

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

THOMAS P. RICHTER

NOVEMBER 11, 1985

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY PAM SMOOT

ORAL HISTORY #1985-3

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3067-#3068

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



EDITORIAL NOTICE

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Thomas P. Richter and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

RESTRICTION

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ABSTRACT

Thomas P. Richter served as the ranger in charge when the Truman home was transferred to the National Park Service and was the site's first chief ranger. He remained at the site until October 1987, when he moved to an appointment in St. Louis. As chief ranger, Richter was instrumental in developing the interpretive and administrative processes which continue to be utilized by the rangers today. Richter discusses the opening of the Truman home in May 1984 and those involved in the preparation process. Richter then discusses the first two years of the park's development and the acquisition of a permanent headquarters after its initial location at the Truman Library.

Persons mentioned: Jim Dunning, Jerry Schoeber, F. A. "Andy" Ketterson, Jr., Lee Jamieson, Benedict K. Zobrist, Pat O'Brien, Ron Cockrell, Mary Jo Colley, Joel Chapman, Joe Katransky, Earl Perry, Magruder, Tutankhamun, Harry S Truman, Brent Schondlemeyer, Margaret Truman Daniel, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Bess W. Truman, May Wallace, Winston Churchill, Grandma Moses, Norman Reigle, Joan Sanders, Susan Kopczynski, Jennifer Hayes, Rick Jones, Cindy Ott-Jones, Skip Brooks, Jim Schack, and John Kawamoto.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
THOMAS P. RICHTER**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1985-3

STEVE HARRISON: This is a recording of an interview with Tom Richter, now chief ranger at Harry S Truman National Historic Site. The interview is being conducted by Pamela Smoot, historian with the National Park Service in the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska. It's being conducted November 15, 1985, at the offices of the Harry S Truman National Historic Site, which is located at 223 North Main in Independence, Missouri.

PAMELA SMOOT: No, that's cheating.

THOMAS P. RICHTER: Oh, that's cheating? Oh, okay.

SMOOT: Just relax. We are not going to hurt you. This is not going to hurt at all. Oh, Steve, this looks like it's right down your alley. Look at him, doesn't he look good?

RICHTER: Yes, he looks pretty good there. Well, that slide show does just permeate the building here.

SMOOT: Tom, how do you pronounce your last name, Richter?

RICHTER: Yes, like the earthquake scale.

SMOOT: Okay.

RICHTER: Hold on a second. I need to holler at Palma. [extraneous conversation ensues—not transcribed]

SMOOT: This is Pamela Smoot, and we're interviewing Thomas Richter. Today is November 15, 1985. Mr. Richter, would you state your full name and

address, please?

RICHTER: Oh, it's Thomas Paul Richter, 1407 West Short Street, Apartment #4, Independence, Missouri 64050.

SMOOT: Are you a native of Independence, Missouri?

RICHTER: Oh, no, I've only been here for about three years.

SMOOT: Three years? Prior to coming to Harry S Truman, where were you employed?

RICHTER: Oh, I was at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis.

SMOOT: And how long were you employed there?

RICHTER: Five years, half a decade.

SMOOT: Half a decade? My goodness. So what was your position?

RICHTER: I was a historian when I left, although primarily I had served as a ranger in charge of interpretation at the Old St. Louis Courthouse.

SMOOT: What were some of your other responsibilities?

RICHTER: Oh, some interpretive planning, writing new position descriptions—we usually reorganize our division about every other year or so—editor of the park newspaper, interpretive specialist in general, coaching the other interpreters and their programs. Before that, I was a ranger trainee for two years there with a variety of duties. Worked for the superintendent directly for a while, which was very beneficial, in the superintendent's office. Pretty much a variety of things. Also, some time at the Gateway Arch in the Museum of Westward Expansion as a supervisor down there.

SMOOT: I see. So you're a historian? You were a historian. Do you still consider yourself a historian?

RICHTER: Oh, sure.

SMOOT: Okay, have you worked on any historical projects that you think are extremely notable?

RICHTER: [chuckling] Oh, none recently. I did have an article published on an Indian tribe in Nebraska called the Otoes, and I got a diary edited and published of a couple of nuns in frontier New Mexico, their exploits in raising money and running an orphanage and hospital and everything in Santa Fe.

SMOOT: So why did you come to Independence?

RICHTER: Well, it came about one day when the superintendent at St. Louis called me into his office and let me know that I was being considered for an appointment as ranger in charge at Harry S Truman. The reason he sort of spilled the beans early was that I was also applying to a job in Alaska and he was afraid I'd accept this job in Alaska before they got to me with this other thing. That was in December of '82, and early in January of '83 I was officially offered the job by Jim Dunning, the regional director in the midwest region of the National Park Service in Omaha. And ten days later, I was on my way over . . . Well, actually even quicker than that. Superintendent Schoeber and I came over in early January and met with Andy Ketterson from the Midwest Regional Office, and Lee Jamieson, who was a restoration specialist from the Midwest Regional Office. We met with Dr. Zobrist, the director of the Truman Library, Pat O'Brien, the historic preservation officer for Independence. That was mainly an orientation visit, and then ten days later I was over here permanently as the first person to be assigned right to the site.

SMOOT: So, Mr. Richter, did you really want to go to Alaska?

RICHTER: [laughter] Well, at the time, before I knew this was coming up, I was interested. It would have been a regional office job up there as an interpretive specialist. With all those new parks, it would have been sort of setting the groundwork for interpretation in all those parks.

SMOOT: Okay, so as the ranger in charge of Harry S Truman, who did you report to? Who was your immediate supervisor?

RICHTER: Okay, my immediate supervisor was Superintendent Jerry Schoeber at St. Louis at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site, and Mr. Schoeber in turn then reported up to the regional office. But in practical terms, a lot of my communication went directly to the regional office, particularly to people like Andy Ketterson and Lee Jamieson and Ron Cockrell, the regional historian, at the regional office.

SMOOT: What was your first day on the job like when you got here to Independence?

RICHTER: [chuckling] Well, through the generosity of the Truman Library, they provided me with an office at the Truman Library, plus the use of their Xerox machine. They had a secretary that helped me out.

SMOOT: And what was her name?

RICHTER: Mary Jo Colley. The first day, a lot of moving into that office, going down to the home to get to know the Federal Protective Service employees, who at that time were in charge of security at the home. The federal protective officers stood eight-hour shifts around the clock there, one person at a time.

Also, my first day I had the pleasant experience of putting the water bill into the National Park Service's name. Our first visit, we discovered a

notice from the water company saying that . . . it was addressed to H. Truman, and that if we didn't pay our water in the next few days they were going to turn the water off. Andy Ketterson had previously turned most of the utilities over to our address, but forgot the water, so that was one of my first things that first day was to make a trip down to the water company. They demanded a deposit, even though I explained that we were going to be here for an eternity and there was no danger of us skipping out on our bills or anything. And as far as I know, that deposit is still there.

SMOOT: That sounds like a very exciting first day on the job.

RICHTER: Oh, yes. It was also snowing that day, so that added to the fun.

SMOOT: I see. So do you remember the names of any of the protective officers?

RICHTER: Oh, one of them's name was Joel Chapman, Joe Katransky, Earl Perry. Some of them I only know by their last name. There's a guy named Magruder. Several of them . . . They basically were being paid overtime. It was an additional responsibility for Federal Protective Service, so these people usually they were working overtime shifts. So I would say there's probably a good fifteen different people that were taking shifts down there. Certainly, it was one of the things that a little concerned me because there were so many different people down there. It was hard to develop sort of a loyalty or pride among the officers there when they would only be there maybe once a week or so, or once every two weeks. Andy Ketterson had arranged this system with Federal Protective Service, with also another arrangement that the Federal Protective Service would contract a private guard company for us.

SMOOT: So these federal protective officers, were they just sort of like federal police?
Is that similar?

RICHTER: Right, Federal Protective Service is sort of the law enforcement arm of General Services Administration. They have moved more now into contract administration. They used to stand the posts, and now they supervise the contract guards. Our concern in the beginning was certainly just the physical condition of the building. We had problem with leaks suddenly erupting. Because of the primitive smoke alarm system, we were very concerned about the threat of fire, so we had them make patrols every hour through the building.

SMOOT: These federal protective officers, were they local people?

RICHTER: For the most part, they pretty much were; quite a few were even from Independence. Some had certainly at least met Mr. Truman during his lifetime. A wide variety of approaches. Some of them really enjoyed being there. I know one in particular told me that the whole idea of a national historic site was just a federal boondoggle, [chuckling] which concerned me a little bit about how good he was while he was down there. It was certainly one of my early activities, was really just getting to know the Federal Protective Service officials better.

We were also concerned for the immediate security of the home, and as a result, put in, improved the lighting system at the home, put up a couple of modern light fixtures on the garage building to improve the lighting at night. Also put in, temporarily—which just recently were taken out—wooden bars over the windows in the basement, because many of the

basement windows were sort of ajar where somebody could easily intrude into the house through the basement.

SMOOT: When did you first improve the lighting? Do you remember what year that was?

RICHTER: Oh, that was early in '83, I would say about March of '83.

SMOOT: What were your first impressions of the Truman home?

RICHTER: Oh, it was almost a feeling of entering like a King Tut's tomb kind of experience. Very much even back then—it was more than even today—the idea or feeling of entering something that was still occupied by the occupants, particularly upstairs. Entering the president's dressing room was a very eerie sensation. Also, I think my first impression, I was impressed with just the architecture of the building. You know, let alone its connection to Truman, just the fine handcrafted woodwork and the fixtures and so much of that. I was impressed [with] 100-year-old fixtures and lincrusta and all kinds of things in there that you don't expect in most people's houses. The other impression was really a delight . . . [pause] I was favorably impressed by the fact that the house was still in its old neighborhood. The urban environment, you might say, was still intact, to the point Mr. Truman could probably still find his way around on his morning walks in that neighborhood.

SMOOT: What type of attitude did the community have toward the National Park Service coming into manage or take over the home.

RICHTER: Oh, what a question! A good question. I would say overall it was sort of a “show-me” kind of attitude. They were a bit apprehensive, to be quite frank,

with their experiences with the Truman Library, which did not have good public relations with the community. There was some fear that, “Oh no, here comes another one of those federal agencies that’s going to act sort of above the community and above community interests.” Certainly, there was concern how the Truman home would impact their tourism program. The city officials were very strongly interested in that. There was concern that we would just align ourselves with the Truman Library, perhaps through a shuttle, and thereby attract visitors only to the Truman home and the Truman Library and sort of ignore the rest of Independence. The attitude also in this community, I think to this day, is that the Truman home really belongs more to Independence than to the nation, that there was sort of a feeling of, “What are these outsiders coming in?” Our rangers still get questions to this day about, “Are you from Independence? How long have you lived here?” and that sort of thing. It’s hard for them to understand the national significance, I think, of this site, even to this day.

I think the fact particularly, Andy Ketterson had already announced that we were going to open the home to the public in time for the president’s hundredth birthday in May of ’84, so there was a level of excitement about that. Because, really, the Independence community really was going to tie their whole centennial observation really towards that event of the opening of the home and the expectation that that would draw a lot of visitors to Independence. Also, because the Trumans were such private people, very few Independence residents had ever set foot inside the Truman home, so there was a lot of anticipation of Independence people just wanting to set foot

inside and see what was really behind those four walls there.

SMOOT: Do you think most of the people were impressed by what they saw?

RICHTER: I think most probably were let-down a little bit. I think they were expecting more of a . . . sort of a palace kind of effect, you know. I think, despite all the stories about Mr. Truman being sort of down-to-earth and everything, I still think they were sort of expecting a little more on the inside. I know from touring some of the other older historic homes in Independence that some of the others have even nicer fixtures on the inside than the Trumans' home. I think also there was sort of a shock as to the physical condition of the building from the local people. I know they were expecting the park service to do miracles overnight as far as fixing things up, and lots of questions about, "When are you going to paint the place?" Of course, the paint would be the last thing we would do after we had fixed up the structure itself. So, anyway, that's an involved question, but it's a good one because it's a unique situation here in Independence with their attitude towards this historic site.

SMOOT: Did you receive any assistance or any support from any groups within the community?

RICHTER: Several. At the time I arrived, the people that lived in the Harry S. Truman National Historic Landmark District were pretty much together, and of course very supportive in terms of historic preservation and very supportive of what we were doing. I would say sort of the people that were interested in promotion and tourism, particularly the city officials interested in tourism, they were very supportive of the concept of us opening the home to the public. Remarkably, to me, very little support or even contact with Kansas

City people or interests. It's sort of funny, certainly you understood very quickly Independence is certainly not a suburb of Kansas City, a completely different kind of politics and support networks and that sort of thing. The Truman Library, of course, they were very much behind us from the beginning, a very strong statement of support.

SMOOT: Mr. Richter, what type of problems did you encounter, or did you encounter any problems, upon your arrival?

RICHTER: [chuckling] Okay, I think one thing was the anticipation of the community, that we were going to do everything overnight, when they seemed to think that it was even outrageous to think we were going to take even so long. I mean, we thought we were doing pretty well to try to get the home open by May of '84, and a lot of people thought that was too long. There were some problems in some ways, I'd say, with the Truman Library. There was support for what we were doing, but it was sort of a big brother to little brother sort of approach. I heard a lot of, "Well, I don't want to tell you how to do things here, but this is the way we think you should do them."
[chuckling]

Some problems . . . Independence has so many rival little interest groups, and it is very difficult to keep on the good side of all of them, particularly in a town like Independence where public affairs are discussed so openly, and sometimes twisted around by different groups to serve their purposes.

I would say one thing that certainly concerned me from the beginning was the fact that the Truman Library had in their possession a lot of objects

that were in the home, and very hazy conditions of ownership. Dr. Zobrist had always said though, anything that we needed for the home, that he'd gladly loan us back. That was his statement, but it was a bit weird in the situation, knowing that before the park service had taken over possession of the property the Truman Library had had access for a month and a half or so after Mrs. Truman's death.

I would say the other problem I encountered was the fact that my office was at the Truman Library, in terms of getting down to the home. I don't think I got down as often as probably I should have to have just kept up with the guards. Once we went with the private contracting service on April Fool's Day in 1983, April 1, 1983, we had a very good guard on the day shift. That was one reason I didn't go down that often, because he was just so trustworthy and would keep me up-to-date on any little problems down there. But we did have the normal situation of contract supervision, that some of the guards were not that productive or efficient, and we went through several. One guard got caught watching the Trumans' television set one night, and another one was caught reading a collection of comic books when he was supposed to be staying alert to his duties and everything. So that was a little bit of a headache, particularly being the only one down there. You know, essentially I was on-call twenty-four hours a day. If I wanted to go off on a little trip somewhere, I'd have to leave word as to where I could be reached, and so that was a little difficult.

SMOOT: So how many guards were on duty at one time?

RICHTER: Just one per shift. They would do eight-hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day.

They would do an hourly patrol of the building and about three exterior patrols during their eight-hour shift.

SMOOT: How did you solve the problem with the community, in terms of them thinking that the Truman home was going to be ready for visitation [almost] overnight? Or did you solve the problem?

RICHTER: [chuckling] I think I calmed it down a bit, just being very level with them, talking to as many people as I could, going to civic groups. One thing about Independence, because everyone loves to talk about such things, it was easy to get the word out in a hurry. [chuckling]

SMOOT: That's true.

RICHTER: Basically, also using the newspapers, explaining what we were doing, what remained to be done. I think the word got out quite a bit in a hurry about the physical condition of the building, that it needed to be rewired completely with new electrical systems and needed a lot of repairs to the roof. There still was a bit of a hesitation of the people thinking, "Well, this still can't possibly take so long as they're talking about."

The other thing that was so incredible was how long it took just to get our enabling legislation passed. Our authority was based upon a presidential proclamation that was signed on December 8th in 1982. The proclamation was an emergency measure giving us authority to protect the property until Congress officially passed a law giving us our enabling legislation. There, I think, people were losing their patience with Congress over how long that was taking, because it didn't really come to pass till May of 1983. It took a while.

SMOOT: What were the names of some of the civic groups that you addressed?

RICHTER: The Optimists Club of Sugar Creek, the Kiwanis Club of Downtown Independence, and also another Kiwanis Club a little bit west of here. I forget their official name. I talked to what's called Independent Study Club, a group of elderly ladies that get together once a week. Also, the Junior Service League of Independence, I talked to them, which is a service organization of ladies. Lions Club. In fact, that was my first public appearance, the Lions Club of Independence.

SMOOT: I'll bet it was a major disaster, wasn't it? [chuckling]

RICHTER: Well, what was funny was I was given about fifteen minutes before . . . I had agreed to address them in the future, and it turns out their speaker had turned ill at the last moment, so they called upon me to pinch-hit. And again, I approached these really trying to get feedback from the community. I wasn't basically going there and saying, "Here's what we're going to do," but always offering them the opportunity to give us suggestions. The big questions always were: How much are we going to charge? Which it turned out it was free. What are we going to do about parking? And, when are we going to be open? Those were always the three questions. With the fact that we're within this national historic landmark district and a neighborhood that still was intact, you know, from the beginning we tried to let the community know that we wanted to develop a plan that would not severely impact the way of life of that community right around the home.

SMOOT: So were these civic groups responsive, receptive to what you said?

RICHTER: Oh, pretty much so. Without exception, very good response. Oh,

Independence Chamber of Commerce, a big meeting there. I sort of was surprised by the turnout there. Of course, that one was a slide show, so extra people showed up for that, the first look inside the home sort of thing. Almost without exception, a very warm reception. Some surprise at the cost that it was going to take to do all these renovations, which again, in a local community like this, is hard to just explain the way the federal government does business and certain requirements on contracts that up the wages and thereby up the price of these jobs.

SMOOT: What newspapers did you utilize in trying to explain the renovation and why things were taking so long, or would take so long?

RICHTER: Well, especially the Independence *Examiner*, and then the *Kansas City Star* and *Kansas City Times*. At that time, we had a really good news reporter for the *Kansas City Star* named Brent Schondlemeyer, who was really interested in the project, and he really helped things out. We went through a variety of reporters with the Independence *Examiner*; they kept changing their assignments as to who had the Truman home beat. And as I said before, you know, just a lot of word of mouth. It is sort of a miracle how things get around here in Independence. Also, it was sort of funny though, that some of the city officials, in tourism especially, were perhaps the most impatient as to why we couldn't get this thing done faster.

SMOOT: Have you ever met Margaret Truman before?

RICHTER: Oh, on a couple of occasions. She paid a visit . . . Well, she always comes out in May during the birthday week celebration the first week of May, celebrations of her dad's birthday. She also made a visit for the filming of an

episode of “Smithsonian World” TV show. Particularly her first visit in May of ’83 was very important, because that was really the first opportunity the National Park Service had of direct contact with her, talking about our plans for showing the home. She was very reluctant to even have the home open to the public. Her idea at first was we simply would preserve the home without opening it to the public, because she felt the house could not withstand the wear and tear of all these visitors. We used our powers of persuasion to convince her that we would do whatever was necessary to preserve the home as well as show it to the public. [chuckling]

SMOOT: The wonderful power of persuasion.

RICHTER: I would say that it was interesting, though, that when she did finally agree that the home should be open to the public, then she was very helpful, even had her own ideas on what the tour route should be, had ideas about . . . certainly wanted the table, the dining room table set as it would have been on a formal occasion for dinner. She also agreed to certainly answer any questions that our historians might have, or anybody, about the way of life there.

SMOOT: So, on an overall basis, would you say that she was very cooperative?

RICHTER: Overall. It was sort of a winning her over process. Each meeting was more beneficial as she got used to us. I think you need to remember that until that time she had always dealt with the Truman Library, National Archives people. National Park Service was a total unknown quantity to her. In fact, her only contact was a friendship of one of President Roosevelt’s sons, where the National Park Service nearly let the Roosevelt home burn down with

defective wiring. So that was about her only contact. In fact, that Roosevelt's son even told her that there was no way that the Truman home could be opened to the public successfully, so . . .

SMOOT: I see, so that is one of the reasons why she was so reluctant?

RICHTER: I think so, and then just personally I think that you've got to remember that was her home for all those years, and all those memories. And the idea of 70,000 people a year going through, I'm sure, had a negative impact on her feelings. Also, in terms of cooperation, if you recall that the way Mrs. Truman wrote her will, it said that the objects inside would go to the government, except Mrs. Daniel's personal property, but it didn't define what that meant. So I think if you look overall at what little Mrs. Daniel did take out of the home, then I think again you'd have to say overall that she was cooperative, because she really had carte blanche to just about anything that she claimed was her property.

SMOOT: I see. Mr. Richter . . .

HARRISON: Let me change the tape.

[End #3067; Begin #3068]

SMOOT: Mr. Richter, do you know of any objects that were removed from the Truman home?

RICHTER: Well, that's a good question. Well, let's see, to begin with, one day Dr. Zobrist came in and said that Margaret had just given permission to . . . I think it was the chamber of commerce. Some fund-raising group was going to auction off one of the president's canes, and that Margaret had given permission for them to get a cane out of the attic that they could . . .

SMOOT: Oh, really?

RICHTER: So we really didn't have much choice in that one. So I went up there and found the most common looking, plain cane that I could find. Most of the objects I know that left the house left as a result of Mrs. Daniel's May of '83 visit, in which she went through the house in a thorough fashion from the basement to the attic, a very odd way of doing it, also. Superintendent Schoeber and I were there, and Dr. Zobrist. Well, she practically ordered Superintendent Schoeber and I out of the house while Dr. Zobrist and Mrs. Daniel went through the house from the basement to the attic, developing up this itemized list. She gave her aunt Mrs. Wallace, our next-door neighbor, quite a few objects, dishes, a chair out of the study, and some mementoes. She picked out some things for herself that were to go, that the Truman Library was to ship back East, china pieces . . .

Of course, I know the big objects, a couple of them left the premises before I ever arrived: an original painting by Winston Churchill of Marrakesh and also a Grandma Moses painting, original.

Also, there was an icon from Europe, either Hungary or Bulgaria—I don't think it's ever been really established which. President Truman referred to the icon as probably the most valuable item in the house, and it apparently was a gift of state, because the president described it as a gift from Hungary in gratitude for relief after World War II. Anyway, the icon used to be on the west wall of the study, and originally Mrs. Daniel had the icon removed to the library for safekeeping. I thought I had sort of an understanding with Dr. Zobrist that if it was ever to go to New York that we

would be informed first, because we basically had simply agreed for it to go to the library, with the understanding it would be a safer place for it to be kept. Well, to make a long story short, it eventually did go to New York, and we were informed sort of after the fact that it was in Mrs. Daniel's possession in New York.

She claimed a couple of other things that she said belonged to her sons. Like I remember a little child's chair that was in the study. That was shipped off to New York.

SMOOT: Were there any other items, that you know of, that were shipped to the Truman Library that were in the home?

RICHTER: Again, most of that had already happened before I arrived. The Chinese vases that are now back in the home in the living room, they went up to the library for safekeeping, but they eventually came back once we opened to the public.

SMOOT: Mr. Richter, when was the rest of the staff hired for Harry S Truman?

RICHTER: I came in January of '83. Around the first of October, Norman Reigle was hired as the superintendent of the park, which then made me the chief of interpretation and resource management. Shortly thereafter, we hired Joan Sanders as our administrative assistant—administrative technician, I guess, is her official title. She came from Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Reigle came from Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri. We also about that time, in the fall of '83, had an offer—really almost an offer we couldn't refuse—of a temporary loan of a curator from Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey, a lady

named Susan Kopczynski. The idea was that she would be on loan for six months to start out our basic curatorial operation, pending our hiring eventually of a curator. So she came along there in due time on her detailed assignment. Of course, then we eventually hired a secretary for the park, Jennifer Hayes here from Independence. Then, as we got closer to our grand opening, we did then hire our permanent museum curator Steve Harrison, who came from St. Louis from the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Then we hired our interpretation staff, our original staff of Palma Wilson-Buell, who came up from Ozark National Scenic Riverways, our lead park technician. We hired Rick Jones and Cindy Ott-Jones, who came out from Lava Beds National Monument in California. They were our other two permanent interpreters, and then we hired some seasonal employees for the first summer.

SMOOT: How many seasonal employees did you have?

RICHTER: Had five the first year.

SMOOT: Were they all from the Midwest?

RICHTER: Oh, let's see, I guess you could say . . . Let's see, we hired two from St. Louis, one from southern Missouri, one from just east of the River, over in Illinois side of St. Louis.

SMOOT: So overall how large was the permanent staff at Harry S Truman?

RICHTER: Okay, the permanent staff would have been eight.

SMOOT: During that time, did you also hire a facilities manager?

RICHTER: Oh, yes. Oh, I forgot Skip. Yes, okay, make it nine there. Thanks for reminding me. Yes, I can't forget Skip from Virginia. [chuckling] Yes, in

fact, a very important assignment that he had as a facility management specialist, particularly in getting the home ready for the grand opening.

SMOOT: What do you mean, “getting the home ready”? What does that mean?

RICHTER: Well, primarily our eventual plans for guided tours depended a great deal upon the use of a special visitor carpet to get people through the home in a restricted way, so that they did not just wander all over the downstairs area. We were involved in getting that carpet laid. Skip was involved in such things as reinforcing beams in the basement, especially on the porch, as we found a lot of the porches had decking that was really not too safe for large numbers of people to be walking on. Had the finishing of the rewiring of the home before we opened, a lot of roof work. Skip had to get involved with contracts for lawn care. Meanwhile, the park had moved its headquarters down here to downtown Independence on the Independence square, so Skip had to be looking for some kind of a janitorial service. He did have his hands full.

SMOOT: So would you say that overall Harry S Truman had a good staff, a well-equipped staff?

RICHTER: I would say not only that but a highly motivated staff. I think without exception everybody just was so excited to be in on the ground floor. It's so easy to fall in love with a resource like ours. It's, to my mind, one of the more outstanding presidential homes, in that it is so intact. So much of the original furniture is still there from the days when Mr. and Mrs. Truman lived there. I think the extra advantage, that there was quite a level of excitement in the community here in Independence, that that certainly spread to the staff.

SMOOT: After the staff had arrived, were all of you located . . . Did everyone have an office in the Truman Library?

RICHTER: Well, by the time our, that did sort of get a bit funny here as Norm and Joan showed up, and later on even Skip and Steve. We were all squeezed together in a couple of rooms at the Truman Library.

SMOOT: Sort of like sardines? [chuckling]

RICHTER: Just about, just about. It was very particularly difficult with the telephone. You know, we sort of had to wait in line to use the telephone. Then the city of Independence was really generous in providing us office space here adjacent to the Independence square, which is five blocks from the Truman home, and we could sort of spread out a little more and have more of a normal office routine.

The interpreters had to depend upon our facilities at the Truman home. It was very primitive, as far as the space. They literally ate their lunch on a little table underneath the back porch. They used the servants' bathroom in the basement, with a basement where the door didn't even entirely close. [chuckling] It was difficult for them because they were not really taking a break from their job, because even when they were on break they were still hearing tours going on. I mean, they really weren't able to take thirty minutes off and go off somewhere away in the peace and the quiet.

SMOOT: So when did you first move into the building located at 223 Main Street?

RICHTER: Yes, North Main Street.

SMOOT: North Main Street?

RICHTER: It seemed to me it was right around the first of May or so. It was real close to

when our grand opening was going to be, and there was a period of sort of transition. Some people moved here right away, and then others sort of stayed up at the library to keep answering the phone up there, as most people still had that phone number as our phone number.

SMOOT: So eventually how long did it take before you settled into the building, I mean, with equipment, chairs, furniture, what have you.

RICHTER: Oh, I'd say it was probably about a three-week process or so before we all got settled in here. Sort of the way it worked out, I was sort of one of the last to leave at the library—first to arrive, last to leave there. Also, we were all running back and forth to the home so often, and also because our dedication ceremony was going to be up at the Truman Library, we continued to maintain some presence up there. Regional office detailed a man named Dave Herrera to help coordinate the dedication ceremony, and Mr. Herrera's office was up at the Truman Library. So I would say really it was not until after the dedication, about May 15 or so, that we finally cut the last strings to our direct attachment to the Truman Library.

SMOOT: I see. How many people are on staff now here at the park office?

RICHTER: [chuckling] Well, let's see . . . [pause] Let's see, about eleven by my count. Our facility management specialist position is vacant right now.

SMOOT: So, Mr. Richter, are yourself or Norm Reigle, do you keep in touch with Margaret Truman on a periodic basis, or do you only have contact with her in May?

RICHTER: Mr. Reigle does have periodic contact, usually initiated by Mrs. Daniel through phone calls. He is involved presently in negotiating a written

agreement about the ownership of objects in the home, and I think that's one reason for his occasional contact with Mrs. Daniel.

SMOOT: I see. Was there or was there not a small fire in the Truman home recently?

RICHTER: Oh, yes, during our exterior rehabilitation. We had a problem that we were removing paint with hot air guns, like oversize hair dryers. Particularly woodwork around window frames had become so brittle that it was just very easy for them to catch on fire. So there was a small fire up in the attic area that was very quickly put out, particularly because of Mr. Skip Brooks, our facility management specialist's foresight in having a garden hose hooked up, to be able to put it out in a hurry. But considering the amount of paint that we removed through this process, we were probably very fortunate that we didn't have any other major incidents.

SMOOT: So was Mrs. Daniel contacted?

RICHTER: Oh, sure, right away.

SMOOT: What was her reaction? I mean, after having talked to Mr. Roosevelt about the fire there?

RICHTER: Well, I'll tell you, her actual reaction was very positive and very thankful to Norm for calling her. She said, "Well, how thoughtful of you," and everything, to the point that she was about to go off on her annual summer vacation up into upstate New York, and she gave Norm her extra-secret, private number in case . . .

SMOOT: Impressive!

RICHTER: So, if anything, the fire sort of worked to our advantage because she was very touched that he had taken that extra time to talk to her about it, so that she

didn't just read about it in the *New York Times* or something.

SMOOT: I see. Well, that's very interesting.

RICHTER: And I think it's just another step in this process of her getting just more and more used to us and our way of doing business, and having more confidence in our professionalism.

SMOOT: Do her sons ever come to visit?

RICHTER: Their last visit was for Mrs. Truman's funeral. And from what I understand, they did not come that often after Mr. Truman passed away.

SMOOT: I see. So, Mr. Richter, I think this will conclude our interview, unless there is something extra-special that you'd like to tell me that maybe you forgot? Because as a historian, you know, sometimes I have a short memory, so maybe your memory has gotten short, too. [laughter]

RICHTER: Well, I think one thing maybe we didn't cover too much was the great degree of support that the regional office specialists provided us.

SMOOT: Which regional office?

RICHTER: Oh, the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska. Not only in terms of technical support through rehabilitation specialists and restoration specialists, but also Ron Cockrell, one of the regional historians, provided a lot of help in developing research on the home. He came up with so much new material. When I arrived, I was depending mostly on family legends as to the history of the home, and Ron just got right in there and dug through the records and came up with a lot of additional information.

SMOOT: What types of things did you and Andy Ketterson work on? Did you ever collaborate on certain issues?

RICHTER: One of the first things we worked on, at the time that I first arrived, the federal government had initiated a special amount of funding. It was called a jobs bill to put America back to work. We got funding through the jobs bill for both a rewiring of the home and also some roof rehabilitation. So Andy and I worked on that on estimates, and just a proposal on that, and we went from there to more proposals through the PRIP program, the Park Restoration and Improvement Program. We got a lot of funding through PRIP for additional rehabilitation and improvements in the home. Andy also was very helpful in our plans for how we were going to interpret the home. We had a National Park Service team of experts that came in to develop what was called an “interim interpretive prospectus.” Andy participated, as well as Jim Schack, who is the chief interpreter for the midwest region, and then a couple of individuals from the Harpers Ferry Center also participated in this planning process. So I think Andy had a soft spot for us all along there. I think one thing I didn’t establish was that before my arrival Andy had been the midwest region’s representative down here. He would make periodic visits.

In fact, Mr. John Kawamoto, the Midwest Regional Office, had been the first contact going back ten years ago. The National Park Service started informally developing a relationship with the Truman Library staff, particularly about the fate of the home. There was a good indication that eventually the National Park Service would take operation responsibilities for the home.

SMOOT: When did you and Mr. Ketterson first begin drafting proposals?

RICHTER: Virtually from that first visit I made here in early January, we were scoping out the physical condition of the building and making decisions on the absolute high priority projects, which again were the wiring and the roof repair. We had several leaks in the roof that were threatening the inside of the building.

Andy and I discussed from the beginning also a site for office space for us here. We originally had our eyes on the former headquarters for the Secret Service across the street; however, in looking over the inside of the building, it was quite small. It also had major problems with its foundation and wiring and lack of insulation.

SMOOT: That would have been really convenient.

RICHTER: Sure. Sure, it just, I don't think, really would have fit the bill too well.

SMOOT: I see. So do you have anything else you'd like to tell me? Just spill all the beans.

RICHTER: [chuckling] Oh, I think another matter maybe for another time would be to go into sort of the controversy within the national landmark district between the so-called preservationists and then the forces of the First Baptist Church of Independence, who saw the preservation movement as a threat, or at least a restriction of their religious liberties and right to practice their religion. They are a growing, expanding church, and they wish to remain within the Truman neighborhood and not move somewhere else. We were certainly caught in the middle of that one, and we still are to this day.

SMOOT: So are you saying that there are some conflicting factions here?

RICHTER: Tension. Very much.

SMOOT: Tension? Okay.

RICHTER: Lingering tension, which also gets involved with the politics of the city.

SMOOT: That sounds like it can really be . . .

RICHTER: A whole other tape could be made. [laughter]

SMOOT: I'm sure. So I really appreciate you allowing me to take up some of your time, and I'm sure that we'll get together again in the very near future.

RICHTER: Well, yes, I enjoyed it. It's an important project, to get this all down.

SMOOT: I think so, and this has really been a grand experience for me. You know, I never thought I'd ever end up in Independence, Missouri, or go through the Harry Truman home.

RICHTER: [chuckling] That's right.

SMOOT: Or even help develop an oral history program for the Harry S Truman National Historic Site. So it's certainly a joy for me.

RICHTER: Well, I know it's in good hands with you. So good luck.

SMOOT: Okay, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW