**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH**

**STEPHEN ADAMS ORO VALLEY, ARIZONA**

**APRIL 22, 2020**

**and MAY 27, 2020**

INTERVIEWED BY DEBORAH HARVEY AUDIO FILE #BRVB042220 – STEPHEN ADAMS

and

AUDIO FILE #BRVB052720 – STEPHEN ADAMS

**EDITORIAL NOTE**

This document is a rendering of the oral history interview as transcribed by the interviewer from the audio recording. Although effort was made to provide a verbatim transcription, for easier reading of the transcript, verbal pauses, repetitions of words, and encouraging words from the interviewer were omitted. The resulting oral history interview transcript was provided to the informant for review and, if necessary, correction. Mr. Adams made some modifications to the draft transcript. For the original interview, please refer to the audio file.

**ABSTRACT**

Mr. Adams describes his career with the National Park Service, beginning in 1974, prior to his move to Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in early December of 1999. He also describes his career after he left Brown v. Board of Education National Historic site in 2004 until his retirement in 2013. Mr. Adams explains the circumstances surrounding his appointment as Superintendent of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. He discusses the differing tasks undertaken by the National Park Service and the Brown Foundation as they pursued opening Monroe Elementary School to the public and talks about some of the early design considerations for uses of the building as a National Historic Site. Mr. Adams gives a synopsis of the development of the Design Advisor Board in the early days of the park and how it functioned to rationalize proposed design elements for the park. He offers his view on the reaction of the neighborhood, particularly the small businesses in the area, to the establishment of a National Historic Site in their midst. Mr. Adams describes the various repairs and rehabilitation activities at Monroe School, as well as some issues with the interpretive media. He also discusses the many trips he and his cohorts as well as members of the Brown Foundation made to locations around the country, both to inspect interpretation methods for ideas for how to interpret the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site and to residents from the other communities involved in the Brown decision to sell the interpretive plan to them and to get input from them. He talks at length about the Dedication Ceremony to open the National Historic Site to the public in 2004. Mr. Adams also describes how the National Park Service operated the Visitor Contact Station at the original Administrative Office in Topeka’s old Post Office. He explains the events that resulted in the oral history project he began being cancelled and describes in detail the events of the cancellation of the contract. Mr. Adams also describes how the cooperating association for the educational bookstore at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site was chosen. Lastly, he describes and discusses his staff and the staffing needs of the Brown v. Board National Historic Site and expresses his appreciation for the opportunity to work on it.

**PERSONS MENTIONED**

Art White, Deputy Regional Director David Given, Treva Sykes, Satchel Paige, Dennis Vasquez, Cheryl Brown [Henderson], Deborah Dandridge, Ron Griffin, Chelsea Smith, Freeman Tilden, Ray Harper, Johnnie Neill, Sändra Washington, Bessie Sherman, Cheryl [DeSchazer?], Alicia [Bullocks], Katherine Cushinberry, Deborah Riley, Toy [last name unstated], Randy Standingwater, LaTonya Miller, President George W. Bush, Radar O’Reilly, Colonel Potter, Lydia [last name unstated], William [last name unstated], Craig Manson, Gerard [last name unstated].

Stephen Adams, 2020

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH**

**STEPHEN ADAMS**

Interviewer: This oral history interview is for the Administrative History of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. The interviewer is Deborah Harvey, with Outside The Box, on behalf of the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. Interviewed today is Stephen Adams, former park Superintendent at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. The date is April 22, [2020]. This interview takes place by telephone.

So, Steve, as I’m sure you know, the purpose of an Administrative History is to document the development of a unit of the National Park System, both physically and administratively. Oral histories are one way to get information that might not otherwise be available from documentary evidence. We try to get as much information as we can from as many different perspectives as possible in order to craft a robust narrative of the developmental history of the park. This will be used by future park administrators to inform their decisions as they navigate future developments. However, I should inform you that not all the information we gather will be included in the final Administrative History, although it will be in the final recording. But I do want to let you know that we appreciate that you are giving your time to share your experiences of the development of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site to further this project. So, to start with, I’m going to ask you – considering what your name is, this sounds silly, but it’s what we do at the beginning of every interview – to repeat your name and spell your last name.

Adams: Okay. I’m going to do both. Stephen Adams, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, Adams, A-D-A-M-S.

Interviewer: Okay, that was helpful. So, first, let’s start – in general, we’ll start, first, with your career with the National Park Service, and then we’ll move on to the specifics of your time at Brown v. Board. So, when did you start with the National Park Service?

Adams: I started as a seasonal park technician – let’s see (laughs), that’s a long time ago – in the summer of 1974, and, later on that summer, I had the opportunity to –

Interviewer: And where were you?

Adams: I was – I was at Western Archeological Center, here in Tucson, back under the old Western Region of the National Park Service. And, at the end of that summer, I had an opportunity to take a – it was called a Subject to Furlough position. I believe it was a one-month furlough – or, one month per year I was furloughed. And so I got into that

job, and was with Western Archeological Center for several years doing archeology and historic preservation around the Four Corners area of the Southwest and also some of the other sites around the Western Region, including California, Nevada. And, after – I was – after several years of that, there was a realignment of personnel. I was doing most of my work in the Four Corners area.

Interviewer: Which is where?

Adams: Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico. And most of that work was being done within the – there were eight national park sites under the Navajo Lands Group of – which was a satellite of the old Southwest Region. And since Western Archeological Center staff was being downsized – since most of my work was being done up in the Four Corners area, I was transferred to the Navajo Lands Group. I believe that was 1977 or so. And went up to that office and, again, worked mostly in the Four Corners area, but also did – helped out – we were – as I said before, Navajo Lands Group was a satellite office of the old Southwest Region, and I did some work with the Regional Office staff over in Texas and some other places. And, in about 1982 or so – let’s see, I’m looking back through my materials here (sounds of paper shuffling and pages turning). Sometime around 1982, Navajo Lands Group was being downsized, and we – that office changed to the Farmington Field Office, and our General Superintendent for Navajo Lands Group, Art White, had retired, and so, when they downsized the staff, they moved us over into a building with BLM, and there were only, I think, three of us – no, four – four of us left at that time. And then, by 1983, two of the other people had retired, so they closed the field office, and I was transferred to San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. That was (sounds of papers shuffling and pages turning) –

Interviewer: Okay. What was your – what was your position at San Antonio?

Adams: I was Chief of Cultural Resources to start with. That was November of 1983. And the park was undergoing a transition from development to operations, so there were some staff changes going on there. The previous Chief of Maintenance had moved on to a different park. I can’t remember where, but – so, I became also – in addition to Chief of Cultural Resources, I was the Acting Chief of Maintenance. And that was okay, because almost all the work that the maintenance crew did was on historic structures, because –

Interviewer: Oh, well, okay. What is your background?

Adams: Yes, and some minor things. And most of the maintenance was – that was the days of A- 76 and the contracting of all kinds of services, maintenance being the primary one. And that was done through – oh, DARPA? Not DARPA, San Antonio Real Property Management Authority, SARPMA. That was the Defense Department Contracting office out of, I think it was, Fort Sam Houston. And a lot of the federal facilities around there contracted their maintenance thorough that central office. And since the other work was historical preservation, there was a large contract with an architectural firm for

preservation of the mission churches and their ancillary structures. So, it was a pretty good fit, but then we moved our people – as we became operational, we moved our headquarters down to a purpose-built building closer to Mission San Jose. And we moved out of the Federal Building downtown, and we wound up getting the – filling the Chief of Maintenance position and, as we – as I said, as we became operational, we were, you know, trying to figure out how we were going to handle different work with a fairly small staff. And we did have a significant amount of natural resources in the park.

Interviewer: (Laughs) I think I can see what’s coming here.

Adams: (Laughs) Yeah. So, I wound up with taking Natural Resources also, and I had the good fortune to wind up with a really good biologist as the primary person in that Division to take care of those resources. And –

Interviewer: So, Steve, let me – let me interrupt for just a minute and ask you this question. With – you started out in archeology. Were you an archeologist? Did you have a degree in archeology?

Adams: Anthropology with an emphasis in archeology, yeah.

Interviewer: Anthropology, okay. So, now, you’ve been the archeologist, cultural resource – Chief of Cultural Resources, Acting Chief of Maintenance, and Acting Chief of Resources – of Natural Resources?

Adams: Well, it wasn’t an Acting role for the Natural Resources. I had been – when I was at Navajo Lands Group, I was actually – we didn’t have a Natural Resources person in the Group office, so, I kind of took over that responsibility, too, and worked with the Natural Resources people in the parks, did Resource Management Plans, that kind of thing. So, I was – it wasn’t unfamiliar territory. And so, they just – that was brought in under my purview. And then, about that time, we got a new Chief of Maintenance, so I was no longer the Acting Chief of Maintenance. So, then, I was Chief of Resources Management. And then – let’s see –

Interviewer: Okay. And where did you move from there?

Adams: Well, we’re not finished with San Antonio! (laughs). I’ll talk your ear off, if I can. But I’ll try to compress the story. So, our Chief of Interpretation moved on, and so, I became – that was added, so I was Chief of Interpretation and Resources Management. And then the Chief Ranger retired, so I took over protection.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Oh, my gosh! Did you have a Law Enforcement – did you have a Law Enforcement certificate?

Adams: I had gone – not with the Park Service. It was kind of – at that time, that was – San Antonio was still under the old Southwest Region, and Southwest Region was having a

little bit of a problem accepting the fact that we needed to professionalize the law enforcement function, so they didn’t – they didn’t want to send me to FLETC. But I went through the Sheriff’s Department – went through the Basic Academy and the Advanced Academy, and then I took the state test and was certified as a Texas Peace Officer, and then I got a regular commission with the Sheriff’s Department and was working within the Sheriff’s Reserve. I was doing – I was a dispatcher for a while, and I was working patrol, and then I was a personnel investigator.

Interviewer: Good heavens! Was this in addition to working at the park? Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh, my gosh! And did you also get to sleep?

Adams: Well, that was a tough time because, about the time I took over Law Enforcement, we got a new Superintendent, and – anyway, I was – I was working, pretty much, eighty- hour weeks, so, no, there wasn’t a whole lot of time to do anything but work. (Laughter) But, so, when the – there was some issues at Padre Island National Seashore, and the Chief Ranger down there retired, and so I was transferred down to Padre Island, and I had – it was Interpretation, Resources Management, Environmental Protection, and Resources and Visitor Protection. And I went down there in June of ’89, and then there were – well, I don’t want to get in – too far into the weeds on this, but there were some issues with park management there, and I was transferred up to the Regional Office in February of ’91.

Interviewer: Which Regional Office was that?

Adams: Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe and was – as the Chief of the Branch of Cultural Resources Management. And one of the things I did there – there was an issue with the management at Pea Ridge National Military Park, and I went over then in the fall of ’91 to serve as the Acting Superintendent and then decided to apply for that job, and I was there from, you know, February of ’92 through early December of ’99.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, it sounds like the Missions assignment gave you all the hands-on training you could possibly need to be a Superintendent. You pretty much covered all the bases?

Adams: Yeah, it was – it was a good experience. It was – it was kind of tough, but – you know, all my jobs gave me a lot of education and –

Interviewer: Yeah. So, in December of ’99, you went to Brown v. Board? Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you – did you apply for that, or were – did they say, “This is where you’re going?” How did you become –?

Adams: No, it – when I was at Pea Ridge – there had – there had been a lot of issues there, not only with the management but with Resources Management. They were – they were doing things without getting any Section 106 clearance. The park had – it was – it really hadn’t been brought into the fold. There had been a succession of – well, I shouldn’t say that. Anyway, what I – one of the things I did, I started making changes when I got there, and –

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Well, we’re going to – we’re going talk about the things that you did, but I’d like to skip over those right now and discuss the remainder of your career.

Adams: Okay.

Interviewer: So, you went to Brown v. Board in 1999 and you left in 2004? Adams: Yes, July of 2004. And –

Interviewer: What happened then?

Adams: Went up to – they asked me to come up for Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. And so, I came in, kind of, at the end of the first third of the bicentennial and finished out the bicentennial with the Trail. And then we went – the Trail also had some – it had gone from, kind of, an afterthought to an operational headquarters combined with a – an interpretive function, since we were co-located with the new Regional Office building.

And so, we were working to get things going after the bicentennial, because there was actually, you know, a trail to administer. And so, I was there until – I think it was March of 2009, maybe? Something like that. And I applied for the Associate Regional Director for Cultural Resources for the Midwest Region and was appointed to that. And I just had to move upstairs, so –

Interviewer: (Laughs) From your office down below? Adams: Pardon?

Interviewer: From your office down below?

Adams: Yeah. (Laughs) That was one of the less strenuous moves. (Laughter) Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. Did you finish your career there?

Adams: Yes, I did, and I retired in January of 2013.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. Well, that was quite a varied career. (Laughs) Adams: It was.

Interviewer: (Laughs) So, let’s go back to your time at Brown v. Board. When you first arrived on site – well, first of all, let me ask you this: had you seen the site before you went there as Superintendent? I mean, had you visited it at any – at any time before that?

Adams: I hadn’t visited it – visited it, but I had seen – we had – back then, we usually had a Regional Superintendents’ Conference every year, and, you know, one of the things we did when we got together was give a brief overview of what was going on at our park. And I remember there was a – there was a guy who was the Superintendent – had – I think he was the first Superintendent – the first – the first operational Superintendent. And that gets kind of muddied, because there were four or five Superintendents before me, but they had different functions. But, he was showing – he had a slide show or a PowerPoint – I don’t remember which – showing the condition of the school, and we all kind of grimaced and said, “Oh, we’re glad – we’re glad you’re working on that!” (laughter) because it was – it was run down and falling apart.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was going to ask you, what was your first impression of the – of the park when you first arrived? So –?

Adams: Well, there were – there again, there were some other things going on, and what the Regional Office did – the Deputy Regional Director, Dave Given, called me up one day at Pea Ridge, and, because of the – some of the work I’d done with the state and the other parks in Arkansas when I was at Pea Ridge – I had – I had a – we had put together a coalition of state and federal and local and organizational people to establish the Arkansas Civil War Heritage Trail. There were components for tourism, and we did a curriculum for school kids. And so I was – I got really good experience there, working with local groups to build up things like tourism and education. So, they – Dave and, I guess, the Regional Director thought that that made some good qualifications for coming to Brown and working on some of the issues up there.

Interviewer: Okay. So, let me just interrupt here and make sure I’ve got this straight. Was Pea Ridge your assignment just before Brown v. Board?

Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, I – somehow, I missed that. Okay.

Adams: Yeah, I was at Pea Ridge for – oh, it was about eight years, and then it – towards the end of that, they asked me to come up to Brown.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, before Pea Ridge was Padre Island?

Adams: No, the Regional Office – the Southwest Regional Office was before Pea Ridge, and then, before that, that was Padre Island.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. I got it. Okay. So, now I – now I’m straight. Thank you. (Laughter) And so, your first impressions were that the building – by the time you got there, was the building still in disarray?

Adams: Oh, yeah! And I’ll spend a lot of my time talking about the two main components – or, the two main things I was working on, and that was the physical rehabilitation of the structure to convert it to staff offices and a museum and then the – and I – and the work to go out nationally and get the story straight, and tell people what we were doing, and get some buy-in, get some good ideas so that we would have a good product at the end.

Interviewer: Okay, so you were the Superintendent – you were actually the Superintendent up until the park opened – until the Grand Opening. Is that correct?

Adams: Well, until afterward.

Interviewer: Well, after – okay. So, basically, you were there when it was being transformed into a functional park?

Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, when you started – when you started, the Visitor Center was in the old Post Office? Is that correct?

Adams: Yeah, that was just a – it was actually – we call it a Contact Station. But, you know, we had a Park Ranger down there basically handing out information in – downstairs in the old Post Office part. That building also later became – well, I guess, it had long been the federal District Court. Now, by the time I got there, occasionally, they were using some of the courts and the offices over there, but most of the court business was in the new courthouse across the street.

Interviewer: Ah, okay. And so, what was it like to have the Contact Station so far away from the object of the park? How did you – how did you – how did you deal with the challenges?

Adams: Actually, that wasn’t a challenge, because – and I’ll get to – you kind of touched on one of the big issues, which was the mythology about Brown v. Board, you know – what was important and what wasn’t. And, you know, there really wasn’t any point in – I mean, if people – we usually told people, “You know, if you want to drive by the old school – that particular school, which was only one of the four segregated schools in Topeka, you could do that, but you couldn’t go inside. It’s just an old building, and you’re not going to get the information you need to understand the court case.” And we didn’t really want people running around down there (laughs).

Interviewer: Yeah, you had a fence around it?

Adams: Well, there wasn’t a fence at the time, anyway.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. By that time, the fence was gone? Adams: Yeah, I don’t –

Interviewer: Well, Treva Sykes told me that, when she first started, she had keys to unlock the fence.

Adams: Yeah, there had been a fence, and then, when we – I think, when we started construction, or reconstruction, rehabilitation, we put up another fence, but that was a different fence.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. That was the construction fence?

Adams: So – yeah. What had happened when the – after the park was established in 1993, then the Park Service and the Brown Foundation were working on getting ready for the rehabilitation and the development of the interpretive background, and so it – between, I would say, 1993 and 2000, the – on the Park Service side and in terms of money, you know, it was getting an understanding of what needed to be done to rehabilitate the physical structure, and how much that would cost, and how it should be done, etcetera. And then the Brown Foundation was concentrating mostly on educating people involved in the project about the case and what was important and what wasn’t. And so, those kind – those two things were kind of running concurrently. Well, they were running concurrently. So, the Superintendents that were coming in were doing a lot of PR with the community. They were learning about the case, and then it – they were beginning to look at, “Okay, when the physical rehabilitation is done, what functions for park operations go where in the building?” So, a kind of a logistical – operational logistics thing. But they were doing charettes on, you know, what this room could be used for and starting to do some of the preliminary work on what kind of exhibits were needed, what kinds of – what kinds of exhibits would be useful and effective. And, by the time I got there, we were at the stage where, you know, we had pretty good estimates on what it would cost to do the physical rehabilitation and what it would cost to put the interpretive exhibits together.

Interviewer: Did you have designs already, or this was just the Park Service’s estimates? Adams: This was just Park Service estimates.

Interviewer: You hadn’t gone out for designs and design bids?

Adams: No. There were – by the time I got there, there – I think, maybe, a couple years before, they had started dipping their toes into the design part of it. I think that’s when – oh, what – (sighs) I’ve got some of my materials sitting out here, and I’ve just – you know, it’s been twenty years!

Interviewer: I know. And I really appreciate you digging back into your memory to find the – to remember these things, because this is – one of the – one of the ways that we can

determine what the – what the real story – or, closer to the real story is, that you don’t find in documentation. So, I do appreciate your efforts.

Adams: And the – it’s kind of funny, because, you know, it doesn’t seem that long ago! (Laughter) But, when I’m trying to remember something, I have to think, “Oh, boy! What was that person’s name? What was that company’s name?” So, Quinn Evans was the thing I was – that was the architect and engineering firm. The – so, they were beginning to look at the structure and what all of that meant and come up with some estimates and some preliminary design considerations. And then we – about that time – as a matter of fact, I think it was – I may be misremembering this – about 2000 – now, there had been some things going on before this in terms of line-item construction, and Congress was getting pretty nervous about giving bureaus all this line-item construction money. And then, sometimes, you know, things didn’t look quite right. And so, one of the things that Department of Interior wound up doing – and, specifically, the National Park Service – we had a national panel of experts, and these were architects, and engineers, and accountants, and who knows what else. And it was a national-level panel, and so, about that time, what you would have to do, if your park had a – had line- item funding, you would have to go before this panel and make a presentation. And I remember the people from Quinn Evans were there with us, and they, kind of, laid out their thought process on costs and materials and such, and then the panel would deliberate on that. And the panel had the power to say, “Okay, we think you’re going the right direction. We think the costs are reasonable,” or not. And could, kind of, put their thumb on things if they needed to, and there were some occasions – when you went before this panel, I think they generally took, maybe, two parks in the morning and two parks in the afternoon, something like that. You didn’t have a whole lot of time to make your presentation.

Interviewer: Was this – was this – was this – was this the DAB? Adams: Pardon?

Interviewer: Was this the DAB, the Design Advisory Board?

Adams: Yeah, Development and Advisory Board, yeah. I couldn’t find that – I was trying to remember the name of it. And I remember, the first one of those I attended, their – I don’t remember which park it was, but their presentation wasn’t up to the standards they were looking for, and they told them, you know, “Here, we’ll write these questions down for you, but you need to go back and take another look at this and come back with the answers, and then we’ll review it again.” And, you know, line-item money was fiscal year money, so, if you couldn’t get in a position to start spending it, it would get diverted to some other project, or you might even lose it. So, the – I guess – you know, normally, I had – I had been doing project funding documents from very, very early in my career, and I knew that – well, typically, for me, when I developed a funding request,

it would take about ten years for that money to show up. And so, you know, the – when the school was being sold to a – well, it was owned by a private developer, and he was just going to dump it on the market, and that’s when the Brown Foundation found out about it, and they started making moves with the Congressional delegation to get a National Historic Site designation. And they – well, in a – in a way, it was a blessing in disguise that they were somewhat naïve about the time that it took to get money. So, you know, there was a push-push-push to get all this done, and then, on top of that, in addition to the Development Advisory Board, the federal contracting laws were being tightened up severely. And there was a timeline for that, and it really couldn’t be pushed. And so, all of that was, kind of, stacking up, because the Foundation’s timeline for opening the park was the fiftieth anniversary. And –

Interviewer: Yeah. So, was all this – was all this additional regulation slowing down the process of rehabilitating the park – or the building – and opening it up?

Adams: Oh, yeah! No doubt. No doubt at all. And it – and it was a – you know, that stuff wasn’t put in place because of Brown v. Board. It was a broader concern about how federal tax dollars were being spent, completely understandable. And now, a contract’s being let with, you know, no real management by the government, and you had these millions of dollars disappearing into the dry sand.

Interviewer: (Laughs) So, I do want to ask you: at that point, was Quinn Evans under contract with the park or the National Park Service to provide these services, or were they just doing it pro-bono?

Adams: Yes. Yeah, they – I – well, that’s a good question.

Interviewer: I mean, I know, sometimes, A&E firms will provide preliminary ideas and designs for you guys.

Adams: Well, you just triggered a memory. I think, about the time I got there was when the Park Service – I think, maybe, why – when I got there, Quinn Evans had just participated in the last round of Requests for Proposals, and they had the proposal that made it through all of the gauntlets. And they had – one of the reasons they did, if I’m recalling correctly, was that they had a little bit more polished and real presentation. They didn’t just say, “Well, you know, we would think of – if we got the project, we would think about these things and these things and then we’d put that together.” Quinn Evans had come down, and they had done some real field work, and so they were able to put out a presentation that said, “Well, you know, we’re going to tell you what we would do if we got the project.” And so, then, it kind of began in earnest.

Interviewer: Okay. So, they were, kind of, the *defacto* design group, by that time? Adams: Yeah, they were. Well, I think that was fairly early in 2000.

Interviewer: Okay, but they weren’t under – okay. And, you know, we talked about – you talked about how long all this stuff took. Did you find that they public was impatient or just (laughs) – or just the Brown Foundation? How did the public view the park when you were there – when you first got there?

Adams: Well, they didn’t. It may have been – well, it was interesting to some of the people who were interested in the history, but, in general, the public really didn’t know about it.

Interviewer: Oh. What about the neighbors – surrounding neighbors? They didn’t know that you were doing something?

Adams: Well, yeah, they did. And they were getting nervous, because they were in – you know, there had been a – in part of the master planning – it wasn’t called a Master Plan by that time –

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. The General Plan – General Management Plan?

Adams: – but some of the – some of the planning for the park as an operational park – Interviewer: Yeah, the General Management Plan?

Adams: – General Management Plan, you know, there were some boundaries shown, and, within those anticipated boundaries were some small businesses that were operational. But, yeah, they were getting a little bit nervous about, “Well, you know, does this mean the government’s going to come in and take us over and kick us out?” And so, yeah, that was – there was that component of it, but, in terms of the community and the city – you know, it was kind of interesting, but it had been going on, at that point, for seven years, and so, I don’t think that the general public, at that point, was really focused or paying much attention to it.

Interviewer: Okay. Just the – just the people in the immediate vicinity, I guess?

Adams: Yeah, and the business owners, because, you know, that had – for a long time, that had been a residential area, and all of their – then, some small businesses there before it was – just across the street to the north, you know, there’s some old photographs of some bars and other small businesses. But, you know, most of those buildings had been torn down, so, some of the more substantial buildings that – you know, like, brick buildings a little bit further out were still around, but much of the neighborhood was gone. And –

Interviewer: Okay. So, the General Management Plan had boundaries that included not only the school, but also private property of other people?

Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and over the course of – were you at all involved in – you weren’t involved in the General Management Plan’s development, were you?

Adams: No.

Interviewer: Okay. So, over the course of that time, some of those – some of those structures were demolished and others, possibly, were abandoned? So, in the – so, in the – so, when you were there, were there any private – was there any private property within the boundary of the park?

Adams: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And it was businesses or residential? Adams: I’m trying to think. It was both.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, did you go to any kind of, like, public meetings where people were hoping – were worried about the – what the federal government was going to do about their properties inside this National Park?

Adams: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And the – of course, the city was all for it, because, you know, they saw the tourism benefit. And it was kind of a blighted area, so they were, you know, all for improving in that regard. One of the typical things with the residential sites was that people were moving out of the neighborhood, and there were a couple of houses adjacent to the west part of the school grounds that had been vacant for some time. It was – it was real interesting, too, because one of them – I think it was the house that was furthest north on that side, right beside the school – there had been a fellow – and I can’t remember his name, but he had been in the old Negro Baseball League and had played baseball with Satchel Paige with, like, the Kansas City team, and he was – I guess, after he died, that may have been when the house was vacated. So – but most of the – most of the concern was from the business owners. And there was a business owner – well, there was a magnet school that had been built in the north end of the block north of the school, and then, between that magnet school and Monroe, that was just a blank lot of – I don’t know – a couple of acres or something – or so. And there was another business across the street from the magnet school that owned that property. And they had – they were going to build, I think, a big, new warehouse there. And so, we were – we were quite concerned about having a new building built there with no considerations for the historic scene, and there were a lot of conversations. There were – the city was having some zoning – re-zoning meetings, and people were pretty upset.

Interviewer: Okay. Were they concerned about additional traffic and parking, in addition?

Adams: No, they were – they were concerned about their plans for development being interrupted, in the case of that one particular owner. Or, in the case of some of the other businesses around there, I think there was a – I’m wanting to say that, to the

northeast, there was a machine shop or something like that, and they were just concerned that they were going to have to find a new location to operate out of. And then – yeah, what wound up being the parking lot for the site, that land over there was owned by one of the railroads, and, supposedly, there had been an agreement with the railroads that, once they quit using that track over there, that that would somehow wind up in Park Service possession. And, by the time I got there, those people had moved, and the people from the railroad had moved on, and the new people didn’t know what we were talking about.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Oh, no! The people from the railroad had sold the land to somebody else instead of giving it to the Park Service?

Adams: No, they still owned it. And there was a provision – I guess it was Kansas state law, but, if a railroad was – if a railroad track was abandoned, after a certain number of years, that it was – the land was considered abandoned and could come into some sort of governmental domain. And then, when that was brought up, the railroad said, “Well, we haven’t abandoned the track. It’s still there. We could use it today, if we needed to.” And so, there were some conversations between some people who knew some of the higher-ups in that railroad, trying to start the conversation again about, you know, “This was intended to be the parking lot.” And we were moving in that direction by the time I left. We had some sort of understanding. And I think that’s getting pretty muddy, now, in my memory. (Laughs)

Interviewer: (Laughs) So – well, railroads are notoriously difficult to negotiate with regarding land, I do have to – in my experience. So, by the time you left, they were working towards being – having that parking lot available and getting that land from the railroad? Is that what you’re saying?

Adams: Yeah. I think what wound up – and, again, I’m raking through my memory. I think what eventually happened was that the railroad finally agreed to turn it over to the city, and then the city was going to turn it over to the Park Service.

Interviewer: Ah. Okay. Well, I guess that must have happened, because it now is the parking lot. So, let’s just –

Adams: (Laughs) Yeah, it seemed to be – oh, and, also, our – that was Midwest Region, and the – at that time, the Chief of the Midwest Region Lands Office, he’d come down, and he was a real estate developer, so, you know, he knew how to talk to people in real estate terms, and he, kind of, got the ball rolling again, and we were working towards that resolution.

Interviewer: Okay, but what – in the meantime, what you were doing was rehabilitating the building?

Adams: Yeah. So, there were – there were two phases of that with three phases to the reconstruction-rehab. The first things were the – were the physical rehabilitation, and Phase One was the – let’s see, I’ve got my – I’ve printed out my – oh, where did I put it? (Sounds of shuffling papers) My PowerPoint presentation. I –

Interviewer: Oh! (Laughs) Well, that was for the DAB, for the D-A-B? Adams: Well, no, this was – this was – this was for the public. Interviewer: Oh! For the public meetings?

Adams: We were – literally went around the country with a presentation and public meetings to tell people what we were doing, and get some ideas from them, and try to get some buy-in on what we were trying to do.

Interviewer: So, you – so, you did this, not just in Topeka, but in, like, the other – maybe, the other sites for the Brown v. Board of Education –?

Adams: Oh, yeah. We went to South Carolina, and Virginia, and D.C., and Delaware. On just that specific purpose, we had public meetings just to show people what we were doing.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. Get – to get their input?

Adams: Yeah. And lots of other meetings on other – there were a number of different approaches going on concurrently. We were working with – well, we and the Brown Foundation were stuck together really well and working very effectively. And we were working with the Smithsonian, and the NAACP, and the Legal Defense Fund, and the Trust for Public Land, because the Trust had – actually owned – they had bought the school and the grounds from the developer and held it until the Park Service could take it over. So, all that stuff was going on at the same time. The – so, I developed this PowerPoint presentation to use in those public meetings and to use at Rotary Club and those kinds of venues to show people what we were doing, because a lot of people had never been there, didn’t know what we were talking about. But – so, Phase One was the exterior. That was – it was – as I said, there – the school was in pretty poor shape, and, you know, when a - when a building is not lived in – and, by that, I mean, either literally lived in or lived in, in the sense of a business or an organization being there, actively using it – it starts to deteriorate. And so, there was some major work. We had to have a new roof. The chimney had been – I think the top had been blown off in a tornado. The windows were in – there were a lot of broken windows, and then the windows themselves, some of the casings were in pretty bad condition. There were a lot of issues with the subsurface drainage. Practically the whole thing, the brickwork had to be repointed. New doors. We had to put in a – some ADA ramps. And we – it was also a pretty forward-looking – we had a geothermal heating and cooling system that went in on the playground across the street. So, that was a big deal. So, that was Phase One, and

then Phase Two was the interior work. And, again, you know, inside, there was no – all the utility systems were dead, and there had been – when – after the developer took over the school, it had been emptied, and then there was some – I guess, some homeless people living in there, and, one day, they started a fire. So, there had been some significant fire damage to a couple of the downstairs classrooms. So, you know, we had to have new plumbing, new electricity, new heating and cooling put together with the geothermal system. All – yeah, it was a mess.

Interviewer: It was almost like building a new building?

Adams: Yeah, basically. I mean, it – there was a whole – most of the original fabric was retained, but there were also some – had – there had been some changes to the building during its several iterations of use, and some of those violated the fire codes, and so that had to be fixed. And –

Interviewer: Okay. So, let me ask you this question: you had – you did this presentation, but this was after you had a design, correct?

Adams: Correct.

Interviewer: And so, you had blueprints, and you had specifications; you were ready to roll? Adams: No.

Interviewer: Oh, you just had a conceptual design?

Adams: Well, we – by that time, we were – and I was trying to – and I’m missing – I keep an annual calendar on a little pocket calendar, and I was going through those last night trying to refresh my memory, and I’m missing 2001. So, I’m trying to remember – when I got there in 2000, we were working concurrently on some of the exhibit questions and the rehab issues. And so – and we were getting – it’s kind of funny, because people were saying, “Well, you know, the Grand Opening’s not until 2004.” This is 2000, you know. We’re already behind. And so, it got more and more compressed, and it was –

Interviewer: So, here’s a question I’m always fond of asking: during construction – during the rehabilitation, were there made – any changes made to the original design that were necessitated either by unforeseen conditions, or changes in approach, or budget?

Adams: No. There were some changes, but they – and I have to say Quinn Evans did a really good job. (Coughs) Pardon me. They did – they did a really good job of identifying all of the issues – or most of them, anyway. So, we had a really clear path, and, as we went along, other things, like the – some of the things that were violations of the fire code – those were obvious, but those were good, because – like, for one thing, somebody had enclosed the stairwells – had put – had put a wall to make it an enclosed stairwell. Well, that violates the fire code. But they had also covered up the original – they had taken off

the stair rails, and, fortunately, they had stored them, so we still had the originals. So, we were able to restore the original stairways with the railings – the wood railings – beautiful, old, oak railings. And so, those things naturally came together. And we also had a very strong cultural resources team in the Regional Office, who was very insistent that we retain historic fabric, so, actually, the changes that were made were not to the structure. It was to – for example, some of the ideas on how to do exhibits had to be changed because they would have resulted in removal or changes to the historic fabric that just weren’t acceptable. So, we worked, and worked, and worked on those, and it wasn’t an easy thing, by any means. I mean, we had some knock-down, drag-out meetings, complete with shouting.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Within the Park Service, or – in the Park Service, or –?

Adams: But we worked through that, and we came up with some good solutions that preserved the fabric, the character, and still accomplished the interpretive and educational side of things. So, that all worked out very well. There were some things that we had problems with. One of them was the roof. Even after – you know, I don’t know how many times Quinn Evans crawled around up in the attic, but even after the roof repairs were finished, we were having problems with leaks. And, of course, this – it was coming through inside, so that was complicating things inside, but they finally got that one figured out, I think. There was one – also, when we were doing the outside, I remember – I didn’t believe it when – at first, when – I thought Treva was exaggerating. She took me – took me down in the basement one day after there had been a rain, and there were these pencil-diameter-sized jets of water shooting out of the concrete coating on the basement walls. And, you know, the basement was always flooding. And so, one of the things that was done on the north side of the building, outside – they dug down along the foundation of the school. Now, that was the third school that had been built on the site. So, they ran across some of the foundations of the previous two schools, which had been disturbed by the construction of the present school. Anyway, they dug all that out. They applied all of this waterproofing coating and such down there, and I think there were some – they added some extra drains, and that helped, but it didn’t eliminate the problem. There was still too much moisture coming in. And I think, probably, there was – you know, that’s fairly close to the river, and so there’s probably a pretty high water table right there. And that will vary in depth, depending on how much rain there is at a particular time. And one of the reasons I bring that up is because, when I left, they were still having trouble keeping water out of the elevator pit, which, you know, seemed to me, kind of, a major problem. But – so, yeah, there was – there was a lot of time spent on just the logistics of the rehab, but a lot of it was straightforward.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. But, basically, it went the way the design said to go?

Adams: Yeah, pretty much. Now, we had a – we had a hiccup. It was – in hindsight, it was kind of amusing. I was down there – I went down there every day. I tried not to be too much of

a pest, but I wanted to know what was going on, and I could help – I went in one day and went into the – this – the classrooms on the first floor, southeast corner, and there were some tradesmen in there – this is during the interior rehab – and they were arguing about who was supposed to do what in this corner of the room, so I – and it was getting pretty loud, and I was getting a little concerned, and so I said, “Well, okay, what’s the problem?” And they were telling me that – you know, the electrician was saying, “Well, I came in here to put my electrical run stuff in, and this plumber is trying to put stuff in the same place, and those can’t go together, and he’s putting stuff in my hole.” And so we got the general contractor foreman in there, and he was talking with them, and so we looked at the drawings, and, sure enough, it – the electrician’s drawings said his stuff went in there, and the plumber’s stuff said his went in there. And so we got the – I can’t remember if it was the same day – if the architect – if the architect from Quinn Evans, who worked down there several days a week – if he was there at the time or not, but we got him there that day – or maybe it was the next day – and he got to looking at it, and the problem had been that, at least in that particular area, the utility drawings had not been overlaid to see if there were any conflicts. And they found out that, yeah, it was definitely a conflict because two different drawings showed two different things, so, anyway, they got – they got that straightened out, and that worked out. And one of the blessings of the condition of the site previously was that, since there were no utilities that worked in there, and they wouldn’t have met the current codes, and since everything was – you know, there was no question about whether or not we were going to be modifying any of the interior structural walls, you know, like the bathrooms. They all had to be completely redone. So, it’s – you know, whatever we need, in terms of a restroom here, including ADA, have - has to be met within the confines of this room. So, it was a known situation. They knew what they needed to put in there, and it was going to be all modern stuff. So, that worked out really well.

Interviewer: Right. Did you – did you have any input into where things went?

Adams: Yeah, when I got there, that was one of the things that they’d been working on between ’93 and 2000 – was where things went in terms of when it was operational. So, you know, if it – there was no question about, you know, bathrooms are going to be bathrooms, and, “Okay, so where do we put the offices, and where do we put this, and where do we put that?” And so, the Regional Office work group, and the Foundation, and whoever else they needed to have as part of their deliberations were having meetings where they’d sit down, and they’d draw circles. You know, this function would go here, this would go here. Is there enough space for this here, or does it need to go over there? So, by the time I arrived, they had a good, conceptual handle on, in general, where things needed to go. And about the only thing that changed – that influenced any of that was when – as – I don’t know whether it was before I got there or after I arrived – shortly after I arrived – the Regional Director and I were talking about the Foundation,

and he asked me to, if I could, find a place for them to have an office in the building. They – at the time, they were in a commercial – they were leasing a commercial space several –

Interviewer: The Regional Director? Adams: Pardon?

Interviewer: The Region wanted an office in the building?

Adams: No, the Region wanted me to, if I could, find a place for the Foundation. Interviewer: Oh! The Foundation, okay.

Adams: The Foundation. I’m glad you brought up Region, because, later on, they asked me – there was a Regional employee who needed to get down to that area due to a family situation, and they asked if we could house her down there, and there happened to be a good place to put her, so we created a place for her desk there. So, you know, when you – when the Regional Director asks – you know, asks you to do something if you can, the translation is, “Do this.” (Laughter) And he probably literally didn’t mean that, but that’s what we – so, we – I took a look at that and made some adjustments. Now, it did – it did create an issue later on when we were trying to figure out where we were going to put the new Chief of Interpretation, and we didn’t have a private office for him, and, of course, the supervisor needs a private office to have conversations with their employees. So, that –

Interviewer: Yeah. How did you – how did you resolve that problem? Adams: Well, we were still working on that when I left.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, when you left – it was after the Dedication and the – and the installation of the – I assume, the installation of the exhibits was done, mostly?

Adams: Oh, yeah, that was – that – well, with the exception of one thing I’ll talk about later. It was all done previous to the Grand Opening, and –

Interviewer: Right. But you were still having trouble deciding where everybody’s office was going to be?

Adams: No, by that time, it – that – we found a place to put his desk – the new – the new Chief of Interpretation. And, because we were getting ready for the Grand Opening – that was a national-level event because the president was the featured speaker, and we simply didn’t have the time to deal with it, at that point.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, you said, “Well, you could sit here until after the Grand Opening, and then we’ll figure it out?”

Adams: Yeah, because he came in – I’m thinking it was the early part of 2004. Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. So, he might not have needed to yell at his – at his subordinates yet, right?

Adams: (Laughs) Well, you know, there were places where he could go. We had these little rooms in the media center, where – they were kind of like study carrels that you’d find in a library. So, he could go in there, if he needed to, like, do any personnel evaluation or something. He could go in there with his employee and have some privacy. Alright, it wasn’t – I’m sure it was an issue for him, but it – we just didn’t have time to resolve it before the Grand Opening. And things were getting really crazy. And, in terms of exhibits, almost everything was in. We were short – we were having some problems with some exhibits. They weren’t working, probably – properly, or something like that. And, you know –

Interviewer: Do you mean that they weren’t – do you mean that they weren’t conveying the information that you wanted or that they - there was some sort of technical problem that was causing them to not function?

Adams: Yeah, they weren’t functioning properly. And it wasn’t a whole lot of them. It was just some of those minor issues that you have to work out. So, we were working on that. In the meantime, there had been a – the Phase Three, of course, was the interpretive exhibits, and the media center, and the AV equipment, and, see, all of that stuff was tied together. We had a – we had to have a separate computer server room where all this stuff was wired in, and the – we had a – an IT media specialist to run this stuff. And there was a – I was trying to think of what it was. Hillman and Carr was the interpretive exhibit design general contractor. And there was a major component of the media part of things that we’d been working on for several years with one of the subcontractors to Hillman and Carr. And I don’t remember what the issue was, but he had a concern about something and wanted to do something either a different way or wanted to do something else instead, and we said, “No, this is what we want. That’s what’s been contracted for.” And they had been – the money had been paid already, because they were x-percentage along in completion of that part. And he put his feet down and said, “No.” And the – Hillman and Carr couldn’t get him to budge. The Regional contracting people couldn’t get him to budge. And so, that – we did open – the Grand Opening came without that specific thing, whatever it was. It was – it was a major part, and it – I think the – for some reason, I’m thinking that the money we spent on it was, you know, at least a couple hundred thousand dollars.

Interviewer: And it never was – you spent the money already, and it wasn’t installed? Did they –? Adams: Right. And I don’t – I don’t know how that was resolved because, you know, that – the

Grand Opening was in May, and I left in July.

Interviewer: Okay. So, whoever was next after you knows how that was resolved?

Adams: Yeah, Dennis Vasquez should.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I’m talking to him tomorrow, so I’ll ask him. (Laughs)

Adams: Yeah. I hope they were able to get it resolved. I – and what I finally wound up doing was, I was telling them, “Look, okay, so, he’s absolutely refusing to do it. We want our money back.” And so, they were trying to figure out whether that was even possible, at that point.

Interviewer: To recall the money? So, what you were asking him to do was in the design? It wasn’t something – it wasn’t a change or anything that you –?

Adams: It wasn’t a change, and we had been discussing it for a couple of years, maybe as long as three years. I don’t remember for sure when we started talking about – since I can’t remember what it was, exactly.

Interviewer: What it was. Okay, well, maybe Dennis can add to this story. So, when the rehabilitation was completed, were you pleased with the results?

Adams: Oh, yeah! The – it was a beautiful end product, I thought.

Interviewer: Was – did you think everything worked well, or were there things that you wished had been different?

Adams: The only concern I had at the – that I can remember, is whatever component that was we paid for, that we really needed, was not going to be part of it. Because we had worked so hard, and we had had so much – so many discussions – very passionate discussions that –

Interviewer: Yeah, with yelling and stuff?

Adams: Yeah. It was disappointing, but the school turned out beautifully. The exhibits were beautiful. The – not only were – you know, the exhibit furniture was beautiful. They were working really well, and the – I guess there were three A/V presentations or parts that I thought worked exactly like we had planned. There was the big presentation in the auditorium. That worked wonderfully. The “Hall of Courage” – have you been there?

Interviewer: Yes.

Adams: Oh, okay. You know, even we – I don’t think we had it clear how visceral that experience was going to be. And it shocked us, and it delighted me that it did exactly what I wanted it to do, which was slap people and say, you know, “This is what people were having to go through all their lives!” And then, the video, “Pass it On,” with the runner across the desert – so, it all came together. There was some very interesting side conversations about – in that same downstairs classroom where “Pass it On” video is, there’s that place where you could go and listen to protest music, and there were some very

interesting discussions with the person in that – person at Hillman and Carr who was – we were evaluating different protest songs to be included in there. There were a couple that they had proposed that I said, “No, you’re going to have kids – you’re going to have children come here – in here, and I don’t want them to be listening to some of these lyrics.” (Laughs) So, I had to put my foot down on some of that. But we had some other really good protest songs, and, you know, a lot of – it was interesting to see the reaction of people coming through there, going through the museum and listening to some of that – those songs, and they would say something like, “You know, I really never listened to that song from that perspective, and now it’s meaning something totally different to me,” so that was – that was very effective.

Interviewer: Good! Okay, so, once you got the rehabilitation done and the exhibits mostly installed, you had a Dedication. So, I assume you planned – helped plan for that?

Adams: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was –

Interviewer: So, let’s talk about the Dedication for a minute. First of all, what – who helped plan the Dedication besides you?

Adams: Well, again, we had (begins sorting through papers on his desk) – I’m – I’ve got my Grand Opening Dedication Commemorative Brochure here, and the last inside pages is chocky-jam full of people that helped with that.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the people who are listed on there – on the Dedication Brochure – Program are the people who helped you plan it, you’re saying?

Adams: Well, this was – there – actually, there are two – there are, kind of, two different components of the Grand Opening – or the ceremony. One was the logistics of it, and that – most of those people listed are the people that were helping with the logistical side of things.

Interviewer: I assume that there was quite a lot of logistics involved with having the president come be the featured speaker.

Adams: And, actually, that’s another – that’s a separate component. So, the people that are listed on the Event Planning Committee – no, I’m sorry, actually – I don’t know if you’ve seen this brochure –

Interviewer: I have not.

Adams: Okay. It’s – we’ve got a list of – you know, Park Development is one header, we’ve got the Brown Foundation and the specific people, like Cheryl Brown, Deb Dandridge, Ron Griffin, Chelsea Smith, Board of Directors, Midwest Region, Harpers Ferry Center, Intermountain Regions and Midwest Regions for the Incident Management Team, the Central Special Events Team, the Trust for Public Land, Park Event Neighborhood

Development Support – you know, the mayor, and the police, and fire, and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And some of those – some of those people were directly involved in the Planning Committee itself, and then we have people who were supporting that, like – oh, the City Planning Department, City Human Resources, FBI, Department of Justice,

U.S. Marshals, Secret Service, Kansas City – they sent over eight motorcycle officers – Shawnee County Sheriff’s Department, State of Kansas, all those people. And then, some of the organizations and individuals from the town and the community, including that business that wanted to put up that new warehouse north of the school, and we had got kind of sideways with them because the politics – state politics – were getting involved with the State Historic Preservation Officer, who was basically told, “Stay out of it. Don’t you dare say that this could impact – this new warehouse could impact the historic scene.” So, the city had public meetings on that, and that got kind of tense, at times, but they wound up – the business owner wound up supporting the event and let overflow – we were having some overflow parking over on his land. So, you know, it – after the tension of the planning kind of died down, it – we were having some better relationships there. So, there was – there were just, kind of, physical logistics of, “How do we get X number of people into this place, and how do we get – it’s going to be hot in May. How do we provide water? How do we do this? How do we do that?” I remember there were also – you know, “Okay, the Ku Klux Klan wants to protest, so what do we do about that? We have the –”

Interviewer: Oh, no! What did you do about that?

Adams: Well, I’ll get to that in a second. We had another group that wanted to protest. Well, several groups wanted to protest. So, originally, the – well, one of the things I had to do as the Superintendent, through the Federal Register, was to establish the First Amendment Area, designated First Amendment Area, which, at the time I designated it, was the south lawn of the school, just south of the building itself. So, if a group wanted to come in, they could go out to the grassy area there, which is visible from the street, and protest all they want, but they had to do it in a certain area. And – but then – see, we didn’t know whether the president was going to come or not. The Brown Foundation – Cheryl Brown wanted him to come, and they certainly were thinking about it, but they weren’t going to tell us one way or another until, we were told, about, you know, no earlier than thirty days out, and probably not more than two weeks. They compromised, and it ended up being about three weeks, if I recall correctly. So, you know, we had all of those logistical issues of pouring, at the time, what we thought would probably be hundreds of people in around the school. “Where do we set up the stage? Where do we do this? Where do we do that?” Now, when the – it was decided that the president was coming, of course, that’s a whole new ball game, and so the – you’ve got White House staffers who are telling what the president’s wishes are, and the Secret Service telling everybody what their requirements are, and so the whole thing just, kind of, went exponential, and so, then, you’ve got to – got to bring in all kinds of other people. And it

was – it was – it was fun, but it was kind of nerve-wracking because, when you go into crisis-management mode, and it’s really a frantic pace, and – but, all of that – you know, we had done enough – actually, when I arrived there in early 2000, we started planning, because I knew how long these things took. And so, we planned, and we planned, and we planned, and we had some pretty good meetings about that. Not much passionate exclamation there! Everybody – you know, that was the touchy-feely, feel-good stuff everybody enjoys working with. So, we were getting all of that lined out, had a – even before it was confirmed the president was coming, basically, we had the program outlined, and we had the organizations committing to come and doing their thing. And so, the president’s part of it was icing on the cake.

Interviewer: Yeah, you already knew you were going to have a featured speaker, so you just plug him in there? (Laughs)

Adams: Yeah. So, it all came together. I thought it was fantastic. Everybody enjoyed it. Interviewer: Good. And you saw that – you noticed that the public was having a good time?

Adams: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they were – you know, we knew there would be hundreds of people coming, and that they would enjoy it, but, when people heard the president was coming –

Interviewer: They were more than –?

Adams: Yeah, we wound up, I think, with – but, by the time – you know, there was an inner – there was an outer security perimeter, and then a mid-way security perimeter, and then an inside security perimeter, and, oh, they did things like they brought in these school buses, and they parked them all around the park grounds as physical – large, physical barriers. And the protests – the First Amendment Area had to be moved outside the parking lot area across the street to the Cushinberry Park over there. And the KKK was fine with that. There was a guy – well, that’s another story. There was – there was another guy who is a – who was a lawyer, who was – his contention was that the State of Kansas had no legal obligation to school children. And we told him he – not only could he not protest in front of the front doors of the school, like he was going to do, he couldn’t even use the original, designated First Amendment Area, but he would have to go into whatever area the Secret Service designated to do his protest. But that’s a long story, but I wound up – he sued me in federal court two weeks before the Grand Opening. And –

Interviewer: Oh, my goodness! So, the – so the Secret Service was the one who re-designated – designated a different First Amendment Area, is that correct? They were the ones who decided where it would be?

Adams: Yeah, basically. I can – I think they asked me for suggestions, and I said, “Well,” – because that – maybe, at the time, there was still a fence around the parking – east part of the parking lot, but I said, “You know, that’s – we had planned to put up seating in the parking area and in the playground area for the general audience,” so, you know, if they wanted the – to –

Interviewer: So, did you have to have – did you have to have some – did you have to have some kind of additional security for the president’s – I mean, just checking for guns?

Adams: Oh, yeah! That’s why we had those – oh, god! It – there were police coming in from all over the place. We had the sheriff’s office, we had the highway patrol, we had the state capitol police, we had the FBI and the U.S. Marshalls, and we had those motorcycle cops that came in from Kansas City.

Interviewer: I heard you had snipers – I heard you had snipers on the roof.

Adams: Oh, yeah. They had – I think those were Secret Service snipers, and they commandeered the roofs of those businesses over to the northeast that I was telling you about. They were up on top of their roofs with their sniper rifles. So, yeah, once the president was coming, you know, it – they – the White House and the Secret Service just made things happen. And, at that point, you know – and it was – they were very good. They were really professional people, easy to work with. Now they – you know, they told you what was going to happen.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Yeah, I was going to say, “Easy to work with, as long as you agreed with them, right?”

Adams: (Laughs) But they had a little bit of flexibility there. And we would say, “Okay, well, we had planned to do this and this,” and they would say, “Okay, as long as you understand that this and this are going to happen, then you can plan on that and that occurring the way you want it to.” So, it was very easy to work with them. It was intense, because it was such a short period of time. There was so much to do to put all that together. But, again, when the decision was made to come in, they made things happen. You know, when I was – when we were working towards the Grand Opening before we knew he was coming, I was having to plead and cajole and beg for things to happen in the right sequence at the right time. But, when the White House and the Secret Service are there, telling everybody else, “This is what’s going to happen,” then it was no longer a problem. I think there was something about the audio-visual system for the presentation stage, and they said, “What do you need?” And I told them. They said, “You, so-and-so, take care of that.” “Yes, sir.” And that was taken care of.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, that sounds – that’s good. And so, you felt like the Dedication was successful? We have been talking –

Adams: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, we – that was – I wanted to make a point here. There – what – when I started out going – when we started – when I got there, we started on the details of what we were going to interpret and how we were going to interpret it. And I knew that was a challenge because we can’t interpret something that isn’t true or is mythological. And so, I do not believe – I have never bought into the notion of interpretive neutrality. And what I mean by that is – I don’t know who came up with that term. I don’t think it was Freeman Tilden – and I don’t know how familiar you are with Freeman Tilden. He’s the godfather of National Park Service interpretation. He wasn’t – he was a National Park Service consultant for many years back in the, I think, ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s. And he had what he called his, I think it was, ten interpretive principles. And there were – there were two of them especially that hit home for me. And one is that you can’t expect – and interpretation is a word that’s fraught with all kinds of misinterpretations and misunderstandings. You know, how do you tell a story to the people – the general public – and have them understand what you’re trying to tell them and why it’s important and how it affects them. So, one of his principles was that, if interpretation didn’t provoke people to – and I’m paraphrasing – didn’t provoke people to think about something in a new way, if you didn’t challenge their perceptions, then they weren’t – they weren’t going to listen to you in a way that – where they would understand and learn what you’re trying to tell them. And the other big one for me was that you have to tell them a story – the story in a way in which they can relate to it personally, because, if you’re talking about some other people that they don’t know, and they don’t necessarily care about, they’re not going to get the message. But, if you can tell the story in a way that shows them how it could affect – or did affect – them, then they will understand better. “Oh, okay! I see what you’re talking about now.” And we – interpretive neutrality – I don’t know where that concept came from, but I don’t like it. Basically, what it’s saying – it says is that you take a controversial story, and you give people some information, and then you step back, and you say – and some people who believe in this principle literally say, “You can decide for yourself which way of thinking about it is the correct way.” So, for Brown v. Board, it would have meant saying – this is interpretive neutrality – “There was this court case where Black people were trying to get the right to go to decent schools, and it went to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court decided that they were right. So, that’s what happened.” And the people hearing that will think, “Oh, okay. So, everything’s hunky-dory. There’s no problem. And there was no problem to begin with because – so, what’s wrong with segregation? I went to an all-White school. Why was that wrong? That was okay for me.” So, you see, you can’t operate that way.

So, I – it was with considerable trepidation – once I got – I didn’t really – you know, Park Service people in many different roles, they have to operate with situational learning.

And so, I didn’t really know the story of Brown v. Board before I went there. But I always prided myself in researching a subject or a topic and finding out what the facts are to – so I could understand why it was we were involved in telling this story. And so, I learned quite a bit. I learned so much from Cheryl and the Foundation Board. And, you know, the Foundation Board included, you know, law professors and history professors, and

these were the people that really knew the story. And so, I had to learn the real story versus the mythology. And I knew that we couldn’t tell the real story without broaching some uncomfortable topics, such as enslavement, segregation, Jim Crow, etcetera. And I was a little concerned that I might – I was getting out on a limb, and I was sawing it off with enthusiasm, and nobody was going to catch me. (Laughter) So, I was very pleased, as we talked about the story as it was going to be told – and I’m talking about the big story, which is much bigger than Brown v. Board – as we were talking about how we were going to tell that story to the public, how we could do the exhibits in a way that would provoke them and help them relate to that story (pause) – and I’ve suddenly lost my train of thought. Oh – oh, yes. So, I thought, “Okay, so the president’s going to come, and I don’t know what he’s going to say.” And we had conversations about that, and, of course, Cheryl was in constant touch with that subject with the White House point person and other people.

Interviewer: Oh, Cheryl was – Cheryl took the lead on that?

Adams: Yeah, she was – it was – it was definitely her role to – one of her roles was to help – and she had been working on the Republican Party – I mean, she had been a candidate – a Republican candidate for one of the Kansas House seats. So, she was familiar with the party. She was embraced by the party. She knew a lot of those people. But she also knew the story. She knew the mythology. So, when the president gave his address, I was very pleased. He was very gracious. He stuck to the script. It was a very positive message, and that – again, that was another way – just one of those little things that worked out the right way, where you’ve got the President of the United States provoking people’s perceptions and helping them self-relate to the story. So, that worked out very, very well.

Interviewer: Good. Okay, I’d like to move to a couple of other questions. We’ve worked – talked for almost two hours now, so I don’t want to hold you up more than absolutely necessary, but I wanted to discuss the changes in administration, because there were a few questions I had about, you know, the actual administration of the site during your tenure. And what would you say was its condition at the time you arrived there? And, by that, I mean was there enough staff? Was there enough organization to manage your objectives?

Adams: That’s a really good question, and the usual answer is “No.” But, in that particular case, the answer is, “Yes.”

Interviewer: Okay. So, at the time, you had enough staff to manage your objectives?

Adams: We – yeah, because we were in the old courtroom – Courthouse, downtown, we didn’t have to worry about the structure. We didn’t have – I mean, there were visitors that came in, and they would look for information on Brown v. Board, and we had information to give them – to them, down at the Contact Station, but, you know, we

didn’t have a steady stream of visitors coming in looking for that, so we didn’t need a large interpretive staff. We just needed somebody as a – kind of, a point person down there. I think we had a couple of Park Rangers – two or three Park Rangers that were dealing with that.

Interviewer: Okay, so, you never took tours – or did tours or any of that kind of stuff?

Adams: Well, I did management tours down there. I – you know, if somebody – some retired Kansas Supreme Court judge would want a tour, I’d take them there and show them around, or, you know, that kind of thing. But we didn’t – we didn’t do public tours because there was really nothing to see, and, you know, we couldn’t take them inside, because there were some safety hazards.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you just directed them in the general direction of it?

Adams: Yeah, we didn’t – we weren’t – we weren’t in the public interpretation mode at that time. And I think there had been some conversations about that before I got there, and it was one of those practical, common-sense things that – you know, why create a problem that you don’t have?

Interviewer: Right. So, did you have a – like, an introductory video or anything, or did people just come and pick up a park brochure?

Adams: I think, maybe, there were some posters or something. I – it was very minimal, and it was only – I guess it was only there because, occasionally, somebody would come in and look for information, and, rather than having them have to find their way upstairs, you know, we just had somebody down there. They’d see a Park Ranger uniform when they walked in. And there weren’t that many of them. I think that was one of the big issues – or the big factors: there just wasn’t the demand. And we certainly didn’t want to start drumming up business, you know. “Come to – come to Topeka, and come to the courthouse, and we’ll tell you about Brown v. Board. We can’t show you anything, but,” (laughter), so, we had a – an Administrative Officer and an Administrative Technician, and we had a Chief of Interpretation, and, of course, we had Treva, and she had some – I think, some part-time help at that time. So, with me, and the Chief of Interpretation, and the Brown Foundation, we were able to address the interpretive development issues. And the – in terms of operations – that was another thing that I was doing concurrently, was – I was a Position Management Instructor years and years before that, so I was taking a look at what the planned operation was and what kind of staffing that would require, what kinds of skills in the staff. And so, I began to put together a Position Management Plan and then request – start requesting the funding to support that level of staffing. So, I was planning the staffing for the operational period of the park. And, as we – as we got closer to the Grand Opening, we were bringing more staff in.

Interviewer: Okay. So, in 2000, your Superintendent’s Annual Report stated that you had high staff turnover of seventy-five percent permanent staff, a hundred percent of interpretive staff. Why would you – why do you think that was? Was that something that you were doing intentionally, or was it just the times?

Adams: No, I think it was the times. I – and one of the particular issues was, there was a conflict between one of the interpreters and the Chief of Interpretation.

Interviewer: Ah. So, they all went their separate ways, huh?

Adams: Yeah, and I don’t – I’m trying to recall (pause) what’s behind that statement, and, you know, I’m – just off the top of my head, I’m thinking that, number one, there wasn’t a whole lot for people to do. The – I think, when I got there, we had two people who took turns staffing the Contact Station downstairs, and then, when they weren’t down there, they were up, maybe, developing some ideas for interpretive programs. So, I don’t think we had very – I don’t remember what the staffing level was when I got there. I don’t think it was very many people, but –

Interviewer: So, you think, maybe, they were just trying to go on to more challenging positions? Adams: I – yeah, I think, maybe – and, as I recall, those subordinate positions were pretty low-

graded. And I think there was one person who had – I can’t remember whether she started out in interpretation and went to – as part-time in the Admin Division or vice versa, and then, kind of, went back and forth. All of that’s kind of murky.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. Well, then, let me ask you about another part of that report where one of your goals was to improve communications with the Brown Foundation. Was that just a standard kind of goal or is – was there a – was there a problem with communications?

Adams: No. And let me say something about time. The only – the only thing with my time is that I may have to take a bathroom break or something like that.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Well, I can turn off the record if you need that.

Adams: But I don’t – I don’t have anything better to do, so I can give you as much time as you want. So, the answer to that question is a very interesting thing, and it – it’s the reason they asked me to go there in the first place.

Interviewer: Okay. Why don’t we take – why don’t we take a pause right here, and I will pause the recording, and then, when we come back, we’ll come back.

Adams: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay (recording device paused and then resumed). Okay, so, now tell me the interesting story.

Adams: Okay, so, when Dave Given called me at Pea Ridge to talk to me about the job, he asked if I was interested, and I said, “Yeah, what’s the deal?” And so we talked a while, and the reason he called me was because of that work I had done at Pea Ridge with the State people and the tourism people and organizations around the state for the Civil War Heritage Trail, and got some of the support there for the park itself. And he explained to me that – a little bit more about the situation in Topeka, and what – the only thing, basically, at that point, that I knew about or remembered was that, you know, when the – whichever Superintendent that was – I – Ray – I can’t remember his last name – at the Superintendent’s Meeting, where he had showed some pictures of the condition of the school and –

Interviewer: Are you talking about Ray Harper?

Adams: Ray Harper – how much that was going to cost to fix that up. That’s what I remember. I don’t remember anything else, and, of course, I don’t think I had really heard anything else, but, he said, “Well, we’ve got a –” He said, “I called you because of your work with the people there in Arkansas that set up that trail, and some of the other work you’ve done with the community there, because we’ve got, you know, this thing called the Brown Foundation, and, you know, they’re a major factor in this project.” And, he said, “I’m not going to go into it in any detail. I want you to call Johnny Neill,” who had been one of the other interim Superintendents.

Interviewer: Johnny Neal – N-E-A-L?

Adams: N-E-I-L-L, I think. And, he said, “He can – he can fill you in on everything you need to know. He and I have already talked, and call him, and then talk with him first, and then, after you’ve talked with him, let me know if you’re still interested.” And so, I called Johnny, and –

Interviewer: Okay, was he – was he the interim Superintendent at the time? Adams: He had been.

Interviewer: Oh. So, he was no longer?

Adams: He was no longer. I think – I think he had gone in on a temporary basis. I think he had been temporarily assigned from his park, and I can’t remember which – where he was. So – and he had gone back to his park.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, he’d just been doing a detail?

Adams: It was a – it was a – I think, originally, thought of as a long-term detail. And I can’t remember – I used to know the sequence of the Superintendents, but I can’t remember –

Interviewer: He was just one I hadn’t heard of before, so I was interested.

Adams: Yeah, I don’t know if he was before or after – gosh, now I can’t remember her name. Interviewer: (Laughs) Well, Sändra?

Adams: Not Sändra. Sändra was – Interviewer: Bessie?

Adams: I think she was the first detailed Superintendent. Interviewer: Yeah. Bessie Sherman?

Adams: Yeah, Bess Sherman. Interviewer: Okay. So, anyway, you called –?

Adams: So, I called Johnny, and, basically, he told me, “You know, the Brown Foundation, you know, they’re the reason that there’s a park. They’re the ones that started the Congressional interest in seeing this as a unit of the National Park System. And they’ve – you know, the – it’s got three members of the Brown family on the Board, and so they’ve – you know they’re very interested in the project, they’re very interested in how the story’s going to be told, and they want people to listen to them and treat them as equal partners.” And so, we talked for quite a while, and he said, “You know, that’s all they want. They’re not – they’re not trying to run the park or make the decisions. They want to be part of the process, they want to be consulted, and the want to be listened to seriously. And they haven’t been able to get that under one of the previous Superintendents.” So, I thought, “Well, yeah, makes sense to me.” So, I called up Dave a couple days later and told him I’d talked to Johnny, and it was pretty straightforward to me, and sure, I was interested. And so they appointed me as the new Superintendent up there. And –

Interviewer: Okay. Well, the 2000 Annual Superintendent’s Report was, I guess, a year into your tenure, and so, would you say, this “improve communications with the Brown Foundation” was just a – why would you – had that not happened?

Adams: No, it had. And I’m trying to remember – see, that would have – that report would have been for the fiscal year of October through September, so I wasn’t even there for the beginning of that fiscal year. And, usually, those reports are based on some sort of a plan on what you’re going to do for that fiscal year. And I like to – especially because of the – oh! That’s why: it was – it – I’m sure it was because of the Government Performance and Results Act, where we had to project what specific things we were going to work on over the year and what measurable results we were targeting – we were targeting to achieve. And so, I don’t even remember if the GPRA planning for

Brown v. Board for that fiscal year had been done, but, certainly, I like to document things like that, because, you know, your report is a report on what you’ve achieved and what you’ve not achieved, so you’ve got to have that tied into some sort of a plan. So, that’s – I’m sure that’s why that talks about improving communications, because, at the time, that means the GPRA planning had been done. It would – should have had a component about communications because that was the measurable results – one of the boilerplate measurable results that you could work with. So –

Interviewer: So, it sounds to me like that comment was really just a leftover comment from the planning process.

Adams: Yeah, I think so, because I –

Interviewer: Okay. So, you didn’t really have a problem with communications with the Brown Foundation, did you?

Adams: No, I didn’t! Not at all!

Interviewer: And so, you achieved your objective? (Laughs)

Adams: I’m not – I’m not sure whether I was trying to apply the measurable results to an existing plan to improve communications or whether I thought that should have been in there, so I stuck – we spent time and funding on doing that, so we needed to report on that. I just – I just can’t remember whether or not it was referring to a planned improvement in communications in a document or whether I thought that was important enough to add it on to the end. It should have been on – added on anyway, because you’re supposed to report what you’ve accomplished with all of the funding and human resources that you are allocated.

Interviewer: Okay. So, if that was an objective, how did you do that?

Adams: Very simply. I think even before I got there – I think I made a trip up to Topeka before my Entry on Duty date, and I met with Cheryl, and – called her up, and we selected a time. So, I drove up to Topeka, and we got together, and had a good conversation with her, and she told me what her perspective of the communication problem was and how, from her perspective, it could be easily fixed. And it was so simple, and it fit right into what Johnny had told me, and it’s, like, “Well, yeah. So, let’s just do that!” So, we did.

And, you know, what – as soon as I got there – well, of course, that was in December, so there wasn’t much going on, because that’s when we always took our “Use or Lose” annual leave. But, I remember, we hit the ground running in January. It was – it was

non-stop until the day after the Grand Opening. So, one of the things that – and I really appreciate Johnny’s perspective on all of this, because I didn’t have to find out the hard way, and what I found out was that sometimes you really – it – from the start – very beginning of a conversation, you might not be able to figure out what Cheryl’s concern

was. But, if you – if you listen long enough, and if you asked clarifying questions, it would soon emerge. And I – it was, usually, something very, very simple. And so – you know, she and I worked very well together. And, you know, we would have these – we’d go on these trips, kind of, around the country. I remember – I think it was 2000, we – I don’t know – don’t remember if we – we must have flown down to Alabama and then driven over to Birmingham, and, as we were driving along, coming and going from whomever we were meeting with there in Birmingham – oh, we had gone there to look at the Civil Rights Museum there, and we went by the 16th Street Baptist Church, visited that, and talked to some people there. And so, we had these long conversations about Park Service processes and bureaucracy. And, you know, having to put up with that stuff myself, you know, I was equally frustrated by some of the things that I had to put up with, so it was – it was pretty easy to figure out what a problem was and how to fix it.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Okay. So, alright, when you started in 2000, let’s just say, you had a small staff, and you made adjustments to the staff over time. When you left, what was the status of your staff?

Adams: I think we pretty much had most of the positions filled. I’m not too sure about whether we actually had our Education Specialist selected yet. But one of the – because of the way the interpretive developed - interpretive exhibits developed and the interactive nature of them, we needed somebody who knew how to troubleshoot the equipment and how to accomplish things if we wanted to switch out a program and put in an updated program or switch something in for a special period of time – somebody who could do that, and who would be there for the installation of all of that, and that’s where Cheryl – oh, the IT Specialist there – where she came in, because she was there for the installation, so, she would – she would know how it went in and where, because she was there. And that – and I think, basically, she was – she was covering two different positions or two different functions. I don’t – I think we combined the functions into one position, but she was an IT Specialist, so she could take care of our network and troubleshoot computer problems. But then, you know, the exhibits were driven by computers and connected by computers, and some of the other machines were just different versions of computers, so she was also the AV Specialist. We had a new Chief of Interpretation. We had several more interpretive staff people. We had another – I think, another full-time maintenance person plus a part-time maintenance person to help Treva. We had our Administrative Officer and Administrative Tech.

Interviewer: So, it sounds like you just about tripled your staff.

Adams: Yeah, it was – we were able to move things along. I had been in places where you practically had to beg, borrow, and steal staff, and, fortunately, because of the special interest that – the Congressional interest, particularly – in the project, we were able to look forward to the permanent funding for the operational staff. So, that all came together pretty well, and we had time to determine the – based upon the anticipated

staffing budget – the positions that we wanted to fill. And, because it’s such a small site, and it’s all located there in the same building, and we were – you know, that helped with staffing levels, because you don’t – you don’t have to worry about staffing outlying parts of your operation. So, that all worked out pretty well.

Interviewer: Right. So, basically, though, you staffed up for operations, and then you left, right? (Laughs)

Adams: Yeah. Well, as I said, the – when the Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark Trail needed to move on to a different position, I – and that was – that was right at the beginning of the second third of the bicentennial, so that was a critical position. And, again, it was because of my work with numerous organizations – governmental and NGOs – they asked me if I would like to come up and do that, and I jumped at that opportunity.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what kind – did you make any other kind of changes during your tenure, up into the – up until the Dedication, in the administration of the site besides staffing, like, changes in hours, or reporting requirements, or –?

Adams: Well, you always have to feed the bureaucracy (laughter), so, you know, we were – we were having to make sure that we were doing our GPRA planning and reporting. I remember that there were some other plans and documents that had to be done. The bureaucracy will literally eat you alive.

Interviewer: But they had to – they had to be done – yeah, but they had to be done because somebody else decided you had to do them, not because you decided, right?

Adams: No, I decided they could – I – I’m (pause – laughter) – I’m, what do you call it?

Compulsive, to a degree, and I don’t like things hanging over me. I don’t like people bugging me for something. It’s a lot easier – I can – I can process that stuff pretty quickly. So, it’s a lot easier for me to just do it and get it done, get it out of the way so that I don’t – constantly having somebody bothering me about, “When are you going to do this? When are you going to do that?” And some of that – it’s tied to your funding. Like, GPRA. You don’t do GPRA, you don’t get the money. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So, when you – when you first started, and during your four years, did you – what kind of direction did you receive from the Midwest Regional Office, from the Regional Director or the Deputy Regional Director, over the years? Did they give you directives, or did they give you advice?

Adams: No, no directives, really, because they were very supportive of Superintendents and expected them to do what they needed to do.

Interviewer: Okay. And it sounds like you had already had all the training you could possibly need.

Adams: Oh, yeah. I mean, I was – I was used to – I had been a Superintendent for quite a while by that time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did they have training – but did they have training available for Superintendents, or was it, really, just on-the-job?

Adams: It was the – no, no training, per se. It was – there were some training courses like, since we were going through the line-item construction program and the Development Advisory Board, and the money was starting to come, I went to a Line-Item Construction Management for Superintendents training course out at – I think that was Yosemite.

There were – there were some courses like that here and there, but nothing – there was no Superintendents 101. And that’s one of the problems – the problems the Park Service has had since its inception.

Interviewer: Well, maybe they just think that each park is different, and different – has different requirements for supervision? I did want to ask you – I did want to ask you about your oral history project. I noticed that you started an oral history project initiative. I think that was in one of the Superintendent’s Reports.

Adams: Yeah, and I was – I was trying to remember – there was a – we had problems with a contractor, and I was trying to remember what it was that contractor was supposed to be doing for us. And it was kind of bizarre.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Bizarre? Okay.

Adams: It was very bizarre. We had one guy that we hired. He may have been also working on some oral histories, but the problem wasn’t with him. It was with somebody else. I think – I think he was a Park Service employee, but the contractor that we had – I think it was somebody based in Washington, D.C., because whatever it was we had paid him to do – and it was another one of those things where the contracting laws – they had some unintended consequences, one of which was, sometimes, the schedule of producible results wasn’t in tune with the schedule for payment of those results. So, this guy had our money, had not produced anything, and every time we’d – I think the Chief of Interpretation was – that was her – one of her things was to manage that – help manage that contract, be the Contracting Officer’s Technical Representative. So, it was her job to keep track on that. And he would tell her, “Oh, oh, yeah. I’m making great progress, you know. I expect to be finished up here within a few months.” And she’d check with him. “Oh, yeah, I’m getting closer and closer,” and then, “Oh, yeah, I’m typing them up now.” And blah, blah, blah. And we never got anything. So, we –

Interviewer: You never got – so, you never got any recordings or transcripts?

Adams: Well, I think we did. I think we – I know we did. But – because one of the things that happened – he kept promising that he was going to put them in the mail, and they

wouldn’t arrive. And this went on for weeks and weeks and months and months. And, finally, I got tired of it. So, I called our contracting people in the Region, and I told them, “You know, this guy’s been promising us for months and months. And he’s been promising us recently that he was – he just had to mail the stuff. For months and months, we haven’t gotten it. So – and we – and we’ve paid him. At your insistence, he’s been paid. So, what I would like to do –” I don’t – I don’t remember if it was my idea or the Chief Ranger’s idea or whose, but we wound up getting a Park policeman to track this guy down, go to his apartment, and catch him at home, and offer him the choice of handing the stuff to that officer or going to jail. And he handed the stuff to the officer.

Interviewer: I didn’t know park police could do that. So, he hadn’t mailed it, obviously.

Adams: He hadn’t mailed it. And he, apparently – well, I – when we talked to the officer, he said, “Yeah, the guy was treating it like it was no big deal, and he was kind of laughing, thinking, ‘Oh, my goodness! I’m in trouble.’ Making light of it.” So, we finally got some stuff. You know, what I – what I remember is, there were – I think it was some cassette tapes and some notes. I don’t know if there were transcripts or not. I don’t remember. But that – yeah, we finally got delivery of that stuff. It wasn’t something that could be used without somebody taking it on, and I think we actually were talking to the Region about some more project money to farm that out again and have somebody put it together in a useable form. But, I remember, we had at least one box of tapes and writing of some sort.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. So, do you remember what year this was? Or several years? I’m not sure.

Adams: I think that was probably late 2003. It was – I think it was before we moved down to the school. We moved down to the school – you know, they got the interior rehab finished – I think it was that winter, and I think the exhibits – I remember it being cold in there when they were putting in – the exhibits in.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Okay. And so – and did you have a certain number of people you wanted him to interview, or did – was this – he was supposed to determine this on his own? Did you provide him with people you wanted interviewed?

Adams: I think he was provided a list of people.

Interviewer: Okay, because I was provided a list of people with contact information, and – Adams: Yeah, I’m pretty sure that’s what he got.

Interviewer: Okay. But the result was that you didn’t really get what you thought you were paying for?

Adams: Right. And that caused – I think that was one of the causes of some of the people in the other case communities being upset with us, because they were expecting something to come out of their interview. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Okay. Oh, because he’d interviewed some of them – he’d interviewed from the other cases? Oh, well, that’s seriously too bad. Yeah, that’s really too bad.

Adams: Yeah. So, we were having – we had to do a lot of apologizing. And it was – and we were also – you know, we were dealing with things like – well, when we went to South Carolina, we were, kind of, being raked over the coals by one of the U.S. Representatives about why was this National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas, rather than in South Carolina. And we had – we heard similar things from people – maybe not as vociferous – in the other case communities about, “Why Topeka?”

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. How about because they had a building?

Adams: My answer was, you know, there was an opportunity, and the Brown Foundation was there, and –

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Were they – were they worried that you would interpret just the Brown family’s story?

Adams: I think that was one of the fears, and they – that was one of the reasons we were going around, you know. And Cheryl was with – was with us. And we were – we were telling them what the story was we were going to be interpreting. And they were skeptical, but I – and we invited those people to the Grand Opening. It was kind of interesting, because, up until the Grand Opening was over – and they had come in, and they were allowed to go through the exhibits before they had to go back out and take their seats. And I remember one guy from Virginia, who had been one of our most vocal critics, who said, “You know, now that I’ve been here, I see what you were trying to tell us.” (Laughter) So, that was an affirmation of the approach.

Interviewer: Good! (Laughs) Okay, so, in general, the roles of the Brown Foundation in your park projects was as a consultant on context, or did they – did they, like, volunteer to – I don’t know – man the desk?

Adams: No, because that – they didn’t have – you know, they had the Executive Director, and she had a – I think, a part-time secretary, and that was it as far as staff goes. I mean, they were – had been dependent on donations for a good part of their history. Now, we were – they were also getting money through us, and then, later on, I think, that was, maybe, switched to some direct – some –

Interviewer: Well, as I understand it, the money – part of the money they were getting was for providing educational materials, like teacher curriculum and that sort of – teacher’s guides and that sort of thing.

Adams: Yes. Yeah, but they weren’t – they weren’t helping to man the desk because that was – that was Park Service staff responsibility. But I wouldn’t – I wouldn’t call them – I didn’t see them as consultants. I saw them as subject matter experts, certainly. I – you know, I embraced the idea of partnerships. It was just we –

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. Did you have other partnerships? Adams: Pardon?

Interviewer: Did you – did the park have other partnerships besides the Brown Foundation?

Adams: Oh. Well, for various things, mostly regarding things like, you know, trying to get that railroad land so that you would have a parking lot, those kinds of things. And maybe some – well, we – yeah, we partnered with the Kansas State Historical Society on some interpretation and curriculum things, and that’s where, also, the SHPO was housed.

Interviewer: Okay. What about the Southwest Parks and Monument Association? Did you have – did you have a bookstore or an educational store at the Contact Station?

Adams: No. And, when I was at Pea Ridge, we had Eastern National Parks, and, when I went up to Brown, we didn’t have a cooperating association. And as we began to talk about, you know, where that function was going to be located and what we wanted out of it – through the years, I had worked with – actually, I had worked with Western before I had worked with Eastern, when I was out here in the Southwest before, and they’re a – they’re a bit more focused on support and education. So, I was leaning towards – when it came time to start asking them to respond, I was, kind of, leaning towards Western, but I gave Eastern a chance. And so, when it was time, I called up both of them and told them what was going on, and what we were looking for, and what we were hoping to get out of it. And Western just had a – I thought, a better fit. So, I –

Interviewer: Okay. So, you’re talking about Western Parks, not Southwestern?

Adams: Well, it used to be Southwest Parks and Monuments. It’s been – even when I was at Brown, it was Western National Parks Association. I think it was Western National Parks Association then. And then, I used them again up in – when we established our bookstore in the Regional Office in Omaha for the Lewis and Clark Trail. I brought them in.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Okay. So, the Brown Foundation did not provide any of the – anything in the retail function?

Adams: They may have provided some stuff. I don’t – ahhh! I know we consulted with them about, you know, what kinds of publications would be – would be best to carry.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay. But they weren’t involved with the retail aspects of the educational outreach? Is that correct?

Adams: Not the retail that I remember. No, not that I recall. I may be wrong about that, but I don’t recall.

Interviewer: Okay. (Laughs) That’s okay. So, I have another question. What is a Certificate of Unserviceable Property? Apparently, you got one.

Adams: Okay. That’s – you’re supposed to do a property inventory, and it would – it would vary – the schedule would vary depending on how concerned somebody was about the property, you know. So, generally, what happens is, you – you’d have this list of equipment – it’s usually equipment. Like, it’s a computer, serial number XYZ, and you’re supposed to locate that. And, you know, if you’ve located it, you make a notation that, yes, it’s there. So, you do that with all of the property on your property list – it’s usually, fairly list – a long thing. And then you make your report on the things you’ve located and the things that you couldn’t locate, and, if you have something that you were going to – let’s say it was a – there was a time period when we were – well, let’s say you had a computer that broke down, and it was going to cost more to fix it than it would to buy a new one. You would do a – you would do another document on Unserviceable Property, which means that – usually means it’s broken and can’t – it can’t reasonably be fixed.

So, you – that goes on a separate form and you send that up through your property people, and it goes up to the Regional Office, and they genuflect and sprinkle holy water on it, and you get it back, and then you can get rid of it.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Buy a new – and then you can buy a new one?

Adams: Yeah, well, you usually already bought a new one. And, in the case you’re looking for something, and you can’t find it, which, when Park Service started getting laptops, started to become an issue. And, when somebody would get rid of something, and they had failed to do that other – that Surplus Property or Unserviceable Property form, and it would disappear, and nobody would know where it was or why it left, or there were – there were cases where it appeared to the office obvious that something was stolen, and then you had to do a report on that, and you had to have a panel get together and discuss what might have happened to it, and what you’ve done to make sure it’s actually missing, and all that, so.

Interviewer: Oh, my goodness! Okay. Well, I saw – I saw it on a – I think, an Annual Report, and I just didn’t know what that was. So, I’m down to my last two questions. The first one is, of the things that you did at Brown v. Board, what would you say you are most proud of doing, or what would you say was the most effective? Or both?

Adams: (Long pause) Ooo, boy! (Pause)

Interviewer: When people say, “Well, what did you do at Brown v. Board?” what’s the first thing that springs to your mind that you’re proud of talking about?

Adams: Well, the – you know, the – I was – you know, I’m – coming from a background of archeology and historic preservation, I was very happy the way the building turned out. And I was glad there weren’t any bad surprises.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Oh, that reminds me – I was wondering – you found the foundations of earlier buildings. Did you do any archeological surveys?

Adams: Yeah. There had been done – been some archeology work done, and I think, maybe, somebody from the SHPOs office came out when we were – when the contractor was digging on the foundations. And, of course, I was there, standing by, too. And maybe somebody from the Midwest Archeological Center. I don’t – there was an archeologist on site, and, you know, I mean, they had some information on the previous schools, and it was interesting to them, because, you know, it put a good physical impression on what was suggested in the previous documentation on those. But – so, the – you know, the building was fine. That turned out wonderfully. It was a great – it was a great place to work in. The exhibits were fantastic. But the story is more important. So, I guess, the thing I’d be most proud of is that we were able to work with people who knew the real story versus the mythology and that we put in a lot of long, hard work, and we came up with an interpretive educational presentation that was – you know, if somebody’s got half a brain, they might – may not agree with what they’re seeing, but they’ll understand what we’re saying and why we’re saying it.

Interviewer: Okay. And then, my last question is: we’ve talked about quite a number of things, but is there anything that I have not asked you about that you would like to talk about? Any final words? (Laughter) Was there something you were hoping I would ask you about that I didn’t ask you?

Adams: (Long pause) I’m running through the Rolodex in my head. (LONG pause) Well, I guess, maybe, a couple of different things. We sort of touched on some of it, but, you know, once I understood the story and had the mythology kicked out of my head, it was just – it was wonderful to be working on a national level with all of these other organizations that were – had been working on similar things and were now a part of this big, national team working on the Brown v. Board story and presentation. It was just – it was very inspiring. It was very uplifting. It was – you know, it made all of that hard work worthwhile. And it was – it was really good to be part of that. And, you know, I guess, when I’m thinking of what my roles were, you know, I had the assigned role – and it was absolutely no burden – of working with the Foundation as it – an equal partner, because I learned so much. But my other role was to, kind of, keep us all going in the same direction and with a known timeline (laughs) and –

Interviewer: (Laughs) Yeah. A deadline?

Adams: Yeah, it – kind of a deadline. And, you know, the – you asked about how the Regional Office worked with its managers, and, you know, that was after Superintendent – the Superintendency grades had been bumped up twice to more accurately reflect the responsibilities. And, of course, the executives expected the managers to perform those responsibilities at a professional level. So, you didn’t – you didn’t have a whole lot of, “You need to do this, and you need to do that.” As a matter of fact, one of the things that I was – one of the other hats that I had was I was part of the Midwest Leadership Council. That was a group of Superintendents voted by their peers to get together in this group and talk about issues. Whether it’s funding process issues, or contract process issues, or communications, or whatever it was, we would get together as Superintendents. We would talk with our colleagues and find out what their concerns were, and we – we’d discuss that in the Council, and we would have people from the Regional Office come in and talk to us – educate us on a particular process, or a particular law, or whatever it was. We’d try to understand both perspectives, and then we’d come up with a recommendation to the Regional Director on how to resolve this particular issue. And so, there was a high level of self-discipline and professionalization expected there. And, in terms of, specifically, what I was doing there at Brown – you know, basically, the only thing I was told to do was, you know, find out you need to do for the Park Service to work effectively with the Foundation and do it. And aside from that, they were – I had wonderful support, particularly from – well, the Deputy was always very supportive. And our new Regional Director – he came into his job – I was trying to remember – about the same time that I came into mine. Anyway, he was – when I got to Brown, he was relatively – oh, no! He came in a little bit later. That’s right. Like I say, this is kind of murky, so I’m kind of remembering things as I speak. Anyway, he came in somewhere late 2003, early 2004 – somewhere in that broad range and came down – and, you know, we gave him the fifty-cent tour, and he was very supportive and supportive throughout the whole thing. So, aside from the fact that there were some very passionate feelings shared during the various meetings, that it was a lot of hard work, it was an absolutely wonderful experience.

Interviewer: Oh, good! Well, you know what? That sounds like an awesome place to end the – end the interview: on a high note! (Laughs) So, I’m going to – I’m going to turn off the recording here.

END OF INTERVIEW

**FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW**

**with STEPHEN ADAMS**

**MAY 27, 2020**

**AUDIO FILE # BRVB052720 – STEPHEN ADAMS**

Interviewer: This is a follow-up interview with Steve Adams. The date is May 27, 2020. We’re following up in order to talk about more internal operations questions during his time at Brown v. Board of Education. So, Steve, what would you say was your management philosophy of the park, and did – philosophy for the park, and did it change over time?

Adams: Well, it was – you know, normally, when a park is already operational, what you’re supposed to do is go in and just try to get an idea of how the operation is matching up with all of the planning and the management documents. With Brown, since it really hadn’t been operational, per se, before the development period, that was – the operational – the real operational phase was, kind of, on a hold there. But we still had things to take care of in that regard. I mentioned before about that little Contact Station at the first floor of the Post Office –

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. So, you were – you were developing a strategy for operating the park in the Contact Station – from the Contact Station, basically?

Adams: Well, that had just, I guess, already been, kind of, taken care of, because, I think, as it usually does, development was lagging a little bit behind anticipation. And so, I guess, everybody was, kind of, expecting things to go more quickly. And so, the Contact Station was an interim solution to the public interpretation side of things. So, I was looking more at the long-term. I think – I think I mentioned before about considering the kinds of things that needed to go on in the park after the Grand Opening and trying to line up the staffing, the organization chart, for those operations. So, we were operating at a very basic level in terms of administration and maintenance. And Treva, of course, was doing a wonderful job of taking care of the school, you know, trying to keep it from falling down before we could get the construction phase started (laughter).

Interviewer: Okay. Well, tell me – do tell me about your – about your staff, who they were, what they did, how you felt about them.

Adams: Well – yeah, this is where my memories are a little murky. When I first got there – I don’t even remember whether some of the people were already there or whether – oh, okay. Now, I’m kind of remembering it. (Laughter) Now, we had a small staff. There was a – an Administrative Officer and a Technician. The Administrative Officer, that was Alicia, and I don’t remember her last name. I’m drawing a blank there. Katherine Cushinberry was the Administrative Tech, and she later became the Administrative Officer when Alicia left. I don’t recall whether there was a Chief of Interpretation when I

got there or not, but what – anyway, we did need to fill that position, because it was vacant at some time. And so, Deborah Riley came in from – oh, goodness! Someplace in South Dakota, and it escapes me where she came from. But anyway – so, she was hired to fill the Chief of Interp position. Toy – and she – Toy has changed her name.

Interviewer: Toy?

Adams: Toy. I can’t remember what she’s going by now, but she was one of the Interpretive Rangers, and she later became part of the administrative staff. And then I think, maybe, she went back to interpretation after I left. I’m not sure. I don’t recall when Randy Standingwater, who was one of the other interpreters came in. There was a woman who was one of the interpreters, and, gosh, I can’t remember her name at all. Treva probably would remember who that was. But –

Interviewer: Okay. So, all together – all together, how much – how many staff were there when you got there in 1999?

Adams: Oh, gosh, you know, I’m trying to reconstruct that in my mind, and I – it’s not going very well. I think we only had – let’s see, we had two in Admin. I think we had two Park Technicians, interpretive folks. There was Treva, and I think Treva had a part-time helper. So, that’s six. And then I hired LaTonya Miller as the Public Relations Officer, so that’s seven.

Interviewer: Okay. Public Relations Officer is not one I’m familiar with. What is that – what did she do?

Adams: Well, she was an integral part of the development and planning portion. We went – LaTonya and I and Deb Riley, the Chief of Interp, and the Regional people, and the people from Harpers Ferry, and some of the staff from the prime exhibit contractor – we would go around the country to different places and talk to people. LaTonya and I were, kind of, concentrating, in that aspect – respect, on meeting with the community leaders in the other – in – not only in Topeka but in the other four case areas – and doing some Open Houses on developing the exhibits. We wanted to get their input on whether or not we had the story straight and what their reaction was to some of the preliminary concepts for the exhibits and the interpretive education program.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have the Interpretive Plan? The Interpretive Plan had been developed, at that point, and you were taking it around – you were taking it around?

Adams: Yeah, it had been – there had been a lot of work going on at the same time that the folks from – in the Regional Office, from Cultural Resources and Operations – in the Regional Office, it was, kind of, a strange set-up. The – we had the engineers and architects who were upstairs, in Operations, and then we had architects in Cultural Resources that were looking at things more from a Section 106 standpoint. And the

architects from upstairs were looking at it more from a construction aspect. So, because they – because those people in the Regional Office – I think, primarily, the Regional Office, because there wasn’t – that was early in the process, so the park, itself, wasn’t really in high gear for – in that part of it. And necessarily so, because, you know, we needed the interpretive folks in the Region to come up with those concepts – engineers and architects to come up with the development, and preservation, and all that. And –

Interviewer: So, were you taking everything around to the public to look at? Were you taking, not just the interpretive plan, but, also, the plans for rehabilitation of the building?

Adams: Well – and that got me back to my point that I was trying to remember where I left off – I – at the same time that the Regional Office – part of the Regional Office was – had geared up, and they were talking about, you know, “What is this building? How do we repair it? How do we prepare it for adaptive use?” At the same time, the interpretive part of it was being developed. “Who are the audiences? How can we best convey the history and the stories?” But, what we were doing was taking more of the interpretive and education part of it out to the public – public meetings, where we were saying we – you know, for instance, we would go to Delaware, and we would say, “Okay, for the Supreme Court case from your area, this is, kind of, where we’re going in a general direction, telling that story, and this is what – this is how it fits into the comprehensive story of the five cases, and what do you think of that? Is there something that we’re missing? Are we – are we mischaracterizing something? If so, you know, what is that?

We want to get your response so that we can develop something that is accurate,” because, I think – I think I mentioned before, there are a lot of things about Brown v. Board that, history-wise, were just – well, in the – in the contemporary lexicon, it was Fake News! (Laughter) So, we were having to – and I – and that’s one of the things that was really something to overcome – was, not only were we asking people, “Are we getting the story right?” but we were having to educate along the way, because, when somebody would say, “Well, you know, you said such-and-such, and that’s not right.” And we would have to say, “Well, actually, the popular history is wrong, and here’s how it’s wrong and why it’s wrong. You know, it’s not about – it’s not about Topeka, alone. It’s not about a little girl in Topeka that had to walk on the railroad tracks to – number one, we talk to the family all the time, and we can tell you that was a set-up story. She didn’t have to walk down the railroad tracks.” And so, you know, we had to educate people so that they could understand what we were trying to do.

Interviewer: Yeah. How did the people in the other places where the – that were part of that lawsuit react to – I mean, were they pleased with your – with your presentation, or did they correct it in many ways, or did you have to – or did they try to correct it, and you had to correct them?

Adams: Well, I would say that the biggest obstacle we had to face in that regard was the notion that, somehow, Topeka was putting something over on everybody. And what – there

was some concern – and, in a – maybe one or two places, it really wasn’t much of a concern, and other places, it was expressed as a concern about, “Well, you know, how come you’re developing this park in Topeka. Why isn’t it here?” And we would have to explain.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. “We have the school, and you don’t?”

Adams: Well, they still – in some cases, they still had the school (unintelligible), but we would – you know, the answer – and it was an accurate answer – was that it just so happened that the people in Topeka who were very interested in this were more organized at an earlier stage. And, I guess, because of Cheryl’s contact with the Republican Party, they just got in on it earlier and worked on getting the place established as a National Historic Site. I think it could have been anywhere. It could have been in any of those five areas. But it just so happens that that all coalesced in Topeka before it did the other places. So, as the park – and I kept sending you emails about people that I had forgot to mention. It’s not because they weren’t important. It’s because, when I would think of the team – I mean, I – it – that was all one group of people, to me, and so – and since we were focusing on, kind of, the purpose of how things – why things were done the way they were, sometimes, that teamwork concept, I think, maybe got a little bit lost. But, as I said, you know, LaTonya and Deb Riley – and I’m just talking about from the park, so – and the three of us, I think, primarily – I can’t think of, right off-hand, anybody else that was directly involved in going around the country on those public meetings and community meetings.

Interviewer: Was Cheryl with you?

Adams: Cheryl was with us on parts of that. But they were on the – and this is a – I forget these things, too. We kind of had two different kinds of meetings that we would go to. We would go with – usually, with Cheryl to what I would term as community meetings, where we were just trying to meet people and get an idea of the local history there and the local resources, the historic structures, etcetera. And then, when we went into the public meeting phase, that was usually just LaTonya and I and, perhaps, Deb Riley, because we were – we were addressing a public consultation need that was required by law. Or required processually, anyway.

Interviewer: Right. But it wasn’t required that you take Cheryl with you?

Adams: No, and she – I know there were some times where she had – you know, she was doing her own work with the Foundation and setting up things – other meetings for us in the future, working with – oh, for instance, like, the Legal Defense Fund and local NAACP folks, and –

Interviewer: Okay. So, in some cases – in some cases, she was, kind of, paving the way for your presentation?

Adams: Absolutely. Yeah, and, kind of, looking at getting all those different people together. You know, we were meeting with – oh, the Smithsonian Institute and all kinds of other people, and about that – I don’t remember which year it was, but, somewhere in there, the Brown v. Board Presidential Commission was established, and Cheryl and I were part of that. And so, that was, kind of, a third round of meetings and get-togethers.

Interviewer: What was the Brown v. Board Presidential Commission?

Adams: Well, it was a presidential-level commission established to – that’s when – it was, kind of, a national effort from on high to bring all of these organizations together. And, you know, at that level, we started bringing in – I think that’s, maybe, where Smithsonian came in. You had the Department of Education, Department of Labor – I think the Justice Department was involved in that because of the case history.

Interviewer: Okay, so all these – all these representatives from these different agencies were nominated and, I suppose, put on the Brown v. Board Presidential Commission for the purpose of –?

Adams: Yeah, it was – and I guess I need to mention that the – I can’t remember who – but, as part of the commission set-up, I think the states were asked to nominate people. It wasn’t all government people, by any means. It was – it was governmental organizations and organizations like NAACP Defense Fund, Smithsonian, but then you had representatives that were nominated by the different states and the District to represent those interests. So, I think it was, kind of, a top-level approach of getting people together that needed to have a say.

Interviewer: Okay. It was a stakeholder –?

Adams: Yeah, stakeholders, and not just – maybe, not so much the development or – I think it was more geared to the interpretive and educational program afterward and, certainly, geared towards elevating the whole project nationally for the Grand Opening and the fiftieth anniversary. So, it was a way to increase the public exposure to what we were all trying to accomplish.

Interviewer: And so, what – I assume, by “the Grand Opening,” you’re talking about the – actually, the Dedication in 2004?

Adams: Correct.

Interviewer: Okay. So, was this commission set up by Bush – President Bush?

Adams: Yes. Well, it was – he signed off on it, but, you know, it was all those people – all those staff people that got together and said that, you know, “Here’s –” It’s kind of like Radar and the Colonel, you know, “Here sir, sign this.” (Laughs) But – so, you know, Treva, certainly had her hands full taking care of the school and the grounds, and –

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Can you remember anything – any, in particular, stories about her efforts in that regard?

Adams: Well, I think I mentioned before that – the water spigots in the basement that – from the groundwater, shooting out of the walls. That was one of her big concerns. And, you know, it was her and, I think, a part-time helper. And, of course, there were quite a few areas to mow and all these little maintenance things that kept coming up, leaking roof, so she kind of had her hands full taking care of that, keeping it from deteriorating further. And then, the administrative folks, you know, they were – they were handling the – all that kind of stuff at the park level. And then, as we began to – well, the development and planning money wasn’t coming to us, but, certainly, as we approached the Grand Opening, and we were getting more funding for permanent staffing, they had to take care of all of those issues. So, it was very much a team effort. Alicia left – she left before we moved down to the school, and then – so, we advertised the position, and Katherine Cushinberry applied and got the position, and then we filled in behind her with Lydia. And then, when we – I think that was after we moved down to the school. And then, when we had moved down and got into our offices – gosh, it’s just been so long ago, I can’t remember last names very well, but, William was the new Chief of Interpretation, and – oh, yeah. He was the guy I was telling you about. We – because we were making room for the Foundation, we were – we were going to have to tackle, you know, “How do we make a private office space for the Chief of Interpretation?” And we had been talking about, you know, perhaps, a – there was a large room upstairs, in one of the old classrooms, where the interpretive staff – well, there were two – I think, two interpreters downstairs, right by the entrance vestibule, and the others were upstairs in this large room. And I think we were talking about the possibility of partitioning off part of that for William’s office – and I don’t know if they ever got to that or not, but, yeah, it was – I just didn’t want those folks to get short shrift, because they were a critical part of everything.

Interviewer: Right. So, you felt like you had a good staff? Adams: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: And, when you left, you were comfortable with leaving the park in their hands?

Adams: Yeah, I was – I was very pleased at how the offices turned out. I mean, I – it’s – I think it’s a – you know, it’s a beautiful structure. It really turned out well. And it was a really good feeling to be there and in those spaces, but it was – having been around for a number of these anniversaries where it – whether it’s a bicentennial or a sesquicentennial, whatever, I – there’s a phenomenon – you know, we have this national effort to celebrate – commemorate something or celebrate something, and we go through that, and then, okay, it’s almost as [if] everybody says, “That’s over. What’s the next thing?” And it was – I have to tell you, I was absolutely exhausted at the end of

the day on May 17. And there was a guy – one of the Assistant Secretaries in the Interior Department – he was a former judge, and a real nice fellow, and he came for the Grand Opening. And it was kind of funny and very heartfelt when he told me – ordered me – to take some time off. Craig Manson. And –

Interviewer: (Laughs) Uh-huh. That was his name?

Adams: Craig Manson, yeah. Real good guy. And I was a Type A personality, at that point, and I was used to going full bore, but, after May 17, I was ready for some time off. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Take some – and, what – and did you take time off? Took, like, four hours or something?

Adams: I took a couple days. Well, no, maybe two or three days. And then I came back, but the place was absolutely dead. And that really disappointed me.

Interviewer: Oh, because – oh, because there weren’t – you’re talking about there were no visitors right after the Dedication?

Adams: No visitors. You had –

Interviewer: Huh. How long – did it pick up before you left? No?

Adams: No. We would have – during the week, we would have a few visitors every day. I don’t remember the number, but it was, I think, quite a bit lower than the projections. And then, on the weekends, it would pick up because, you know, people were looking for something to do. We had hoped – we had worked with the Highway Department to get signs, and we had hoped that that would – it’s just right off the Interstate, so we hoped that people would see that and come in. And we had hoped that all that national exposure – I mean, that was a national media event. All the networks were there covering it live – the opening – covering it live. And the president was there. So, we thought we – maybe we would get some people coming in on that, but –

Interviewer: Right away?

Adams: Yeah. And it was just awfully quiet. And I got bored really quickly. Interviewer: (Laughs) Is that why you left?

Adams: No. You know, I thought I had gone up there, at the Region’s request. to accomplish the development and the – all that, and the Grand Opening, and that was successful, so, you know, mission accomplished. And I was never – I had never had the thought of staying there very much longer, and I don’t think that was their intent, either. And I think I mentioned before, about that time that Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark Trail – well, they were a third into the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark, and Gerard was ready to go do something else. And so, they asked me if I was interested in that, and I certainly was, because it was kind of a continuation of the Brown thing. I look at those things –

there’s a sign that says, you know, “My Civil Rights Tour.” And, certainly that – the history behind Westward Expansion is as tragic and fascinating as the Brown v. Board story. So, I was eager to tackle that, and I really needed (pause) –

Interviewer: Somewhere else to go?

Adams: Somewhere else to go. Something pretty intense to do. And that – but be careful what you ask for! (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yeah, really! Well, Steve, I appreciate you doing this follow-up interview. Was there anything else you wanted to say about your staff?

Adams: No, I did – you know, they were almost all of them wonderful people, and they did a fantastic job, and, you know, it was – I think it was, kind of, an eye-opener for them and –

Interviewer: Had most of them not been involved with a new park – standing up a new park? Adams: Right. Yeah, that was kind of new to them. I was just, kind of, racking through my brain,

trying to think – now, of course, the people from Region and Harpers Ferry, and the contractors, they were all used to that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Right. But your staff – some of your staff wasn’t?

Adams: Right. Yeah. So, I think – well, some of it – some of them enjoyed it. Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Did they think it was really exciting to be starting a new park?

Adams: Oh, yeah. And I think they were – the folks who had originally been in the old Post Office, especially the Contact Station people, were a bit – were real glad to get into a real operation. And, you know, we had that nice bookstore, and that was a good part of it. You know, it was nice to be down there. And, you know –

Interviewer: Yeah, and actually in the park?

Adams: Yeah, and to be able to operate something that you’d helped to build. And I think, you know, that – as I said, the building turned out wonderfully. The exhibits were – everybody worked very hard on those, and we were all pleased with how that worked out, so – and, you know, everybody was, kind of, blown away by the – all of the pomp and circumstance around the Grand Opening. And there was – as we began to really get into that, not too long before the Grand Opening, we had that – on a State level, kind of, that same level of intensity. You know, we had this big to-do where we had a special event over at the Supreme Court, and the Kansas Supreme Court justices were there, and all of that, and, I think, the governor was there, and so there was, kind of, the Kansas and Topeka level celebration of the commemoration before the Grand Opening. And I – so, there was a lot of activity. We had a lot of VIP tours of the school, and that

gave the interpretive staff some opportunities to, you know, kind of, walk the deck and try out some of their stories. And so, I think it was a lot of hard work, and everybody was glad when it was over, but I think they were glad that they had been involved in it. So.

Interviewer: Yeah. Good. Okay, well, thank you very much, Steve. That was – that was helpful, and that will be added to your – the transcript for your review when we get it sent to you, okay?

Adams: Okay, Deborah. Thank you!

Interviewer: Okay, Thank you. I’m going to turn off the recording.

END OF INTERVIEW