

50th anniversary of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park Oral History Project

Transcription of Harry Hoe oral history interview

Conducted on February 2, 2009

Interviewer: Martha Wiley

Transcribers: Kelly King-Riggs, December, 2009

Thomas Mackie III, January, 2010

START OF TRACK 1

WILEY: Today is February 2, 2009, and I'm interviewing Harry Hoe of Middlesboro, Kentucky. Okay, Mr. Hoe, why don't you start by telling me something about yourself. Are you from Middlesboro?

Hoe: Born in Middlesboro...lived here all my life.

WILEY: Alright, and your family has been here for many years?

HOE: Since nineteen five.

WILEY: 1905...okay.

HOE: Hoe family we're considered.

WILEY: And when did the Hoe Foundry start?

HOE: 1905.

WILEY: 1905. Okay...alright. When did you first become aware of the movement for a park to be made here?

HOE: After I came home as many people did from WWII, I was in the WWII at eighteen...and I hit the beach at Normandy, France...and with the fourth infantry division. And when the war was over it was a rough year and half for me. I had been decorated several times for bravery...the Silver Star for gallantry in action, the Bronze Star for heroic action in battle, Oak Leaf Cluster which is another Bronze Star for heroic action in battle and the French Peace Medal. So, here I came home nineteen years old...wondering what to do. My father said, "I want you to go to college." I hadn't even thought about it. When you're in the front lines of the infantry for a year and half, you're not thinking about college. And so I said well...I ought a go somewhere. I couldn't get the proper arrangement at the University of Kentucky...so I had a friend that said, go with me to the University of Tennessee. So I said, "Well, I don't want to go there but I will just to help you get in." So we got a room together and I graduated from the University of Tennessee in fifty-nine...excuse me...in 'forty something' and this was a long time ago. And my wife and I...I met her at U.T. We were married December 21st, 1948.

So, I got out of school in '49...and when I came here I started getting involved in civic work. My father was in the Kiwanis Club. So, I got in a Kiwanis Club and became president and became more civic-minded and got into more community things. (Then I) got on the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and...I kept hearing about this Cumberland Gap National Historical Park...had a good friend,

Mr. Howard Douglas, he really did probably more to get the park here more than anybody. He was Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. Somehow the federal government paid him a monthly payment if he would help buy the property that could become the park. And I found out it was to be a park before WWII, but the Smoky Mountain National Park was so much larger and bigger and more politics into it. It became the big park. So after WWII, Mr. Douglas and his dear friend president of LMU, Mr. Robert Kincaid, they wanted to get this park started...and (through) a lot of correspondence got Mr. Douglas buying up a lot of property...property in Virginia...some in Kentucky...some in Tennessee. And we finally got to the point where it was going to become the park and they asked me to be General Chairman of the Dedication.

WILEY: Okay, General Chairman of the Dedication.

HOE: Yes, in 1959. And we started off pulling a few strings just to get the thing started including going to the White House. I've got a picture over here of all of us with...not all of us, but I was with President Dwight Eisenhower in the Oval Office back then.

WILEY: Oh my goodness!

HOE: We invited him to come to the dedication and he grabbed it. He said, "Of course I will because my forefathers came through Cumberland Gap of the way to Kansas." So, we had a natural there. So, we started pumping that pretty heavy and a commitment from President Eisenhower coming here to little Middlesboro to dedicate the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park -- that was a big thing.

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: And this was back in the fall, like now January or February. And we got a committee formed together about five or six of us. Each took a part of the dedication. I would manage the whole thing on my time and it worked through the Chamber of Commerce. It kept getting bigger and bigger, more and more, finally we set July the fourth, 1959 that year as the big dedication day, but we had a few conflicts. Secretary of State, John Foster Douglas, of Tennessee, he was very active but he died of a heart attack. I think it was May or somewhere like that. And President Eisenhower cancelled all engagements bar none in tribute to him. That really put us in a hole...nobody coming.

So, I really started learning a lot of ropes and who's who...got with some senators...U.S. Senators. And the three states working together...and here we had Eisenhower coming. They said, "Well, if he's not coming that's not going to help." So, we started to ... Vice President Nixon, and his office said, "Well,

he's got his hands full. He's not taking on anything new." And I said, "This isn't new [laughter] we're wanting him to fulfill his responsibility by representing President Eisenhower who committed himself to come." Arrangements have already been made. We're sorry we can't get Eisenhower to come, but if he can't, Nixon should do his duty and represent the president. Which he said, "Okay, we will do it." So, we started contacting Kentucky United States Senators Thurston Morton, and John Sherman Cooper. And in Tennessee in those days it was Estes Kefauver and U.S. Senator Al Gore, the father of Al Gore of today. And at that time it was little Al Gore and I had to knock him off the seats two or three times for being in the way.

WILEY: [laughter] at the dedication?

HOE: At the dedication. They brought his little son, Al. Son, get off the seats, people are going to sit there...a typical kid. And then the two senators from Virginia, Senator Harry Byrd who was the biggie, he was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. And his other U.S. Senator, Robertson... Walter Robertson. And surprise, he brought his kid here too. His kid was Pat Robertson.

WILEY: Oh.

HOE: So, we had two famous kids here...had little Al Gore and little Pat Robertson.

WILEY: Very different people now.

HOE: Yeah, had to swat them both off the seats, and quit playing around throwing rocks.

WILEY: [laughter]

HOE: Long time ago, Martha. And so, we planned a big parade for July third which was Friday. We had about 20 bands and a lot of floats...horses...all kinds of exhibits. A lot of the crowd coming here to see the big parade and hear Vice President Nixon address the people. And I took him up to the top of the Pinnacle. And I never will forget, we were going to the top of the Pinnacle and he said, "Why is this road so new?" I said, "It is new, they just paved it last week." "Last Week!" [laughter] According to federal records, that road had been paved for years. Paved for years. I said, "Look, I'm standing on the road and it's dirt and it's mud and it's rocky and a good rain...we're in a hell of a mess." You better get this thing paved and get it right. Boy, the federal government worked like dogs for three weeks and got that thing leveled off, graded, and paved. Three days before the Vice President got here.

WILEY: [laughter] Now did he have to...one thing Virginia Huff told me is that he ate lunch up there at the Pinnacle, but he didn't join ...everyone for lunch because there were some threats made. Do you remember anything like that?

HOE: No, I don't remember any threats. I do remember going up there in the backseat. We were in the parade together and I met him at the airport. Being the General Chairman...and I was shocked...

WILEY: ...This airport...the Middlesboro airport?

HOE: Middlesboro. He flew in to Middlesboro Airport and I never will forget Some guy came up to me and showed me he was FBI, CIA, or security and wanted to know my army serial number. God, that had been way back in 1944 and you're wanting me to remember...you should know your serial number. I remembered it 45873237 anyway. [laughter] Okay, they just wanted to be sure I was the right one. They had looked up my service record and seen where I had had a good service record, been decorated a few times. So, they just wanted to be sure I was the Harry Hoe to meet the Vice President. So, I got in the backseat with Vice President Nixon. Driving the car was Ernest Mike. He's still alive in Middlesboro same age as me...we're both eighty-three. And...we drove down through Cumberland Avenue and all the people were clapping and cheering and the flags were out. The bands were playing and twenty bands and all the horses.... It was about a 90-unit parade. It was a big parade for Middlesboro. That's for sure.

And we kept on going towards the park on up to the top of the Pinnacle. He was thirsty and wanted to get a drink or something and I reached over and got two coca-colas. Handed him one and me one. We were going up the Pinnacle and there was Secret Police and security all up and down that road to the top of the Pinnacle. We were out in no-no land back then. And we got up there and here came a couple of -- I guess -- big time press people he knew, and he says, "Here Harry, hold this coke for me. I can't get my picture made drinking a coca-cola." [Laughter] I don't know whether he was tied in with Pepsi, or what it was but...[laughter] So, I held his coke and he got done and I said, here's your coke back. He said, "Is this mine?" I said one of them is. You just handed me your coke in a hurry and I got them out of the way...put them on the floor. And you had your picture made and...we went to the overlook and had our picture made overlooking [inaudible] and got a lot of publicity out of that. Came back to the car and he wanted his coke, I said take a chance. Hell, I'm drinking after you...you're drinking after me. What difference does it make? We're both Americans. [laughter]

Well anyway, he had a sense of humor. And then we brought him down here to the old Cumberland Hotel. I'll show you the picture here in a minute. And we introduced the two senators from Kentucky and Tennessee and Virginia...and a lot of counts and no-accounts there. Big thing, wish they hadn't torn down the hotel but it was getting in disrepair.

WILEY: Was that on Cumberland?

HOE: Cumberland...there's a mall there now. And right next to the Chamber of Commerce at that time. But anyway...after the reception was over, he went back to Washington and everybody had a big time that night...visiting homes and celebration and home folks. A lot of people came here for Homecoming and might as well make it a big, big day. It was a huge day for Middlesboro.

WILEY: So Nixon...he did not stay a night?

HOE: No.

WILEY: He just came for the day.

HOE: He came and stayed a total of three or four hours.

WILEY: Was his...any of his family...did any of them come?

HOE: No. No. It was just him and he was filling in for President Eisenhower, which at first he said he couldn't take on anything new until I convinced him that it's wrong to do a little town like that. That he's coming...then when he can't come and nobody will fill his place. He said, "Well, I'll do it for that." And he did. So, it was a very patriotic time and we had a big celebration. For Middlesboro, it was really big.

WILEY: A woman donated the newspaper just a few months ago that she had found in her attic. Her mother had kept for her. The entire newspaper from July 2nd, 1959...and it's huge...section after section.

HOE: Oh yeah.

WILEY: All the advertisements about the park...really interesting to look through that.

HOE: Yeah.

WILEY: It was obviously a very big deal.

HOE: Well, for a little town like Middlesboro, one unique thing that was there was we displayed all forty-eight state flags. The local people here we raised (without any help) \$25,000.00. And one of the things we did with it...at the time it didn't seem that big, but it turned out to be a really big thing. We bought forty-eight state flags and on the day of the dedication when the flags came down through the...parade...We took them over straight to the park and they had a staff placed to put each of the forty-eight flags in and for many years...I don't know if they do that now or not. I got so used to seeing them. A lot of tourists loved for the first time seeing all forty-eight state flags together...going up the walk way.

WILEY: They did do that when I came. I don't know the last time, but even when we were here they did that.

HOE: We gave them to the National Park. And the superintendent's name was Dean Guy. He died real soon after the dedication at a football game.

WILEY: That's what I heard from Ann.

HOE: Yeah, good family man. His daughter, Jane Guy, and my daughter Priscilla were big friends. But it was just...it wasn't a Mayberry thing but.... It was a lot like Andy Griffith with all the local locals. [Laughter] Everybody trying to be seen and get their picture made and all the homecoming families came there. Yeah, we're going to Middlesboro...we'll be there. In other words, a lot of special activities were there that I wasn't even aware of.

WILEY: Fireworks, I know?

HOE: Oh gosh, yeah...we had a lot of things. I had to really be careful as General Chairman to be firm and not letting it become a carnival. This was not another park. No, this was a National Historical Park and we wanted to preserve that distinct classification of being a historical park and if it need do with the history of the park...we'll accept that but no carnival...no hotdog stands...no gimmicks...no endorsements or any balloons or anything like that at all. We kept it strictly historical. We worked really well with the park but when you get a lot of small town politicians, the mayor and the councilmen...you get all these park rangers and the park...head of the park here. And then state politics into it. And it was really tedious for a young guy like me because I remember distinctly, I said, "We got it! All three governors are coming!" And about two or three days later, I was proud to announce that all six United States Congressmen were coming. Senators...all six U.S. Senators...that's hard...to one place, with about seventeen Congressmen...and they all came...big thing...but the day after I announced that, all three governors cancelled.

WILEY: Oh no.

HOE: That [laughter] it was a touchy, touchy thing back in those days. I said, “Good God, if you work so hard to get the governors,” when we got the governors. Then we got the U.S. Senators, all six of them at one place at one time...speaking for the same project. And Harry Byrd of Virginia, he was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the Senate. He was the big league. We had to have his support. Without him it would have been tough. Anyway, Mr. Douglas and Dr. Kincaid...they rode in the parade, too. And they were elderly then and would lend a lot of dignity to it, but it was a big time for Middlesboro.

WILEY: Now, I understand that from reading some of the histories of the park...not everybody was thrilled about the park.

HOE: No.

WILEY: But you had a real positive group. I mean, with the parade and dedication.

HOE: I had a committee of about six or seven people locally...(Kirby Smith across the street and Ms. McDaniel, Dr. Fuson). Each one took one... one took housing, one took the bands, one took the horses, one the places to stay at night. Getting everybody satisfied. One took care of the food. There was one big booboo we made with the food. We hired a guy from Richmond, Virginia to come down and help us. Well, I appreciated the attention, but he decided to do several things his way. He just didn't help because he ordered a thousand chicken dinners out of Knoxville and nobody bought them. Out of Regis in Knoxville, a thousand chicken dinners came and I said, “Who brought these here?!” I mean you'd be surprised when you get a small town and everybody wants to do their part. (“Oh, that's those thousand chickens I thought we'd need.”) Don't worry, we'll sell them. Hell, they didn't sell one.

WILEY: I saw in the paper, you could buy box lunches all over the place.

HOE: Oh yeah, but we got things settled like that...outdoor toilets and bathrooms and horses...picking up the droppings and all that. God! Oh Lordy, had the tobacco festival queen of Kentucky here. It was sort of a...it wasn't heavy, but it was a comical thing and a little class to it. I mean coats and ties. We made Middlesboro look proud and the park service said that never before in their history of had they ever known a local community...a little town go to such a big effort for the dedication. So, we were really proud of that. We gave them the forty-eight state flags. Gave them a lot of good publicity and worked with them real well. So, that was a good send off for the park.

WILEY: Yes, it was.

HOE: Mark was a good superintendent; we were in the same church together...deacons together.

(Wiley: He is good.)

Hoe: He wanted to come here. He was down in the Virgin Islands and he had a choice. I'm not sure how you park people work, but he had a choice of where he wanted to go. He had his choice of any place, he chose the Cumberland Gap because it was the youngest, newest undeveloped park. He wanted to be part of it to develop it and we got the right one. He's doing a good job on that.

WILEY: Well, reading all the history from 1922 ...it's just amazing because of everything that was (thought about) seventy years ago...eighty years ago, is happening by Fern Lake and putting the Wilderness Road back and the tunnel, and all those things were first thought about back in the twenties and now they're happening...little bit by little bit.

HOE: It was going off schedule slowly, and Mr. Douglas was buying up farms and property. Going to court with a lot of families...it's my farm and I'm not going to sell it to no park...had a lot of things back in those days to overcome. And then WWII hit us and that's when a lot of people like myself, eighteen out of high school, drafted...and there was no question were you going to serve. You did. Everybody was for the war. Everybody was against Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito. I mean, eighteen years old, I went into battle. Not that I came out a hero, but I was lucky. The fourth infantry division was the first one to hit the beach at Normandy. Seeing seven thousand dead at one time on the beach was a pretty big shock for a eighteen year old kid. I never will forget the Sgt. Bakovitch. God, he was the ugliest man I ever saw. I kidded him about it later, we became very good friends. He thought I had been killed and he sent a donation to a monument in Paris, France for me. I thought he had been killed, last time I saw him he looked gone on that stretcher. And I sent a donation in his memory to Paris, France and that...what was that guy...whose name was Pierre Salinger. He sent a message, you two didn't realize this but you sent memory contributions in for each other and didn't know you were alive.

And so we got together and later I took my wife and two daughters on a Mississippi River boat from Cincinnati to Pittsburg and met him at the dock. (...) two grown men cry, we did way back then. I never will forget, we hit the beach and everybody was scared and what to do. We just didn't realize what it meant to kill. We were trained in target and practiced and we were good and so forth. I yelled and said, "What you want me to do? What do you want me to do? God dang, let's get off the beach!" He says, "Son, kill or be killed. It's up to you if you want to go home." What a thing to tell an eighteen year old. God, I was just wanting to get back home and wasn't going home. Unfortunately, there was a lot of boys

in those days, couple hundred thousand, buried in France because they wouldn't pull the trigger. The Germans were professional soldiers, winners; they had taken every country in Europe and about to take England. We went over there; we had never even been in a battle before. We didn't know what it was to see...we were scared to see a German. We learned fast when we saw what they did. So, we didn't take many prisoners either. I was with Patton for quite a while and I'm glad he was on our side. I didn't agree with all of his tactics, but George Patton, boy, he wanted to win. He'd drive us into stone wall. He had a nickname, Our Blood and His Guts. Oh boy, I saw him a few times, but he wasn't as manly as a lot of people would think. He cried many times when we would lose the battle. Felt it was his fault.

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: Here he was the general in charge and bury another five hundred. All of them were like me, eighteen years old. It was a rough thing to go through.

WILEY: I can't imagine.

HOE: But we won the war. Came back and got a new start like a lot of other people.

WILEY: Well, ... you said you were good friends with Howard Douglas. From what Virginia said, as you said, he was really the one that made it happen. (He had a hard time with some, from what I'm understanding; he just had to keep trying ...)

HOE: He had a lot of patience. Had to use a lot of tact, psychology, and getting people to sell their place for the National Park would be good for the area. Turned out it really was good for the area and is good for the area. He's the only one that actively...for many years after WWII...worked to get the park together till we got it. I knew him before. We were in the Little Theatre together and things like that. For the dedication, he and I worked good together.

WILEY: Do you remember, I guess at the dedication, they opened the new visitor's center, didn't they, and that was the first day for that?

HOE: Yep.

WILEY: Were you at all involved in anything with that?

HOE: That's pretty much the park did that. They made it very clear, I was talking with (...), they made it damn clear it's their park and we kidded them a lot of times. They hated when summer time comes because all these people would come in and mess up their park. My God, what are these people doing here? What are they called, tourists? Tourists! They come in and mess up our park and Good

God, tearing up the roads and paths and it's not rustic like it used to be. I said, "That's the purpose of the park...to get the people to know it."

WILEY: That's the problem with a National Park. Preserve, but people are supposed to come in and sometimes those two things are hard to...

...

HOE: There's about four or five hundred parks, isn't there?

WILEY: Almost four hundred...I think about four hundred. Cumberland Gap, when it was established, was the largest historical park, but I think there's one now, out West that's bigger. It's one of the American Indian ones. It's bigger, but this is still the biggest one on this side of the Mississippi.

HOE: They developed it real well. The way they built the trails up. I've walked the trails when I was able. Somehow, I came up with three misplaced vertebrae in the bottom of my back. I can't walk well, and I can't walk well. They were going to operate it. They said, "We can correct that...can realign the vertebrae and sciatic nerve..." But the operation. ... Oh, twenty years ago I had a five bypass open heart. They said, "Five bypass, twenty years ago...We better give you a special stress test. It's a good thing we didn't operate on you. Your heart can't take it." The open heart process back then was all they had, but it wasn't what they got today. And back then they expected you would live eight years. And I'm still living twenty years later. So, I've been really blessed with that. So, I've got to be careful with that.

WILEY: Well, as the park has grown up, have you been pleased with the way it's been following its mission for the most part?

HOE: Yeah, I'm more than pleased. You never know what the future holds and you wondering if it's going to get into politics or if you're going get a superintendent here that doesn't give a dang. Good God, what are they doing now? They are tearing up what? And then the tunnel has come. That was a big thing. We were there at the dedication of the tunnel and that has had a positive influence for the park.

WILEY: A lot more cars.

HOE: Back in the good ole days, when the men were men and the women were proud, people didn't want the tunnel. It's bringing a lot of people in, causing a lot of traffic problems. Back then, they didn't realize what a blessing it would be to have the tunnel because more animals (now) are all over the place. When you had three states trying to get the highways to meet, they couldn't do it. Kentucky

wouldn't agree on the meeting place to Tennessee, and Virginia wouldn't agree on the meeting place ...Kentucky and Tennessee. So, the park superintendent back then, he didn't want highways. He said, "God, you're going to put big interstate highways through the Cumberland Gap Park. God, that's going to ruin it."

Well, it came up about the tunnel. There had never been a tragedy or death in the tunnel. And putting it under ground, under the earth would be the quickest, effective way to get traffic flowing through. And it will attract people here, but it won't mess up the park because if they don't want to go in the park they don't have to. They go zip underneath it to the other side on the same highway, but the three states couldn't agree on where to meet at the state line. So, they all agreed to put in a tunnel, which was a good thing.

WILEY: Yes, and it's amazing. We moved here when the road over was still here and were just starting to tear it up, and I don't even recognize [it]. Have you been able to walk through the gap? Through the Cumberland Gap since it was restored?

HOE: What do you mean through Cumberland Gap?

WILEY: Well, the trail that now goes where the road used to go that you could walk over in the park. Have you been able to do that?

HOE: I walked about everything up until about five years ago.

WILEY: It would be brand new after the tunnel and they took all the pavement off and raised the road. You know, all the fill from the tunnel and made it look like it did two hundred years ago. You can't tell there was ever a highway. It's incredible.

HOE: See, animals wouldn't come up near because they knew they were going to get slaughtered or hit or struck by traffic. They stayed away from the highways, but when it went underground and they covered it over the top, the animals said, "Oh now we can get to go over and not get hit by car or truck or get shot." And now they are roaming on both sides and eating fresh new fruit, trees and leaves and stuff. They wouldn't dare go over before. So, it's turned out to be a blessing.

WILEY: Yes. There's been bears that come now, they've just increased their range. They can roam for a long, long way.

HOE: I tell people rangers dressed up like bears. Maybe your husband is one of them.

WILEY: I haven't seen it. I don't know. [Laughter] When you were planning the dedication, did Tennessee and Virginia did they have much to do with that? Just all Middlesboro?

HOE: Well . . . And I was from Middlesboro. It wasn't easy there for a while. The park is very touchy about, it's our park. Why are these tourists coming here and that kind of thing? I made several little speeches back then to sort of promote working together. I had four or five pretty good jokes back then about what's going to happen once the park gets here and so forth. I got along with the superintendent. He was very selfish of giving up any authority. It's our park and Middlesboro you can come up as far as the border line, but they didn't want us in their park. We made gestures, giving all forty-eight state flags to the park, introduced them to the service clubs around town, but there was no other town that was into it. Middlesboro took the initiative on its own. Raised twenty-five thousand and spent it wisely and didn't make any money on it. I was paid nothing. All volunteer work and all the others were volunteer workers. And so, we just had a chance to do something good for the town and the park and to promote harmony. And we did.

So, coming back from WWII, everybody knew me pretty well as a combat veteran. I got a lot of good support. At that time the service clubs were all big. Kiwanis had a hundred, Rotary had seventy or eighty, Lions had about seventy or eighty. We were big active, but then we had no television. We just didn't have a lot of means of communication that you've got now. And it had to be by word of mouth. So, we promoted harmony. If we saw any little bitty fire coming up, we'd put it out in a hurry. Nope, that's wrong, wrong. We are not going to have rides, popcorn stands, and all that stuff around. This is the historical park. We did that for them. We made it real clear. This is to preserve history. Like Eisenhower said, "Yes, I'll come. My forefathers came through Cumberland Gap on the way to Kansas." He didn't even think about it hardly...he just said I'll come. Boy, if it hadn't been for John Foster Douglas, Secretary of State dying, it would have been a lot bigger celebration.

WILEY: How many thousands would you say were here?

HOE: Twenty.

WILEY: Twenty thousand. And I know Anne Justice . . . recalled it was a very hot day. She said that's the hottest day she remembered.

HOE: God yes. I introduced Nixon. We were all in our suit and ties and so forth. In those days we did wear suit and ties. We went out of our way to show a little class. We weren't just some little hick town that didn't matter. Wear a clean tee shirt, that's all you need. That's wrong. So, we sort of looked dressed up for the affair and we'd gone to Washington on a special bus on a tour. They called it Daniel

Boone's tour. And we had a guy that dressed up like Daniel Boone...this is from April to May advertising the dedication of the new National Park. And then pull into a town, Daniel Boone's coming to town. He got out. I want all you people to go see our park. You know...and...just there was a lot of stuff that I had no control over except to see that nothing was done derogatory to the park. And I would get off of my work every day about four o'clock and go to the Chamber of Commerce and work. Late at night, I had one girl...Virginia Huff was down there. She was good. She was Mr. Douglas' right arm. And she liked me and we got along good because my father was president of the Chamber of Commerce for a couple of years. And he said, "Miss Virginia, you really appreciate her. She does a lot of work for nothing." And she did. Yes, she's a treasure. She made it real class. And when I'd pick up the phone, Virginia, I need you. She said, "Oh God, what now?" Like that, it was...we pushed each other to the hilt, but we respected each other very much. Virginia and Howard Douglas ran the Chamber of Commerce. Howard wasn't the most popular man in the world.

WILEY: Was he local? Was he from...where was he from, Howard Douglas?

HOE: He lived on Edgewood Road.

WILEY: So, he was local. Okay.

HOE: And if you notice there's been a house removed because it burned down. That was his.

WILEY: Oh...

HOE: He collected a lot of antiques and china. He was real active in the theatre. And I got to know him well. I won "outstanding man of Middlesboro" two or three years. He said, "Why don't you let us enter you in the state?" And I said, "Good God I couldn't do that." He said, "No, let me write it up." You write it up, what you think (it should be). And I never will forget. I learned a big lesson from him. Howard got what I had written up. He said, "Well, this is good...it's pretty good. How many hours you spent doing this? And he started Little League Baseball and he did this...how many hours? Harry that's not going to win." I said, "It's the truth. I worked all those hours." No, it's not how many hours you worked. It's what you got done. Let me have it and rewrite it. So, I handed it directly over to Howard. In a couple of days he said, "Come down and I'm going to show you what I'm going to turn in." And Harry completed this and he completed that...And I won! I was "Outstanding young man of Kentucky."

WILEY: Oh my! What year was that? Do you remember?

HOE: In the early fifties. It was in the fifties, but he knew how to do it. He had the class. Here I thought I'll brag about all my hours I spent slaving for the people. You know. No, he says...He condensed it. Oh God, fifty percent. And about Harry Hoe completed this, he did this, this has been under his leadership. It sounded like a winner. I had it written down like a laborer turning in his hours worked. [Laughter] He said it isn't how long you work...it's what you got done. I learned from that.

WILEY: Okay. So, did you know Dr. Kincaid?

HOE: Yes. He was editor of the *Daily News* for quite a while. His son-in-law took over that later and he and I were really good friends. I wasn't close to Dr. Kincaid like I was Howard Douglas because Dr. Kincaid left here when LMU was a real small school. He became president of LMU and wrote the book *Wilderness Road*. And we were friends and we went to church together, but he was more into the LMU group. Howard Douglas was just a few doors down. Virginia lives up here three doors.

WILEY: Yes, that's right.

HOE: And Howard Douglas lives on the same road down on the right and...but we both appreciated Howard Douglas.

WILEY: She said to me...she said, "I wish they would put something up at the park for Howard Douglas.

HOE: I'd be for that. Yeah, I'd be for doing it for Howard. He got paid a little (a little stipend) or whatever you call it from the government.

WILEY: I don't think he had any idea what he was getting into from what I've read. Virginia especially was difficult to get land. People wanted more money or they wanted...

HOE: Oh, they were suing each other and he was a monster.

[noise] Thank you, I'll get it.

WILEY: You sure? Here you go.

HOE: Oh. Thank you.

WILEY: There you go, you're welcome.

HOE: Oh thank you. He was really into it for the cause. Money didn't mean anything, but God, he got into trials and families and suits. Hell, I want my share. God dang, what's this feller

Douglas doing? Oh, he's promoting this to get done so it can become part of the park. Hell, I don't want no damn park. Everybody thought they were going to put a playground in their front yard or something. I don't know, but he got it done. And bless his heart, he spent many an hour and I don't think it was very much. I'm talking about a few hundred dollars...I'm not talking about thousands like now. God, it's embarrassing to see what people make now, but he thought he should get three or four hundred dollars a month, but that kept him as Chamber of Commerce Secretary. That's we could afford to pay him here after WWII. And then that extra coming in from the government for his...I don't know whether he turned in his time or what he did or how many farms he bought, but I mean it wasn't any little thing he must have bought...Virginia would know. I'm saying thirty or forty farms.

WILEY: Yeah, I think I saw over fifty. I mean, some of them were small.

HOE: Yeah, but the relatives couldn't get along.

WILEY: And there'd be lots of descendants everywhere. You had to go track down and make sure everybody signed the deeds. Especially for Hensley...I was reading it was hard to get all...

HOE: God, they were special mountaineer folks that lived up on that out of the way location. I don't know if they shot at him or not. [Laughter] Felt he was a revenuer or something, but Howard he was real active in church, Presbyterian, and the Chamber, and the city. He knew a lot about history and art, antiques. And he (had) class on how to get things done in a classy way. You could tell he wasn't some local jocal. It don't make no difference. It did to him. He had class.

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: I had confidence in him. I'd pick up the phone. Howard, I need your help. He said, "What is it now?" But he could guide me on that. Yeah.

WILEY: Yeah.

HOE: I knew him that well. Dr. Kincaid, we were friends, but not as close as Mr. Douglas. But Virginia Huff and Howard worked really close together. I picked a pretty good committee of three women and four men to really meet and greet a lot of the celebrities coming here. The lady across the street she died in April.

WILEY: What was the name?

HOE: Mrs. Kirby Smith.

WILEY: Oh yes, okay.

HOE: She was in charge of...somebody said, "Well, what are we going to do with these high-faluting people coming here?" "What do you mean high-faluting people?" "Well, you know, them big shots."

WILEY: Did you have any celebrities like Hollywood or more political?

HOE: More political. We had...and that was not bragging Martha...but small town like Middlesboro getting all six U.S. Senators.

WILEY: I can't imagine doing it now. Can you?

HOE: Oh God.

WILEY: Security must have been...

HOE: Senator Morton of Kentucky, he was Chairman of the National Republican Committee out of Louisville. Senator John Sherman Cooper was the big dog with the Kennedys and foreign ambassador...he was top notch senator. And in Tennessee, we had Senator Estes Kefauver, he'd run for president. Al Gore, he was pretty well known as a top notch senator with that little brat he had as a son running around (now telling people we're going to get too warm). And the Virginia Senator was Harry Byrd, well, they said, "You won't be able to get him there." He doesn't...He doesn't attend anything..." I was introducing... who was it? One of the senators who was going to say a few words next. And we were all on our toes for Senator Byrd. He's the Appropriations Chairman, he's the one we want here. And I was introducing and I looked out there for him and there was a guy waving a white hat in the backseat of a convertible, and here was young Senator Byrd driving old daddy Senator Byrd to the dedication and here they came up and I said, 'ladies and gentlemen, we want to make a special announcement, here comes Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia pulling up.' [claps] Broke it right there because we knew we had the support, the money. () Senator Cooper said, "if you can get him to come that'll lock it."

WILEY: Now this was held where the visitor center is now? Where the parking lot is? Is that where everything was set up?

HOE: The back, yeah.

Wiley: The back, now you were on a raised platform? You were...so you were part of the actual speaking?

HOE: Oh yeah.

WILEY: Did you have a speech?

HOE: No, I just sort of guided it through. Of course I made a short welcome speech but the people were not there to hear me. I was the local docal. I mean, we had six U.S. Senators -- with the power they had, they weren't just senators. Hell, everybody'd... they were the head of something pretty big to get all six of them at the same thing -- this was a pretty big thing but I, my job was to keep it flowing, keep it moving. Introduce Senator So-and So of Kentucky will now speak a few minutes, and they laughed at me for always saying a moment or a few minutes but it was a long program and we had to get it done. And it was hot, () it was hot. But if you go into the parking lot, if you're facing the headquarters, back there where the physical fitness trail starts; well, that... The stand was right back up near there. But it was close to the headquarters except it was right in that (park). And we had a lot of other dignitaries, we had seventeen congressmen here.

WILEY: They had a lot of people from the park service, ...(Conrad Wirth) was here.

HOE: Oh, Yeah. Yeah. Conrad (Wirth). Yeah. I introduced him to the crowd. I had a lot of introductions to do. I must have been the duck for it.

[Laughter]

It was quite...the occasion. We didn't take it lightly, but we didn't go in for a dance or a band, or Bruce Springstein. Or anybody else involved. We kept it the local politicians... you should be there.

WILEY: Yeah.

HOE: And being three states that got along together for the same project that was something.

WILEY: That is.

HOE: And evidently they thought I was the one to do it. Well, we did it and with as much class as a small town can get. You can't get too high up you know, then people will start saying, "you need some (think you're) too big." But we kept it on a pretty good even deal. All the class, no carnival atmosphere, no jokes, no hot dog stand. We didn't allow any of that. It was strictly (a) historical park. And we were proud and did a lot as a town to show it. We had a lot of flags up all the windows and stores were decorated ... marched straight down through Middlesboro.

WILEY: I've seen the ads and the paper from 1959; every store had welcomed the park and everything was all about that.

HOE: Oh yeah. When you're the chairman of a thing like that in a small town you got to sort of keep everybody included. Well you never told me... I had a good press. Not that I was (great and a wonderful being) but Mr. Henry and I...He was Doctor Kincaid's son-in-law. He was editor of the *Middlesboro Daily News*. Boy, Maurice and I got along great. We even ran for school board together. After that, too, we were really good friends. He got it being ()... He was from Virginia. And he brought along the Virginia flavor into it. But, it was a big time for Middlesboro, that's for sure.

WILEY: (Yes, I'll say.)

HOE: And after World War II everybody was wanting something; what are we going to do, what do we got? And our job was to let them know that...we don't have it yet but we could have a national park here. Hell, that's...that could be good for Middlesboro. Bring a lot of people here.

WILEY: Did you see a lot in the first few years? I look at the numbers and it looks like the visitation just doubled and tripled those...especially once the visitor center opened. (You started getting) a lot of people. [interrupted]

HOE: Yeah, Yeah. Oh, Yeah. And there's not many historical parks, Martha.

WILEY: Not like this at all. I mean, you have battlefields or something like that, but ...

HOE: Well, they still have...Oh, what do they call it; reproduction of the battle of so-and-so here.

WILEY: Oh, civil...yeah, Cumberland Gap

HOE: Yeah, there's a group that goes around; at this park in summer they'll camp out for two or three days.

WILEY: ...

HOE: And a lot of people come there and a lot of people take part in it, and like they did in the good old days. And they'll camp out up there and sometimes they got a big tent. But promoting the history of the park is... and Mark is doing a pretty good job of doing that.

WILEY: We have so much history when I came in I... overwhelmed because you've got the settlers, and you've got the Civil War, you've got industry, you know the iron furnace and, or Alexander Arthur, all kinds of history in this area.

HOE: Oh, yeah. If it hadn't been for the Smoky Mountain National Park we would have been the park twenty years earlier, but World War II hit us at a bad time. Everything went on hold. And then after the war I was on the chamber board and a few other young veterans and we said, "What we got to do is get back quickly on this park thing." We had it going good until the war came along, and, but...I've got all the records and all this and I can get the hopefully a little contract with the government to pay me to buy up all these farms. They got the right one for it. Because he was just smart enough to do it.

WILEY: Virginia said she remembered just one lady who they actually had to move. She wouldn't move.

HOE: Yeah.

WILEY: (Laughing)

HOE: Well, it is a lot..."we've decided to buy your property." "Well, we don't want to sell it." "Well, you don't have a choice." I mean...

WILEY: That would be very (tough).

HOE: I'm not against this government but you got to respect people's rights. "Well I've always lived here, my daddy was born here," and all. () It could have been a lot worse, but it went off real good.

WILEY: I know at the Smokies and Shenandoah they had more problems than we did about getting land.

HOE: Oh, yeah.

WILEY: People still mad.

HOE: Oh, yeah. In fact, in those days a little farm house and three cows and a sheep and very proud. They didn't want no government around their place. And there wasn't. But the Smokies, they're so large... we've never had any problems that I know as far as competition or anything like that. What it would be. We're just real proud of ours. Smaller and historical and lot of people are attracted to come here. When I walked the trails a lot, I was always surprised how many foreign people...golly.

WILEY: Well, they hear about Cumberland Gap. They learn about it, you know. It's a part of our history.

HOE: Some people are really more concerned about history than others. They're not looking for a Daytona Beach. They're not looking for a place to lay in the sun. Or a place to have a good time and get free beer, no. They come here to learn about the park and who was here and what happened. Daniel Boone and () a lot of people who live here don't appreciate it.

WILEY: Yeah.

HOE: I really didn't till I got into it more. But I was surprised the different languages that I would hear up there. [speaks foreign] God, you'd ask them and... very friendly. I never, I walked... Oh, God every week, almost every day. All over the park and I never hit a bad situation once.

WILEY: People are there because they want to be there.

HOE: Well, we've had... a little bit of (prowl). I have one good friend here, David (Harris) was held up with a pistol up on the back of the park there coming down.

WILEY: How long ago was that? ()

HOE: He was kind of walking down and this guy let him pass, then he came up behind him "hold up your hands." He didn't have any money (in fact was partly) handicapped. He's still alive, David. We used to kid him about it. But David went straight to his car and (I've forgot all) the details now, but nothing really happened except he held David up and got his wallet; but that's the only time I've known of anything like that.

WILEY: It's pretty safe.

HOE: Yeah, yeah. So, David he was surprised too. He just happened to be walking there

WILEY: You said that you had some photographs I could see.

HOE: Gosh... I should have... I'm just not able to get around much.

WILEY: Well that's all right. You don't need to do that. We've been talking a long time; I know you're probably getting tired. We can do that some other time.

HOE: Just go over there and see if you can lift that up. Behind the roller thing over there. See if there's big picture box in the back of it

WILEY: Yes, I see it.

HOE: Pull it out here, that's probably what you want to see. I wasn't really exactly sure what you wanted. We could continue another time. Yeah. The White House took that picture and sent it to me up here, it was over ().

WILEY: I'm trying to find you. Let's see.

[Pause]

HOE: Come on (You can do it).

WILEY: () [Laughing]

HOE: Oh, that's Senator Estes Kefauver.

WILEY: Okay, I don't know then, I'm sorry. I don't know which one is you. I know that's President Eisenhower.

HOE: Oh, right now you're getting hot...you're getting hot.

WILEY: [Laughing] Okay.

HOE: And you can't pick me out of that bunch. Gosh. Most people are quick to do that.

WILEY: Oh, I don't know to be honest. That you?

HOE: Yes, that's me.

WILEY: Okay. All right. You look like your son a little bit. I've noticed that.

HOE: Senator John Sherman Cooper. Yup, I stood back there and President Eisenhower said "You're a tall boy, you get behind me." So it turned out a good place for me to be.

WILEY: Oh, that is just really neat. And that is when you went up to ask him to come...
[interrupted]

HOE: And that's in the oval office.

WILEY: To the dedication. Yes.

HOE: This is Wirth, the head of the Department of the Interior.

WILEY: Oh, yes.

HOE: That's Senator Worth, That's his aide. Local man, another local man. Senator...Carol was a representative from Tennessee. () That's Maurice Henry. The one that had the *Daily News*. And Senator John Sherman Cooper. This is Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia. And this is Senator Estes Kefauver). This is (Fugate), Virginia he was a congressman, Harry (Fugate) of Virginia, he helped a lot. This is Senator Thurston Morton of Virginia. And this is...He's a congressman from our district. (Siler), Eugene (Siler).

WILEY: Okay.

HOE: But anyway, all these...they were all big dogs. This was taken in January or February of '59.

WILEY: I would love to get a copy of this.

HOE: You're welcome to.

WILEY: I'll line that up and come borrow it from you sometime.

HOE: Oh, yeah. I've got to do something here about the drawer there, it's getting sort of.

WILEY: Yeah, a little moldy in there.

HOE: As you reminded me, this is the fiftieth year, isn't it?

WILEY: Yes it is.

HOE: () Why wouldn't I think of that? When you get my age you wonder why...

WILEY: [Laughing] Well, we're going to do something.

HOE: () ought to go there and shake hands with President Dwight Eisenhower. And six years before I was an eighteen year old, scared infantry private hitting the beach at Normandy. And the commander was Dwight Eisenhower. A five star general. Little did I know that a few years later I'd be in his office shaking hands with him. To me, it meant more than to some of the others but he was a pretty well appreciated President. Dwight Eisenhower, I remember the campaign button "We like Ike" that was a big thing. He was popular. But, those men in there, that Senator, that's Secretary of the Interior Wirth on the corner up there and all those others with him. Pretty big wheels in there -- Senator (Kefauver), Senator Harry Byrd. Morton. Cooper. Boy.

WILEY: Well.

HOE: That was a big day. It seemed we just all went up in cars or I don't know. We got there. Had an appointment at the White House to see the president. It's a little bit uplifting to be standing in the oval office....

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: And then have the president, those days it was big stuff. It's somewhat () now. In comes Dwight Eisenhower, and he wasn't just President, he was Supreme Allied Commander of World War II. To me, he was a hell of a hero. And here I was a buck private, 18 years old ... hit the beach for him. I never thought I'd be shaking hands with him. But as president, not general.

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: God. I've got a bunch of other pictures around here.

WILEY: I'd like to come back, we've done a lot today. And I'll turn that off

END TRACK ONE

START OF TRACK 2

HOE: ... but we had a lot of people from out of town. I mean from New York, Miami Florida, California.

WILEY: They all stay overnight? They'd stay in a hotel?

HOE: Yeah. Two or three days.

WILEY: ...

HOE: I'm trying to think of the picture. I moved them around (dag gone it). Surely you have a picture of the Hotel Cumberland?

WILEY: Yes, I know. I've seen...[interrupted]

HOE: That's where all the big festivities were in Middlesboro.

WILEY: I just don't know where it is that...Where it was. I haven't been able to tell where it was downtown.

HOE: Well...

WILEY: Is it next to the First State Financial bank?

HOE: Yeah.

WILEY: In that little strip mall there?

HOE: Say, you're looking at First State Financial bank. I was on the board when we built that thing. Worked our tails off for it and they sold it. Anyway, you're looking at the bank and that little mall next to it.

WILEY: Yes.

HOE: Sorry mall. It's where the Hotel Cumberland was. And it was sold for upkeep or some poor reason. Then the Elks club bought it and they couldn't afford to fix it up and rent it, it took a lot of fixing up to get the fire marshals to agree to whatever. So they said, "hell fire". Nobody wants it. Let's just sell it, tear it down. Lot of people hated that. 'Cause it was an impressive 'big welcome to Middlesboro' hotel. So Friday was Middlesboro day. Middlesboro was the day we had the parade. We met Nixon. Had the speeches down at the Hotel Cumberland. And a lot of visitors were there. Eighty horses. And ten men with shovels behind them.

WILEY: [laughter] Where did the parade start and end?

HOE: The parade started up near the airport, on Cumberland.

WILEY: Okay.

HOE: And they came. Middleboro's laid out for a parade. Not many towns our population that have a beautiful layout like we did. And Middlesboro downtown was more booming then it was (wood) siding and all the stores were filled and busy and... after World War II. So we had a lot of things going for us; but it came right down through the middle of town. And ended up at 12th Street.

WILEY: Okay.

HOE: And we had a lot of people from Knoxville, and Louisville, Lexington, Cincinnati. Taking pictures. And the next day was Saturday, the fourth. That was park day. Dedication of the park. All the politicians got a chance to speak. And that's where the festivities were at; at the park. So we were all in our prime there.

WILEY: So really all Nixon did was ride in the parade? He didn't talk, that was the next day?

HOE: He talked Friday. When I introduced him at the Hotel Cumberland on Friday during the parade, and he and I stood there together saluting the flag () till we about dropped, it was hot. Very hot. And Nixon, I introduced him and I introduced the six Senators to show that they were there; and a few congressmen, that I had their names for. I had a lot of people on that big broad porch they had there. It was impressive. Hotel Cumberland and underneath it's the president. And all these dignitaries (accounts, no accounts). But the next day's when the actual dedication of the park. Nixon took off. He came for the two hour parade, and a one hour speech and all that. But he left about four o'clock. And then got out of the picture. And then the six Senators were all here Saturday for the speaking and dedication of the park-- this is the first day of the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. So Middlesboro big day was Friday, and Saturday was National Park Day. And it was not nearly as developed as it is now. But it's come a long way, and the right way. I love the good old days.

END OF INTERVIEW

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR CLARITY AND EASE OF READING. THE ORIGINAL IS AVAILABLE AT THE PARK.