ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

TREVA SYKES TOPEKA, KANSAS FEBRUARY 24, 2020

INTERVIEWED BY DEBORAH HARVEY

AUDIO FILE #BRVB022420 – TREVA SYKES

# 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. Ms. Sykes made no modifications to the draft transcript. For the original interview, please refer to the audio file.

# ABSTRACT

Ms. Treva Sykes recounts how she came to be hired by the National Park Service to be the maintenance worker for the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in 1995. She describes in detail the condition of the site, especially the building, when she first began work and the work that she did to repair and protect it prior to the rehabilitation construction. Ms. Sykes details her involvement in volunteer

clean-up days at the park, such as the Martin Luther King Day On, Not Off. She describes the work that she did to get ready for the park Dedication in May 2004, and recounts in detail preparations for the arrival of President George W. Bush, who was the featured speaker. Ms. Sykes describes the activities on the day of the Dedication, as well. She recounts in detail the work that was done to rehabilitate the building before it opened, as well as some work done afterwards to meet accessibility standards and her involvement in that work. Ms. Sykes explains the recycling program she instituted at the park.

# PERSONS MENTIONED

Superintendent [Sherda] Williams, Ray Harper, Robin White, Teri Perry [Gage], [Rev.] Doctor Martin Luther King, [Jr.], President [George W.] Bush, Darren Huggins, Michelle Obama, Thom Rosenblum, Linda Rosenblum, Steve Adams, “Bill.”

Treva Sykes, 2020

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

**TREVA SYKES**

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 Treva Sykes, Facilities Manager at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. The date is February 24, 2020. This interview takes place in Monroe School at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Topeka, Kansas.

So, Ms. Sykes, as I’m pretty 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. In our case, mostly administratively. However, your experience will tell us a lot about the physical development of this park. Oral histories are one way to get information that might not otherwise be available from documentary evidence, so 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 do want to inform you that not all the information we gather will be included in the final Administrative History. What is in there depends on how the information advances our understanding of the park development. But I do want you to know that we appreciate that you are giving your time to share your experiences of the development of this park. Okay?

So, to start with, we’re going – I’m going to ask you to repeat your full name and spell both your first and last names for the transcriber.

Sykes: Treva J. Sykes. T-R-E-V-A. Last name, Sykes, S-Y-K-E-S.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you very much. We’re going to start with your work with the National Park Service and then go on to the Brown v. Board of Education, but I get the impression that your entire career with the National Park Service is with Brown v. Board of Education. Is that correct?

Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. When did you start with the National Park Service? Sykes: July of 1995.

Interviewer: Okay, and what was your position? Sykes: Maintenance worker.

Interviewer: You were the maintenance worker? So, there was someone else who was the Facilities Manager?

Sykes: No.

Interviewer: No? You were the maintenance worker, and you were it? Sykes: I was it.

Interviewer: Okay. How did you get that position?

Sykes: I went to a technical school that was called KAW Area Technical School, and – Interviewer: Is that K-A-W?

Sykes: It’s now called Washburn Tech, but, in the past, it was called KAW Area Technical School – and took a Building Mechanics course there, and they posted a temporary seasonal job with Brown v. Board, and I applied for it, and then got it.

Interviewer: Okay. I’m sorry – what year was that? Sykes: 1995.

Interviewer: ’95. Okay, I’d better write that down, so I don’t forget it. Okay, so you applied for this through the technical school?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. And was this – this was a part-time position? Sykes: It was part time seasonal.

Interviewer: Okay. And how long did you work part time until you became full time?

Sykes: I worked seasonal ’95 and ’96, and then I underwent the – at the time, they called it the Student – or, SCEP, Student Career Employment Program, and went back to college, and was able to use credits from the technical school that converted to credits for the college. I got an Associate degree in Industrial Technology and became permanent, full time, in December of 2018.

Interviewer: Permanent full-time in 2018? Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sykes: Not 2018 – 1998.

Interviewer: I was going to say – okay, 1998. That sounds more likely. Sykes: 1998. I’m sorry.

Interviewer: Okay. 1998. Alright. So, would you say that the technical school was what prepared you for your career here with the Park Service, or was there something else that would also have prepared you to be the Facilities Manager for this site?

Sykes: Well, I –

Interviewer: The technical school and the college?

Sykes: The technical school helped, but, mainly, it was just an introduction to different fields, and –

Interviewer: Oh, okay. At the technical school?

Sykes: At the technical school, and, the truth be told, my instructor made me apply. Interviewer: (Laughs) Your instructor forced you into it?

Sykes: He pretty much said – Interviewer: “Go apply for the –“?

Sykes: Well, I was a single parent, not working, and I had three kids, and this came on the bulletin board, and I was the first female to graduate from the course, and he wanted to make me his pet.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Poster child?

Sykes: Yeah, poster child. So, that position came, and it was posted on the – because, a lot of times, the Park Service will go to technical schools – and it was posted on there for three days a week, seasonal. And I thought, “I can’t – I can’t do that. I need a full-time job with insurance.” And he took me in his office, and I came out and applied for it. And then I got it. So, it’s basically been self-teaching, basically, for – because the Park Service maintenance is entirely their – different than the commercial world. [Unintelligible – crosstalk] So, it was basically learn by doing.

Interviewer: Learn by doing? Well, Superintendent Williams has given you very high marks for your work. She has had nothing but high praise for the work that you’ve done.

Sykes: Well, I appreciate it. I appreciate it.

Interviewer: So, are you a Topeka native? Are you – were you born here? Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And were you aware of Monroe School before it became a National Historic Site? Sykes: Not really. I knew it was a school, and I knew that –

Interviewer: Did you know that something important had happened, or – related to the school?

Sykes: No, not really. I was in my own little world, trying to get on my feet, and I really didn’t learn the full impact and the – until I started here.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. So, you were aware that the school was there, but you really didn’t have any thoughts about it, one way or the other, right?

Sykes: I just didn’t have any – no.

Interviewer: So, when you first came to the site, what was your impression? I mean, that was 1995, and it hadn’t been a park very long.

Sykes: Right. It was – no. It – I was the first maintenance worker, and, at the time, we had a Superintendent, an AO, a Chief of Interp. I think that was it.

Interviewer: Okay. So, who was the Superintendent?

Sykes: Ray Harper. And they dropped me off down here and basically said, “Here you go.” Interviewer: Oh, okay. (Laughs) Did they say, “Okay, maintain this?”

Sykes: And they said, “What tools do you need?” And I looked around, and they said, “Oh, that field is ours, too,” and it hadn’t been mowed for quite a while on, and I thought, “Oh, this is good!” No running water, limited electricity. I think there was over two hundred windowpanes broke, so, basically, there was no maintenance experience from the staff, and I basically learned, through talking to other Facility Managers, that – and I learned the ropes of, “No, you can’t do that, Treva. Don’t ever do it again,” to, you know, learn, and the –

Interviewer: (Laughs) What did you do that you weren’t supposed to ever do again? Sykes: Oh, like order trash service and stuff.

Interviewer: Oh, just order things?

Sykes: Order things. I had no idea, you know. “No, you can’t sign contracts and stuff.” So, it was basically self-taught and they – what I did was perform moth – they call it mothballing. Basically, protected the building, and –

Interviewer: Okay. What did that entail? Sykes: Fix broken windows –

Interviewer: So, you replaced glass in the broken windows?

Sykes: Replaced glass, made sure, you know, the doors – they had a couple doors – just – in places, you could get in, secure the building. The roof leaked. We had to have emergency repairs. So it was basically, “What can I do to stop this building from going further back until we start the renovation?” And then, I wanted – my own, personal goal was, I wanted to make it look the best I could, even though we weren’t open. There used to be fencing all around the building, and I took it all down. Couldn’t hardly see the concrete out front because of weeds. Cleaned that all up. Finally mowed the field – found out all kinds of stuff, like there’s a big – there was a big culvert over there that I wasn’t aware of. Whoo! Went right down in that thing! So, I basically wanted people to

come by and go, “Oh, okay! There’s – that looks pretty good!” I even went so far as – oh, there was all kinds of debris in the building.

Interviewer: Oh, inside? Sykes: Yeah. And –

Interviewer: So, even things that people couldn’t see, you were into cleaning up?

Sykes: Right. And take care – taking care of it. So, there had been homeless people that had built a fire in one of the rooms. Yeah. Used to be, different people used the building. I think there was a church at one time, and they had a stage built. I tore it all apart.

Interviewer: They built that in this building?

Sykes: Yeah, it was just like a platform stage in one of the galleries downstairs. Interviewer: Did they have, like, permission to occupy?

Sykes: I think they owned it before it was turned over to the Park Service. From what I understood, there was actually a dental office – I mean, it was kind of a church to help the area, and there were funky cardinal curtains in the auditorium. I mean, it was, like, “Wow!” So, that was basically what I – and I was just seasonal for two years. So – because there was no heat. No heat, no air, nothing.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, doing the windows and the lawn were probably the easy thing to do?

Sykes: Yeah, and then they – there was – during – you couldn’t do anything in here in the winter, so – it was – it would – because there was no heat.

Interviewer: Yeah, you could only do it in the summer, spring, fall? Sykes: Right.

Interviewer: When you were replacing the windows, did you then just leave them as windows you could see out of, or did you put –?

Sykes: No, I put window panes in it and caulked – or, glazed them and everything.

Interviewer: Right, but a lot of times, when the Park Service mothballs buildings, they put plywood up over the windows so that you can’t –

Sykes: I didn’t. I didn’t do that.

Interviewer: So, you just – you were just trying to make it look like a decent-looking building?

Sykes: And to fix up – to make sure there were no birds in it – here, anymore, or – I think we had cats in here. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, were the – was the roof in such a bad condition that birds were getting in? Sykes: Well, it was through the windows – the broken windows.

Interviewer: Oh, through the broken windows? Okay.

Sykes: Because they were, like, totally – yeah. And there wasn’t, like, tons of them. You know, I’d find one every once in a while. It was not alive, of course. So – but the roof was asphalt shingles, and the flat roof was – I think it was a rubber membrane. I think – because I never went up there. But it leaked, and the auditorium was – like, had water in it. And it was wintertime. So, I – and it had asbestos tile that – you know, twelve by twelve inch tile, and, of course, it popped that up. And it was damaging – well, there was hardly any plaster left in a lot of the rooms.

Interviewer: So, asbestos tile was on the floor?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm. Because it was put there – I’m not sure. So, there was asbestos in it. Interviewer: Was there asbestos in other – like, insulation or wiring or plumbing?

Sykes: No.

Interviewer: It was just the flooring?

Sykes: The flooring and there was some other – there was lead-based paint in the hall, because we had to – during renovation, they had to hire, you know, a – hazardous waste companies to come in to handle that and the flooring. And I think that was about the only thing that was asbestos that they did.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, it wasn’t major? Sykes: Major through the building. No.

Interviewer: Okay. And, that flooring, you’ve – you took all that up? Sykes: I did not do that.

Interviewer: Or somebody took all that up?

Sykes: The hazardous waste companies that was hired, yeah.

Interviewer: The hazardous waste companies did? Okay. So, it’s not – it hasn’t been encapsulated underneath of –?

Sykes: No. It was on the – yeah, it’s not encapsulated. It was removed.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, when you first came, the Park Service hadn’t really done anything to improve the site, basically?

Sykes: Nope. Like I said, they brought me down here, and this is pretty much the truth. Interviewer: Okay, so, “they” being the Park Service?

Sykes: The – it would have been Robin White. She was my supervisor – and, basically, brought me down and said, “Well,” you know, “kind of make it as best as you can and see you later.”

Interviewer: Do the best you can?

Sykes: I did have a government vehicle, but, I mean, in all reality, none of the staff had had any maintenance experience, so – and I went to –

Interviewer: Right. But the staff wasn’t on site anyway.

Sykes: No. We had – the office was down in the Post Office. Interviewer: Did you have maintenance responsibilities for that? Sykes: Nope.

Interviewer: Oh, just this building?

Sykes: No, just this building. That was owned by the Post Office – the Postal Service, and they took care of all the maintenance of that building.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, so the Park Service was leasing space down there, but they took care of that. Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: So, you weren’t terribly aware of this facility, growing up in Topeka. And when you came here, did you have any idea of how the public and the surrounding neighborhood or whatever might have – might perceive this park, how they thought of this facility – this National Park right here in the middle of their neighborhood?

Sykes: No. I had dealings with some of the neighbors. But this is a run – not a run-down area; it’s improved somewhat, but, across the alley there was –

Interviewer: Well, it’s pretty industrialized here. A lot of –

Sykes: Yeah, but it – yeah, but there was – I mean, the way it was, when it was a school and when it was open – it’s nothing like that and the neighborhood –

Interviewer: It’s nothing like now? Nothing like it was then? Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, because it’s industrialized, things have been torn down? Sykes: Yeah. Right. Houses have been torn down, and –

Interviewer: Okay. So, when you came in ’95, whatever, it – was it more or less like this, or were –?

Sykes: It was like this, except, like, there was a house – a couple houses where that mural is. And, in the back alley, there was horrible-looking houses that had, like, tarps on the roofs and stuff like that. So, it was –

Interviewer: Okay. Houses that were in need of maintenance?

Sykes: Yeah. It was – it appeared more run-down, but then, I guess, if you look at the way the site looked, that kind of added to the neighborhood.

Interviewer: So, when you started improving the site – when you started mowing and fixing windows, did that have any effect on the neighborhood surrounding? A lot of times,

when somebody starts improving one building in an area, other people start improving their – no? They were not connected to –

Sykes: No, not – it wasn’t as important to them, I guess. And, like, when I started, it was – like, I read the history, and then I decided, “Well, this is my building, and I’m taking care of it,” so – and we did have people that actually would drive by, and that’s kind of when I learned about – (pause) I think there’s a mixed opinion in Topeka about the park – why we are a park, and we shouldn’t have been a park, and –

Interviewer: Oh. Somebody else should have been a park? Sykes: Sumner.

Interviewer: Sumner?

Sykes: Yeah, they felt like Sumner should be the one, not Monroe. Interviewer: Oh. Why?

Sykes: Because that’s the school she was denied entrance to.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay. This was just one of the ones that was integrated? I see. Sykes: So – I mean, that’s the only thing I can think of.

Interviewer: That’s your guess? Okay. Sykes: Right. And –

Interviewer: Alright. And so, did they make comments to you as you were working here on the park?

Sykes: Yeah, I actually had a bus – and I don’t know what the circumstances were, but a gentleman came out, and there was, maybe, ten people, and he was talking about the site, and I’m out there doing something, and I overhear him, and I’m going, “Oh, okay. I think I need to –”

Interviewer: So, was he – he wasn’t a Park Service employee, with the Park Service bus? Sykes: No, he was upset –

Interviewer: He was, like, a tour bus?

Sykes: Yeah. He was upset that a certain person was getting all the credit for the park, and it wasn’t just her. So. Yeah, it was, like – kind of eye-opening.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay, so he brought a busload of people to the site to tell this –?

Sykes: Yeah. He just drove by. He just drove by, and they all got out, and were looking at it, and he says, “Contrary to what everybody’s heard, it’s not – just not this person that was the only person involved. And it’s not just” – you know, “She’s not the only one.” So, it was, like, “Okay. I think I’ll go over here and not pay him any attention.” So.

Interviewer: Okay, so, did – I mean, there weren’t a lot of neighbors with houses. Did anybody come and say, “Thank you for fixing it up?” They just ignored you?

Sykes: Well, I really – I really can’t tell you. I think – Interviewer: Oh. But you don’t recall anybody coming?

Sykes: No, I don’t recall anybody swarming over here to say, “Thank you, thank you.” But you have to realize, it was – it was a rough neighborhood. And I would come down here at –

Interviewer: Did you feel unsafe down here, sometimes, working by yourself?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm. I was too young, even though I was forty-ish, I was too young to really realize, “You know, this – you are alone down here.” And then there was a couple things that happened that made me very aware that, “You are alone down here.” So – and the neighbor across the street was a drunk, and he approached me several times. “Can I get a ride somewhere? Can you spare some gas?” So, I learned to just talk to him – to him through the door. So, yeah, it was just different. We had a – I had a outhouse brought over here, and –

Interviewer: Oh, really? Well, because there was no running water, so –?

Sykes: No running water. Needed toilets. Needed a port-a-potty, and it was used as a stolen- good drop-off, so I had to get a lock on it. So, yeah, it was – it was interesting. It was interesting, so.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Would you say the neighborhood’s improved?

Sykes: It improved somewhat when – before the Grand Opening, when the president came in. All of a sudden, the city got involved, and two new houses were built over here, and the vinyl fencing was put up, and houses were painted. And that was in 2004, though.

Nothing has been done since. But they actually torn down the house that – Interviewer: In the neighborhood?

Sykes: Right. They actually tore down the house that was leaning, that had the tarps on it. Interviewer: (Laughs) Well, that’s a good thing.

Sykes: Yeah, that’s the one that the man lived in. And then, they built the two new homes, and restored another one, and put up the vinyl fence. Kind of painted the houses, the front of the house.

Interviewer: Okay. Spruced it up for the president’s visit? Sykes: Spruced it up for the president, yes.

Interviewer: That happens with presidents. Sykes: Yes, it does.

Interviewer: So, when you first started this job at the – at this park, did you have any expectations for what you would be doing? I mean, did they – did your mentor at the college give you a clue? Or did you – I mean, you said they just dropped you off and said, “Here. Maintain this.”

Sykes: No, I – now, that’s exaggerating, but it pretty much is what happened, you know. “Get a list of tools that you think you’ll need,” and, before that, I thought, “Well, what do they want me to do?” I mean, I was –

Interviewer: You really didn’t know what –?

Sykes: I did not know. And then, I just took it upon myself and, “Oh, well, this place is really bad. Let’s get it cleaned up, get the trash out, do the – yeah, they had – I really – like I said, the – I couldn’t do any electrical work, because there was no electrical, basically.

Interviewer: Would you – would you have been able to if there had been?

Sykes: Well, I do now. I mean, I do just – well, like change – well, change ballast, change switches, change lights, that kind of thing. Or change light switches and – basic electrical. And I took basic plumbing there. It was four part: plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and carpentry. So, it was just like – and it was only a year-long course, so it was, like, pretty quick in there.

Interviewer: Did they teach you how to put in new windows? Sykes: No.

Interviewer: No, you just figured that out yourself?

Sykes: Yeah, I figured that out. Yeah, I figured it out – and that was before YouTube! Interviewer: I was going to say, “You couldn’t just Google that.”

Sykes: Huh-uh. I think it was the second season I was here, I went to historic preservation training, and that was a week long, and that’s – like, I went, “Ohhh! Okay!”

Interviewer: Oh, good! “Ohhh! There are rules for this!”

Sykes: “There are rules for this,” yes! So – I mean, I went so far as – because from ’95 to 2003 is a long time to be working on a building like this. I had – I had things done, like, the electrical panels were in the basement, which flooded when it rained.

Interviewer: Every time? Pretty often? Frequently?

Sykes: It was – let’s just put it this way: there was a sump pump pit in the corner that they had actually made channels in the floor so the water would go there, and I did have to replace the pump in there, and I realized that the pit never emptied. We – I found out later that we are above a – oh, a water table here, and it’s, like, that pit never emptied. I would try, and the water would – and we have an elevator pit, and we actually – there’s water behind there, and they actually drilled some holes with piping to kind of relieve the water, and it goes into the pit – not continually, but after a lot of rain. So, you could

take – be up on the first floor and hear the water running. Yeah, it was bad. So, that’s where you turned the power off. So, I had – I did have that moved. There was limited electricity here. Mainly some of the outlets, some of the light fixtures. So, I had the panel moved to the upstairs so I could turn it off if I needed to. And, when the church had it, they actually had four outside heat pumps hooked to the building, that came through some vents that you could see when you walk around. And I had those removed – donated them to KAW Tech so they could tear them apart and use them. So we had those hauled off. So those was different things that I – that I did that – just took it upon myself to do, because they were horrible-looking units.

Interviewer: Were those some of the things that, later, they said, “Oh, no, you –” Sykes: No, that – because that was, like, not original at all, and it was – Interviewer: Okay, so you were – they were okay with that?

Sykes: Oh, yeah, that – and they – there’s vents on the outside of the building, wherever there was a Uni-Vent inside – which was a high-tech radiator, at that time, in 1924. Well, they vented – because it would actually take air from the outside and run it through the coil of the radiator and heat it up. So, there was vents on the outside of the building, and they, actually just went through that area, so –

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, they hadn’t made any new holes? They went through existing openings? Sykes: No, they went up through – and that – I’m not sure – that was there when I started, so

I’m not sure who put them in. Probably the church.

Interviewer: Okay. So, overall, just thinking in terms of the whole project, let’s just start with what would you say was the biggest challenge to getting this building back into shape?

Sykes: The biggest challenge then or now?

Interviewer: The biggest challenge at – when you started. Well, once you had become familiar with the building, and you had, let’s say, done the windows and the mowing, and you looked at it, what would you – what did you think was the biggest challenge. Was it the roof, or was it the electricity, the plumbing?

Sykes: Oh, probably the roof, first, and then, probably the basement – the – Interviewer: Okay, the water problem in the basement?

Sykes: The water issues, yeah. Interviewer: Is that solved?

Sykes: Yeah. I mean – there’s a six-inch concrete slab over the underground drain – underground drains that go into a pit, so – and a sump pump in it. So, Sherda will have to take you downstairs – or I can. Yeah, it’s totally –

Interviewer: (Laughs) No, that’s okay. I don’t need to do that. I’ll take your word for it.

Sykes: No, it’s totally nice down there. That’s where my office is, is in the basement. Yeah, I would say it was mainly, just – to me, it was like, “If we don’t get this place open,” you know, “I don’t know – it’s needs a new roof –“

Interviewer: Yeah. Was the biggest challenge, maybe you had a time-crunch to get things done? Sykes: No, because – I mean, basically, I had my routine, and it was basically always wondering,

“Okay, when is the money going to start? When are we going to –?” You know, I was just mainly thinking, “Ah! I’m doing the best I can here, but, man, we need it –“

Interviewer: Did you have a problem with the budgets?

Sykes: I never really got involved in it. I was told in ’95 to tell people we were going to open in ’97.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay. And so, at that point, did you say, “Oh, my gosh! We’ve got a lot of work to do between now and ’97?”

Sykes: No, I knew it was all going to be contracted out, but then, when ’97 came, I realized, “Tch! No, I don’t think that’s going to happen!” And that’s what, I believe, he was – I think that’s what he was telling the public, and there was no funding. It hadn’t gone through anything, so it – I think my – maybe it’s not my challenge, or maybe it was like, “I can’t wait! I can’t wait!” That kind of thing. Because I wanted to see it. I wanted to see it.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how did you – how did you manage acquiring – I mean, you needed tools. Did you go through the Superintendent to ask for these things?

Sykes: First, I would go to my supervisor, and then she would go to the AO. Like, I would – Interviewer: Okay, so you went to Robin and then she went to –?

Sykes: Uh-huh. Teri. Would have been Teri Perry at the time. Yeah. So, she – they – I mean, I had no problem getting what I needed. I had no problem. So – and I did buy a lot of tools, and I had them in the kindergarten room, and they were all stolen. Someone broke in and stole them. So, kind of, started all over. And I did buy – like, I painted all the doors, replaced window in the doors, and just – my goal was, “Okay, I’m going to just keep on going. Keep trying to – you know, if a window got broke – and, really, I – once I started to replace them, I didn’t have anybody come and break them. But they did break in.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. Somebody broke in and stole tools. Obviously, they must have known there were some here, because you were working –

Sykes: Stole my – yeah, they probably saw me bring them in. And we had a mower. They bought me a mower. In fact, they might have bought that before I started, to have it ready for me.

Interviewer: The mower? Did they buy – give you the vehicle right away? Sykes: Yes. I had a white Dodge Ram, I think. A big, big truck.

Interviewer: Okay. So, right away, you had a maintenance vehicle and a mower? Sykes: Mmm-hmm. Yep.

Interviewer: Okay, and then the next magical trick was get the rest of the tools assembled?

Sykes: Get the tools, you know – and then, whenever I would – like, when we discovered the roof was leaking, that was an emergency repair. And I can’t remember how much that cost.

Interviewer: Did you hire that – I assume you hired that out?

Sykes: Yeah, and they put, like, a temporary coating on the flat roof.

Interviewer: And so, when we did – when you did those kinds of projects, where you contracted out the work, were you the superintendent? Did you watch what they were doing and make sure they did it correctly?

Sykes: No, because I think that was one of the periods of time when I wasn’t here. You know, my season at the park –

Interviewer: Oh, okay, because you were seasonal? Okay.

Sykes: Yeah. I think my season was – might have been from – I think it ended in October. Interviewer: Okay, so, like, April to October, thereabouts?

Sykes: So - yeah, something like that. Interviewer: And they replaced the roof in the winter?

Sykes: Yeah. And I think we discovered – I did get called back. We had, believe it or not, we had an event here – what was it? I think it was Martin Luther King’s – (pause)

Interviewer: MLK Day-On?

Sykes: Yes. And it was unreal.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about that. Well, did they do more than one of these – those, or was there just –

Sykes: We had a couple of events down here, because I kept thinking, “Why?” Interviewer: But, I mean, MLK Day-On. Did you just do that once?

Sykes: That one once. But we had, like, Girl Scout events down here. The one Martin Luther King thing, I think it was called “A Day On Not Off.” And we had lots of volunteers, and I had to furnish all the cleaning stuff and figure out, “what can these volunteers do here?” And that’s –

Interviewer: What did they?

Sykes: Well, we – like, they swept all the rooms. I had mops. They actually – and I had water, and I had to get a temporary heat source.

Interviewer: Yeah, because of the day – time of year?

Sykes: Yeah, it was January. And before that – I think it was in December – that’s when I discovered the roof. Because I had come in to – because it was, kind of, “Oh, we’re going to have this event, and you’re going to be in charge of the volunteers.” And I went, “Oh! Okay.”

Interviewer: And so, you came in and discovered that the roof was leaking?

Sykes: Right, and then it got fixed. And it might have been earlier in the season. I mean, that’s been a long time ago. But I know that we had – I couldn’t tell you how many volunteers. I brought - bought brooms, mops – they actually helped – Ray Harper had bought some school desks from somewhere here in Topeka, and we actually refinished those. Sanded them.

Interviewer: Oh, okay! The volunteers did that during that event? Sykes: Yeah. So, I bought all their safety stuff they needed. Interviewer: Are those – are those desks still here?

Sykes: No. They were not used at all. Except by me.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. They were not acceptable? Not historically accurate?

Sykes: No. And he actually bought the old type, that probably were from 1924, that were attached to the floor – and we have a couple of those.

Interviewer: Oh, is that where the chair is attached on the back side – on the front?

Sykes: Right. But they were not historic to the building, either, so. But the – all the desks that he bought were the wooden chairs with arms. None of them – and so, I made sure I took two, anyway, and I cut the arm off, and they’re my office chairs.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, they’re still in the building?

Sykes: Those two are. Yeah. But they’re not – they weren’t historic at all.

Interviewer: Okay. So what the volunteers did for MLK Day was, they swept and mopped and refinished –?

Sykes: Yeah, helped restore stuff. They did help – I had tore that stage apart, and we did get it hauled out of here. So, there was a few things like that. And it wasn’t an all-day affair.

Interviewer: Okay. When was that? What year was that? Do you remember?

Sykes: Oh, my gosh! Hmm. It was either ’96 or ’97. Yes. Yeah, it was either ’96 or ’97.

Interviewer: Okay, did you – so, that was one volunteer day for working on the building. Did you host any others that you were in charge of?

Sykes: We had Girl Scouts that helped clean.

Interviewer: Girl Scouts? Did the Girl Scouts come on a regular basis, or did they just –? Sykes: No.

Interviewer: Was this part of their training – badge work? Sykes: They were working on a badge, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, just occasionally groups would come?

Sykes: Occasionally groups – like, volunteer groups and stuff, so, nothing major, at all. Interviewer: Okay. Well, how about Boy Scouts? No Boy Scouts?

Sykes: No, not that I dealt with. But I was a Girl Scout leader, so I – yeah.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. Oh, I see. Okay. I gotcha. Okay, you were here when they did the March for Parks in 1996 and unveiled the first official park sign?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you remember that at all?

Sykes: I remember them unveiling the sign. And I probably marched. Interviewer: What did they march – where did they march? Around the building? Sykes: I could – I’m telling you I could – I could not tell you.

Interviewer: I know that March for Parks is a program that is in all the parks that I’ve heard of, but they seem to have a variety of notions about where they should march. So, some of them march – like, if they are in the capitol city, they march from, say, Central High School [in Little Rock, Arkansas] to –

Sykes: I really could not tell you anything. I really could not tell you.

Interviewer: Don’t know where they marched? (Laughs) You remember the first unveiling of the sign?

Sykes: Yeah, but I could not tell you – and it was just the Brown thing. It wasn’t like – it was a regular, old, metal thing. I mean, it wasn’t –

Interviewer: Was there – was there, like – were there speakers? Did anybody make a speech before the unveiling? You don’t remember? (Laughs)

Sykes: I really couldn’t say. I really can’t tell you! I don’t remember! If it didn’t have to do with me, that’s just kind of like, “Well, okay.” Which is terrible to say, but I –

Interviewer: Okay. The Brown Foundation had symposia here. Did you have any – Sykes: Had what?

Interviewer: They had meetings and gatherings – Sykes: Here?

Interviewer: Well, I assumed so. No?

Sykes: Not on a regular basis, and not before we were open. This was a horrible – a horrible building. Now, I think –

Interviewer: Well, at some point it wasn’t.

Sykes: I think – yes. It was not horrible, but, I mean, it was not comfortable at all. No air, no heat, no water.

Interviewer: Okay, but after it got – let’s say, after it got restored, did they use it then? Sykes: Okay, now, what do you mean “restored?”

Interviewer: Well, after it was open. After you opened it as a park. Sykes: Oh, yeah. They had an office here.

Interviewer: Okay. They had an office here?

Sykes: And they met regularly – the Brown Foundation Board.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. In 1996, you received a Fast Track Award for the MLK Day. What’s a Fast Track Award?

Sykes: It’s just like an On The Spot. See, there it was – it was in 1996, then. Interviewer: Yeah! Okay. Well, you received the award in ’96.

Sykes: Yeah, it was like a cash award.

Interviewer: Oh, was it? Okay. And “Fast Track” means – what does it mean?

Sykes: I think they call them “On The Spot” now. It’s for something you did above and beyond and extraordinary.

Interviewer: Extra from your regular duties? Sykes: Yep.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Alright. And so, they were rewarding you for managing all those – all of those volunteers?

Sykes: Yeah, they were. That was very nice. Interviewer: And you probably deserved every minute of it!

Sykes: Yeah, I didn’t do it – I didn’t do it for the award, but, let me tell you, it was hard work, so.

Interviewer: (Laughs) In ’97, you received a STAR Award. So, what’s a STAR Award? Is that the same thing?

Sykes: It’s the same thing. The STAR is –

Interviewer: Okay, they just changed the name? Sykes: I didn’t care.

Interviewer: So, do you remember what you did to qualify for that? Sykes: What year was that?

Interviewer: ’97. Sykes: No.

Interviewer: No? Okay.

Sykes: I probably have a record of it downstairs. I kept all my awards.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay, let’s go to ’98, when the park held the Grand Opening. In ’98, the park held a Grand Opening. Was the park ready for a Grand Opening in ’98?

Sykes: No. Who held a Grand Opening?

Interviewer: Well, I am – I am using the Supervisor’s – or, the Superintendent’s Annual Reports to determine – to list these things. They reported every year what they did. And so, they reported that they had a Grand Opening in ’98. My experience is that sometimes – for instance, I worked on the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site. They held three Grand Openings. They held a Grand Opening – well, it wasn’t a Grand Opening. They held a – when they turned the first soil over for restoration. So, they held a big thing for that.

Then, when they finished Hangar Number One, they held a Grand Opening for Hangar Number One. When they finished Hangar Number Two, they held a Grand Opening for Hangar Number Two and the whole rest of the park. So, in ’98, a Grand Opening for this park, would they have even been able to come in and see the building? Did people – do you remember whether or not people came to see the building for a special event in ’98?

Sykes: (Long pause) I seem to – see, I would have still been seasonal. Probably would have been – well, yeah, I would have been going to school. And I seem to remember something held on the front steps, but there was nothing – they could come in, I suppose, and see –

Interviewer: Okay. Well, in ’98, the funds for the rehabilitation of the school and grounds and the funds for the exhibits had only just been approved, and the park was not open for visitors. So, you’re saying that the Grand Opening was probably just held outdoors on the steps of the school because it obviously wasn’t ready for –

Sykes: No. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So, then, later, there was a Dedication. And that was when it did open for visitors. Do you remember that – the Dedication ceremony, at all?

Sykes: Oh, my gosh! You mean the Grand Opening Dedication?

Interviewer: Well, did they call it a Grand Opening then? Because – Sykes: It was Dedication Grand Opening.

Interviewer: Okay. Because, in ’98, they called whatever it was they did on the steps the Grand Opening. So, then, in –?

Sykes: No. 2004. May 17th.

Interviewer: 2004 was the Dedication, after they had done all the restoration of the building and had all the –?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm. Yes. Everything was done.

Interviewer: Exhibits were all installed and all that kind of stuff? Okay. Sykes: That’s when the president – President Bush came.

Interviewer: That was when the president came, and they painted the houses and put the fence up?

Did all that sprucing?

Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, do you remember that at all? I mean, what went on, who was – besides the president? Did the president speak?

Sykes: Oh, my gosh! Do I remember that? Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Sykes: Oh, my gosh, yes!

Interviewer: Okay. So, what did you – let’s do it this way. What did you have to do in order to get ready for the Grand – for the Grand Opening Dedication in 2004?

Sykes: Well, I – okay, I was, like, the park representative on the – because there was three phases of construction. There was exterior, interior, and the exhibits. And we were down to the wire on the exhibits, because they couldn’t start them until Phase 2 was done. And I think it was, like, December of 2003, we were still at the crunch. And we had the Grand Opening in May. We did have staff down here, I think, starting in December or January. And when it got close, my – so, I had an opening building, and it was just me, still. So, I did the custodial –

Interviewer: So you were the only – still the only staff?

Sykes: Maintenance staff, yes. So, then it was an open building, and, at the time, it was, you know, brand new, so, it was just mainly custodial. And then, when it started getting close to the Grand Opening, they – like, they refinished the floors, and I said, “That’s not going to work.” I redid them.

Interviewer: Really? Which floors did they refinish? Sykes: The terrazzo. They did not –

Interviewer: Oh, really? What did they do? Sykes: It was too dull, so I – Interviewer: So, they put in new terrazzo?

Sykes: No, the terrazzo floors are all original. They refinished them. I did not like it. It was too dull.

Interviewer: It needed to be shinier?

Sykes: It needed to be like glass. So, I redid those.

Interviewer: So, you did - you re-did them instead of the people who had –?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm. Just put, like, a real nice finish on them. First and second floor. We got the – an Incident Command Team involved. And, I would say, the two weeks before, that’s when we started having the Secret Service come in, and I did – I was there –

Interviewer: Yeah, because the president was coming.

Sykes: Yeah, I was – and I think, by 2003, I had hired a seasonal – or, I hired a maintenance worker, finally. So, I did have help. Because even though the renovation was going, there still had to be grounds work. And I was here through it all, kind of keeping track. And I have documentation after documentation, picture after picture. I was taking pictures of everything that happened. And I was so involved – only, I put myself involved, because I wanted to see everything. So, it was like, “Oh, this is –”

Interviewer: And did the Secret Service – did they install anything for security purposes? Sykes: No, but they were just here.

Interviewer: They were just looking around?

Sykes: They were here – I think they were here for, like, three days, maybe, or something like that. It was basically a check of the building every day.

Interviewer: To make sure that nothing had –? Sykes: Nothing had changed.

Interviewer: Nobody was hiding in the bathroom or whatever?

Sykes: Yeah. I mean, they – it was just like - and there’s a lot. I had no idea. And then, once it got closer, we had TV stations move in, and it was just like –

Interviewer: Into the building? Sykes: No, in the parking lot.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. They had their trucks –?

Sykes: Then – yeah. But it was like, you know, “This is going to be really big!” And then I was at – like – it was just like every day, getting closer, it was like all these arrangements that

had to be done, and I had two volunteers – park maintenance workers – come in to help.

Interviewer: Did you get Park – help from other parks?

Sykes: Just those two guys, for maintenance. And then, we had these – Interviewer: Okay. What parks did they come from?

Sykes: I knew you was going to ask me that. Oh, gosh! Darren Huggins – I can’t remember what park he was from. And one of his maintenance workers. Yeah, I can’t remember. All I know is, that week was a blur. I mean - but was so exciting, and every day there was, like – okay, they needed to organize trucks and busses to block this entire area so there was no view, and – they did not want – they did not want anybody to be able to take a shot. I mean, you had the busses and trucks all in my wonderful yard right before kick-off, and – yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. This is so nobody could shoot the –?

Sykes: And then it was, like, you know. Well, it was, like, totally blocked in, so nobody – you couldn’t get a rush of people to come in. And they – we had a protest area over there, and there was just a lot of – a lot of fine details that I really wasn’t in – that was the Incident Command Team, that came down first. And so, my job was basically assist the Secret Service, assist – I mean, we had all kinds of – I got, I think – I want to think the – somebody from (pause) CIA? Surely not!

Interviewer: FBI?

Sykes: FBI, I’m pretty sure. I mean, we had – oh, my gosh, it was just like – people coming in right and left and wanting to know where is this, where is that, where is this access, where is that –?

Interviewer: Yeah. You were kind of like a traffic manager.

Sykes: Yeah, traffic manager. But it was so exciting. It was a day I had waited for forever. Well, for almost ten years, and so it was –

Interviewer: Yeah. And so, you attended, I assume.

Sykes: Yes. And it was kind of – all the work I put into it, and I didn’t even get to meet him. The Incident Command – the Incident Command Team got to, but my highlight of that day – we had, like, I think, five thousand people over here, and I kept getting phone calls: “Treva, I can’t get in!” The architects from the firm that did the architects – “I’ll get you in, just a minute.” And so, it was, like, I had calls all the time. And some people I got in and – because they were supposed to reserve – you know, the dignitaries for the Park Service and stuff. Of course, a lot of them were on the stage. But it was a big ceremony. They had a calvary that brought in the flag, with horses. So, I got a call: “Treva, we need you out with a bucket and a shovel.”

Interviewer: Because of the horse poop? (Laughs)

Sykes: And I was the [unintelligible] trash unit with the flat hat and everything. Ran out there in the street in front of five thousand people. That was my highlight. And I -and I – once he came – I mean, there were canopies out back, and we had to cover any window where he could be seen walking up front, so we just put, like, paper on them, brown paper.

And then, I thought, “Okay, I’m going to be able to watch him.” You know, “I’ll get out there.” Nope. At a certain point, after the Secret Service had been in here for them, they did the final sweep – walk-through, they had brought the bomb-dogs in again, the guys in the black, creepy-looking suits went on the roof – the sharpshooters – they were up there. And, once I came in the building, it was total lockdown. So, I was in this room over here, and he was out – on a stage out front, and I got to see the back –that’s – I could see the back of him, looking down that window. And he shuffled his feet a lot. So, that was my – yeah.

Interviewer: That was as close as you got to the president, huh?

Sykes: Yeah. I did get to meet Michelle Obama, so that was – that made up for that. So, yeah. So, it was very exciting. And we didn’t open to the public until May 17th. Actually, it was probably the day after. We weren’t open to the public yet.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So, before the Grand Opening, when people could just come to the school, they had to make an appointment to see the school once it was available, and be – I guess, be escorted over by a Ranger, or something. When somebody made an appointment to see the school before it had opened, did you –?

Sykes: You mean, before the – before the renovation started or after? Because we weren’t open to the public.

Interviewer: Right. I know you weren’t open to the public, but, for some reason, there was a program whereby people could make an appointment to tour the school. And they would go to the Post Office, I assume. So, my question to you was going to be: did you have to do anything special for these special people who got these special tours? No?

Sykes: No. You have to realize – which I’ve learned – maintenance is kind of – we’re the undercover people. And we’re on a need-to-know basis, and sometimes that need-to- know is an hour before you need to know something, so that’s one thing I’ve learned. But, yeah, all of our staff was down here. We moved all of us and left the Post Office – and it might have been November of 2003 – or December – because the maintenance worker that I hired, we helped move stuff down here. So, yeah. And we – you know, the furniture had to be delivered. It was – it was pretty intense – the getting ready – but I – and it’s very possible, but I do know that we were down here – the staff was down here, and we had moved out of the Post Office.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, then let’s talk about some of the major restoration, rehabilitation efforts that went on in this building. I know there was – now, the roof replacement, it was the complete roof?

Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. And that only happened once – 1996? Sykes: No. The – okay, the renovation started in 2001.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you restore – did you replace the roof then? Because there was a – there was, like, a roof replacement, but I don’t know if it was temporary or partial.

Sykes: You mean the flat roof? It was the flat – no, at one point, the asphalt shingles were put on there, but that was before the Park Service had it, I believe. The only roof improvement made while – before the renovation started was the flat roof. And that was that temporary repair over the auditorium.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it wasn’t the complete roof? Sykes: No. Right.

Interviewer: And so, then, when they did the renovation, then they did the whole roof – or not? Sykes: Do you want to know everything we did?

Interviewer: (Laughs) Well, the things that I have listed here are: the restoration of the kindergarten room, relocation of the educational bookstore, and accessibility projects. So, what – so, for restoration – I mean, you did a lot of re-organizing the structure with carpentry and stuff this – upstairs. I mean, the bathrooms are different up here than they are downstairs.

Sykes: Okay. Bathrooms downstairs are mainly public – for the public. Are you talking about men’s restrooms?

Interviewer: Yeah, I’m talking about the restrooms up here, in the administrative space, where you go in the Boys’ Restroom, and that’s the – that’s the restroom for up here, I assume? I don’t know.

Sykes: In the hallway?

Interviewer: In the hallway – off the hallway, yeah.

Sykes: That’s actually a unisex restroom. Yeah, it’s – all the restrooms in here are new, but the intent of the renovations – because, I would get upset that, “Why are you taking this radiator?” And I was told, over and over, “This is a renovation project.”

Interviewer: Not a restoration?

Sykes: Not a preservation or restoration. It’s renovation. But they still tried to keep, like, the doors in the hallway on the second floor are original. Where the restroom is in the hall was where a restroom was. Where the restroom in the break room is where a restroom was. They tried to keep offices that were – this was a classroom. That kind of thing. But you’d asked about the roof. The Spanish clay tile roof was put on during the renovation, which is what it originally was.

Interviewer: During the rehabilitation? Okay. And so, what was the restoration of the kindergarten room? What happened with that?

Sykes: That was done internally. That was not done during the renovation – the original plans for that and what it was until – it was originally the Reflections Room. And there were actually stations where people could record their thoughts and that kind of thing. It was neat. And that’s what it was, and then our historian – I believe, through the Superintendent’s discussions – people were asking, “Wish you had a classroom that was restored.” So, that’s when our historian, Thom Rosenblum – we worked – I worked with him, and we put the kindergarten room back to the way it looked in the old – 1950s.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you restored the kindergarten room back to itself? Sykes: Only basically furniture – furnishings, nothing major at all.

Interviewer: Okay. Because the rest of the room hadn’t really been modified, right?

Sykes: And the rest of the room looked just like it was. And when they had put the exhibits in, it just set in the original footprint. The fireplace was there, the cabinets – you know, during the renovation, they restored the cabinets, put them back – anything that was here originally was left. We just changed the furnishings, basically.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I’m asking these questions because when – before I came to interview you, I sent my question – my interview guide – to the Midwest Regional Office in case they wanted to add anything or if there was something they particularly wanted to know about. This was something that they added. So, what about the relocation of the educational bookstore? Where was it originally? I mean, I know where it is now.

Sykes: It used to be – we call it the Program Room now. It used to be across the hall downstairs. Downstairs was a huge – all the entire room. And it was, basically, decided – I think our Chief of Interp at the time, Linda Rosenblum – we – she thought it would be better to have – because, sometimes, the bookstore manager was not there, and you’d have people in the bookstore, and you’d need a Ranger over here. So, that’s when we moved the bookstore – kind of downsized it and put it –

Interviewer: Where the Ranger is?

Sykes: Where the Rangers are now. That was basically –

Interviewer: And that was another – was that another instance where you didn’t really modify the building, you just moved bookshelves?

Sykes: Yeah. Just – didn’t modify the building at all, except we put carpet in there because it had – it had bamboo wood flooring, which fades in the sun and is kind of, actually –

Interviewer: Was it beginning to buckle?

Sykes: Well, it was, like – yeah, it was – we put carpeting there because it was going to be a meeting room, we decided, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what about accessibility projects from 2015 to 2019? What did you do for accessibility?

Sykes: We had a – an assessment done, and they - we had a list of things. A lot – I took care of all the physical things, but there were a lot of interpretive things that – for example, what I did is – they measured the ramps on the side of the building and decided they were too steep by, like, a quarter of an inch or something, so they wanted handrails put up. And I said, “No.” We re-did the ramps.

Interviewer: Okay, so you made whole new ramps? So, they’re longer than they used to be?

Sykes: Well, they’re – yeah, I think – sloped them the right slope. They wanted the front doors replaced because the swing of it wasn’t open, and I looked at the guidelines, and I said, “Yes, it does open thirty-six inches. You measure from so high, not where the handle is.” We were – so we were fine. They wanted mirrors put in.

Interviewer: So, in that case, what they wanted was something that you blocked because it didn’t meet the guidelines?

Sykes: Right. Well, it didn’t – it wasn’t needed. They – Interviewer: It wasn’t necessary?

Sykes: Yeah, I just – anything –

Interviewer: Well, it’s a good thing you were there to stop them, though!

Sykes: Yeah, because they wanted the front doors made wider. Well, I think that – because there’s – sometimes, I think, the federal government or the National Park Service can say, “No, we’ll do it – find a different way to do it,” or something. But a lot of the findings – I mean, I still have that report – a lot of the findings was, “The print’s too small, it blends in too much,” you know. It was that kind of thing. So, a lot of –

Interviewer: Okay. But the physical stuff – what was the physical stuff other than they wanted to enlarge the doors and increase the ramp?

Sykes: The ramps – it was just minor things, like, “You need a longer grab bar in this restroom. You need full-length mirrors in this restroom, the handles – people can’t get their hands in the – or, their hand in the handles of the drawers,” so, I found – I found, you know, larger handles. Just stuff like that. The major thing was the ramps. So, it was mainly just –

Interviewer: Okay, and then the rest of the accessibility issues had to do with, probably, the exhibits? Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. That the type needed to be bigger, contrast needed to be –?

Sykes: Type needed to be bigger, there was a glare, right. Yeah, there was – a lot of it was [unintelligible – paper shuffling]. And that’s why she had to redo a lot of the panels and stuff.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright, so, they did update the exhibits to –?

Sykes: Yeah, they’re just still getting updated. They just basically took panels and made kind of a wrap around them, with the wording contrasted, that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay. So, during the rehabilitation, were there ever – you mentioned a few things that you blocked them from doing so – because they weren’t necessary. Were there any, kind of, unforeseen conditions that arose during rehabilitation that changed any of the plans for the rehabilitation of this building?

Sykes: Well, there were always amendments and stuff, like Phase 1 was the exterior, and they took out – it was basically the contractor said, “Why are we going to put down a concrete sidewalk when Phase 2 says we’re going to bring in this – or bring in – bring in piping – and, while we’ve got the hole cut out, why don’t we bring the radiator, or the –

?”

Interviewer: Okay, so it just changed some of the phases?

Sykes: Just add, like – “Okay, let’s change this to Phase 2 because we need to bring piping in.” It was just more common-sense thing, but there wasn’t anything that you went, “Man, oh man! That’s major!” There was nothing –

Interviewer: Okay, so basically the design of anything that they were doing didn’t change, just the timing?

Sykes: Timing, yeah. The design was –

Interviewer: Of what they were going to do – have happen? Sykes: Yep.

Interviewer: Okay. And, during this time, you had a lot of subcontractors here. Were you – were you the Park Service liaison with the subcontractors, watching what they did or whatever?

Sykes: I basically – no, I wasn’t a Contracting Officer or Technical Representative. I think they called me the Park Representative. I did not deal with subcontractors. I watched them, and I knew who everybody was, and mainly was just, like – I didn’t direct them. We had a – A-1 Construction was the company that had the two phases, and they were amazing, had good subcontractors, and I was –

Interviewer: Okay, was there anybody assigned to look at their work and say, “Yes, this meets the Secretary of Interior’s Standards?”

Sykes: Yes. We had a couple contracting officers from the Midwest Region. I think it changed hands three times, and they would come down regularly. And then, in order to avoid – if something came up, they actually sent – handed it to an architectural firm here in Topeka, Trainor Architects, and they came down regularly. Which made a lot of sense to have a local company. So, they would – they would come down and check.

Interviewer: Okay. And was there anything that had to be redone, like re-tuckpointing or re- mortaring because the mortar didn’t match, or any of that kind of stuff?

Sykes: There was – usually, before they started something new, they did a bench sample, and they would have to, sometimes, change things. And it – when you’re talking about – like, the contractor would get so upset because the architects were this far away from the mortar, and it doesn’t look – it doesn’t have this – and then, you’d get the companies’ – or – and they were very particular, to the point that it was, like, “Oh, my gosh!” you know. And they decided, “We’re not going to use traditional glazing on the windows.

We’re going to use a caulking compound.” And I’m right there, looking, and go, “Oh, this is – can’t use it under forty degrees, it’s sticky, it’s going to get dirty.”

Interviewer: Was that what was originally used in the windows, the caulking compound? Sykes: I think it was glazing.

Interviewer: It was originally glazing compound?

Sykes: It was originally glazing and painted over. This was – Interviewer: So, this was some other kind of –?

Sykes: This was actually caulking, like when you caulk a crack. This was, like, the architect – Interviewer: Yeah, but my question was: in the original building –?

Sykes: In the original building it was glazing compound.

Interviewer: Okay. But the architects wanted to change it to this caulking compound?

Sykes: Because it was supposed to – they could match it to the color, it was a lot – you know, it would move, and –

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, it was – it wouldn’t get brittle and break out?

Sykes: Right. But you couldn’t – I – maintenance perspective, I’m looking at it, going, “Well, you can’t replace a window – you can’t use this under forty degrees. What if we have a window break out?” And I tried getting my glazing angle on it, and it was like trying to – I didn’t like it. And the people that were doing – the contractor that was doing it, they had a heck of a time. We did make them redo it, like, three times.

Interviewer: Did they continue to use the caulking compound instead of glazing? Sykes: Mmm-hmm. Yep.

Interviewer: Well, that is an important point, because, at some point, somebody is going to look at the windows and say, “Why did they use this?” And so now we’re going to document that this was the decision that was made by the architects? Okay.

Sykes: Yeah, it was – by the architects. Because, as you can tell, there’s a lot of window panes, and there would have been a lot of painting, and you have to realize that caulking was put in in 2003, so, what’s it been? Seventeen years, and it’s still there. But it’s brown, it collected dirt, dust, and –

Interviewer: You couldn’t paint it – paint over it? I’m trying to figure out –

Sykes: Well, there – that’s – the reasoning was, they could color it to match, and it would just be –

Interviewer: Oh, I see. And it would always be that color.

Sykes: Yeah. And it would always be there. So, yeah. So that was they’re – and it – I mean, I guess, in the long run, you know, it’s lasted this long, and it did save steps.

Interviewer: Did it save money or just labor steps, do you think?

Sykes: I – when it – when it came to doing those windows, the company that they had lost money, I’m sure, because they had to redo.

Interviewer: So, did it improve your ability to maintain the windows, do you think?

Sykes: I just think it looks bad. I think – because you can’t clean it. So, when I have the windows washed – because we don’t have the ability to get the second floor windows – so, when I – there’s nothing they can do to make it clean. There’s always –

Interviewer: They’re just going to always get dirtier and dirtier? Sykes: But nobody notices it.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Except YOU!

Sykes: Except me. Yeah. So, it was just a decision that – and that’s one of those where Steve Adams was the superintendent – him and I were just going, “I don’t like this.” But it turned out, you know. It’s lasted all this time, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, that was – the advantage was that it would last a long time?

Sykes: Yes. And it didn’t have to be painted. And traditional glazing usually starts cracking, so this is –

Interviewer: Yeah. Starts drying and falling out. So, is there anything else? Is there anything that’s left to be done to restore or rehabilitate this building?

Sykes: Hmm-mmm.

Interviewer: Now, it’s just – now you’re just in maintenance phase?

Sykes: Maintenance. And, unfortunately, things are getting to be older. You know, you’re going on – the design life of some things are only twenty years, and we’re going to be on that, you know, before you know it, so.

Interviewer: Yeah. Have budgets been any kind of a problem for you for – in the maintenance department?

Sykes: No. None whatsoever. And especially not now, so.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. Do you recall being on the Value Analysis Team for the park in 1998? Sykes: Yes, I do.

Interviewer: What was your role in that?

Sykes: Just mainly my opinion. The main things they did, I think, were the HVAC system, and the windows. That might be the only two I was involved in. Whether they want to do boiler-chiller, or do we want to do this, do we want to – how do we want to do the windows, so – and then they give the cost value and then – yeah. And that’s when they decided to not do a boiler and chiller but put in geothermal.

Interviewer: Okay. When you went to the Value Analysis – I love Value Analyses. Did they find – they present you with, like, three options for whatever it is you’re discussing –

Sykes: Mmm-hmm. And that’s the only Value – that’s the only one I’ve been involved in.

Interviewer: Okay. When they finally got the preferred alternative, was it a specific one of the original presentations, or was it an amalgam of all of the different ones? Did they combine parts from each of the Value Analysis presentations to make one new one, or did they pick one that was already –?

Sykes: I think, with the windows, they picked one. This has been – and I wasn’t, like, sitting in on it every single day. And they might have changed the HVAC, and might have done – because I don’t think, at that time, there was even a discussion of the geothermal system.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, do you remember why the picked the HVAC system that they picked? Sykes: The geothermal?

Interviewer: Is that what they picked? Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. So, that wasn’t part – one of the – one of the options, and, yet, it ended up being what they did?

Sykes: I don’t – I am probably telling you wrong, and I honestly just don’t remember. I just knew – I just know a chiller on the roof wasn’t going to work.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. That’s fine if you don’t remember. That was twenty-two years ago, so – Sykes: So, as it is now, we have – everything is contained in the building. You don’t even see –

there are thirteen air handling units, and they are in the attic. So, everything was thought of as far as least impact, so.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have a recycling program? Sykes: Yes.

Interviewer: And when – that was started in ’97. Were you involved in that? Sykes: Well, yeah, I was the one. (Laughs)

Interviewer: You were the only recycler? (Laughs)

Sykes: I was the one who started it, yes.

Interviewer: And its still ongoing, I take it? Okay. What do you recycle? Glass?

Sykes: We recycle – we have mixed – co-mingled. We have very little glass, but it is acceptable.

Certain – I think, clear glass, all of our plastic, all of our cardboard, shredded paper, anything – we – like, all the – our – well, it’s not called recycling, but, if we have scrap metal, I take it in. If we have office furniture that we give to someone else or donate, that is considered re-using. So is – and I think last year we were at sixty percent – close to that – of recycling everything. So, it [unintelligible]. And I try – what I’ve tried to do is make it easy, so everybody has a recycle container which then Bill takes care of by putting in the curbside, because I arranged to get four curbside containers versus taking it everywhere – taking it out. So, it’s real easy for everybody. We –

Interviewer: Yeah, the easier you make recycling, the more people do it.

Sykes: Yeah. Right. And the co-mingled is just wonderful. And Bill weighs it every – I mean, people know, “Don’t throw that cardboard away,” you know. We count it. So, basically, it’s – I mean, we’ve had – well, like, for example, we used to have a – we used to have a pathway going across the field –

Interviewer: I know. I miss that pathway. (Laughs) Sykes: The black, square, recycled things? Interviewer: Uh-huh. It was here the first time I came.

Sykes: Well, I never wanted it – liked it. That’s a cultural landscape. It should not have a pathway across the middle. But it was overruled. And, anyway, when the cultural landscape artist said, “That does not need to go there. It needs to come out!” And I went, “Yesss!” So, I recycled all those, because they were recyclable. So, it was, like, every time I’d think, “Okay, I think that’s recyclable. Let’s get that.” So, it’s, like, yeah, pretty much. You know, we’re always going, “Can that be recycled? Well, let’s find out!” you know. So, it’s – we try really hard. And Bill is in charge of that.

Interviewer: Good! Okay. Is there anything about the rehabilitation and maintenance of this park that you think was unnecessary and doesn’t need to be done?

Sykes: No.

Interviewer: No. Is there anything that you wish they would do, or to have you do, because you think it is necessary and should be done? (Respondent shakes her head, “No.”) You think you’re doing everything that should be done and nothing you don’t need to do?

Sykes: I think I’m doing what I need to do and when I need to do it. (Laughter) But it’s things like – okay, we’re getting – rooms need to be repainted. I have the color chart. It has to go the historic colors the architect – I mean, since I was here, and have been here forever, I can go back and go, “Okay, well, we got that light fixture from – it has to be the same.” Because I had to replace the light fixtures out front because they got vandalized. And they had curved glass, which was, like, three hundred dollars apiece for

this curved glass. And then I thought, “They’re going to keep getting broken.” So I went through the PEC-C project, found a light fixture that exactly – it was a Gettysburg light, but –

Interviewer: Okay. But plastic?

Sykes: No, it was glass, but it didn’t have the curved lights, so I had to go through that approval. So, we bought those. I put those up. So, it was, like – I’m, like, extremely hyper-vigilant.

Interviewer: So, “PEC-C” stands for –?

Sykes: Public Environmental Compact – Comment. It’s – because everything we do – well, I probably overdo it, but anything we do in – like, I even put in a project for routine custodial, and it’s looked at by historic landscape artists, by historic architects. “Okay, what you’re doing, it’s” – you have to do this because you might have a park – if you don’t go through that process, and you do something like – which has happened at other parks, where they’ve actually put things where they shouldn’t put things, and they did not get approval, and so everything I do is, like –

Interviewer: You get approval? Sykes: I get approval.

Interviewer: So, when you got those new light fixtures, did you have to go through the SHPO, or did you just go through –?

Sykes: No, just went through PEC-C.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So, we’ve come to – we’ve been talking about this for a little over an hour, and we’ve come to about the last couple of questions. First of all, of all the work that you’ve done here, what would you say is the thing you are most proud of, that you think maybe was most – the most effective in promoting this park? What are you most proud of doing?

Sykes: Oh, my goodness! I think it’s that – still that thing where this is my building! Interviewer: You just took control of the building?

Sykes: It is my – it’s my building, and I want it - I love to hear people say, “This is one of the best, cleanest parks we’ve been to!” And I think it’s just the fact that – and this might be the wrong word, but I’m so intimate with the building that it’s, like, I go by and go, “Oh, yeah, we need to –” you know. And this – and I want it to – I think, when you’re involved, it’s kind of like your baby. You’ve seen it from really, really rough, and now it’s nice, and you can hear – and then you can hear the kids are back again, and you can just – and now that I have been, you know – and know the history and listened to interpreters, and you hear kids downstairs, and you can just get the sense of, “Wow!” This is – yeah. So, everything, pretty much, is from a maintenance perspective, but I do read the comments that people write, and I have a wonderful staff. So, I’d say it’s just my job, entirely, and –

Interviewer: So, when did you become Facilities Manager, as a title?

Sykes: Well, it’s actually Facility Operations Specialist, and that would have been in 2005.

Interviewer: Okay, and then, did you get staff right away or did – have you only recently hired additional staff?

Sykes: I was able to hire Bill in 2005 or ‘06. The first maintenance worker I had was hired in 2003. And then we replaced – I hired Bill, and then was able to hire another one. And he was temporary, part-time, but got converted to full-time because we actually cover seven days. We still have to cover seven days, so.

Interviewer: So, it’s you and two full-time staff? Sykes: Mmm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, so we’ve been pretty wide-ranging here. Is there anything that you would like to say, or like to talk about that I haven’t asked you about that you wished I would ask you?

Sykes: (Pause) No.

Interviewer: No? Okay, you think we’ve covered the topic pretty well? Sykes: As far as the building goes.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Okay. Well, I want to thank you for taking the time, and I appreciate it. We’ll turn this off.

Sykes: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW