

I: So were those places you'd normally worked?

P1: Well I worked at Vanderbilts was were I was working. But I also worked at, we did switch back and forth over time. It was, you know, we would go if somebody was not coming in or if somebody needed, they needed you there that day. Or we switched off and on working at all the houses. So, that's how.

I: I know you brought a plastic bag with some artifacts with you.

P1: I brought, actually

I: Is this a good time to go through this?

P1: Well this is just a letter which probably you already have this probably. This

I: So why don't you read it into the tape.

P2: I'll let *name withheld* read it because I don't (P2: No you can read it). You want to read it, Bill?

I: Well then I'll read it then.

P1: Okay, you do it because I would prefer that.

I: This is a letter from the superintendent to you, *name withheld*. A special achievement award and it's to express our appreciation for your work at the Roosevelt Home fire as well as the clean-up, salvage, security operations during the days after the fire and it's dated June 25th, 1982 and it's sent by *name withheld* who was the superintendent at the time and you received a uh cash award in the amount of \$300 less taxes. [laughing]

P1: And this was sort of maybe the same thing. But I just thought I'd bring 'em up if you just wanted to look and, and stuff. Not that it's necessarily

I: Ah! This is a commendation from the Regional Director of the North Atlantic Region dated June 18, 1982. That was Herbert S. Cables, Junior. And uh let's see. Memorandum of commendation and uh it has a copy of um another memo from June 6, 1982 from the Associate Director of Cultural Resources Management in Washington to the Regional Director who, as I mentioned is Herbert S. Cables.

P1: This is something that I was just going to show Bill. These were like from when my grandfather worked here. I thought, they're old, just old. I just thought I'd. This is like old. My dad worked for the Park Service. My grandfather went to work for the Park Service I forget what the year was.

I: These are 1960. These are time and attendance reports.

P1: And then the year that was, that he started with the Park Service was somewhere on that

I: Service comp date is 8/19/47 (P1: yeah) It's scary to think that we still use all of these same designations. Service comp date, time and attendance

P1: I thought, I just happened to come across these and I thought that's an old list.

I: Well, I'm interested.

A: Can I make a copy?

P1: Sure you can. And I think that's got some of the people that might be. But that's about it. That's (I: great). You know, but I just thought I'd bring that in just as a side.

P2: You know what. You know the more I think about what it was to. They didn't give me any of that, did they?

P1: [pause] No.

P2: Remember they, they had. She got like \$300 or whatever it was on there. And a lot of people were rewarded patched and belt buckles, all that kind of stuff. But here I was a volunteer. Now I don't know, I didn't really pay no, I didn't really care one way or the other, but they were handing out different awards for the people that did different things, you know. Similar to 9/11 and what the people are going through now. You know I was thinking. Here I volunteered for the critical parts of that house. (A: inaudible) You know people personally that I. Uh *name withheld* and those guys said thank you, we really appreciated that and stuff like that. But as far as the government goes it was never no recognition. You know they never sent me a letter. A letter would have been nice saying, you know, thank you. You know, we appreciate what your part for the, you know.

I: Did you come back to the park after the fire except to

P2: Oh yeah, I came back and volunteered to help some of the clean-up up on the on the upper floor, yeah.

I: What types of people were you working with on that clean-up?

P2: You know I can't. I, I remember *name withheld* was stepped out of it at that point. I can't remember the other guy's name that I was working with. Do you remember? It'll come to me in a little while (P1: No). No, right now I can't place his name.

P1: There were so many people.

P2: And uh basically I went back to see what the damage and what and what was involved. And at that point their investigations were all over. And at that point it was clean-up time and the park had stepped in and done some of the pre-clean-up or whatever to see what could be save and couldn't save and that's what I was talking about. They decided to take off some of the wood work and save that. Uh, there were seeing what

wallpaper they could get (P1: now that did come in later on) replacements. That was later on.

I: So was that a park person you were working with or a

P2: Yeah, park, they were park (I: uh huh) I remember I can't remember (P1: I remember) his name though.

P1: In the Dresden Room the, the, the water was sagging underneath the, the (P2: oh yeah) on the ceiling. It was sagging. And *name withheld* and I were right there and we just, and we yanked that, that valance down that had that gold (P2: that's what we were doing 'cuz I went in and (inaudible) library) oh yeah. [laughing] We just, he got one side 'cuz he was a little bit, (unclear) there was like a ladder. There was two ladders or something. And I was there to balance the thing when it was coming down and now and he says (unclear) and *name withheld* and I when and we just got it down and there was a big sag of water. I'll call it a belly of water. That's, that's better. It was a belly of water. It was, you know, like that. I'll always remember that, seeing that, you know. And he and I just stepped back and got it down and out the door and onto the lawn. And like I said, you know, things were chaos, things happened so fast and you're trying to be careful and trying, you know. And of course the firemen are, you know, thinking something's gonna fall so you hear people saying things so you wanna keep, you know, safety is, you know, the main thing so that was, that was pretty interesting. It's like, you know, you don't think about it because you're adrenalin is going so fast.

P2: Well that's the only reason I was able to lift those pictures. Because I went back were we put 'em and I asks them was everything all right, nothing was damaged. They so no, everything was fine. They're getting ready to package. And I said would you really mind if I went in there? I'll tell you the next day, and I could even feel it that next morning. I was sore, but it was the adrenalin that gave me the strength to lift those things off 'cuz I went back there I sez you know I don't know how I did it, to walk down those with that many times going back. Because I'd take 'em out and hand them off to somebody back there. They'd put 'em back there in the building and everything and it was just as fast as I could get back in there and get another one and get it out. But the next day I felt it all, you know. (I: uh huh) Because you know. But the next day I actually had trouble lifting 'em. I said I don't know how I ever got those things over my head. [laughs]

P1: You know it's just one of those things you just don't

P2: 'Cuz I was actually on my tip toes, spread out across that frame on my tip toes trying to get that cable off. I'll never forget that. You know and then going out to that grand staircase and seeing that big block of ice coming down those stairs. And I says oh my God if you ever see any pictures of that (P1: you know if you think about it) that was impressive

P1: that were left in glass cabinets that that didn't, it didn't like in the Dresden Room. A lot of that stuff was still all there. I mean it did get covered up with plastic. I think they tried to do as much as possible for that stuff.

P2: And the fact that nothing really got broken, you know. That night

P1: I think the only thing that was (P2: with all those people) I think there was a stool stolen, wasn't it? I remember it was over over in the corner. Yup, that was the only piece that was stolen. They didn't really have to take the books, but nobody didn't really

know that. That was the thing. They didn't have (emphasis) to take the books. Some of the books (P2: Yeah, but we didn't know) out.

I: What do you mean they didn't have to take the books?

P1: Because it was

P2: They found the firewall afterwards. (P1: That was in the living room/library) Water was starting to come over and then the fire spread over to that side of the building and then they discovered later. I guess that there was a fire wall there, but it, at the time Henry had to make a decision and the fire department told him we don't know if we can contain the fire right here and at that point he made the decision. Take the books rather than lose them. You know, but find out later that we didn't have to. There was a fire wall.

P1: But then it all happened. I don't think I don't think they took all the books out of there. Just the ones (P2: No, we didn't, just the ones closest to the fire) Yeah.

P2: And as the fire progressed over they kept going over further um books. It was either that or lose them. Same thing with the portraits. Either lose them to the water damage or you take 'em down.

I: Did you go upstairs at all?

P1: No.

P2: During the fire? Uh, I don't think we did.

P1: No, nobody was allowed on the second floor. (P2: No it was just the portraits in the library) It was just the first floor only that I remember. Yeah, so

I: So you've given us some vivid descriptions of what you remember. Are there any other um anecdotes you want to share about the (P2: Hard night to forget [chuckles]) night of the fire.

P1: It's just the whole, the whole thing of seeing it was. It's just. You were shocked I mean you believe it, you, you were. I mean you believe it, but you don't want to believe it. I mean the thing that I, I was just standing there and watching those flames it was just like, it was like, oh my God. I mean I always remember all of us. It was like oh my God. I mean there was just a whole bunch of us just standing there. And just, you know, no we can't go in. Because I know *name withheld* was there. And there was a lot of people from, you know, old timers. And uh and we just we're just standing there going oh my God and I mean. I do remember one thing, *name withheld* put the ax to the front door. [laughing] But they couldn't find the key. I don't know. There was something up like that. But I mean I don't know.

P2: So there again it got you in the building. See you didn't lose it. Well

P1: Well he had his keys on him, but [laughing] something like that

P2: They couldn't find the keys. They were looking for them.

P1: That's about if for as far as I can remember. That's about it, you know.

I: Did you uh remember anything about your interaction with your colleagues who were in the curatorial division at the time? (P1: Uh huh) about working with the other people in the few days after the fire? (P1: oh yeah) What stories do you have?

P1: Oh yeah, well that's why I said we uh we gathered up the things and looked. Started looking over things that needed, could (emphasis) be rebuilt from the rooms and stuff. And then there was a station for everybody to take and put things. And things that were really wet, things that needed to be, that same, found something that broke. There

were certain areas that we had to just go off and all that. 'Cuz you know stripping all the beds and stuff like that. Getting things off of that, off of that, too. So

I: How did you know how to properly treat the materials after the fire?

P1: Well, by then *name withheld* had done the wet table in order to be able to do things like that. So his big basically was orff. (A: orifice) Yeah, that was our big first you know no soap or anything like that. But it had to rinsed and then dried on, like I said they were spreading out in the hallway. Things had to dry just like that. Nothing in the washing machine at all. Some, I think. Now let's see. Sarah's room had damage. I can't remember if they set that out or not. The bedspread in there. That (emphasis) I don't remember. That's all after that I uh you know

I: Sure, this is your oral history so we're interested in what you worked on.

P1: Yeah, we worked, well, we worked on a lot of things. But mainly we did a lot of the, you know. The cloth stuff that, you know, uh doilies and things like that. And things, of course had to be. The mattresses stood up to be dried and things like that. And move them out of where they were, but (I: how long had) I package up a lot of things had to be packaged up, boxed in. You know, but things had to dry out so

I: How long would you say you worked on uh fire related artifacts.

P1: A long time. I think we worked on it for a long time over (emphasis) a period of time and stuff, you know. Things had to be dried out. I don't remember all of the details, but when the lab went up that's that's really where a lot of things got cleaned and taken care of. So

I: Did you work in the lab?

P1: Uh huh. Bill and a lot of other people, too. So

I: So, did, what kind of changes in your work environment was, were there after the lab was established?

P1: Well, I was still at Vanderbilts and I did come down to the Home. But we were also at certain times that were that I would come to. Like Bill had things to be done, they wanted us to do things. They said well come down today, we're going to work on this (emphasis). We're going to work on cloth or work on books or artifacts that needed to be washed and stuff like that.

I: How many people were you working with at the time?

P1: Oh, oh. 'Cuz we had different conservators come down. 'Cuz, of course we had to assess some things 'cuz all, you know, that you know knowledge and things like that. (inaudible) (A: about ten people). Yeah that's about right. And sometimes we'd do our duty with whoever would be at work and. Say that day we were assigned to go to the lab or whatever. They when we'd come down to do that. As I said before I was at Vanderbilts or at Roosevelts

I: So of these ten people, were most of them park people you would work with over the

P1: Yeah, (I: years?) and then a lot of conservators who would come to assess things.

I: So where would the conservators come from?

P1: Harpers Ferry. I think we had a lot of people from Harpers Ferry. We had a lot and Morrystown and where else was it, Bill? (A: Boston) Boston, (A: People's Island) People's Island, yup. I mean we did have a lot of help from the beginning. I mean, you know, I mean for the major stuff. You know, good for getting things into line and that stuff, so. And then things really got renumbered [laughing]

I: Were you involved in the renumbering process?

P1: Yeah. So were a lot of us doing the numbers and sewing them on the uh different cloths.

I: What was the purpose of the numbers?

P1: Well we didn't have numbers [chuckles].

I: Were those um

P1: There were old numbers. They used to, well I don't know if you're familiar, but they used to use these black letters. I didn't have anything, but that's how they were originally. When I first came to the park that's, that's the numbers on them. And then some things didn't have numbers on them. It was because, I don't know why.

I: So, did you ever refer to the numbers? Or why, why would the park want to have numbers on pieces of

P1: For tracking if if things got stolen. (I: Thank you) Had all the numbers and then going along through the sheet. Then they had the old blue books. I'm sure you've seen those, so. And so a lot of that.

I: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

P1: Well I hope it helps a little bit. I mean, you know. I don't know if I gave you enough information and stuff so that's about all I know. [laughs]

I: And the point to this project is to capture your stories and uh so I will give you the opportunity to review the transcript and uh (P1: Okay). I guess one more time I'll ask you while we're still on the tape if there's any other stories or anecdotes. Anything you'd like to share?

P1: I really can't think of anything else really. I mean just the experience of, of, of that was enough within itself. You know, I mean, like everybody was just devastated by it, was just in disbelief that something like this could happen at, you know. But it did. So, of course they had done a lot of filming of that. They were doing a lot of filming so I don't want to say, but maybe suspected that we had overloaded the house for wiring, you know. 'Cuz David, David (A: Brinkley) Brinkley was there and stuff so there. They were doing all this stuff 'cuz the Roosevelt Home was going to be on the you know. Well

I: Well, thank you so much for driving over this afternoon.

P1: Oh, my pleasure. Well, we're not that far [laughing].

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #12

JANUARY 26, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

Attending: *Name withheld*

I: Good morning, today is January 26, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm here in Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. With me in the room are Bill Urbin from the National Park Service and today our oral history interview is with *name withheld*. Please introduce yourself.

P: Well, Let's see. Actually I just retired. I worked for the Park Service for 25 and a half years. And I actually worked in Administration and Visitor Services and Museum Services.

I: All here at

P: All here. I didn't move around. I came from here and we lived here in the county so we decided to stay here.

I: And what was your position, at the Park Service in 1982 at the time of the fire?

P: I was, was a clerk in the Administrative Division at the time of the fire. And then a year, a little more than a year after the fire I was hired to be their um temporary registrar on the fire account to recatalog the objects in the Roosevelt Home. (I: can you explain) Part of the team that put the Home back together.

I: Hmm. Can you explain a little bit more about what a registrar does?

P: Basically I was responsible for the contents of the house. *Name withheld*, Northeast Region, who I think you interviewed, said when he came to look at the floor plans and start the prep for the, how we're going to put the house back together. Was if you could turn the house upside down, everything that fell out would belong to the curators [laughing] and everything else stayed inside and belonged to the architects or whoever. And that's basically what it was. About 8000 objects in the Home. Some things in storage, some things on exhibit and we went through room by room and reviewed everything and went through objects and put it all back together. In one way it was a blessing in disguise because things that hadn't been touched since the Roosevelt family turned it over to the Park Service in 1945 hadn't even been looked at. A lot of photographs had been in frames so we got to find out who people were in the photographs, more about the oil paintings when things were taken apart so it was an interesting time.

I: How long were you the registrar?

P: From April of '83 until May of '87. It was a term appointment. In fact, everybody who worked on the fire account. Bill Urbin, Museum Technician at the time worked on the account and some other people. Those were all temporary positions. Terms.

I: What did you do next?

P: What did I do next? Well, actually what I did next was throw a fit and leave the Park Service for three months. [laughing] Went to “summer camp” at Montgomery Place which is the Livingston Home just north of here and cataloged about a 1000 objects in three months for them. And then there was an opening back here. A temporary opening in Interp so I came back. I came back to Administration. And did that from ’88 to ’92 and then went to Visitor Services from ’92 to my retirement in 2006.

I: Thank you. So let’s talk about the fire. Please, tell me, how did you hear about the fire?

P: *Name withheld* was “Val-Kill or Eleanor Roosevelt NHS Historian” at that time called me up at about [slight pause] 5 o’clock in the morning. We heard sirens. We lived in the Village. We only lived about a mile away. We heard sirens during the night. There was also a large fire at a private school north of here the same night. So there were a lot of sirens all night long. And about 5 o’clock in the morning *name withheld* called to say we need you to get in here, answer the phones, handle the press, and the joke afterwards was is the I was the only person who had the National Park Service, David Brinkley and somebody else, I forget who it is at the moment, on hold at the same time. [laughing] Roosevelt family members it was. Trying to filter through everything. So what we actually did was get up, get dressed, flew down here and went into the um Home first. By then most of the firemen had left and um a lot of the Park Service folks were over here in Bellefield. But um the weirdest thing about the house was on the woodwork, like all the gunked up material from the fire, so it was on like somebody had thrown it on the wood. It was like somebody had thrown snowballs on the wood. It was really weird looking. And the whole thing creaked. Remember? It creaked just like boat in the water. From all the water that had been put into it. And it was surreal almost. They pushed some of the larger pieces of furniture to the center of a couple of the rooms and had big, huge tarps over them. They moved a lot of things out. Um, they had taken most of the books, about 3000 of them in the library/living room off the shelves in the library because they were afraid that the water, the fire water was going to come down and destroy the books or ruin them. And I came over here and everybody was here, frozen cold, since they’d been at it since midnight and um answered the phone all day long and talked to members of the Roosevelt family had called. And [pause] it was surreal. It really was, uh, and nobody had been through a fire like that in a historic house so it was it was it was interesting. All the offers of help that came.

I: Do you remember who some of those offers came from?

P: Yeah, um, the Pinchot House in a in uh Milford, Pennsylvania. The uh only house, historic house in the Forest Service that’s open to the public. Called Grey Towers. They came. A crew from Kinderhook came which now includes our Deputy Superintendent, *name withheld*. (I: oh) For the first week. Um, my former boss from New York State, Mickey Forscht, who was the Taconic Region supervisor at the time. She called up and brought a team from New York State. *Name withheld* now “Facilities Manager” was a “Museum Technician” in 1982 who I think you already talked to. *Name withheld* had worked for New York State so he knew a lot of those folks, too. And, just about everybody, was at one time maybe the whole park pulled together. [laughing]

I: Did you have opportunity to, you mentioned earlier about David Brinkley. Did you have the opportunity to talk to any other uh people in the public?

P: Yeah, but you know, that's that's a blur in my head. I can't remember who all might have called. That might be in *name withheld*, "Museum Curator's" journals who all called that day. But I mean ev-everybody called because it was a unusual, an unusual happening. And our public affairs person, *name withheld* who's now, she's now superintendent at Hopewell Furnace. She got involved because it was only, there was all these preparations going on for the anniversary. The centennial I should say the FDR centennial. Which was going to be the following week and major people had been invited to that. The governor at the time was Hugh Carey. So they moved everything outside in front of the Home. Of course it was freezing cold and tons of snow.

I: Did you attend the ceremony?

P: I actually, I worked dispatch in the little ticket booth which is now gone over where the lawn is, where the parking lot is. I worked over there. The post office had a temporary trailer. They had commemorative stamps which people could come get their cancellations.

I: Sooo

P: And then we settled in to put it back together.

I: Uh-huh. Do you want to talk a little bit about that now?

P: Putting it back together? Well, it just. At the time of the fire there was a curator, there was a museum. Let's see there was a museum curator which was *name withheld*. The chief curator, *name withheld*, and then there. Well they're museum techs today, but in those days they were housekeepers. And that was about it and *name withheld* and that was it. There was only about six or seven people. So they made a decision to hire a temporary registrar just (emphasis) for the fire account. And a hands on person to help *name withheld*. And the decision to build the lab which, was where the Wallace Center is there. So that took almost a year by the time they got the funding from Congress and they put out the announcements and [pause]. *Name withheld* who was *name withheld's* assistant had gone to New York State (emphasis) museum school which *name withheld* had gone to so he know all of her instructors by reputation and I had been taught be all of them so. I hadn't gone to the museum school, but I had been taught by them. So I was hired for that. She was hired for that. Then the, we started out in here actually. Downstairs was all storage. The front room, the room where *name withheld* and *name withheld* are, those two rooms and the Morgan Room. And then up at Vanderbilts on the third floor and the servant's quarters they stored everything. And some things were shipped out. I think they shipped out a few pieces too for storage, a baby grand piano and a couple of big hutches because there was no. There just (emphasis) was no room for them. [pause] And um that's where we worked until the fall of '84 before the lab was finished and then they hired *name withheld* and *name withheld*, Museum Technicians, to do actually hands on conservation. Plus we contracted out. Paintings, photographs, some furniture, fabrics. Things that they, there was no capacity here although they did do some fabrics, but there was no capacity here to do major things like the velvet drapes in the dining room.

I: How did you catalog those pieces that were contracted out?

P: When they came back is when we did them. Brought them back here and did them downstairs, but I did a lot of them first thing. Then what happened was, in the summer of '83, they hired a new superintendent. That's *name withheld*. And we were also putting together Val-Kill for the opening for the fall of '84. And we were all over

there in *name withheld's* office. They brought *name withheld* in and introduced him. I'll never forget it because he looked at me, he looked at *name withheld*, he looked at *name withheld* and *name withheld* and he goes and you will open the first floor rooms at the Roosevelt Home at the same time. (I: Oh) And we all looked at each other and went oh my God how are we going to open a new site, how are we going to open the. So *name withheld* threw all the um everything to do with the Home at me and she went on with the research and things she was doing for Val-Kill. She was also (emphasis) doing the research to have all of the stone walls and all of the garden work redone at the Vanderbilt Mansion. So she had major, major projects on her table. And *name withheld* turned most of the work for conservation work and supervision of it over to *name withheld*. So that they could go on with everything for opening up a new historic site for Val-Kill. And we just, we decided to do. The living room was actually left in tact. That was the one room that everything wasn't taken out of. So we decided to do the front hall, the Dresden room, and the dining room. And the living room was in tact so that way we could open the first floor. And that's what we did from the summer of '83 til October of '84. [pause] And then after that it was a room, a room a month pretty much. Then the one fellow left. *Name withheld* left. Bill got hired in his place in early, middle '85. Middle of '85. And we just kept going and going and going in the lab. And then we had to move out of here [emphasis]. So then *name withheld* and I did that. Just before you started maybe. Um we did all of that. We moved everything single handedly practically, the two of us into the lab. And then we had a huge storage area. So we had to redo all of our shelves and bakery carts and everything else so we could find anything we needed to find. And the whole time that's going on we're, I unframed everything and doing all the photos and the oil paintings and the works of art on paper. And tracked conservators, tracked the, the everybody, everything.

I: Did you make the deadline?

P: Yeah, we made the deadline. We made the first deadline. The second deadline was um in the summer. The following summer and that was the Boyhood Room and the Birth Room um Franklin's bedroom and um I'm not sure whether it was the Chintz Room or the Pink Room now. We'd have, we kept all the records so I'm not sure. But that was the second. And that time we did a ribbon cutting on the front porch and Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. came and cut the ribbon and we made a little flap over that.

I: Do you remember when that was?

P: It was in the summertime of of, I thought it was '84. No, must have been the summer of '85 or maybe even '86. Where you here when that happened?

A: I came right after that.

P: Okay, then it's '85. It was the summer of '85. (A: inaudible) Yeah. We did make that (emphasis). And there was an incredible amount. Each room was missing objects. Even making the deadlines these rooms were missing things because they were at the conservators here. Fabric was being made or things were being done. Wall paper had to be completely done over, researched, and done over.

I: Um, well, I know the answer to my question of how did your duties change after the fire because you became the registrar. But for the few days after the fire, just in those couple days after the fire, how did you respond, oh well how did (P: oh yeah) your responsibilities change?

P: Oh well, we didn't work on Sunday. We didn't. The curatorial folks did. And then on Monday, is when they made the decision, because they couldn't uh move those rooms around downstairs. At that point almost everybody working here in Administration was working up here on the second floor. So um for the first few days it was everybody moving everything into the rooms for storage. Uh and the first, well of course there was the Centennial was the following week so that kept that week busy. *Name withheld* now site supervisor was a clerk for Val-Kill at the time, Urbin and I and the superintendent *name withheld's* wife put the living room back together basically because they wanted to use it as a, a talking point for the Centennial. And um after a lot of you know high level people coming in and out. A lot of talking going on. It was really a pretty busy time that week. And then it did slow down a little bit as far as um [pause] you know um day to day kind of things. But then *name withheld* and his Northeast Region crew came right away and so they were here. And a lot of changes in the park. A lot of a lot of coming and going.

I: Could you describe how you put the living room back together. With some of the details of how

P: Well, what the firemen had done was taken the books just out of the shelves and stacked them in piles all over. We had to find the photographs, the historic photographs from 1940 and 1945. And then there was a Youth Conservation Corps that worked summers for several years previously to that and a group of them had actually sat down and written out shelves. What books were on what shelves. Plus there were, there was a whole card catalog so we used all of that. But on Thursday afternoon before the Saturday celebration they told us we had to finish so we took one bookcase in one corner. Opened up the bookcase and then literally threw (emphasis) the books into the bookcase behind the door where you wouldn't really see it, but they were off the floor because the curatorial division needed to open up the rug, put the furnishings, the furniture back and things like that. But they made arrangement to um show the that room. And then in the spring and the summer they came around through the side porch facing the River.

I: Who was they?

P: The interpretative division and visitor services division. The visitor services and museum services so that when John Q. Public came to visit they could at least see something of the house. 'Cuz they could look, they could peak in that room. And then um there was another person that worked for us, *name withheld*. But he, at the time he came before he came to work for museum services he had worked for law enforcement. And he made this huge cut-away map and you could just drop each page and it shows the progression of the house. And so, and they cleaned up the front hall so you could do sort of an intro talk in the front hall to the visitors. They dropped these pages down on the easel and you got a really good view of the house. It became lost to eternity, though, because we were hoping to find it, and we never found it. I don't know what happened to it. Which is too bad because it was really nice.

I: Do any stories or anecdotes stick out in your mind about that time period?

P: The fire and the week after? The aftermath?

I: The fire and the aftermath?

P: Well, let's see. I, I think the way everyone pulled together. There was no more complaining about anything or anybody or work or anything. Everybody every division

worked really hard to help put it back together. I think the shock. I think the people were really shocked. At the um what can happen when you have a story in a historic house.

I: Why do you think they made the decision to have a registrar on the fire account?

P: They needed somebody to keep track of everything because everything was, as I as I mentioned, everything was here, things were at Vanderbilts, everything was being dispersed. You know, decisions were being made very quickly. There was no disaster plan. There was no thought that anything like this could ever happen. Although, I mean it did and the Park Service had other fires before. Plus nobody ever really learned any lessons from it. [all laughing] But they ever put 'em to work.

I: Um did you have any role in lessons learned after this particular fire? [pause] Did you participate in any disaster plans or planning activity after the fire took place?

P: No! As a matter of fact, nobody ever asked me. I did have a very interesting discussion with someone um in 1997. Uh Prince Andrew came to visit of England and was saying that, was telling a story of, of finding, I think it was some kind of chamber pots, some sort, in the attic at Windsor Castle. And he said something along the lines of you know the attic at Windsor Castle and my brain was going [laughing] the attic at Windsor Castle. I thought my grandparent's attic was fun. [all laughing] Anyway, he said that he picked up this pot that he wanted and he put it in his car and he went back. And while he was still looking around somebody came to him and said that the Castle was on fire. And um about a week later he was having dinner with, he said, with the Prince of Wales. He never called him my brother or Charles or anything like that he said the Prince of Wales. And I told him that I had this pottery in the car and the, the Prince of Wales collects this pottery and he really wanted it. And I said so what did you do? I didn't give it to him [all laughing]. But we talked about the implications of fire in a historic house, because Windsor Castle is considerably, probably bigger and more important, than the Franklin D. Roosevelt Home in Hyde Park, New York is my guess. Certainly to history. But it was it was kinda, it was sort of fun to be talking about historic fire. You sort of go through the same thing wherever it is. But, no, we didn't do any talking about planning or anything for years. I think *name withheld's* (Curator – Division Chief) done some (emphasis) since, but I don't think. I think everybody was too, just in shock too much.

A: Put the fire cache together.

P: Yeah, you made those big um wooden boxes with fire materials. And had them in a couple of strategic places in the house. One in the truck room on the second floor. Another one downstairs in the alarm room.

I: So um did you participate in putting the caches together?

P: No, but Bill and *name withheld* and *name withheld*. The other fellows who worked in the lab did, yeah.

I: I noticed that when you came in this morning that you had something in a box. One of the questions is uh uh to describe any artifacts or photographs that you have dating back to this time.

P: Oh that's, that's a retirement pin *name withheld* just gave me [laughing].

I: Oh! [laughing] Well that's nice. [all laughing] That's quite an award.

P: We don't have any. I mean the park has photographs (I: sure), here at uh.

I: Did you keep anything personal?

P: No, I didn't. You know I knew *name withheld* was keeping a log which was just basically the fire. I mean she didn't continue it. Um I kept what we called scope of work which was every object in every room. Was by rooms. Everything. And I think *name withheld* who's the registrar has it on file up at um archives at the Vanderbilt Mansion. But, I didn't no I didn't actually keep a. I kept a calendar so I kept track of whatever was out, whoever whatever contractor or conservator might have had it. But that all went into the files. Each object has its own file. And I don't know how familiar you are with Park Service cataloging. And every, all those kinds of notes and things went into all those files. [pause] I learned a lot. I learned a lot about what FDR and his mother and father had in the house.

I: Can you talk a little bit more about your background and training to be selected for this position?

P: Well, I, I have an undergraduate, junior college degree in history and political science. And then I worked for New York State at the Ogden Mills Mansion for four seasons which turns out to be, which works out to be about two and a half years. And I worked for people who were trained with New York State. Fred Rath was the first historian here. Are you familiar with Fred?

I: I know his name.

P: Uh well Fred, Fred was responsible for every museum person. And in the '60s, '70s and '80s, everybody, *name withheld*, and and all, *name withheld*, all those folks. And *name withheld* graduated from the school at Cooperstown and occupied every historic mansion on both sides of the Hudson from New York to Albany and trained by Fred. So I got trained by those folks who were trained by trained by Fred. So I didn't meet him for a long, long time, but I felt like I knew him for years 'cuz everybody, everybody knew him and everybody worked with him. And um I did my first cataloging work at Mills and that (emphasis) had. That had become a state historic site in the '60s, but it had no cataloging done. So by the time I got there in the '70s they were just getting a real professional staff, museum staff, really going to work on it. They taught me how to catalog.

I: Do you, I have to confess I'm a librarian (P: ah hah). My Master's degree. So if you want to wax nostalgic about cataloging here in the Park Service this would be a great opportunity (P: laughs) for me to hear about (I: Ralph Lewis) some real experiences.

P: Ralph Lewis, in the middle of it when we were discussing should it be A and B with a cup and a saucer. I, and one day we had sort of a, to be quite honest sort of a go round about it. I said that's it! I went back to the lab and I called Ralph and I said help. [laughing] And he said this is what you do. Now it's gone completely around the other way. Now it's one entity together. It's a matching cup and saucer, but in those days one was A and one was B and if you had another set it was a higher number. Um I added a considerable amount of numbers to the Roosevelt collection. I don't know what, I think they're going to leave it. Um, we actually in the middle of that got new accession book for the whole thing and rewrote the whole. All of them. Vanderbilts and the and the Home. Val-Kill was new so that was already being done up to snuff.

I: Did you ever move to a computerized system?

P: Yeah, just as about as I ended they were starting to teach the. It's called ANCS. The new the new system that they have. And they've made several changes to that.

I: The ANCS?

P: Yeah.

I: As I mentioned, I might ask you to clarify some terminology. Uh, let's see, so that's ANCS.

P: Yup.

I: Do you? So your cataloging, your original cataloging was all done by hand?

P: Yes, yeah, yup. And then typed. It was um it was a triplicate form. One went to the files, one went to Harpers Ferry and one went to these we called them the blue books. The housekeepers kept in the, in the on on site so that they could. If they did anything they could make little handwritten notes on it or if somebody asked. If a visitor asked and interp wanted to go look it up to see what the object was or provenance and things like that. But we added we added a lot to what they had. 'Cuz they had originally been done in the 1950s. Oh, there had been an original done when the house was given. Then there had been another project in the 1950s. And then *name withheld* and *name withheld* when they got here in the '70s had sent that out and had cards made for each object. And had a file. Well, when I started there was one file cabinet of four drawers with maybe a quarter of one drawer filled for the Home. Maybe not much more than that for the Mansion. Val-Kill was just starting so those didn't even count. And then there were several drawers of these cards that *name withheld* and *name withheld* had done and that was it.

I: Did you do cataloging after the fire account was finished?

P: I had done some. I did do some after over at the Home for some things. In the cabinets in the living room, you being a librarian, on either side of the fireplace all the way up and down the shelves FDR had collected everything Theodore Roosevelt had ever written. And he wrote tons of material for a magazine called the Auk which is like National Geographic. None of those had been cataloged. And there were some other things like that. I did do some of those while I was in interp, too.

I: [long pause] What else? Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?

P: Well actually I think we had fun. I think it was it was it was very interesting and very different. And I think all those years in the lab and all those things that you have your hands on um actually objects. Because now when you look at a historic site my palms itch because [all laugh] you wanna turn the silver over and see who the silver maker was or who the china belongs to or *name withheld* will tell you sometimes in a restaurant will go don't don't! I wonder what this is? This looks like Buffalo china. *Name withheld* who did the frame conservation, the gilded frame conservation. I never looked at a framed object the same way ever again. I always look at the frame first. And I said to her one time, wouldn't it be nice if they had a nineteenth century frame exhibit. Which they've had several all over the place since I said that. Not 'cuz I said it, but I just thought though it was interesting. And I learned a lot about um art and contracting and it was a very multi-faceted. You know one day it was porcelain, the next day it was the linen, the next day it was something else. But one of the most. Where you there when we put the cannons back on the front porch? One of the funniest things that happened was putting the cannons back on the front porch. FDR had a barrel and then he had two small miniature cannons. Which, I mean they were heavy, but they didn't look like that heavy. And we started to move 'em and wondered how Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen and everybody else moved all those cannons over the. They weren't Revolutionary War cannons. They actually came from Santa Domingo, but we wondered how they moved

any of these cannons any place because we had these little carts with carpeting on them and little wheels and we broke all of them. They just sort of sort of went crunch and it was it was quite quite a scene with it, putting it back together. But I think we did, I mean, it was really work but we had fun, we really had fun. And it was. We met a lot of famous people, did a lot of things and uh.

I: Do you recall any of the famous people you've met?

P: That I've met?

I: That you met in particular.

P: Well, maybe famous, maybe famous isn't quite the right word. Actually there was a lot of writing going on in the '80s about FDR because of the anniversary. So Geoffrey Ward who's a primary writer spent a lot of time here. Who else spent a lot of time here. I spent a lot of time with him. Doris Kearns Goodwin. It's just, for the centennial it was. It was David Brinkley and it was Charles Osgood. It was some of the others like. And over the years Jonathon Alter and um Jon Meacham. If you look at any of the Roosevelt books from the middle '80s until now. Eventually we all. You know, eventually they all came through the house 'cuz they had to come look at the house too besides all the material in the Library.

I: Well thank you so much.

P: Does that help you out a little bit?

I: It does, it does. Thank you. And also it helps out the park because the tapes will become part of part of the archives. So I'll just ask you one more time. Is there anything else you'd like to share.

P: I still can't think of anything else. As I said the thing, you know the day to day of it was, it was really uh interesting and fun. And as I said you had to keep switching because you never knew each day, the porcelain today. Tomorrow could be the painting that hung in the library living room. I found it interesting that when the movers took the piano apart and put it back together. I never saw a baby grand piano be taken apart in about five pieces. I never saw anything like that. I got my hand smashed; every time I look at the cupboard in the dining room with a the long handle inside it comes apart in about a zillion pieces, too. We were putting the crown top on it and somehow my hand slid down there and became, the whole thing came crashing down on my hand. Flattened my hand out like a pancake. I though for sure I had done my hand in, but it came back to [laughing]. Things like that you think about. And working with people. It's just everybody's cooperation was just so good. It was um so nice and actually Bill and I have commented over the years that it was a simpler time then it became in the later years.

I: Well great. Thank you.

P: I'm curious to see how. But your bend is on structural fire itself. Right?

I: Yes, but also planning and how your activities or your role as a Park Service employee may have changed. Some people's roles changed dramatically. Some people's role's didn't change at all. So I'm interested in your (emphasis) story. The changes that you experienced.

P: As I used to say I did everything but public, clean the public toilets and windows. Done it all.

I: Well, great, thank you for so much for driving down.

P: You're welcome, you're welcome.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT #13

JANUARY 26, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good morning. Today is January 26th, 2007. This is Wendy Schumacher. And I am at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. In the room with me are Bill Urbin from the park and this morning we are interviewing *name withheld*. Good morning.

P: Good morning.

I: Uh, let's see. We're here to talk about the 1982 structural fire at the Home of Franklin Roosevelt. Please, tell me how you heard about the fire.

P: Well I was superintendent at the Manhattan sites in New York City and of course it was a major news item or news story around the country and actually the world at that time. So it was on the tv, it was in the papers and that's how I learned of it.

I: Soooo, your position with the National Park Service was at another facility?

P: Yes, it was.

I: And when did you come here?

P: That would have been in the fall, the late fall of 1984.

I: And how long had you been with the Park Service?

P: Well, let's see, I think I joined in 1966.

I: And can you give me a brief history of (P: Sure) your time here?

P: I graduated college with a degree in in science education and I had taught school. So I had some time in the summers and I had visited National Parks and had talked to people that worked there. And actually had a cousin who worked as a seasonal ranger in Rocky Mountain National Park. And uh I applied to several national parks in the west for a seasonal position. And I was hired in Yellowstone National Park. I worked there for three summers and taught school and determined on balance that I enjoyed the work at the National Park Service and I joined as a permanent full-time employee in 1966. In those days you were brought in as an in-take to the Grand Canyon for a three month stint in a formal training center capacity with some field experience thrown in. And upon completion of that I was sent to Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia. My next assignment was as chief ranger at the Richmond National Battlefield Park which is a Civil War battlefield. And from there I went to the Manhattan sites as. Actually in those days it was called the New York Group. New York Group consisted of Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Gateway and the Manhattan sites. And so I went there as chief ranger. Reorganization of the New York Group split these units and after the dust settled I became superintendent for the Manhattan sites. I spent almost ten years as superintendent there in New York City. I uh was invited to the superintendency here at at the Home and accepted that post. And then so I arrived here in 1984.

I: What is your current position with the National Park Service?

P: Well I retired out of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in 2000 so I'm, I'm retired now for nearly six years.

I: How long were you here at uh Hyde Park?

P: About ten years, ten years.

I: Sooo around 1984 to 1994?

P: Yes, yes.

I: My next question on the interview questionnaire is please explain what you did the night of the fire.

P: I have no idea [all laugh]. (I: as you told us), I probably ate a meal and slept I'm sure. [all laugh]

I: But since you told us that you heard about the fire through the media um. Did the fire, you were a superintendent in New York State, did the fire have any impact on your (emphasis) duties for the weeks following the fire?

P: Well certainly whenever an event of this nature occurs you have a concern for the safety and well-being of the properties you have responsibility for. We felt we were pretty familiar with the condition of our resources. Perhaps one of them was, was an unknown was because it was not directly accessible. We had a tenant living in the place. It was an old arrangement. So. It was an old structure. The home of Alexander Hamilton. And so we didn't know the condition of the wiring or the or the heating plant and so forth as we might have if we had daily access to the building. So we did, we did look into that and didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

I: In the time between 1982 and 1984 when you came here did you do any other planning or any other sorts of activities related to structural fire?

P: Well you know I think alarm systems were, were installed relatively early in lots of National Park Service facilities and some of these systems were better than others. They were designed more more thoroughly and uh and installed more carefully. So you know in those days in the in the '70s and '80s. I would say that some systems were pretty rudimentary and some were were less than satisfactory. A few might have been state of the art at that time. I'd say the one at the Home from all reports probably was not state of the art, it was not a complete system and it was lacking several uh major uh uh it had several major gaps. For example to my knowledge the the attic space in the Home of FDR had no detection.

I: [pause] And the sites that you were responsible for. Did you take an active role in um investigating structural fire issues?

P: Well these sites included Federal Hall a building a building that dated back to the uh 1842. Very nicely built with masonry construction. Grant's Tomb which again very similar and uh had a masonry construction. Neither of those buildings had much in the way of uh of wood or of other combustible material. Then we had other structures that, that uh were a little bit more problematic. The home of, the birthplace of Theodore Roosevelt which was a hundred percent reconstruction of his birthplace. And during the process of, of accomplishing some work in the birthplace we had a very significant curatorial project under way there. I had occasion to be standing in the hallway with some other staff members within arms reach of a gas fixture on the wall. And I just reached up and turned it on and the gas was still pressurized. No one seemed to know that and we took a look at why the gas was even turned on in the home at that point. And so we we had it shut off. The home was, that structure was built in something like the

1920s and it, it was equipped with gas for both for kitchen purposes. But they had put gas fixtures in the, in the rooms so that it would resemble the conditions that existed at the time of the President's uh childhood in that in that structure. And so they were live gas fixtures. You sometimes, you sometimes find things that are a little bit scary. That was, could could have been. But it was never a problem and we turned it off and hopefully it's never been a problem since. Yes the the other structures the uh the uh Alexander Hamilton home, it was a wooden frame two story home. All the concerns one would have for a structure that is very flammable and for material that is as dried out as an old structure like that one would be. Castle Clinton, another masonry structure, that was uh with timber, wooden floors so that it would also be a possible a potential concern. But that also was a reconstruction and so with with a better quality of of techniques and minimal electrification and the heating and so forth. Reasonably safe. But I I would say our alarms in those days were, were not substantial. Today they they would be similar to a simple home owner's systems.

I: When you arrived here in Hyde Park in 1984 what stories did you hear about the fire?

P: Well, actually I I was told as I was hired that my primary function here, my first responsibility would be to shepherd the reconstruction efforts that were underway. And specifically, I was told that contractors were working on the Home itself but that the furnishings of the Home had been removed during the night of the fire and put in storage. And the work had not yet begun on taking care of them and getting them into condition to return them to the Home. So that was a responsibility that was identified for me. When I got here I had perhaps a week or so of overlap with the outgoing superintendent, Dixon Freeland, and he shared with me uh his recollections of of the fire and the the things that had happened during his tenure here. And I I found that to be very helpful, very interesting. And so my my job was to take the conditions as I found them and try to make some headway with that.

I: What was in your background that led the Park Service management to select you for the position?

P: Well, um I, my background was science education but I had uh served as as a chief of services and a superintendent in New York City for ten years. And I think during that time we'd taken, undertaken some major work that included the home of, the birthplace of Theodore Roosevelt that had been put together in the '20s and in uh the 1980s or 1970s, late '70s there it was due for a renewal. And we had a bit of money available from an endowment and we had a curator at that time who was extremely capable and we began work of uh of restoring the conditions at the at the birthplace. That included going back to the people that had made fabrics and had created wallpaper, wall coverings. People like Scalamandre and Birge. For the Scalamandre for fabrics, Birge for wall coverings. For example when the Birge Birge was contacted there was a lady who was sort of their in-house uh memory if you will and she says, yes, Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, we still have the screens for that project. And she was able to put her hands on things that were needed to uh to recreate. And actually, they didn't end up doing the work but um one of the papers as I remember had screenprints of 26 different colors. And so it was quite a project. Creation of fabrics, Creation of wall coverings, carpeting, some work on case goods because the joints were loose and they were falling apart. They were rickety, just just glue had dried out and so forth. And it went on and

on. And we re-created and I think in a way that was more than acceptable to the uh hierarchy of the Service if you will at that time.

I: When you arrived here did you have any role in planning for another structural fire?

P: Well, uh [pause] there was a a contract in place to, of course, to repair the Home after the fire and part of the specifications that were drawn up included a security and fire system. And so when I arrived here the work that was ongoing at that time was plastering and painting for example. It meant then that the utilities were already in place in the walls. They had already strung wire. They had already. It was already basically a done deal as far as this, as far as that point in time. It was just a matter of those folks were working and Park Service was supervising that work to get that to completion. The uh the Home itself needed a major reconstruction of its top floor. And lesser work was necessary on on the lower floors. And actually the the library in the Home suffered very little damage. And so when I arrived here the Home was not open to the public. It had been closed since the fire and one of the first things that we looked at was when we could start moving down the road getting things back into shape and reopening the Home. So and and reopening the Home. So the uh even with construction underway, even with work ongoing we took a look at that library environment and determined that that that ought to be the first room that had furnishings restored or returned. And we were able to access it from French doors directly to the outside. And so as staff that were already on on-site started to identify the items that were from that space and did a basic cleaning of surfaces. Just because some of them didn't have, if not fire damage, they had the accumulation of of decades of of dirt and various waxes and uh and cleaning agents that had not always been properly applied or or removed or what have you. So before anything went back in we went through a process of that required tremendous elbow grease just to clean things in a in a non-threatening sensitive way so that finishes would not be removed. But removing the dirt and gunk that had accumulated and if necessary if, if there were structural needs for a particular piece. And if perhaps it had to be reglued or whatever to make it reasonably sound. So that was, that was the way it it occurred. We looked we looked around the park uh we visited with staff, a number of potential work locations and we ended up selecting the basement, the laundry room of of Bellefield, the building you're in as a logical place to establish this, this uh curatorial workshop if you will. A place, a place that the work could begin on, on the furnishings. So that's exactly what happened. The space was cleaned, it was wired for uh for uh substantial amounts of overhead lighting and and uh power outlets. And we we put some heaters down there so that the work could continue. It's not a space that was intended for occupancy, but anyway it was it was made useable fairly uh, fairly did I say spartan working conditions. But nevertheless that's how how it began. And it and it started with staff that was already in place.

I: And how did the Home get to the point where it is now where the rest of the rooms are open to the public?

P: Well it was it was a tremendous job of course to to deal with the, the rooms of furniture that came out of the Home. And the furnishings the night of the fire the stuff pulled out onto the lawn. And they secured and storage. A lot of it went here in to Bellefield, the entrance hall and the Morgan Room downstairs were completely packed with with case goods, works of art, you name it, it was here. Some things were, I believe,

perhaps at the coach house at Vanderbilt, but most everything was right here. So it was a matter of finding the pieces that were appropriate for the space. Like the library and those were selected first and the work began on that. Of course, it didn't stop with with just a cleaning because each. Time had not been kind to lots of fabrics. For example, the uh the upholstered pieces from the from the library were very faded, stuffing was coming out. There were tears and rips in the original material so part of this whole process was to identify firms that were capable of reproducing in kind the material that needed replacement. Everything was retained and everything was carefully saved and so forth. But of course as you as you remove upholstered material you can uncover the edges that that were not in direct sunlight and you can get a better idea of colors and so forth. And of course there were some some of the Roosevelt family members who could also assist in that process and give some indication of what things used to look like and so there was a bit of that going on as well. But a lot of it was just a matter of detective work and careful processing of what we were dealing with there. So [pause] there was a a a amount of money appropriated by Congress to do work on the Home. And that sum of money was paying for the contractors that were doing work on the Home. There was some money left over for doing other work. Did you explain that, the in this region, of the National Park Service, the regional office had staff members who were at the engineering and architectural and historic architectural types of positions. Most of these were not funded positions. Those positions survived because of monies from projects. In other words the the money that was appropriated by Congress not only funded the work, but it funded the salaries of people who developed the specifications, who who did the research and who supervised the the contractors. It even paid some of the administrative overhead costs and some of the other expenses at the regional level. The uh that was not an insubstantial chunk of the total resources. And uh several things happened. One, in the process of doing work with existing staff in the cramped space in Bellefield was fairly slow. We had Roosevelt family members who were who were expressing their concern both to me and I think to others in the National Park Service with the very slow pace of getting the Home reopened to the public. So even though we were successful in in putting the the first space the library back into operation so people could at least get into one room. It was not the, there were Roosevelt family members who were truly not happy campers with, with the process. And so I was able to persuade folks at the regional level that what we needed was, was an appropriate facility that could accommodate the work that was needed, necessary. And staff that would work in that facility to accomplish the necessary hands-on work that was required. And so those things were begrudgingly I would have to say uh uh approved. And a facility was made available to this area. Was basically a, intended to be a temporary facility but because at the same time it was a decent quality for curatorial purposes. It had equipment and space and lighting and venting and all sorts of things that made it a decent facility. Everything from a fume hood to work on small objects with with hazardous chemicals to uh to uh specialized equipment that might that might serve the process as well. Various hand tools and various [exhale] electrical whatever that were required to to do this work. And so over time then beginning with the hiring of some staff, temporary staff members, term employees. Term of of years that that were hired and put to work in Bellefield. And as the facility went online they were moved over to that facility and, and work continued in earnest there. And it uh it continued for years. The process was such that I

went back to the to the region and let them know that you know that the cost of doing the work exceeded the monies that appeared to be available. And they said well you better go talk to your congressman. So I did. I talked to our congressman and he was supportive. He visited the site. I visited with him in Washington and so forth and so on. And lo and behold when the formal question came from the Congressman back to the regional office they allowed us that they had set aside another three hundred thousand dollars that they hadn't given, given up to the park. So that was that was a start. They had you know taken some money because they had projected the cost of needs of, of the staff members at that level who would who would be doing work on behalf of the park. But three hundred dollars is a lot, quite a lot of money even in today's terms and was far beyond the need for professional staff at at that level at that point in time. So, it came to the park along with some additional funds from from Congress. And so we were able to continue working with, with at least three people. I think sometimes perhaps as many as four term employees to do the hands-on work. So it took a period of time. And we moved into uh first floor rooms as as the work progressed in the Home. It started the refurbishing those spaces and of course moved to other floors of the house as well. The second floor and finally the third floor. But we didn't leave it at that. Actually we reviewed the whole Home and there were spaces that had not been addressed as completely before. For example the president's office had a desk in it, but it was not his desk. As it turned out one of the Roosevelt family members had the original and it was eventually returned to the park. So along with some things that were in storage it made sense to put in that space. It was put back in n reasonable condition. The kitchen, the employees dining room or break room. These were spaces that had not been open to the public before and some of the furnishings were available in storage. Even a piece of art work that hung on the wall in the in the servant's break room dining room was was returned to that space. And so tours eventually were led into those spaces as well. Places the public had not been before. I remember one of the things that happened I think was that staff members cleaned the stove. And when they looked inside pulled up the burners, it was it was a wood burning stove. And they found waded up newspapers in there. Looks like somebody was just was ready to set a fire you know. Just laid the fire, but never struck the match. And the papers as I recall were dated 1944 or something around there, something like that, yeah. Yeah, maybe it was '46. (A: inaudible) Yeah, it it was it was was back there maybe '46 something like that. So it kind of gave you a time capsule here of when that stopped being used. It certainly made the staff crank it up just for a pot of coffee or or just for warmth or whatever they were doing at the time, but clearly it was the last time it had been used. The process was not without fits and starts. You know in in the National Park Service like any kind of hierarchical organization the higher up you go in the organization you know that there is a responsibility for more stuff. And the region has responsibility for a collection of resources over many states. And truly dozens of historic structures. So in order to maintain a staff to provide advice and support at the regional level it was not unusual, as I described earlier, for the region to take certain funds right off the top, project monies, in order to accomplish that. And so that that was the standard operating procedure in Park Service both at the regional level and certainly Denver Service Center as well. That that Congress appropriated money for a project a certain percentage was taken off the top in order to accommodate staff work at at a higher level. And of course when you get a nucleus of people they need support.

They need administrative support, they need secretaries, they need cars, they need transportation money. And as these staff situations continue to grow at the regional level these costs grew. And so when projects were funded it seemed like the percentage coming off the top was just higher and higher. And when you looked at well [pause] what staff member participated in our project and how much time did they take. What did they do for the park and so forth. We, we, we threw up our hands with some of that process and procedure because we felt that the support was inconsequential or in fact it was just simply not there. So that's that's why we continued to go back to the well. We continued to press for, for support and at the same time for their reasons which were different from ours they continued to grow a support staff and they continued to look for resources wherever they could find them in order to, to support that function. So we, we had some friction there I would have to say between people that were hired at the regional level and people that were working at the park. Because certainly we had people doing work in the park that uh, and we had a facility in this park that was not present at the regional level. And so people probably looked at it with probably just a little bit of jealousy if you will. Maybe that's one way of putting it. But, jeez, they've got a facility, they've got people doing things down there. We don't have anything. There was a bit of friction I would have to say. The the folks that we had hired did some work for other parks. Did very good work. And they were well received by those parks that they did work for. But the region didn't like the encroachment if you will of a park doing work for other parks and so basically at a point in time we were told that, that was not something that was our responsibility and we should not be doing that. Whereas initially we had been encouraged because there was not another source of that kind of support. So when the question was asked can we do work for other parks. People have asked about it, and they said yes because quite frankly they knew that it didn't exist any place else. Anyway that, that was just an aside. But certainly it was it was indicative of of the kind of thing that was on-going. Today I believe, and I've I've been out of the Park Service now, out of this region for a very long time. I think they still have a large professional staffs and facilities that have been created over time that, that do work across the region. Now that I. I doubt if there are any comparable facilities or or staffs at the local level. I don't think it would be permitted today. Quite frankly I think the the structure and nature of the organization has changed so the hierarchy in the technical staff resides at the regional level and so the work to be done probably all gets done through there. But the time that we were working on the fire it didn't exist any place else and that's why it was done here. And um I don't know, I don't know I know you've talked to other people that had hands on responsibilities. I always felt that the work was excellent. The documentation I thin was was without reproach. The the documentation as far as a description, item by item, of the existing condition of the appraisal of, of what was needed, of the work that was accomplished. Photographs before and after. It just went on and on. So I think anybody trying to pick up the pieces and go back and take a look would be able to find answers to, to their questions.

I: [pause] Thank you. Please uh tell me more about your visits to Washington.

P: Well, our, our congressman was was Hamilton Fish, Republican. A member of a family long associated with politics. (inaudible) And my contacts with with him were cordial and welcoming and I I went down and uh his schedule was busy, but we met over lunch. And that first contact led to the freeing up of the three hundred thousand dollars

that the region was sitting on. And then a proposal that I had left with him indicated a short fall based on, on our projections of need, the length of time it was taking to complete the work, the numbers of people we were paying to do that work, the bills we were paying. All of those things. The, the uh my recollection is we probably got several hundred thousand dollars more. I I at this juncture I can't put a number on it. But probably another three hundred. Probably more than that. I I'm not sure. I honestly include in this whole scenario while we were doing work at the Home of FDR we had the Eleanor Roosevelt site, Val-Kill, um and it was not open to the public. And we had some original material and the, the intent was to open it to the public on the occasion of an anniversary and and so we started that process as well. So that that was a separate tract but that was ongoing even at the same time that that work at the Home of FDR was ongoing. There was, there was monies available specifically to that project activity as well. So the work that was accomplished on furnishings for Val-Kill was very similar to work that was accomplished on furnishings for the Home of FDR. So there was there was a a larger workload and additional goals that needed to be met at the same time with things going on with the Home of FDR. Everything from uh uh, for example, the old photographs showed walls full of framed black and white photographs. And if you look very carefully you could identify those photographs. So my going over to, going through the Park Service material and going over to the Library and checking with family members and so forth. Those photographs were identified and so copies were made of the photographs. That that could be used in the Home. And we had a piece of furniture and it didn't exist the photograph of it would tell you, give you enough information to find one that was identical or very close to that appearance. And so we were we were basically you know given the green light with the suggestion that the Home needs to be given the appearance of the Home even though we don't have the original material which had been sold at auction. So it was put into shape by all these kinds of processes as well. A lot of, a lot of scratching and digging. And at the same time the staff wrote the first site brochure and created the first audio visual program for the site. And the the maintenance people put the grounds in order so that the first visitors might be welcomed on site. So we were busy a very busy park operation across the board because of of the work from the fire and the work at Bellefield. It was a one, two punch. It was a very interesting time.

I: Did you have a role in uh planning for structural fire issues as part of your responsibilities as superintendent?

P: Well what happens in in in a situation like that is that if you if you've got a system that needs cyclic renewal. Those are not monies that the park has in its budget and so you have to put together requests for funding. And what this park did is put together an extremely comprehensive list of projects. Everything from replacement of standing seam copper roof to renewal of of the utility systems, replacement and upgrading of the fire security systems and so forth. And so our first step, of course, is to identify our needs, take a look at what we have and then because we have no resource to accomplish any substantial upgrading ourselves we would ask for the support, we would ask for the money. The National Park Service would receive blocks of money from from Congress and divide it up among the regions. And each region would divide up their share, their block of resource monies among the parks, after they took their percentage off the top [laughing]. And so that was that was the way it went. And uh yes we did that

sort of thing. And where we were not successful and where we felt that there were needs that were not being met we looked at ways and means of pursuing off off the shelf equipment and assistance to make improvements to what we had. And uh I think it there were even GSA bid components that in some cases we, we were able to purchase with existing park monies simply to improve the systems we had and to replace components of the systems that were not functioning. Either detector heads or or [pause] the security boxes, the security alarm systems themselves and so so we did upgrade what we had. But we we looked forward to to major resources of cyclic monies to do big big bucks work. You know to get outside contractors in after, after design by so-called experts in the area of alarm systems to spec out state of the art equipment. Yes, every park has that opportunity. Some probably carry that further than others but I know you've talked to some people here who were very actively involved in this whole process of putting together these requests for funding. And those requests were as I say extremely comprehensive. They, they filled many three inch notebooks [laughing] and had back up information galore. Took, took file drawers of of stuff to hold it all.

[flipping tape]

I: So I guess this is the point where I'm going to ask if there's anything else that you'd like to share.

P: Well let's see I, I. You know the fire at the Home of FDR wasn't the first in the National Park Service and it hasn't been the last either. Any number of fires caused by a number of reasons. Everything from arson to just lack of care. A lack of maintenance and so forth. In this case the design of the system initially at the Home of FDR was flawed. My understanding is that the electricians doing some rewiring of the Home of FDR had been working in the attic. There was blown insulation covering the beams up there. And electrical wiring lying on those beams may have been stepped on and the metal cut the wire themselves and so it just simply laid there and cooked until it got hot enough to start the fire. And so you had a couple of things going on there. You had people doing work that they were aware of the conditions that they were working in and a system where people were probably were complacent with the with the feeling the sense that they were covered. That the alarms were good and would would serve. And in both counts they were probably wrong. The alarm did not include detectors in the attic space and I don't think the contractors and the supervisors were aware of the potential dangers of stepping on Romex wire and uh old brittle wiring and uh creating a problem eventually that it did. So, there's always something to be learned from these things and clearly part of it is simply uh we hope that we learn before the accident, before the before the problem occurs but it's not always the case. There, there's many other kinds of examples that one could use fire's not just the only example. For years there's been a problem at Vanderbilt Mansion. The drains were leaking causing water damage at Vanderbilt Mansion. So so drains were added, new drains were put in. The problem still continued. And so that one day one of our young maintenance people said you know that system has got some clean outs in it. Now this was not anything that former superintendent, former chief of maintenance or former employees of the National Park Service recognized. It was simply was that somebody who was prowling around the home doing other work said these drains have clean outs in them. And so when the clean out plugs were open and they basically did roto-rooter work. Picked out the twigs and the leaves and the debris and so forth. They cleaned these lines out. Lo and behold the system would

function. And you know lots of times I think people look at a facility and look at a system and say that doesn't work. Well you know the darn thing worked for 120 years or whatever the age might be. You know you have to ask yourself I guess the question why doesn't it work. What's different today than it was 50 years ago or 100 years ago when it apparently did work. And so in that instance. It was simply that there was there was a lack of institutional memory to clean the darn drains. Give you one more example. Staff at Vanderbilt complaining that there was an oily residue coming out of the heating ducts and it was dirtying things up. It was making a mess. And this went on until somebody looked in the chimney tunnel. And this is a tunnel that you could enter on hands and knees and it was intended to be an access to the to the vertical rise of the chimney. Lo and behold what had happened over time was that the accumulation of soot and debris from the burning of the furnace had just dried up. And it eventually rose to such a height that it had shut off the chimney and now this smoke didn't have any place to go. These, these fumes had no place to go. So they were being recycled through the equipment right into the Mansion. And when a chimney sweep was hired and went in and cleaned out [pause] my recollection is 17 large bags of debris. The chimney worked, the system worked and the problem was was resolved. The dirty mess was still behind which was not taken care of, but at least the venting of the of the furnaces took place. I'd have to say that you know around the system, around the Service, around the National Park Service if there's anything that I have learned as a lesson from the fire and from these, these other experiences. If there are problems generally there's an answer. There's a reason why something is going bad, happens the way it did and hopefully it will be recognized before it becomes a disaster or a serious incident, but it doesn't work that way all the time. And so there are problems that occur because people don't know any better or just incapable of of I guess the the detective tendency to follow up on a clue and then to find out why is not going right. It's it's not something you learn at school, it's not something that if you haven't experienced it on the job it's new to you. So you have to find it in another way. And finding it in another way certainly is is a skill that you would look for in any staff member who has a role and function in maintaining historic properties. Whether it be at the maintenance level or be at the curatorial level, whether it be at the administrative level to squeeze every nickel out of the program. Whatever it might be. And I feel that in total the staff members both permanent full-time and term people that worked on the curatorial collection here at the Home did yeoman's service and they were extremely professional about what they did and to my knowledge nothing was done in such a way that it did damage to a resource. It did document so carefully that the steps could be followed and retraced and determined exactly what's going on. Just one example of that. Pieces of furniture in some cases that can be viewed on the front side and maybe on the front and on the two sides by the public may have not been cleaned at all in back simply to leave that as the existing condition. And so if you were to go in the library in the Home today, unless conditions have changed there, there are some pieces that of of furnishings there where they were they were cleaned on three sides so that the record be left in tact of what the piece looked like before the work was accomplished. Well, all sorts of things happened like that. Let's see. Anything else. Um it points up also that the National Park Service has relied wholly on on alarm systems. There's no 24 hour guard service on the Home. No 24 hour protection in the park. Basically you would have ranger law enforcement service, during the time the park

is open to the public. And during the evening hours, but nothing more than that. So there was no fire watch or law enforcement. As it was, as there is in the in the Library. Operated by a different agency so they have different a different way of approaching the resource. They maintain 24 hour seven day a week coverage in their resources because they have determined years and years ago that once lost it ain't coming back if you will. Park Service has never had a resource deep enough to do that sort of thing. And it's indeed a very rare park that has anything like a 24/7 operation. Just, just really rare. And that of course is also one of the one of the reasons perhaps that you could say that there was a problem at the Home of FDR. There was no human surveillance on that structure. No park staff available as a as a guard, as a watchman, as a ranger what have you. And so that's something that the Service has never, never dealt with in an adequate way because there's never been a resource to do that. If, if you were going to provide that service it would be quite costly and the Congress has never. I don't know if the Park Service has ever asked. But in the rare case. But certainly that kind of support had never been never been asked. There are too many historic structures around the Park Service and if you were to put 24/7 human surveillance on it would take more bucks than the Park Service would be willing to carve out for or to ask for. It's a problem. It's still a problem today. I hope that the alarm systems today are better than the ones from the '70s and '80s. I'm sure some of them are. I'm sure some of them have flaws even today. I'm sure some of them have had break downs and they are no longer functioning as they did when they were installed and nobody's found out yet. And unfortunately some are probably not being tested on a regular basis. Some components that may have a shelf life are not being replaced. New staff is not being briefed as they out to be. The uh the uh institutional memory doesn't always track as well as it ought to. But the training exposure, word of mouth. Too many times what will happen is the person will vacate a position and so that knowledge is lost to the operation. A new person is not hired certainly weeks, months, in some cases even years so there's no hope of of of any kind of transition where that kind of transition of knowledge can be transferred to any somebody, from somebody who knows to somebody who's new. So unless you have redundancy in people so that if you lose one you still have one or two others left that still have the same information uh you do tend to lose over time. You lose that and I think that it happens quite frequently. I think the Park Service like a lot of organizations has some staff members who have a wealth of knowledge and other people around them in some cases doing similar work for any number of reasons have never picked up on that knowledge. Either because somebody's holding it close to the vest or because they are who they are and they're not quite as competent or interested or knowledgeable and they just don't carry it carry it forward. That is that is that can be a problem. And I'm sure it is in almost any organization. And Service is no different. Service is absolutely no different. The uh will the fire be the last? Unfortunately not. No, the Park Service is bound to have other serious problems with whether they're fighting fires or arson fires or failures of systems that are that are just not maintained well. Or or detected quickly enough or whatever the case may be. So will somebody else doing doing a doctorate have an opportunity like this one. I hate to say it but yes. I'm sure that is going to the case. And in the case of the Home of FDR it didn't burn to the ground. There are there are other structures that have. Jordan Pound House in Acadia burned to the ground. There are others in the Park Service. Any number of historic farm houses and barns at Delaware

Water Gap burned to the ground by arson. [pause] It happens. And it will continue to happen. Oh my last time at the park as superintendent was '94 so my recollections are from that period of time. And I don't know basically what's happened since then from the standpoint of upgrade to the alarm system of upgrades in staffing that would improve the lot of the resources. I'd like to think that everything moves forward in a very positive way and I'm sure a lot has. But when you're dealing with resources like this with this age you're living sort of on borrowed time before the before the water line breaks or before the roof starts leaking or before the tinder dry building catches fire and burns before you can do anything about it. Any other questions?

I: That's all my questions.

P: Yeah I could probably go on and on, but I'm starting to philosophize.

I: So thank you for your participation.

P: Oh, you're very welcome.

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS #14

JANUARY 26, 2007 at BELLEFIELD, HOME OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT, HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

Interviewer: Wendy Schumacher

Participant1: *Name withheld*

Participant2: *Name withheld*

Audio specialist: Bill Urbin

I: Good afternoon. Today is January 26, 2007. My name is Wendy Schumacher and I'm here at Bellefield in Hyde Park, New York. In the room with me are Bill Urbin who works for the park and two gentlemen who will now introduce themselves.

P1: I'm *name withheld*, assistant chief, Roosevelt Fire District.

P2: *Name withheld*, past chief of Roosevelt Fire District. Deputy fire coordinator at this time. Was chief of the Roosevelt Fire Department during the fire.

I: *Name withheld*, what was your position with the fire department at the time of the fire?

P: I was a lieutenant with company 1.

I: Can you give me a little bit more detail? I understand there was more than one fire department who responded.

P1: Yeah we have a list. I believe *name withheld* has it. Of mutual aid that was used that evening.

P2: There that evening was Hyde Park, Arlington, Fairview, the Hudson River Psychiatric Center, La Grange, New Hackensack, New Hamburg, Pleasant Valley, Poughkeepsie and three companies from Roosevelt.

I: Wow. So I usually have been interviewing people from the Park Service so I'm going to skip over a bunch of the questions that have to deal with their tenure at the Park Service and things like that. And just get right into it. So uh, please, tell me how you heard about the fire.

P2: The fire was reported as a box alarm over our fire radio system. And I happened to be in Roosevelt. We were on stand-by. So I'm going to put a little history of what went before. The, there was a large fire at the Anderson School in Staatsburg. There was two engines and Hyde Park's engine and ladder truck were also up at that fire. This box alarm was reported as fire in uh in the Roosevelt Home here and I had a feeling. You know you get them feelings of maybe something was wrong. So I headed on over. The ironic thing that night is that it was all the oldest owned equipment in Hyde Park or Roosevelt that responded. It's called because the first line equipment was at Staatsburg. Not that the second line equipment is poor, it's just old. [laughing] We also had a. Hyde Park was the only one in the area that had a ladder truck at the time. So the ladder truck from Hudson River was called in to cover this assignment. And uh that's how I heard about it and responded.

I: How far away was the Hudson River ladder truck?

P2: It was only about two miles down the street. It was a. At the time that was an active paid department. (P1: Hudson River.) It's since been closed.

I: *Name withheld*, how did you hear about the fire?

P1: I was at the Anderson School fire which was a dormitory fire up there. That went to probably what, three alarms. (P2: uh huh). That was a third alarm fire also. And uh I guess we were up there for about two hours. Then we had that fire kind of under control at that time. And then the radio went off for a box alarm at the Roosevelt Home and then we really didn't pay much attention to that. So they come back and said they had a fire at the Home. Then they started calling more equipment. And we went to one of the coordinators um, Sandy Williams at the time. We had our rescue truck up there and we had asked if we could be released to respond to this fire. And about ten minutes later he said, yeah, go ahead. And we responded back down approximately ten ten members when we went from that one to this one.

I: So what happened when you got down here?

P1: Well um *name withheld* and them, they were already here. They had a line stretched into the building. Uh we went up into the building. Up into the second floor (inaudible) and we were operating up in there trying to locate the fire which was up in the attic. And openin' up some different doors and trying to find out where we could stop this thing at. So most of the doors were unlocked except for I think one or two. And, it was a heavy smoke condition. We forced one door and uh one of the guys put the ax in and there was no floor. It was the elevator shaft. It was nailed shut, the door. We didn't know it was an elevator (I: oh) but it was very hard to see at the time. We was just checking that the floor was there and there was no floor. [laughing] And we realized stay out of there. It was an elevator shaft we found out later. And then we just operated up there for numerous hours. And uh started evacuating some of the belongings that were up there. Pictures and that sort of thing. Paintings I guess. We started carrying that stuff out and putting it downstairs getting it away from the water and.

I: *Name withheld*, what did you find when you got here?

P2: When I arrived here basically we had one engine here and there was a lieutenant named Howard Martin. Let's see, he was a chief's aide in New York City. Uh actually deputy chief if I think (unclear), sharp individual. Was a good friend of mine. So he says come on upstairs. They had stretched a couple lines upstairs into this. There was a step ladder and a scuttle hole in the ceiling and they took the line. They shot it into the ceiling. The fire darkened down and so they stopped the water just went whoof and was fully involved again. At that point I sez Howard I'll go down. We'll go down and get some more help. Okay. That's when we went down and started calling for more help from Arlington and Hudson River and so forth. Some more manpower and also to get some people at least. The problem with the system back then was their hydrant system here and I don't know if it's any better now. They didn't have a great water supply back there. Okay. So we had to lay lines from, Route 9 all the way up the original driveway (P1: okay [laughs]). Change that once here to get water to lay two, three inch lines all the way up there. There was Roosevelt, New Hamburg and I can't think of the other company. But to get water there seemed to be enough water. Then Bob Rover was assistant chief. He was there. Had just become assistant chief. And a little more strength was needed so we kind of all just got together. Had another assistant chief came from Hackensack. That guy was named Kenny Martin. No relation to the other guy Howard Martin. That really

had a good knowledge of tactical fire fighting. So put our heads together. Had enough equipment. We asked for the City of Poughkeepsie to bring their ladder truck in. Uh we declared that we were going to do an interior fire fight which means that you do everything from inside. Normally in a fire this size um you would just put a big ol' ladder pipe upside and squirt it down. The problem I had with that is first of all it drives everything down in the building. And the damage to the building would have probably been a whole lot more than it was. We did and a lot of fire fighters and there's pictures of it hauled a lot of stuff out of that second floor. And your security people or rangers or whatever you call 'em uh kinda got things hauled on that front porch covered and tried to save everything. So, uh there was a policy here you were supposed to sign in and sign out [laughing]. If you take a call here. That policy went real quick. There was no time for that. But everybody worked together. And everybody had the same cause to save as much as we could. Eventually we found upstairs, there was a room in the middle of this thing and there was apparently it had been closed off over the years. And we kept trying to, you know, outside you see this thing burn in the attic. You know so what. Uh but it was starting to come down into the second floor and you know we said we were going to hold it to that. There's this room in the middle that was like closed. And we finally breached the wall and found it was like a room that had apparently been closed for some reason. I mean archives or birth room or something called it up there. And uh we got in there and got that. That stopped the travel down and then we got it under control. But it was it was daylight when we went home. So with about two foot of snow on the ground. So um

I: Can you talk a little bit more about the weather conditions and how that impacted your response?

P2: The weather when we got here it was cold. I'd say probably in the teens, right? (P1: uh) We uh then it started snowin'. By the pictures I have here I see it and the problem with the snow is it covers the hoses. And we had to pick all the hoses up and with water things freeze. And it didn't, as long as you're moving water, it's okay. It's once you stop it's all the labor to pick it up. Also just the firefighters rehab. You know, back in 1982 we didn't know a whole lot about that. Today we bring big rescue trucks and big vans and everyone gets in and gets warm and rehabs, recycle. Back then you just worked until you dropped. And you got it done. But the cold was a was a not a major factor in getting the fire out. Just a pain later cleaning up and getting going home.

P1: You had to keep switching off. You had to watch where you walked. Coming up the stairs as far as the stairs it was starting to freeze in the building. Right, 'cuz you got water coming down coming down the stairs. And it was freezing on the stairs. And anywhere you walked inside you had to be careful 'cuz it was turned to ice. And like I said you're soaking wet anyway. Okay from the water, but now you're also sweating from what you're doing and then the fire darkens down so it starts to cool down (I: uh huh) [chuckles] and it gets very cold. And like I said we were outside. You know I think I went out about nine thirty that night. I never left here. I was nine thirty up there, never left here 'til probably seven thirty in the morning. (I: oh my gosh) Eight o'clock. Something like that. So it was an all night operation. It wears and tears on you because you have to keep switching crews. You know guys pull and lug hose so long and then they need a break. So we had to keep swapping people in and out all the time.

I: Did you have enough resources to do that? To swap them.

P1: Yeah we did. (P2: Oh yeah) We called them in. I mean they came from New Hackensack (P2: it's gotta be at least 15 miles from here). (A: eighteen miles) Eighteen miles well. Eighteen miles that firehouse to here. Would they have been here normally, no. Probably not, but since we had a third alarm up the street at the uh Anderson School. You also had a third alarm down here. That's two big alarm assignments that kind of taxes the resources in this area.

P2: And the policy is to jump over companies to get companies who are see, let's say, so you don't have another fire down the street. Everybody's here. You don't have the same problem over and over. So you jump over companies to bring 'em up to rehab and help us out. Recycling members.

I: Had you been to the Home before the fire?

P1: Yeah (P2: yes)

I: Under what context?

P1: School [laughing]

I: In the fourth grade you were here?

P1: No, we would come here when Hyde Park or someplace else had box alarms. Hyde Park had had rangers here. Had given tours so we knew what was inside the building. I had also worked on the fire alarm systems and did some stuff here because of my previous business.

I: Can you talk a little bit more about the tours from the rangers?

P1: They would uh take us and show us where the powers supplies were so we shut the power down. Also, configuration of the rooms. They ol' what's where so if when you go down to the cellar down there it's like a little maze which you could get caught in. We probably need to do it. We haven't done one in a few years. Time to do it again. But that all helps because when here you're familiar. When you're at least somewhat familiar with know where you've been. At least for officers and (unclear) members.

I: Did you find it was helpful on the night of the fire in 1982?

P2: Yeah I think so. It's hard to remember back then. I can remember highlights.

P1: You have to think things you never get into a building like that. I mean I've been there probably twice. People come up to visit and you walk in where they allow you to walk but that's it. Now what's in these other parts. I have no idea. No idea at all. Like *name withheld* said, sometimes you need to come over here and uh I wanna know what's up there. Um like the fact that, like I said, the door was nailed shut. It was an elevator. I guess they had an elevator in there. If somebody didn't check that floor and we opened the door and somebody went to step in and it went back down (I: oh my gosh). So now you got an injury. Um it's things like that. You'd like to know, but ah you can't tell in a place like this. (I: right).

P2: Also the problem with a building this age is it doesn't have fire protection systems. I'm not sure that it has some kind of sprinkler system in it. Probably been retrofitted maybe they should look at that in the future.

P1: Yeah I know they had a Halon system and they took that all out because of the (A: gas) whole global warming [laughing].

I: Did you, do you find that um well it was 25 years ago. Did you come over here with a greater frequency after the fire to talk to the rangers?

P1: No, no. It's up to actually Hyde Park fire department to invite us. We're the neighbor.

I: Oh, okay. Great. I I see that you brought some photographs.

P1: Yes this is

I: Where, where did these photographs hang? They're hanged. They're framed.

P1: In our fire house.

P1: This is probably half way into the fire. You see all these are all the trucks, but (I: there's a ladder). That's Hudson River's ladder. (I: Oh, okay) (unclear) that ladder, that's a pumper and a ladder back here. Here's a ladder and I can't see the fire company.

I: Let's see. This photo's from a greater distance. I can see that there is also a regular ladder going up to the portico to the second floor.

P1: I find that set of pictures because I have pictures almost from the beginning to the end. So it was up there look at the snow

P2: I know there's a set here some place.

I: I think up at Vanderbilt Mansion.

P1: (unclear) took a lot of pictures.

I: Yeah, there's lots of similar photos. You can really see the flames shooting up from the roof on these two photos as well. And uh let's see. These look like snapshots.

P1: Well this is what we have in the

I: So this one, the tree, you can really see how much snow was on the ground.

P1: This is later on in the day. You can see the beginning. There's hardly any snow.

I: Oh yeah, look at that.

P1: And when we get nearr the end there's a lot of snow [laughing]. They're not in order.

I: So it snowed pretty heavily because this was a couple of hours.

P1: It was about sixteen inches of snow that night. (I: and I can see that there's) Here's the snowflakes coming down.

I: Yeah, look at that. I can see that there's people in some of these photographs who are, are not in fire gear. Who are some of these folks?

P2: Probably they're observers. You know people who (P1: or rescue personnel from) (unclear) or they could even be your own staff. We do have in those other pictures it shows the inside of the lines going up and your staff taking that stuff out and where we stacked a lot. That's kinda an old fire picture, fireman ah [laughing] sure.

I: Um, there's somebody knocking at the door. I'm just going to put that on the tape. Um, wow, are you in any of these photographs?

P2: Not that I see myself, No not in these.

I: Uh huh. Let's stop the tape for a moment.

[resume taping]

I: Great. We're back. That was *name withheld* who's the acting chief ranger. And now let's talk a little bit about why she wanted to stop by during this interview because that has something to do with how things have changed since 1982.

P1: Well she uh we have keys for the gate and for the buildings of Eleanor Roosevelt's place over there. Um now so the fire department has keys. We now longer have to wait for the ranger to show up. We can get in right away to see what the problem is.

I: And how many keys did she give you?

P1: Uh we have one gate key and one building key. [pause] Which is very good, but it's it's a start. Like I said we're looking for the Knox box (I: what's that) because when the chief has this key and he's not around we don't have a key to get in.

I: What is a Knox box?

P1: A Knox box is a steel box that goes on the outside of the building or on the outside of a gate. And in this box you would put your key to the building. We have keys to the Knox box. One key fits all the Knox boxes in the Roosevelt fire district. It's made for us and us only. So that we open up that box. Your key is in there. Now we have access to the building. We go in see what the problem is. If for some reason the homeowner or business owner doesn't show up we just close the door lock it back up and put the key back in the box and we go home. I mean it's it's such a great thing that came out with. You know for a number of years and they're really not expensive. [pause] Today with liability the way things are. You know call the lawyer in the morning and this whole thing. Uh we used to hang around for 15 minutes or 20 minutes and if nobody showed up we'd just go home. Can't do that anymore. What if there's a fire in the basement. Maybe we don't see anything right now. And we go home. The next thing you know the lawyers are on the phone and somebody's being sued. So now we have to break in. So it's a lot cheaper to pay \$150 or whatever it is for a Knox box then to replace a \$200 door.

I: Thanks, for explaining that. Uhhhh after the fire took place was there media interest in the fire department and their response?

P1: We had gone back to the Hyde Park fire house. They served breakfast. And I know when we were there that BBC called from England. They were looking for any type of video they could get their hands on. And the one guy who usually carries his video camera that night did not bring it. And we didn't have any for them, but I'm sure they must have gotten something from someplace. Yeah, but there was a lot of channel 2, channel 4 was callin'. Sure they must have gotten contacted you (P2: yes).

I: Did you do any interviews?

P2: No, we left that up to the chief of Hyde Park to do. The chief of Hyde Park was originally at the uh School fire. So he came back down and he became the PR guy. His name was Ed Ferris.

I: Who took the photographs that we were looking at?

P1: A guy named Bill Jackson, New Hackensack fire department (P2: Johnson). Johnson. It was Johnson.

I: So he was with another fire department?

P2: Yeah (P1: right) But he was a buff. Photographer. Very good.

P1: He does a lot of them. He still does them today. He takes a lot of photographs of fires he responds on. A lot of alarms. Yeah, he did a good job as you can see. Um, like I said the other photos that you, you have 'em. And I think station 2 had some (P2: yeah). They show the interior. Okay with the hoses going up the stairs and people carrying things out. You know, getting them out of the area where they could be destroyed by water or fire or whatever. But uh and and that was a lot of I think of went on that night (P2: me too) by the Park Service and the fire department. I mean a lot of people going in and out and carrying stuff out. (P2: we'll get you a set of those).

I: That'd be great thank you. Do you, earlier we talked about the ice, the ice conditions. What stories do you have about how this fire might have been similar or different from other structural fires.

P1: Well um I don't know so much about this one, you were doing, there was more ladder work I think. Right, *name withheld*? (P2: uh huh) And uh the rungs of the ladder were freezing. So you had to be careful of that. In and out of the building, the front entrance, the side entrance. Okay, they all became a sheet of ice. And then the snow on top of the ice. You think it's snow and there's a sheet of ice underneath it. So you had to be real (emphasis) careful. I mean there was a few people slipped and fell. We all laughed. Nobody really got hurt, but, you know, and you gotta be careful because you're carrying a lot of equipment and you go down. You're gonna hurt yourself.

I: We heard that there was also uh ice forming on the roof or where you had gone up to the top. Were either of you up at the top or on the roof?

P1: No, (P2: No) mostly inside the building. Uh the ice was forming inside as well as on top of the building. Um you know actually there was no heat. Uh the windows were broken out in places. Um it was a lot of ice that night. I mean it was icicles were hanging off from where the hoses were hittin' on the trees. Especially around the back. Okay you could see the ice forming on the branches. Looks like something after an ice storm. That's what it started to look like. So it was a tough night, tough night had by all I guess. I mean and and we're not used to that. This is a volunteer department. It's unusual to go from one third alarm fire to another one. If we get one house fire every two months, that's somethin'. And that lasts for an hour, two hours and you're back at the station cleaning up and then you go home. I mean this went, like I said, I went from around nine o'clock at night and I didn't get home until seven o'clock the next morning. Eight o'clock. Whatever it was. So it was a lot of work, it was a lot of work. It was a good job.

P2: I think it probably had 200, 250 people there.

I: Frooom?

P2: All the companies together. (I: inaudible)

P2: And it's paid and volunteer. Like Arlington's paid. Hudson River was paid at the time. Fairview was paid at the time. Poughkeepsie's paid. They're they we all worked together.

P1: I mean I was 25 years younger then. [all laughing] And it was kind of um, when we were up at the Anderson School fire. Like I said we had asked the coordinator up at there if we could be released to come here. Uh I think after about five minutes they were begging, begging to get into the releases so we could continue fire fighting for the rest of the night. And then the guys were just chomping at the bit to get down here and he finally said yes when *name withheld* called for manpower. And then he let us go. And we came down here and started all over again. And like I said, everybody was anxious to go to work. I did a good job. I was 25 years younger, too.

I: Had you been back to the Roosevelt Home after the '82 fire?

P2: Uh yes I have. I did the presidential visit.

I: Which one?

P2: Clinton's. Um

I: What was your role for the presidential visit?

P2: I worked for Verison, the phone company. And I had to wire the building for all phone jacks, all through, wherever he was going to be.

I: Did that include the Home?

P2: Oh yeah, right in, right in Franklin Franklin's office. Put a jack right behind the desk so where you normally only come through the door. I got to sit at this desk. (I: oh wow) [laughing] (A: inaudible) A lot, yeah.

I: Did you make any mental notes about the condition of the wiring based on your experiences being a volunteer fireman?

P2: Uh, no. The wiring I was doing was all temporary and was just phone wire. I remarked to him about all this stuff that's over there. That's all old phone wire. It's probably been there for forty years. But enough. In the Home it's all cleaned up and in the walls and that sort of thing. I think the walls are basically all open. I mean I don't believe there's any firestops up there given the age of the building so if you. With the fire up here as it was if it did drop down on some of the walls on the second floor. I mean inside the wall. So that's why you have to tear them apart and tore a lot of ceilings down trying to get at it.

I: How do you go about tearing down the ceilings?

P1: With hooks and axes. Well you just poke holes and keep pulling keep pulling. This is all lathe and plaster. So that's a little bit harder than your normal sheetrock. And it comes down and you open it up and look for fire. In today's world you have thermal imaging cameras that you can just point up there. And it saves, it saves a lot of damage. But uh on this, there was nothing. You weren't going to save anything anyway as far as the top floor goes.

I: Is there any other new technology that might have been helpful in 1982?

P1: Not really (P2: not really) It's basically hose, water, Scott air packs.

P2: That's it. Fighting a fire, put it out.

P1: That's I mean the gear is basically the same. It's changed a little bit, but as far as the other stuff. No I would probably say the biggest thing is what, the thermal imaging camera. Yeah, (P2: yeah) that I believe would save a lot of things. (P1: yeah). The pressure vented. They were already vented so. The venting had actually helped us.

I: Can you explain a little bit more about the venting?

P2: Well when it's free burning like the pictures show with the flames going up through the roof. Really what it does is it sucks out the smoke and heat from inside the building. (P1: cuz it wrecks you up in this case you're under the fire) So uh you could do an interior attack because you can keep working up into the ceiling of the fire and stuff's going up so you don't have a visibility problem. Then, you know if this was a barn fire. Okay instead of a home fire you would just put a big deluge up there and drown it. All that stuff goes down inside and destroys everything else. Because it's the Home we didn't want to have you know that kind of damage in there so we. It takes longer to put the fire out this way, but probably less damage when you get done.

P1: And you actually have control over it you know. (P2: Push it all through the building) Because it burns through right back on its own. If it didn't do that you'd have to go up there and put your own hole and do it yourself. Okay, now you're above the fire because

P2: And there may have been some venting that night. I don't know what the truck companies did.

P1: Basically, that fire's going up was hitting the rafters in the roof and spreading this way. (P2: and then going out this way) and then pushing itself down again. Okay, so then that heat and smoke is banging down onto the second floor and if it's not vented enough it'll go right on down to the first floor. Now you're fighting your way up the stairs. You can't see anything. And you're trying to find out where you're going. Once it vents itself like and you go up and cut the hole. You clear that out. And that that helped a lot. I'm not sure, to tell you the truth I don't know if we vented it or it burned through.

P2: Yeah. I don't remember. Poughkeepsie was there. Hudson River was there with with members so

P1: [pause] Yeah they might have helped it a little.

P2: In the beginning it hadn't gone through and

P1: When we went in there it started to go through. By the time we got at it it had gone through. What else

I: What else do you remember?

P2: Lots of things.

P1: That basically about it. I mean

P2: I did get a nice letter from Ronald Reagan. (I: Oh) Thank you for the help.

P1: I can't find anything. [all laughing] Well I know it was on green stationary. I know I filed it someplace.

A: Can I ask a question? We have this historic site. I know with the fire going on you don't allow people to go in and pull things out. Was there a conscious decision made to allow some of the staff to go in and at what point did you have the fire controlled (inaudible) and knew where it was and let the staff go in?

P2: They were allowed to stay on the first floor.

A: First floor.

P2: And we brought everything down to 'em. And it's just one of those things. You can have all these rules but what do you gotta do to preserve what you've got. Okay and you know. You gotta take all the authority problems out of it to get the job done. And that's really what what we're worried about. And you know the president's office and everything is down underneath and, you know, there's stuff down there that can't be replaced. (I: Right) And I know we brought figurines down. We brought down furniture and baby beds.

P2: You know when somebody says it's only a baby's bed. Well that's somebody's baby bed that throw it out the window.

I: Did you say throw it out the window?

P2: Somebody would say that. You know that's what we would normally do (P1: throw it out the window) This is a house fire. We'd open a window throw the beds, the mattress, everything out the window. I mean we were not throwing their jewelry or their nicknacks or stuff like that or Sigorski glass things you know. But here [pause] every stick is worth something. You know, every spoon's worth something. (A: so you had sensitivity)

P1: Yeah, we did. (A: inaudible) And there was you know some problems with the guards saying you know you guys are doing this. They're not doing it. They're bringing everything downstairs. You you get to the first floor there right where the carpet's at and

then they brought everything on the front porch and staked it. And then I think they eventually took it to some barn or some other place. (I: yeah) Okay.

I: Did you personally participate in that decision making process?

P1: Yes. Like I say couple (I: And) of people that the authority was more important than the getting the job done. So we straightened that right away. (P2: yeah)

I: So earlier in the interview you had talked about Ed Ferris' role. So I'm just wondering, you know, kinda how that worked.

P1: We all worked together that night. All together for most of the night and um. Then you know we made decisions together. 'Cuz he was I was kind of an older fire chief then. Newer fire chief and then we just you know. And then we had help from paid fire chiefs that'd come up and say you know. This this is a big fire for us, okay. And the decision makings made in a group. (I: that's great). That's not hard to do I would say. Just what has to be done what has to be protected. And that was all on everybody's mind. You know this is real valuable stuff.

P2: And they were worried about picking the little letters I guess that were in little frames or something. You know and upstairs (upstairs)

P1: Some of us we got a little nervous about it you know. The upstairs wasn't open to the public. I could care less you know. We brought it down. Whatever you wanted we took off the walls and we tried to get 'em out. As guys were coming in we had more and more manpower. That's when the stuff started to come down the stairs faster. 'Cuz I guess they started. They must have went through you or something earlier and started to come in the building (P2: They were allowed into the front very) They were on the staircase there.

I: So if I can just recap that uh the fire department people brought things from the second floor down to the first floor where you were allowing the park staff to

P2: Yeah I'd say (I: public folks to come in) stuff from the third floor and the second floor because you. We weren't sure we were going to stop it at that point in some of the walls started burning so we we also evacuated this floor. (P1: and tarp stuff) And tarps as much as we could do. And like I said there was a lot of rangers or people, you know your staff here helping. You know could be secretary, could be ranger, could be anything. They was all here helpin'. Everyone's here for the same reason. I mean. 'Cause it is an historic site I mean like you said you don't know what's. Most of the time we'd throw the stuff out the window. [all laughing] But this, that made you a little nervous so we'd better bring it all downstairs because I mean we we're taking things that looked like you know maybe it was bought a Kmart [all laugh] and you'd say well okay is this well I don't know take it downstairs. Let them figure it out. So that's what we were doing.

I: Great. Well thank you guys for coming over and sharing your experiences today and thank you so much for bringing the photographs.

P2: Like I said send where should I send the photographs to?

A: You can mail them to me if you want.

I: Okay. I'm going to stop the tape recorder.