

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

THOMAS P. RICHTER

AUGUST 27, 1990

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1990-4

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HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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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.

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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 provides an in-depth understanding of the problems and their solutions encountered by the rangers in opening the Truman home to visitors. He also gives detailed description of park, regional office, library, and Independence city employees involved in the process.

Persons mentioned: Norman J. Reigle, Bess W. Truman, Jerry Schoeber, Jim L. Dunning, F. A. "Andy" Ketterson, Jr., Ken Shaeffer, James Watt, Tom Eagleton, John Danforth, Margaret Truman Daniel, Benedict K. Zobrist, Pat Kerr Dorsey, Elizabeth Safly, Donald H. Chisholm, Warren Orville, John Kawamoto, Abraham Lincoln, Lee Jamison, Dave Given, Jim Schack, Jill York O'Bright, Ron Cockrell, Steve Harrison, Ken Smith, Pat O'Brien, Sarah Hancock, David McCullough, May Wallace, Maud L. Gates Wells, Myra Gates Wallace, Ardis Haukenberry, John Hughes, Russell Dickinson, Sally Schwenk, Millie Nesbitt, Molly Hankins, Tom Hankins, Sarah Grebb, Doris Hecker, Randy Pope, Mike Martin, John Carnes, Barbara Potts, Bill Bullard, Keith Wilson, Al Swift, Palma E. Wilson, Edward Hobby, Joan Sanders, Jennifer A. Hayes, Sue Kopczynski, Cindy Ott, Rick Jones, Brent Schondlemeyer, Charles Odegaard, Tony Gentry, Fran Krupka, Dave Herrera, Winston Churchill, Grandma Moses, Larry Blake, Gentry Davis, Tom Danton, George Porterfield Wallace, George Brett, General Dawson, Rufus Burrus, Robert E. Lockwood, Dan Cortes, Lyndon B. Johnson, Madge Gates Wallace, Prince Charles, Genrose Welch, Skip Brooks, Mike Healy, Denfred "Dink" Watskey, Shirley Wilt, Jane Hanna, Tom Gray, Mary Jo Colley, Diane Farris, Vicky Alexander, Pauline Testerman, John Curry, Dennis Bilger, Warren Hill, Harry Clark, John R. Fuchs, Phillip D. Lagerquist, and Neil Johnson.

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

HSTR INTERVIEW #1990-4

JIM WILLIAMS: This interview is with Thomas P. Richter. It's being conducted in the conference room of the Old Courthouse, part of Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 27, 1990. The interviewer is Jim Williams, a park ranger at Harry S Truman National Historic Site, and also present is Michael Shaver, museum aide at Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

First of all, Tom, I'd like for you to go over your experience with the National Park Service before coming to Harry S Truman.

THOMAS RICHTER: Oh, from the very beginning? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: From the very beginning.

RICHTER: Well, I started with the park service as a seasonal at Homestead National Monument way back in 1973, and spent six delightful summers at Homestead. I became a permanent park ranger "intake trainee," as they call it, in November of 1977 here at the Gateway Arch, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. And after two years as a trainee, normally we would then move on to a new park assignment. However, a job came open as supervisor of the Old Courthouse, so I stayed on as supervisor of the Old Courthouse from March of 1980 until January of 1983, at which time I moved on to the Truman home as ranger in charge, as they called it, and

served in that capacity until around the 1st of October of 1983, when the superintendent, Norm Reigle, arrived, and at that point I became the chief ranger.

WILLIAMS: When did you leave the Truman home?

RICHTER: Well, I left on a temporary assignment in October of 1987, for a three-month detail assignment. They were shorthanded. They had lost their chief of . . . or their chief of interpretation. Their director of visitor services and their park historian had left, they were very shorthanded, so I was on loan with them for three months, and that was extended another month, and then I got the permanent position over here as director of visitor services. So, essentially I was no longer at the Truman home as of October of '87.

WILLIAMS: And you are still the director of visitor services here?

RICHTER: To this day. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: How were you first made aware that the Truman home might be transferred to the National Park Service?

RICHTER: Well, the first I heard was more in the media when I was over here in St. Louis. I kept hearing some news reports about the situation at the Truman home after Mrs. Truman's death. And late in December, the superintendent here let me know that I was being considered for the ranger in charge job, and wasn't officially appointed until very early in the New Year. I had just come back from my Christmas vacation, and I can't remember the exact date, but it was in about mid-January of 1983 that I went over to the

Truman home for the first time.

WILLIAMS: What was your reaction to the possibility of the Truman home being accepted into the park system?

RICHTER: Well, it was just overwhelming, the potential for the site, with the fact of so much of the furnishings being intact, that you immediately could understand how it could give a really quality experience about the personality of a President of the United States, to give visitors a personal glimpse into the life of one particular president. And as a historian also, I saw a great value just in the fact that the home itself was sort of a time capsule of 1950s culture, which in years to come is therein enough to, I think, merit it being included in the national system of the National Park Service.

WILLIAMS: So did you actively campaign or promote yourself for this position at the Truman home?

RICHTER: Oh, I wouldn't go that far. I would be candid that the superintendent, Jerry Schoeber here at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, was suggesting me for that role to the regional director, who at that time was Jim Dunning in Omaha at the Midwest Regional Office.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Dunning before?

RICHTER: Only had met him a couple of times in different times that he'd come down here to St. Louis to superintendents' conferences and that sort of thing.

WILLIAMS: So you didn't get the job by applying or responding to a vacancy

announcement?

RICHTER: Well, no, it was called a “directed reassignment,” because it was a GS-9 that I was here to a GS-9 over there. As they explained to me, they needed somebody over there in a hurry, that up till January . . . Mrs. Truman had passed away in October and there had been that period where there was sort of a . . . the question of ownership of the property was a little bit hazy, whether to the National Archives or the National Park Service. So, for that period from late October until January, Andy Ketterson, who is the chief of cultural resources in the regional office in Omaha, was looking after things sort of by long distance, or sort of by shuttle management. He would come down periodically. Once, in December, after December 8th when the Secretary of Interior did issue a proclamation proclaiming the site as a national historic site, Andy came down and did such things as putting the utilities in the name of the National Park Service and that sort of thing, and he kept in touch with the regional director. But as I say, they were anxious to get somebody in there on site very quickly. As I recall, it was about eleven days from when I was officially offered the position until I was there on site.

WILLIAMS: Did you understand this to be a temporary or a permanent position?

RICHTER: It was proposed to me as a permanent position. It wasn't a loan type of situation. I remember a conference call with me and Superintendent Schoeber with Ken Shaeffer, who at that time was the assistant chief of

personnel in the regional office, and I remember that came up, whether it was going to be a temporary or a permanent reassignment, and it was decided it would be a permanent situation.

WILLIAMS: So once the park superintendent came into the park, you didn't have to apply for the chief ranger job in a competitive—

RICHTER: Again, because of it being a nine to a nine situation, Mr. Reigle called up . . . As soon as he had been offered the position, then he called me an hour or two later and did ask if I'd be interested in staying on as the chief ranger.

WILLIAMS: So you knew you would be there in some capacity for a while?

RICHTER: Right. It was a little hazy. I knew that it was going to be a permanent reassignment in that I wouldn't be going back to St. Louis. It was a little hazy what would happen once the superintendent arrived and everything.

WILLIAMS: What is your understanding of the designation of the site by Secretary Watt in December of '82? Do you have any knowledge of how that came to be?

RICHTER: Oh, mostly by hearsay, I guess. I certainly wasn't involved in any of that at that time. I did understand there was a problem in the way the will had been written. The will had granted the home to the Chief Archivist of the United States, and the National Archives was hesitant to take on the project, I think recognizing they have rather limited expertise in managing such historic sites, outside of maybe the Eisenhower home in Abilene, and I think, what I understood—it was more by hearsay—just the enormous cost of renovation and rehabilitation and then operating the site, that they

quickly thought of the National Park Service as a likely recipient of the property. Again, what I understood, then there was negotiations between the executor of the will and the National Archives, which at that time was part of General Services Administration, and the Department of Interior representing the National Park Service. And out of that resulted the December 8, 1982, proclamation that Secretary Watt proclaimed.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever hear of any reluctance on his part to accept the Truman home?

RICHTER: Well, I do recall one story, again it's sort of by hearsay. I remember Superintendent Reigle telling me that he had heard that there was a bit of reluctance, and it was basically poor staff work, that when they gave Secretary Watt a presentation on the situation, the staff people showed him a map of the entire national landmark district, which included several square blocks of private homes and so forth, and the secretary was not willing to take on boundaries of that magnitude, and that that was part of the reluctance, at least the stories that came out that we were reluctant to, and a good example of how your staff can sometimes get you into predicaments.

WILLIAMS: Before your selection and then movement to Independence, you've already mentioned some things, but what other things had the National Park Service done in the roughly month or so, in December and early January?

RICHTER: Well, they put on a new lock system. They also purchased a set of plastic runners, to walk through the home, and with the theory that that would then

protect the flooring and everything. That was rather ironic because later on the upstairs where the floors were not covered with carpeting, it turned out these plastic runners, they had a little gripper, almost like little teeth underneath, and they actually damaged the finish on the wood floors on the second story. As I recall, Andy . . . basically it was through some lumber company or something that he ordered these runners. It was rather curious that he also paid for installation. Because I remember later on giving a guided tour of the Truman home and somebody said, "Oh, I'd been in real early on because I was in charge of putting down the runners."

One of the controversies was the question of security of the home during this time period where there was a debate as to where the home was going to go, whether to the park service or the presidential library system. And at that time, what I understood, the executor of the will had just . . . was using the services of a rental security company, where they were not even inside the home. The rental security man would sit in a car in the driveway next to the garage, and that was the extent of the security of the home. So that was one thing. Once things were settled with the proclamation in December, Andy established an agreement with the Federal Protective Service to station guards twenty-four hours a day in the home, with the understanding that the National Park Service would reimburse the Federal Protective Service for that. Most of it was overtime work that the Federal Protective Officers were doing.

One ironic thing, later on the executor of the will submitted a bill for this rental security man, and as I recall, someone in the Missouri delegation, I can't remember if it was Senator Eagleton or Danforth, put through a rider to the appropriation bill for the park service to reimburse this security agent, or reimburse the executor of the will.

WILLIAMS: So that was done by reimbursement?

RICHTER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Before the December proclamation, are you aware of any activity in the home by family members or Truman Library people?

RICHTER: My understanding is that the Truman Library, particularly their curator, had been in the home. They had been on a long-term project of inventorying all the objects in the home, and also, by the request of Mrs. Margaret Truman Daniel, had taken some valuable objects out of the home for, quote, "safekeeping." There had been charges that the nurses taking care of Mrs. Truman in the last days had been suspected of stealing things, and so Mrs. Daniel worked out an arrangement with the director of the library, Dr. Zobrist. The idea of the inventory, they'd then be able to more carefully document if anything were to turn up missing. And my understanding was that that went on even after Mrs. Truman's death in October.

Now, they very carefully orchestrated things when Mrs. Truman was alive so she didn't know what was going on. They would work out with the nurses where Mrs. Truman would be that day, so they would work

in a different . . . Say, if they were going to be working documenting what was in the study, then they would have Mrs. Truman out on the back porch or out in the living room, or somewhere where she wouldn't realize what was going on. The two staff members that were involved in this were Pat Kerr and Elizabeth Safly.

WILLIAMS: Was there any other activity that you were aware of in that two and a half months?

RICHTER: I do remember one thing that happened that did pose a bit of a dilemma for us later on in terms of interpretation. In Mrs. Truman's illness, they had her in the downstairs bedroom, which had basically been set up like a hospital room. They had a hospital bed and other such furniture for her to be attended at home. After her death and, as I understand it, before the funeral, the Library staff first of all arranged to have the medical facilities and everything taken out, and then they moved down a bed or furniture from the upstairs, and the question was in terms of documenting what furniture was there before the illness. It seems like they brought the wrong bed or a different bed down from the attic than had been up there to begin with, so that was another bit of activity that happened. Also, my understanding was that at the funeral Mrs. Daniel did stay at the home. I remember one conversation with Dr. Zobrist where she took one last look around and departed after the funeral.

WILLIAMS: Who was so-called in charge of the home before the park service assumed

control?

RICHTER: It's sort of a hazy situation. I can't recall the name of the gentleman who was with a bank in Kansas who was the executor of the will.

MICHAEL SHAVER: Donald Chisholm?

RICHTER: Donald Chisholm rings a bell, yes. [chuckling] Yes, Don Chisholm. Because I remember the first trip I made over there with Superintendent Schoeber and Mr. Dunning and Andy Ketterson. We did have a meeting with Don Chisholm downtown in Kansas City.

WILLIAMS: When was that?

RICHTER: That was very early in January. Basically, the scenario, I came back from my Christmas vacation, and shortly, just a few days into January, they made me an offer of this position. And just a couple of days later then, Superintendent Schoeber and I flew over for the day to Kansas City, then out to Independence, and we met with Dr. Zobrist. There was a news conference arranged at the Truman Library where Mr. Dunning announced what was going to happen, as far as I was going to be there and that they would be advertising for a superintendent and that sort of thing. And after that news conference . . . Oh, and of course that was my first vision of the home then, too. We got to see the home, and then we did go downtown to talk with Mr. Chisholm.

SHAVER: Do you remember the topics of the meeting or the subject of the meeting?

RICHTER: Well, I do remember actually even that early on Mr. Chisholm brought up

that idea about being reimbursed for the guard service. And at that time the will had not gone through probate or anything, although Mr. Chisholm stressed that in the law of Missouri that the will takes effect immediately with the death of the person, and so that was another reason for the urgency of figuring out what was going to happen between the Truman Library or the National Archives and the National Park Service because of that quirk in the law of Missouri.

WILLIAMS: What was your first impression of Benedict Zobrist?

RICHTER: Well, he was very enthusiastic. I remember our first meeting with him up in his office. I remember he was really tickled. I came in my uniform that day, and he reacted as if the cavalry had arrived or whatever. He seemed very genuinely interested in giving us all the cooperation that we needed. He had already offered, and Mr. Ketterson accepted, a space for an office for me there right at the library, and secretarial help, free use of the copy machine, which as a good bureaucrat I made a lot of use of. He was enthusiastic early even in that first meeting about developing a joint operation where the whole Truman story could be told between a visit to the library and museum, a visit to the home, and a visit to the county courthouse in Independence's town square where they have "The Man from Independence" audiovisual program. I remember even at that meeting he brought up he was involved even at that time in the restoration of the Truman farm home, which he also thought had a lot of merit as part of the

whole story, and he was enthusiastic about the fact that, as he told us, he felt it was the most unique opportunity he knew of for a visitor to get a complete experience of a president's life and career and everything within a small area of just a few miles. And as I say, he was very gracious about welcoming me to the library from the very beginning.

WILLIAMS: It was his idea then for the park service to use a little bit of the Truman Library for office space?

RICHTER: I would imagine it was sort of a . . . My understanding was that he offered it to Mr. Ketterson.

WILLIAMS: Ketterson didn't ask for it?

RICHTER: I don't know. I don't know really the fine points of that. I do know that by the time of that first arrival I made in January the office was already cleared out, an archivist by the name of Warren Orville was moved down the hall to share an office with another archivist, and that things were ready to go.

WILLIAMS: So you actually displaced a member of the Truman Library staff.

RICHTER: I wouldn't say *displaced*. He had to share an office with somebody else as a result of that.

WILLIAMS: Well, you said you also went to the home that day for the first time.

RICHTER: Right.

WILLIAMS: What was your impression of the home?

RICHTER: I think the initial impression was the . . . Well, actually, to be honest, the first impression was that it wasn't as large on the inside as it seemed from

the outside, even at that point. I immediately began thinking of ways to show the home, in terms of a tour and everything, but I guess I was almost stunned by the complete nature of the furnishings. It truly did seem as if the Trumans were still there and perhaps were out on a walk or so forth. And I think the quality of this time capsule of the 1950s, I think even at that point, sort of grabbed my attention also, and the fact that, as many people have said, it reminds them of their grandparents' house or whatever.

WILLIAMS: Well, if this job wasn't really a promotion as far as the grade scale goes, why did you accept the job?

RICHTER: Well, I have as a career goal to become a manager in the National Park Service, and as ranger in charge, I could see it as giving me a lot of valuable experience. Particularly being there by myself, it was going to require a lot of decision making. Also, the opportunity to be in at the ground floor of establishing a visitor services program for a national park site is almost a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Also, as I said, I just have an interest in sort of the overall picture of park service operations, and as a historian I particularly relish the opportunity to set a really excellent historic site off in the right direction.

WILLIAMS: You've mentioned Andy Ketterson several times so far. Was he the main contact with the Midwest Regional Office?

RICHTER: Well, once I was established there . . . Up until I arrived, he pretty much, as I said, had been authorized by the regional director to manage the site.

When I arrived, I did most of my business either through Mr. Schoeber or with regional office staff, not necessarily just Mr. Ketterson but sometimes just with the regional director, or John Kawamoto took a particular interest in the site also.

WILLIAMS: What was his position?

RICHTER: He was an associate regional director for cultural resources, historic preservation, and maintenance. And planning. He had planning under his area also.

SHAVER: Do you have any idea what may have been the source of his interest? I've heard it referred to several times by other staff members, but what's your interpretation of what made John pay some interest in the site?

RICHTER: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't really want to speculate on that. I mean, he certainly has a deep interest in cultural resources. He and Mr. Ketterson many times said that this was a golden opportunity to demonstrate the proper sequence of events in establishing and rehabilitating a historic site. And many times, as I say, it's a chance to do it right the first time. Mr. Kawamoto seemed to have a particular interest in the whole Truman story and so forth. I know at one time he made some comment to the effect that he particularly admired Truman because he came back to his neighborhood and his old home, unlike others like Abraham Lincoln. [chuckling] Well, unfortunately Mr. Lincoln didn't have much choice in the matter.

WILLIAMS: He went back to his hometown.

RICHTER: That's right.

WILLIAMS: Were there any other regional office people actively involved in the first phase?

RICHTER: Well, there were quite a few. From the very beginning, one thing very quickly, you asked about initial impressions. Well, quickly I had an impression of the state of disrepair of the home, particularly the roof. There were some severe leaks in the roof, not so much the main roof but some of the side roofs, the flat roofs over some of the porches. So I quickly got to know a gentleman by the name of Lee Jamieson, who is a restoration specialist who worked under Andy Ketterson. He had to make several trips to the home. In fact, as I recall now, he also came down on that same visit where Mr. Schoeber and I came over and Jim Dunning and Andy Ketterson and Lee Jamieson all came down from region for the day. Anyway, as I was saying, Lee Jamieson had to spend several trips coming down to make some emergency repairs on the roof. Also, Dave Given, who was in the planning division under Mr. Kawamoto, made many visits. Together we prepared the first statement for management for the site. Jim Schack in interpretation showed a special interest in the site. I think we had the advantage that we were only a three-hour drive or a quick plane ride down from Omaha, that it was an extra advantage to be that close to the regional office. Jill York, who's now Jill York O'Bright, also paid an interest in the home. She arranged for Ron Cockrell, who started out, he was a seasonal

historian and worked his way into a permanent position in the regional office. He did a lot of work on the history of the Trumans in Independence and the history of the home. Andy Ketterson was interested very quickly in getting the ball rolling on the funding and so forth for a historic structures report on the home, particularly an existing conditions study of how the home was.

WILLIAMS: How much were the regional office people actually in Independence?

RICHTER: The technical people, the people like Lee Jamieson and some of his cohorts, Fran Krupka, who was a historic architect, was down there several times. They spent weeks at a time down, or they would be down for a week and go back for the weekend, as I said, doing either emergency work or starting to do preliminary drawings for such things as putting in a new wiring system, which was a prime concern. The antiquated electrical wiring system was an old knob-and-tube-style electrical system with many splices. Ironically, in Independence, the city code, knob and tube is okay as long as it's not spliced. Well, there were many splices in the electrical system.

WILLIAMS: You said Lee Jamieson actually fixed the roof himself?

RICHTER: He made some repairs. If the truth be known, there was one occasion where he even talked me through. I was up on the roof one time with a bucket of tar trying to patch things up until he could get down the next day. And we did continue . . . Even after I arrived, we continued with this arrangement of twenty-four-hour guarding of the home with the Federal

Protective Service. Eventually, by March or so, we had then negotiated a contract for a contracted guard service in which the Federal Protective Service would make periodic inspections of each shift of this guard service.

WILLIAMS: And these were temporary repairs, I assume?

RICHTER: At the very beginning, yes. Simply trying to stop particularly the leaks in the roof.

WILLIAMS: Was there any damage to the interior of the home?

RICHTER: The most severe case was in the downstairs bathroom where a lot of the wallpapering had flaked off. Also, a lot of the bathroom tile had come off in that room. That really was the real troublesome area.

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RICHTER: Oh, you were asking about early activity in the home even before I arrived or after Mrs. Truman's death. I did remember also that they had somebody from the fire department in to inspect the home. As I say, they were the ones that pointed out the inadequate electrical system, particularly when they saw up in the little sleeping room of the president that they had simply poked a hole through the wall of one of the other bedrooms and put through an extension cord and that was the source of power in there. There is a story that the fire department videotaped the home, which would have been of great value to the curators to this day. Unfortunately, that videotape has never seen the light of day. I know that Steve Harrison pursued that angle but never came up with any verdict of where that videotape ever ended up.

WILLIAMS: I hadn't heard that one before.

SHAVER: Was any particular concern of the wiring due to the result of the unhappy experience at the Roosevelt home?

RICHTER: Well . . .

SHAVER: The fact that National Park Service people were now in charge?

RICHTER: We were a little concerned in terms that Mrs. Daniel did have a friendship with some of the Roosevelt children. She was very unfamiliar with the National Park Service. She was used to dealing with Dr. Zobrist and his predecessor at the Truman Library. And what we understood, her only knowledge of the park service was how things had been managed at the Franklin Roosevelt home, and also the fact that she had a summer home on Fire Island, and I'm sure she'd had some relationship then with the National Park Service with the nearby Fire Island National Seashore. So I would say there was a bit of concern that we certainly wanted to take care of that wiring. Because I can't remember the date, but it didn't seem to have been too far back before that when they had the fire at the Roosevelt home.

WILLIAMS: I believe you've already mentioned some of them, but could you list your primary concerns in those first few months as the ranger in charge?

RICHTER: Well, I think, besides what I already mentioned, I did have a concern about the quality of security with this contracted system coming in. I was assured by the Federal Protective Service that this contractor would be good.

WILLIAMS: Was it?

RICHTER: I would say it was marginal. There was one excellent guard during the day named Ken Smith who took a real interest in the home. In fact, he went so far as to even water the grass. We had probably the best-kept lawn in Independence that summer. In fact, Ken went on to even get a job with the Federal Protective Service. Some of the other guards were not so diligent. One was discovered one night watching the Truman television set in the living room. I guess the bottom line is we didn't have any incidents, as far as things disappearing or whatever.

Another concern I had from the very beginning was in the form of public relations in Independence. Independence was not familiar with the National Park Service. The townspeople probably had an unrealistic expectation of how quickly we could open the home. There were certain political interests that felt that the home should be opened real quickly. I was in an interesting situation, in terms of keeping on an even keel with a lot of different interest groups in Independence. My marching orders while I was there by myself were basically not to make any real firm commitments in terms of policy or what direction we were going to take with the home, but at the same time to keep friendships or develop friendships and working relationships with these different interests. These included such organizations as: the Jackson County Historical Society, which managed the 1859 Jail and Marshal's Home Museum in the downtown area; developing a rapport with the Jackson County people who

manage the courthouse audiovisual program, “The Man from Independence”; also developing a relationship with the city’s historic preservation officer, Pat O’Brien; of course, working with the mayor and the city council. Independence, their form of government, the city council is very independent of the mayor. It’s sort of a weak mayor’s form of government, so that could become tricky. Sarah Hancock worked for the city as their tourism director. One city councilwoman in particular, Millie Nesbitt, was very interested in seeing the home get open as quickly as possible. A lot of these interest groups were concerned that we work closely with the city so that in terms of the average visit of somebody to Independence would not be simply a visit to the Truman Library, a quick dash to the home, and then they’d be on their way. These different interest groups were very vocal, and the idea that we come up with a system that would encourage people to visit the other historic sites of Independence—stay a little longer, you might say.

And, of course, my relationship with the library, I felt, was very important. They had been very good, in terms of their hospitality. They also had their point of view of how things should be run. They envisioned a very close relationship between us and the library, and again their concept of visits to the home was probably more in line with almost a joint visit. The director was always interested in us working out some kind of arrangement with the farm home, or at least being able to encourage people

to go down and visit the farm home.

WILLIAMS: Was there ever any thought at the Truman Library of making our headquarters or ticket center within the library?

RICHTER: Well, actually, early on I remember one time that the regional director was down for a visit, Jim Dunning, and he did approach Dr. Zobrist about having office space—as you say, a headquarters area—within the Truman Library and even using that as a staging area for a shuttle that would take visitors then down to the home. One of the initial impressions that every national park official saw about the home, one of the unique qualities, was the fact that indeed the old neighborhood was still intact, and a living neighborhood, and we wanted to come up with a plan that would give visitors an opportunity to see the home but also not negatively impact the lives of all our neighbors around there. So from the very beginning we thought of some sort of a shuttle system to avoid the impact of all the traffic and parking that would take place down there. And so, as I say, there was an offer very early on. Dr. Zobrist even showed us to the east wing of the Truman Library where there was another audiovisual room. It was designed as a multipurpose room, primarily for use with a school program operation that most of the time was not being used, and he saw that, and that was also an alternate entrance to the library museum, and so he at that time was proposing that we operate out of that end of the building.

WILLIAMS: Why was that option not taken?

RICHTER: I think later on perhaps Dr. Zobrist didn't realize the magnitude of the staff that would eventually come to the Truman home. And also at that time, by then Superintendent Norm Reigle had arrived, and in our relationship with the city we also saw the need to develop some sort of a system that we would provide visitors the opportunity to see the slide program down at the courthouse and work with our friends in Independence. Also, there was a simple probably dollars-and-cents situation. If we were to develop a shuttle ourselves from the library to the home, we in some way would have to fund that, either through charging a fee or through large appropriations of money every year. Well, at one point in conversations with the city officials, they proposed to establish their own shuttle system for visitors to Independence, and so we saw that as an opportunity to also save the taxpayers some money. I would say that basically when we really got down at the library to looking over office space, they really didn't have enough office space really to meet our needs, and so, at the same time, we decided to go more in a little different direction where we'd be a little closer to the other city facilities.

WILLIAMS: Was there ever any friction in the early days between the park service and the library staff?

RICHTER: Well, I would say maybe something minor, like I know that I did use their copy machine an awful lot. Their monthly bill went up, I guess. They paid by the numbers of copies on their copy machine. Certainly when I was

there by myself I felt very little of that sort of friction. I mean, you'd expect as a guest that, as you said earlier, where I literally evicted a senior archivist down to another office, but I would think it was very cooperative. I mean, I look back on those days with a lot of fondness, as far as the reception that I got. I mean, here I was the new kid on the block, the only park service person there, and I can just think of . . . just a lot of people on the staff were very friendly.

WILLIAMS: Did you get much free advice?

RICHTER: Oh, I got quite a bit of free advice, as you can imagine. One thing that Dr. Zobrist was very helpful in at least enlightening me about the complex political situation in Independence. He had had plenty of experience with that, particularly when he was an active member of the city's heritage commission. There had been many controversies politically about the establishment and the management of the Harry S. Truman National Historic Landmark District, and he, again, was very interested in how things were going to progress at the Truman home. He gave me a lot of advice about Mrs. Daniel and the most productive way of developing a relationship with Mrs. Daniel.

WILLIAMS: Which was . . . ?

RICHTER: Well, it was to be very cooperative with Mrs. Daniel, to try as much as possible to do things in the way that she wanted them to be done. And certainly the way the will was written, the will basically said that Mrs.

Daniel was to approve of the operating plans of the home, and so we did have to take that into consideration, in terms of how we were going to show the home.

WILLIAMS: What was your first experience with Mrs. Daniel?

RICHTER: Well, it was probably by long distance, in that the regional director received a letter very early on. I think he had written her a letter sort of welcoming her or explaining who we were and everything. She wrote back to the effect that she felt that the home was very fragile and would never withstand the impact of being open to the public, so that she hoped we weren't planning to actually have the home open for the public, that she was confident that we would take care to keep the home in good order and good maintenance, but that she hoped it wouldn't be open for the public. My first meeting with her was in May of that year when she was in town for the birthday celebration, Mr. Truman's birthday, which she normally attends most years, and there was a meeting of myself and Superintendent Schoeber, Regional Director Jim Dunning, and Al Hutchings, who was director of external affairs in the regional office. Mrs. Daniel . . . things went rather well. She had changed her mind a bit about showing the home because she actually gave us an idea of how the tour route should be. And to a degree, it turned out to be the tour route, except that she had in mind a few dead ends that weren't going to be too productive. She thought we should take people into the living room so they could take a peek into the

downstairs bedroom. Later on we decided that would have been a little awkward.

I remember another time that I talked with her over the phone was she had given David McCullough permission to film in the home as an episode of *Smithsonian World*, which is a public broadcasting station production, and as a preliminary to that we were proposing to bring in Steve Harrison, who was the curator at St. Louis here at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and give the home a thorough cleaning and get it ready for this filming. I remember she was questioning a little bit why we were . . . Mrs. Daniel questioned why we were going to so much trouble, that we should just hire some local cleaning service to come in and clean up the home before the visit and so forth. But needless to say, we gave it great attention, and she was quite pleased by the condition of the home when she came and she was interviewed in the home by Mr. McCullough.

WILLIAMS: And this was in her first visit in May of '83?

RICHTER: Well, not the filming. The filming was that fall. In fact, it was shortly after the superintendent arrived, so it must have been in October or early November.

WILLIAMS: Was she in the home in May?

RICHTER: Yes, in fact that's where we met with her, right there in the home. The sequence of events, she came into the home with Dr. Zobrist to go around and to identify a few of her personal belongings. That was another unique

aspect of the will. Mrs. Truman's will basically gave the home and its contents to the government, with the exception, as she said, of her daughter's personal belongings or personal property. Unfortunately the will didn't identify what they meant by *personal property*. So that first time Mrs. Daniel . . . Let's see, it was Superintendent Schoeber and myself, I guess we were waiting there, Dr. Zobrist came up with Mrs. Daniel, and Mrs. Daniel basically told Mr. Schoeber and myself to wait downstairs in the kitchen, and she went upstairs with Dr. Zobrist and basically identified some things that she felt should go back over to her aunt next door, Mrs. May Wallace, also identified some objects that she thought ought to go up to the library for safekeeping and that sort of thing. Then she came back downstairs, had a bit of conversation with Mr. Schoeber and myself, not too much, but then the major meeting was to be the following day, and that's when the regional director had . . . He had come down for the birthday event, the Truman award and that sort of thing, the ceremony. And that day, the more formal meeting with Mrs. Daniel, we explained our concern for security, that we would put in alarms in the home so that if people got off the proper tour track there would be some kind of an alarm system. Mrs. Daniel kind of laughed and thought that was really charming. As I say, even in a few months she had come around to the idea of actually having the home open for tours, and I'd say over the next couple of years she slowly but surely became more and more confident in what we were

doing. I certainly remember the day of the dedication of the home that she made a point in her remarks of saying what a fine job the park service had done and that visitors would really get a good experience out of the home, so we all felt good at that.

WILLIAMS: What was your impression of her that first day?

RICHTER: Oh, I would say she was all business. There wasn't a lot of idle conversation. She seemed to be very direct and to the point. Obviously she was comfortable with Dr. Zobrist and that sort of thing.

WILLIAMS: Her husband wasn't with her that time?

RICHTER: Not for that visit. I'm trying to remember. I don't think he came to Independence with her for that visit. He did come when we dedicated the home.

WILLIAMS: So was the next time she was in town for the *Smithsonian World* taping, do you recall?

RICHTER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Were you around for the taping?

RICHTER: Oh, yes, the whole day, from sunup to sundown, or actually beyond sundown because the taping went on into the evening a bit, which was a long day. And I worked primarily with the crew, the film crew, making sure that they didn't do anything that would jeopardize the home. It was quite an ordeal, as far as them hauling a lot of equipment in and out of the building, and with the tight spaces in there, it was a tricky situation to get

that filming done.

SHAVER: Do you have any recollections of the filming in particular?

RICHTER: Well, I do remember Mrs. Daniel certainly again was very direct. She had a certain idea of what she wanted to talk about and work that out with David McCullough. There were a lot of takes over and over again, as with any kind of film production. We had one small catastrophe that day. At some points they were using clothespins to hold up cables and so forth, and this one clothespin was too close to one of these real hot lights and had charred the clothespin, to the point that it dropped down onto the rug and made a small burn mark in the rug. So that was our big catastrophe for the day. But other than that, things went pretty well.

WILLIAMS: Did you have much contact with David McCullough?

RICHTER: Not an awful lot, although they had come out earlier, even before this October visit. They did some filming outside on the porch where they taped him doing some introductory remarks and so forth. At that point though, I spoke to him about the National Park Service being able to use that film in some way in the future in any kind of an audiovisual program. What I had thought of was some sort of a combination of the interview of Mrs. Daniel with the old *Person to Person* Edward R. Murrow program that was in the archives at the Truman Library to me would have been a rather fascinating combination of some sort of an audiovisual program. And he was willing to give us that permission.

SHAVER: Did you show him the house? Had he ever seen the house prior to your arrival at the site?

RICHTER: I don't think so. From my recollection, that was his first visit. And again that was part of the reason for the advance trip that they took in, to get a whole feel for the home and everything. The original arrangements though were worked out with Mrs. Daniel, which in a way was a little surprising because she was very protective about the home, not having me take hordes and hordes of special visitors through the home and everything. And she did give permission though for this program, and it certainly is a very valuable part of our archival record of the condition of the home.

SHAVER: Were you the one to take him through the home the first time, or do you recall?

RICHTER: I think Liz Safly and I together took him through, because I think he had previously done research at the Truman Library, so he was very friendly with Liz Safly as the manager of their research facility there at the Truman Library. So as I recall, I think both of us took him through together.

WILLIAMS: Do you recall any of his impressions of the home? Or were they pretty much like everybody else's?

RICHTER: I can't remember anything out of the ordinary that strikes out. It was, as you say, pretty much the same idea about just the overwhelming nature of the home, of it being so intact. I mean, you go to some of the other presidential sites and they're happy that they've got a hundred pieces of

furniture that belonged to the president, and here it was just a gold mine of artifacts.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any other assistance in preparing for the filming of *Smithsonian World*?

RICHTER: Well, actually, the superintendent and his wife helped out on the cleaning. In fact, it was sort of an education for me and them from Steve Harrison in the proper way to clean and proper way to vacuum, with little metal sieves to guard against damaging furnishings and everything, the proper way to dust and all that sort of thing. I think it surprised Steve the amount of work it was going to take, and that's why we enlisted the Reigles to help us out to get it all done in time.

WILLIAMS: Was the house noticeably dirty?

RICHTER: I would say so. Again remember that first of all there was this time period of several months that it was basically unoccupied—you know, just the accumulation of dust and everything. I remember we were up cleaning the top of the . . . no, it was some piece of furniture or something in the formal dining room, and we actually found some coal . . . it looked like coal dust or soot from the old days when they had a coal-fired furnace and everything, so it was obvious they hadn't dusted up that high for quite some time. I think to a curator it looked very dirty. To my eyes it didn't look that bad off, but certainly to Steve he realized he had a lot of work ahead of him.

WILLIAMS: And this is the occasion when Mrs. Daniel set the tables?

RICHTER: That's correct. We had a flower arrangement and a very formal look to the table, and she did give us some helpful hints on the way the silverware should be arranged and everything.

WILLIAMS: While you were still ranger in charge, what was your relationship with May Wallace?

RICHTER: Well, I would make periodic visits. I remember my first visit: Dr. Zobrist, as he was so willing to do, introduced me. We went down together to visit with her for a long, long visit. She was full of memories of life there in the old days. It was rather charming that she was questioning when we would . . . Basically, she wanted us to restore the home to where she remembered it more when the president was alive, or even going back wanting to know when we would put back up a fireplace mantel that had been taken . . . or a mirror over the fireplace mantel that she felt ought to go back up. It was fascinating to me that she even . . . She had a lot of family history, even that one story of the fire in the home early on where the Gates sisters left. Or the one, I can't remember if it was Maud or Myra, supposedly came out with her opera cloak on or something. There's some little family story about that.

WILLIAMS: Is this when she told you about her husband being the handyman?

RICHTER: Well, true, and the story she repeated quite often about her husband was a handyman and also that he had to fix the hands on the clock, on the grandfathers clock, that there had been some children's party or some kind

of party where they'd broken the hands, so he took a pie tin and made new hands for the clock. We heard that story quite often.

WILLIAMS: So she seemed interested in what would happen to the home?

RICHTER: Oh, I think so. She was a bit melancholy about it. She was a little apprehensive, I think, about how that would impact her privacy and everything. I don't think she was quite sure what would happen, as far as how we would conduct tours. Of course, we were very concerned about guarding her privacy and, for example, not giving guided tours way out by the garage, or the "barn," as she referred to it, but doing what we could to protect her privacy.

WILLIAMS: Was she apprehensive about losing her parking spot in the barn?

RICHTER: Oh, she was asking about that, whether she'd be able to keep her parking spot there. That is true.

WILLIAMS: And what did you decide?

RICHTER: Well, we thought, if anything, that added a bit to the ambiance of the home. My concept from the beginning was to have the home looking as much as possible in sort of the last days when Mrs. Truman was still healthy. Particularly in terms of documentation, my point of view was that we definitely knew what the home looked like then. If we were to want to take it back to the presidential years, we'd be getting into a lot of conjecture. Or even taking it back into the early 1950s period we'd still be guessing a lot. And to me, one of the real stories of the home was just the fact that it

reflected this long, long time period of occupation by the Trumans, and what we should be doing is interpreting the home as a reflection of that long time period. So, to me, Mrs. Wallace's car being in the garage to me was appropriate to have in there.

WILLIAMS: What about your relationship with Ardis Haukenberry?

RICHTER: Probably not as frequent, and I don't know, maybe it's because Mrs. Wallace was closer by or something. Again, Dr. Zobrist set up a meeting with Mrs. Haukenberry. Of course, later on very quickly her health started failing, too. Unlike Mrs. Wallace, the time I worked at Independence, Mrs. Wallace was still in very good health. We just tended to run in . . . Mrs. Wallace was so active and would walk by herself down to the beauty parlor every week, and I just happened to see her more often.

WILLIAMS: How did Ardis get involved with the *Smithsonian World*?

RICHTER: Well, she was involved. I guess Liz Safly, for David McCullough, came up with a list of people that he should interview. And as I recall, he did those interviews also in that earlier trip. The October or November trip, whenever, was primarily spending the day interviewing Mrs. Daniel. I remember in the final production Ardis was saying something to the fact that Harry and Bess were great lovers or something, or the world's best lovers, or some quaint expression, which I think was more in her earlier idea of what *lovers* meant and everything.

WILLIAMS: Did she ever tell you stories?

RICHTER: Well, she told a bit about the relationship, of the story of Mr. Truman reestablishing his friendship with Bess by taking the cake plate over across the street and how that was all sort of a set-up deal and that began their romance, and he would stay over there at the Noland-Haukenberry house on these weekend visits and so forth.

WILLIAMS: Did either one of the two ladies ever tell you how much they had visited with Mrs. Truman in the last few years?

RICHTER: Well, I think May Wallace had much more of a closer relationship. I mean, they were very, very close. I mean, I remember my initial visit with Mrs. Wallace when she was talking about Mrs. Truman's death, and a tear came to her eye and a tear came to her eye and of course, Mrs. Wallace and Mrs. Haukenberry were sort of the last of that generation were still around. I don't think Mrs. Haukenberry really had that much of a relationship with Mrs. Truman. After Mr. Truman's death I don't think she really set foot in the home too often. Okay?

[End #4125; Begin #4126]

WILLIAMS: You've already mentioned it briefly, but what do you think was the reaction of the residents and leaders of Independence to the National Park Service coming in as managers of the Truman home?

RICHTER: Well, it was a real mixed bag. To begin with, something that I learned rather quickly was that there is a basic distaste for the federal government within Jackson County, which I think goes clear back to the War between

the States and all the guerrilla warfare and hard feelings towards the federal occupation forces and so forth during that time. Also, the Truman Library's relationship with the town had become a bit distant. And hearing from Dr. Zobrist I could see why, because he had become involved in a lot of this controversy over historic preservation issues, and it was sort of a no-win situation because there was such a fierce division in the town between those that were strongly for historic preservation and those that were against it as being an infringement on property rights and so forth, that it was sort of a no-win situation for Dr. Zobrist. There was a segment of the town also that I think had trouble understanding why the federal government was becoming involved in the project. They could see it being something of interest to Missourians, but they couldn't imagine that people from all over the country, much less the world, would want to come to Independence to see Harry Truman's home.

The neighbors, my feeling, most neighbors were looking forward to the site, in terms of the National Park Service being there and reinforcing sort of the cause of historic preservation. There was a genuine concern about how we would manage things so as to not totally clog their streets with traffic and people parking every which way.

Then we had down the street the First Baptist Church of Independence, and we became the bad guys there just by default because the minister, Reverend Hughes, was planning to build a new sanctuary and

was fearful that the preservationists were going to stop him from building the sanctuary. So therefore he looked upon with suspicion the federal government being involved in the Truman home project and being in such close proximity to the home. He at one time, though, offered the use of his parking lot six days a week. He wouldn't let us use it on Sundays, but the other days of the week he said we'd be more than welcome to use the parking lot. Of course, other people felt that that was just him trying to . . . as a way for us to endorse his parking lot, because he was wanting to expand his parking lot, and jeopardize perhaps some of the other part of the neighborhood.

There was a segment of Independence also, basically the chamber of commerce end of things, that was looking upon the Truman home bringing in big bucks to Independence. I think that goes along with, as I said before, this fear that if the park service just worked with the Truman Library and, say, establish a shuttle bus just between the library and the home, that Independence would not benefit as much from all these visitors coming to see the Truman home.

There was great interest in the home's operation being done in time for the hundredth anniversary of the president's birth in 1984. In fact, the director of the park service, Russ Dickenson, even made a commitment that we would be open by May of '84, in time for the hundredth birthday. That was both good and bad. It was good in that we really got the attention of

the regional office and high priority for projects, high priority from Harpers Ferry to get a slide show done and a brochure done. It could have been bad, in terms of us rushing to get things done and perhaps sort of just being satisfied to get the job done without it being done in a quality way. But as it turned out, I don't think that was the case. We did a good job. So there was a lot of community pressure to get open quickly, and some people were very discouraged when they would hear our time table. I would say, "Well, actually we're doing this very quickly for the way the park service does business," and I gave them the example of the Martin Van Buren home in upstate New York, that after I think it was ten years of operation they had two rooms open in the home.

There was a lot of undercurrents, different things going on. The Jackson County Historical Society, and Sally Schwenk was their executive director, there was sort of a rivalry there between the society and some of these other anti-historic preservation interests in town. The city council was split along those lines. The mayor overall was very supportive of what we were doing. So, in some ways I think it was a miracle that I was able when Norm Reigle showed up that I really don't think I'd made too many enemies during that time, that I was able to keep on an even keel with all these conflicting interest groups, although in a way it was pretty easy, because my marching orders were to not make any real firm commitments. So at first, if I was pressed about making a decision, I would say, "Well, we

still need legislation in Congress before we really made any firm decisions.”

The proclamation from Secretary Watt was viewed by the National Park Service as sort of a stopgap measure, in that we wanted the guidance of Congress through legislation, which came along later on—I think in May, as I recall—because I think it was right around the time of the birthday celebration, because I remember Millie Nesbitt, the city councilwoman, coming up and saying, “Well, you got your legislation, now let’s get on and make some plans and everything.” Well, after that then, I was able to say, “Well, we’ve got to get our superintendent here.” Of course, I didn’t know it was going to be Norm Reigle, but I’d say, “When the superintendent arrives, then we’ll be in business.” Although even before that we did have our first meeting of the general management plan team . . . came before Norm arrived, so there was some planning being done even before his visit.

And as I say, it was an interesting situation. Independence, the culture there is sort of a closed culture, in that, for example, vacations to those sort of folks, a long vacation is to go to the Lake of the Ozarks a couple of hundred miles away for a vacation. I don’t think the townspeople had been to enough other national park areas or seen maybe even the negative side of being near a national park. I don’t think many people, say, had been to West Yellowstone or to, say, the entry point to Great Smoky

Mountains or some of those places that had been rather tacky. And so in some ways that helped us out, that we didn't have a wax museum going in right away or some more tacky get-rich-quick kind of schemes going on. On the other hand, there was a genuine concern from some interests about, well, why is the federal government even fooling with this? And I don't think they were being mean spirited or anything. I think they just really didn't understand the big picture of the national significance of the site.

WILLIAMS: How much effort did you make to get to know the neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the home?

RICHTER: Well, I was fortunate there in that particular Molly and Tom Hankins, who lived right across the street from the home on Truman Road, even set up an evening . . . well, with Sarah Grebb, who at that time was working for the Truman Library, set up a little evening for me to get to know the neighbors. To be honest with you, I don't think I really established a real strong rapport with a lot of the neighbors, except through . . . probably more so through these frequent town meetings on different issues of historic preservation or the issue over the church. There were several public meetings over a proposal to shrink the local city historic district in the Truman home area, and I got to know many of the neighbors that way. They had strong feelings about the fate of their neighborhood. I certainly met Doris Hecker very early on. Doris lived in the Frank Wallace home, or was renting it, and she had very strong feelings about the management of

the district, and I got to know her quite quickly. And as I say, the Hankins were a lot of help as far as getting to know some of the other neighbors.

WILLIAMS: Did you feel it was part of your job to represent the federal government's preservation ethic in Independence?

RICHTER: Well, I'd say it was sort of walking on eggs in that respect. If these meetings were coming up, these public meetings, I always was very careful to check with either Mr. Dunning, when he was the regional director, and then after he was transferred to the office of surface mining, I worked very closely with the acting regional director, Randy Pope. I remember one meeting where the regional office drafted a statement for me to issue to the meeting, and this was over this whole issue of shrinking down the district. We looked with disfavor on that, and I gave a presentation to the city council at this town meeting that they had on that issue. I would sort of go along with Dr. Zobrist's point of view, that I felt the National Park Service historic preservation is just part of our mandate, and I felt it was up to us certainly to set a good example at the very least. And with the fact that the national landmark district being there, I felt we had an added obligation to stand up for the integrity of that landmark district. And of course that led later on when Mr. Reigle was here, to even us listing the landmark district as being threatened. As I said before, Dr. Zobrist had shared that view, and he felt he'd been in the trenches for quite a while in that respect and was looking forward to us taking our turn there as the leading advocate.

WILLIAMS: Well, you've mentioned some of the city officials. What was Millie Nesbitt's particular interest?

RICHTER: Well, tourism was her main interest. She was the head of the tourism advisory board, which was sort of an adjunct body established by the city council, which I sat in as sort of an observer, as I did . . . I sat in on meetings of the heritage commission, whose mission was more to manage the historic district. Millie definitely was at the forefront of coming up with the idea of the shuttle system. She also enabled us, or certainly supported us, eventually moving our headquarters down to the old Fire Station No. 1. And as I say, she was interested in the tourism aspect and how that would lead to sort of boost downtown Independence.

WILLIAMS: Well, as you know, the shuttle bus has been discontinued. Do you think that has a significant effect on the original plan for visitors to Independence?

RICHTER: Well, I would say in a couple of ways. First of all, as I said before, from the very beginning we found it important. In fact, one of the real features of this presidential site was the fact that the visitor could get a full story of Truman, could get a sense of the personal life and the home life at the home, they could get an impression of the presidential career up at the library, they could get an understanding of the president's early political career at "The Man from Independence" slide program, and the shuttle really enhanced that by providing a unifying element to get people from one

place to another. Also, Independence being such an old city as it is, predating Kansas City by many years, as I was frequently reminded, the streets are very crooked and narrow. They follow old trails, even one branch of the Santa Fe Trail and so forth, and it is quite difficult, I would think, for an outsider to really find their way around, even if they had a good map. Of course, the shuttle also went beyond serving our needs with the Truman story by also stopping at the two city-operated mansions. Of course, later on the National Frontier Trails Center was established that would have been on the shuttle route also. So I guess that's a long-winded answer to your question, but I do think it does handicap a bit the original plan that we had for the visitor's experience in Independence.

WILLIAMS: Was there ever any thought at the beginning of having a concessionaire under the National Park Service operate the shuttle?

RICHTER: It was studied in the general management plan. There was some analysis of that. As I said, at the very beginning when we were thinking more still of a shuttle between the library and the home, I think I do remember Mr. Dunning expressing the idea that it would most likely become a concessionaire-operated thing. But then I remember him also having misgivings about the expense and whether it would then be successful if you were charging a fee for that. Of course, another thing about the shuttle was that simply a lot of our visitors are elderly and it was a nice way just for them to get around and not have to keep getting in and out of their cars.

To me the shuttle just represented a real unifying element to the story that we are trying to present to visitors there.

WILLIAMS: What were some of the other city councilpersons that you dealt with?

RICHTER: Oh, to a degree I remember dealing a bit with Mike Martin, not an awful lot. Millie Nesbitt was the prime driving force at that time. John Carnes was more in the background. I don't remember too many direct meetings with John Carnes. He very much supported the interest of, or at least voted along the lines with the First Baptist Church of Independence, and he came up with the proposal to shrink the city's landmark district. So as I say, I didn't have many direct contacts with John Carnes, but his activities on the council certainly had an impact on what we were doing at the home. Sometimes Mike Martin was sort of a swing vote, in terms of how the council was acting on different issues.

As I say, I would say I spent a lot more time with the mayor's office. Probably, with hindsight, I should have been paying a little more attention to individual council members. I don't think I realized at the beginning how independent the council really was of the mayor. Later on I discovered this with the power of the council even to basically supervise or ask for action by individual city staff members. It was not uncommon for Pat O'Brien to be told what to do by one of the city—Pat O'Brien was the historic preservation officer, and to have Millie Nesbitt or somebody go and tell him they wanted this done over at the Bingham-Waggoner house or

whatever, and Pat would do it. So that was rather a different situation.

WILLIAMS: When did you meet the mayor?

RICHTER: I think we did meet with the mayor also, now that I think about it, this lightning trip that we took over in early January. I think we did also meet with the mayor on that trip.

WILLIAMS: This was Mayor Potts?

RICHTER: Mayor Barbara Potts. Because I do think we met the mayor, and then that's when I met Pat O'Brien and Bill Bullard, who was in charge of planning and historic preservation with the city at that time.

WILLIAMS: Is it fair to say that the non-council people were more supportive in the city government?

RICHTER: I guess I would say that was fair, although Millie Nesbitt in her own way was very supportive. She was looking at it more in an opportunity to enhance tourism in Independence and thereby enhance the revenue, the business climate of the town, or whatever. I guess that would be a fair statement. Certainly the support was really overwhelming from people like Pat O'Brien and Bill Bullard.

WILLIAMS: What did they do, in particular?

RICHTER: Again, a lot of guidance as far . . . They played a role with even the tourism advisory board, with Sarah Hancock who worked for Bill Bullard. She was the head of tourism for the city. Particularly supporting, I guess they also helped in sort of enlightening people in the town about how long a process

it is to do careful planning for the home, because there was this aspect of impatience within the town about “When is the park service going to open things up?” And certainly the planning which ultimately resulted in us being downtown, that certainly was through the work of people like Bill Bullard and Pat O’Brien and Sarah Hancock.

WILLIAMS: Did they have any input on the interpretive planning for the home itself?

RICHTER: I think they helped in terms of making sure that we interpreted the home within the context of Independence and didn’t get so wrapped up in the president himself, but put the president within the context of life in Independence. I think they were very helpful in us sort of expanding our horizons and appreciating the significance of the neighborhood, which ultimately resulted even in neighborhood walking tours that we started up later on. I think they were helpful in sort of explaining sort of the political climate in the town, which sometimes, particularly for Norm Reigle, was sort of walking through a mine field, you might say. Bill Bullard was really helpful in enlightening Norm, in terms of the political realities of Independence. I don’t think we would ever have had the shuttle and the fire station and those sort of things without the help of city staff members, which is not to downplay the role of the Jackson County Historical Society, of course, with the fact that they operated the visitor center for us the first year between city volunteers. Again a major contribution of the city was developing a volunteer program which was a major impact upon our

operations at the Truman home ticket center.

SHAVER: In providing this guidance and advice, didn't they in a sense kind of use the park service a little bit, too, in advancing what they thought would be . . . you know, not selfish motives but good solid planning involved with this?

RICHTER: That's true. I mean, Bill Bullard's major interest was planning—I mean, that's his job, and it was support for, as you say, careful planning and doing it right. We would say that over and over again: "This is an opportunity to do it right this time." And so in that respect they certainly were allies, as far as what we were trying to do.

WILLIAMS: How much contact did you have with the city manager?

RICHTER: Very little.

WILLIAMS: And who was the city manager at that time?

RICHTER: Oh, Keith Wilson. Keith Wilson.

WILLIAMS: That was probably three or four managers ago. [chuckling]

RICHTER: Well, that's true because Bill Bullard served his time. What were you about to say?

WILLIAMS: They just laid off another one a few weeks ago.

RICHTER: Okay. I understand they have a new mayor there also that's rather flamboyant.

WILLIAMS: Yes, he fits the description of the Independence residents that you were giving earlier.

RICHTER: As I say, though, I had very little contact directly with Keith, and his

interests were in other ways, I guess. I'm sure Mr. Reigle probably told you, once Bill Bullard became the city manager then we had a lot more dealing directly with But Bill was really the person that we dealt with, particularly once we moved into the ticket center, and if we needed help even with a maintenance problem, whatever. There was a long, drawn-out process to get the curbs restored there along the front of the home and everything, and so Bill Bullard was a real important person and contact, sort of our liaison with the city staff, more so than you might have expected it would be the city manager, but it really was Bill.

WILLIAMS: And Pat O'Brien was eventually removed from the city staff.

RICHTER: Well, no, *removed* isn't the right word. There was no more money for him in the city budget. It was sort of a budget cutback more so. I don't say he was removed or fired or anything. It would be something like a Gramm-Rudman cutback on the federal scene.

WILLIAMS: Was that a blow to park service operations at all?

RICHTER: Well, it certainly wasn't a positive development, because again the very nature of his title, historic preservation officer. He was also a very fine historian and was of use just with his knowledge of Independence and the history of the neighborhood. It certainly wasn't a red-letter day for us when that happened, because he had been a good person as far as providing insight into the community also.

WILLIAMS: How much had actually been done before Superintendent Reigle arrived on

the job, as far as planning?

RICHTER: Well, as I said, early on Dave Given from the regional office and I wrote up the original statement for management, it's called. In addition, Jim Schack and a delegation from Harpers Ferry, Al Swift, the deputy manager of Harpers Ferry in fact, had a lot of close attention to our project. In fact, he pulled rank, so to speak, to come out on the planning team. And we prepared what we called an "interim interpretive prospectus," which was more like an operating plan. Nowadays in the National Park Service, interpretive prospectuses are very limited documents that talk more about the use of media, and the statement for interpretation now is more your operating document. But back then, basically this document was not in its final form when Mr. Reigle came, but we had had our initial meetings and basically had a plan in mind at that point. As I said also, we had already had one visit by the general management plan team from Denver, and they had met with the mayor, with Bill Bullard, with the director of the library. They had come on what they called a "scoping mission" to get the lay of the land, so to speak.

WILLIAMS: Was there any sense of "We should put things on hold until the superintendent gets here for his final approval"? Or would he just move in?

RICHTER: I would say on the interpretive planning there was certainly that. I remember several meetings with the superintendent early on where we came to a consensus on how we wanted things like . . . An important

decision was whether you were going to have guided tours or else have rangers stationed throughout the home in fixed locations, things like that. The final approval was after Norm arrived. But thinking back, there actually was quite a bit that was underway. We had the contract in hand with a company to do the existing conditions drawings and plan, which was an important document to document the state of repair or disrepair of the home at the point that we received the property.

WILLIAMS: That was Solomon, Claybaugh and Young.

RICHTER: Right. Yes, it's all coming back to me now.

WILLIAMS: Solomon Young, you should be able to remember that.

RICHTER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So that was underway already?

RICHTER: That was already underway, as I recall. And as I said, some of these were emergency repairs of the home that had been done, so it wasn't like things were just at a standstill until Norm arrived. There were things in motion, certainly.

SHAVER: You were talking about the general management planning. The team had already been assembled and was meeting in Independence?

RICHTER: They had already had one meeting in Independence.

SHAVER: Do you remember much about that, what the preliminary discussions were?

RICHTER: Well, I think one thing was that normally general management plan teams come up with a whole variety of options, and then you come down to a final

wise decision. And even at the early point I think they could see certain basic things needed to be done, such as some sort of a shuttle system. I mean, they visited the neighborhood and right away could see the ramification of running a popular national historic site in a neighborhood such as the Truman neighborhood. They quickly saw the need for sort of a joint operation, that it wouldn't be the park service just going it alone. So in some ways it was a rather unique general management plan process, because some things they came to a consensus very quickly about.

I remember at one point the team captain, this was later on after Norm had arrived, he was saying something to the fact that "If we don't get the general management plan pretty soon, the whole thing will already have been implemented before we ever get the finished document completed," because things were going along very quickly because of Mr. Dickenson's commitment that the home be open by the hundredth anniversary of the president's birth.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Norm Reigle before he was selected as superintendent?

RICHTER: I don't think I had ever met him. I might have, but I don't recall. I knew of him because of Palma Wilson-Buell working down there. I had first met Palma here at St. Louis when she was a seasonal and had kept in touch with her when she worked down at the Ozark, and she had told me what a great chief ranger Norm Reigle was.

WILLIAMS: So you had a favorable impression of him when the announcement was

made?

RICHTER: Right, and I knew that he was particularly good about being very direct and also getting good budgets out of—at that time it was Ozark—out of the superintendent, so I felt that he would be good at getting the necessary operating funds for the Truman home. I think one thing that everybody realized very quickly was that it was going to be a labor-intensive site, whether you had people stationed throughout the home or else had guided tours, and the fact that you were going to need a professional curator with all those thousands and thousands of objects, that this was not going to be just a little mom-and-pop operation national historic site, that there was going to be a labor-intensive situation that was going to need a sizeable budget right away. Unlike most national parks that start out on a skeleton staff and gradually enhance their programming and justify the need for more positions, from the very beginning Norm realized he was going to have to go in like gangbusters to get a reasonable operating budget right away.

WILLIAMS: Was there a smooth transition between you and him?

RICHTER: I'd say so. I know I gave him plenty of free advice there, particularly again with the unique climate in Independence. Things were bubbling up or almost boiling over the controversy with the First Baptist Church and the whole situation with either shrinking the district or keeping it at its point. And certainly he asked for my advice. There was a bit of difficulty. It's

hard after being there by myself to sort of then sit back in the background, but you also need to just have one voice for the park service there. I remember one meeting of the tourism board or something where we both went, and we realized quickly that only one of us should one of us should, that there should just be one spokesperson to avoid confusing the issues.

WILLIAMS: How similar would you say your management and preservation philosophies are? Norm's and yours?

RICHTER: Oh, I think pretty close.

[End #4126; Begin #4127]

WILLIAMS: What were we talking about?

RICHTER: What were we? I was about to say something good.

WILLIAMS: Norm . . . ?

SHAVER: Preservation.

RICHTER: Oh, preservation theory. I would say one point of disagreement . . . Overall I think we were very much in sync, and I might say I was pleasantly surprised, because Norm really didn't have a background in managing historic sites. His career had been in natural areas and chief ranger type activities, but he did a fine job, with hindsight.

The one area that I would have done maybe a little different was his decision that objects should be moved for safekeeping to some other location. To me, even in the basement, to me there. . . I guess I draw the analogy almost like to an archaeologist: When objects are in their original

location, they tell a certain story. And even though historic objects you carefully document and photograph and everything, it's still not the same in terms of telling a story. And I will give the example of the attic: When the attic is in a jumble, as the Trumans left it, that tells something about their lifestyle. So I think I would have tried harder maybe to figure out a way to just have had very good fire detection systems or whatever. But I wasn't so desirable of getting those objects moved right away. And again, Norm's background is more in security and everything, and so I could understand his point of view. I just didn't totally go along with it, but he was the superintendent.

SHAVER: How much did Steve Harrison play a role in enhancing and developing your preservation ethic education?

RICHTER: Yeah, I think Steve was an educator also, although I was there in the basement the day that the decision was made about ultimately moving things out of the home, and Steve was disappointed, at least . . . I was right there with Steve and Norm. But your point is well taken. I do think that Steve had a lot of education. Even that first visit, that cleaning mission when we brought Steve over, I mean that was very enlightening for Norm, the careful way that Steve was cleaning things, and it was an education. Well, it was an education for me, too, but certainly for Norm, about the care that we had to take with objects and the agents of deterioration, to keep them under control, as Steve called them.

As I say, I think overall we were pretty much in sync. There were a few points that just any two human beings are going to have some disagreements over. I think one of the critical things that Norm went along with was this idea of interpreting the home more or less as a representation of the overall occupancy of the Trumans, rather than going back to some point in time in 1945 or '53 or something. That did come up in some of our sessions at night or at his home discussing things in an informal way, but he was a good listener.

WILLIAMS: And your decision early on was to interpret it the way it was when Mrs. Truman died, or shortly before that?

RICHTER: Well, at least maybe a little bit back when she was healthy enough to give orders to Reverend Hobby to keep the plants trimmed up and that sort of thing. And again, as I said before, just in terms of documentation it was much better documented at that point. For example, if you were to take it back to 1945, you'd have to really devastate the kitchen area and the other improvements that the Trumans made when they came back from the White House.

WILLIAMS: So, for instance, would you be in favor as the interpretation chief of restoring the pergola in the back yard, which is documented to have been there in 1970 or so? Would you favor making changes that would reflect the last years of Mr. Truman's life?

RICHTER: Well, I don't know. If I had a free hand there, I think I would focus more

on even carrying it more closer to Mrs. Truman's last days. To me, part of the story is the time period that Mrs. Truman spent there by herself. I mean, that is part of the whole Truman story. We would get a remarkable number of people that were surprised that Mrs. Truman lived there after the president's death. It was like they expected him to have left in the will that she be evicted or something. But a remarkable number of people were surprised, and to me, that in itself needed to be interpreted. That was all part of the story. I mean, the Truman story is that long-lasting attachment to that home. I mean, my goodness, they never left that one bedroom. Even when they had a chance to move into the master bedroom, they stayed in the bedroom they were comfortable in. And so I guess in answer to your question, if I were running things, I would not restore the pergola. I would want to keep it more towards, say, in the mid-'70s or so when Mrs. Truman was still healthy enough to direct her way of life there.

WILLIAMS: While we're on interpretive planning, whose idea was it to have the dark gray visitor carpet?

RICHTER: I would say Steve Harrison probably had . . . It was sort of a combination of Steve and myself both going to Death Valley to Scotty's Castle. Steve actually worked at Scotty's Castle, and I'd been on a tour there, and I guess that was filed away in my mind, but they have a similar situation there.

WILLIAMS: So this wasn't a totally original idea.

RICHTER: Well, as with most things in interpretation, there's always someplace else. I

think the difference was that at Scotty's it was a distinct carpet, where I think the unique thing was like where we incorporated, and when we put in, say, like, the carpeting in the foyer and the dining room, where we actually incorporated two different colors of carpet. That certainly was more unique than what they were doing at Scotty's Castle. The risk that we ran there was the fact that at Scotty's you had much more expansive rooms, and so we were still kind of nervous in the tight quarters of the Truman home whether this was going to work or not, whether people really would more or less keep on the dark gray carpet.

WILLIAMS: Is that the reason that the initial year or so of tours had two rangers?

RICHTER: Well, right. Again, remember Norm's background in law enforcement and security, that he was real nervous about what was going to happen in the home. In fact, he and I had made contingency plans as to how we were going to arrest the first person that tried to steal a fork or whatever off the table. Norm wanted to make a big deal in the newspapers, and we were going to work things out with the U.S. Attorney to really make an example out of the first person. I think that was one reason why our initial staff, why we had so many commissioned rangers on our staff, because we wanted one on site anytime that the home was open, again with this idea of a ranger running down the street apprehending someone with a fork or whatever. And it sounds ludicrous now, but again think back to when we really didn't know what we were getting into. We had no idea about the respect that

most people paid that home. I mean, overall the visitors pretty much were in awe as much as we were when we first visited, and fortunately we didn't have this kind of Keystone Cops situation going on. And to give Norm credit, you know, that he was thinking these things through, what a disaster it would have been if we hadn't thought this through and there would have been some disastrous incidents or whatever if we didn't have rangers there that knew what they were doing as far as the proper way of apprehending somebody.

WILLIAMS: Were there other similar fears about visitor use?

RICHTER: Well, we were concerned just about loving the home to death. We were concerned about the area with the coat and the hat, people bumping their head there by the staircase. There was a bit of concern how the porches would hold up under all the people coming and going. I don't know, I think Norm rubbed off on me. I had a lot of security concerns or safety concerns. Somehow when they put in the reproduction sidewalk they left this big gap between the level of the sidewalk and the ground around it, and to me it looked like a real natural hazard for visitors falling off and tripping and everything. So, sure, there were a lot of those kind of concerns. I think we all were a little concerned about having the table in the dining room set for dinner and that sort of thing, and even in the kitchen we were a bit concerned.

And believe it or not, even though it sounds almost ludicrous that

we'd be nervous with tours of just eight people, I mean, we for a while tried an experiment with just nine on a tour, and the rangers unanimously felt uneasy with just that extra body on the tour. Because there was a lot of pressure from the regional office to increase the numbers on the tours in order to increase the number of visitors every day, and therefore reduce the number of letters of complaint from people that were turned away.

That brings up one thing I didn't work up when I mentioned before. I remember the very first visit there when Jim Dunning was there in early January, and Mr. Dunning said that we should manage the home . . . at the very beginning, to manage the home realizing that we were not going to be able to serve every visitor. And to me, that's to his credit. And that was his marching orders, really, that we would just from the very beginning realize that we had a preservation ethic to uphold and that we would just have to bear the consequences of turning people away from day to day.

WILLIAMS: Was there any particular reason you think he gave you that order? From experience in other parks, or was it just his personal view?

RICHTER: I think it was the combination just of his support for preservation or for managing historic sites, and I guess almost just common sense after seeing the narrow confines of the home, the desire not to totally overwhelm the neighborhood, that he just had the wisdom, I would say, to come up with that.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned earlier that you were hired as the chief ranger within hours

after the superintendent was appointed. Who came next on the permanent staff?

RICHTER: Oh, well, you know that was a long time ago, but I think Joan Sanders came next, the administrative officer. Her formal title was administrative technician. One thing, if you want to get real technical, my original title was going to be chief of interpretation and resource management. But later on when we decided that we definitely needed a professional curator, the regional office felt that in order to justify that, the resource management title should be under the curator. So, as a result, my title then changed to chief ranger.

Again, these memories, it was a long time ago, but it seemed to me we hired our secretary Jenny Hayes next, and then Steve Harrison came along. Steve was a reassignment person also. That seemed to get your curiosity early on, but there were a lot of these, and part of that was just the speed. Joan's case was a good one, where we definitely needed administrative support. I was a novice at administration, and certainly Norm was also, so it just came up that she was willing to take a reassignment from the Lincoln home, and so Norm had every confidence in her from her background and so she was reassigned. As I say, Steve was another case. An interesting case, though, because as this is all coming back to me now, we first of all, though, had a curator on loan. Sue Kopeczynski from Morristown was on loan, and through a number of

circumstances, we ended up offering Steve Harrison the permanent position at the home.

WILLIAMS: And he was the curator here at Jefferson before?

RICHTER: That's correct, and he was a GS-9 already, so it was a GS-9 to GS-9 reassignment.

WILLIAMS: So very few people got promotions.

RICHTER: That's true. I think the promotion . . . Well, I remember Jim Dunning saying the prestige I got as ranger in charge was my promotion rather than any dollars and cents or anything.

WILLIAMS: When did you hire your staff in the interpretation division?

RICHTER: In the spring of '84, in bits and pieces. I think Palma Wilson-Buell was the first we hired, who was hired in as a . . . Now, to make you feel good, she not only got a promotion, she therefore had to go through the competitive hiring system. Her original title was lead park technician, and then later on the technician series was abolished so she became lead park ranger.

WILLIAMS: And you knew her before her promotion?

RICHTER: That's correct, and she had also worked for Norm at Ozark National Scenic Riverways in protection. We also then hired two permanent rangers, one of which we hired through a reassignment from Lava Beds, Cindy Ott, and then Rick Jones, who also happened to be from Lava Beds, [chuckling] was hired through a competitive appointment.

WILLIAMS: How was it determined, your staff needs, in your division?

RICHTER: Well, it started out with me working with Norm on that, a lot of it being done after hours, as a matter of fact, in a more informal nature at several locations. It basically was planning out what we . . . We had made our decision early on that we wanted guided tours rather than fixed station. In fact, I was able to demonstrate to Norm that if anything, if we went to fixed station, we'd need more rangers there because of there being few very clear lines of view, that you'd almost have to have a ranger in the kitchen, the dining room, and the foyer, and then plus one controlling the crowd somehow at the front gate. So we pretty well lined out what we thought our needs would be, and then Norm and Joan Sanders went up to region to state our case and everything to the regional office. And as it turned out, they were receptive.

There had been an earlier visit by just Norm himself, and he had a whole laundry list full of things. And it was sort of a hasty trip, and I remember Randy Pope didn't think he had very solid justifications at that point. And Warren Hill, who was the associate regional director for operations, he felt that we should pretty much manage the home as an all-volunteer force and use volunteers to give tours of the home, contract for curatorial services, contract for maintenance services, and pretty much just keep a paid staff of me, the administrative officer, and the superintendent. So, fortunately, his point of view didn't win out in the end.

SHAVER: There were some major constraints on FTE and the budget at that time, too,

weren't there?

RICHTER: There was.

SHAVER: At least you were told that.

RICHTER: Well, also that helped, the idea that we did have to open. Thank God that Russ Dickenson had made this pledge. Mr. Dickenson visited sometime during the summer that the first-ever meeting of the Oregon-California Trails Association had their inaugural convention in Independence. Mr. Dickenson was addressing that group, and it gave him the opportunity to visit the home for the first time, and he reemphasized the fact that we were going to open on time and it would be a quality experience. I remember one of the newspaper reporters, Brent Schondlemeyer, asking what the fee would be. And Russ Dickenson said that a visit to the Truman home is priceless, and therefore there would be no fee as long as he was director. Well, of course, later on, with later directors we got in the fee business, but that was his point of view. And he was really taken by the home.

SHAVER: Did you take him through?

RICHTER: I took him through, and he was just . . . Went from basement to attic. In fact, I remember in the newspaper article Brent Schondlemeyer was saying how the director was still kind of sweating from being up in the hot attic and everything. He was also taken by the neighborhood. He very quickly realized the importance of the whole neighborhood as adding to the significance of the home itself and was very much taken by that.

WILLIAMS: So you had very little resistance from the region or WASO of implementing the plan that you wanted?

RICHTER: No, I'd say pretty much, if you'd call it resistance, I guess was there was always this question from the regional office about "Well, couldn't you squeeze a few more on each tour?" so as to speak. Now maybe behind the scenes Norm was fighting off other plans and everything that I wasn't privy to, but I really don't think there was a lot. When Charles Odegaard became our regional director, his management style was to question everything, to see if there was solid logic behind decisions and so forth. And he might have given the illusion of questioning a lot of what we were doing, but I think with hindsight he provided a lot of key support. He certainly made sure that the regional staff continued to keep this as a prime focus of their attention. I do remember Mr. Odegaard questioning our system for handicap access with the use of this innovative stair track device. Mr. Odegaard felt there was a way to come up with ramps, and someone in the regional office finally showed him with mathematics with the way the slope, the acceptable slope for such ramps, that the ramp would have to go clear out into Truman Road or somewhere. But overall, I don't really recall a lot of real questioning of what we were doing.

WILLIAMS: From your experience in other parks, would you say this was unusual to receive such support?

RICHTER: Oh, definitely. I think it was the home itself. It would really just sort of

right away just put people in awe. And it was fortunate that we had people like Russ Dickenson having . . . and it was almost sort of a serendipity sort of situation. His reason for being there was to address the Oregon-California Trails Association, and yet it gave him that opportunity to see the home real early. A key development was when Al Swift from the Harpers Ferry Center . . . and he was the real power behind the scenes. He was the deputy manager, and he was taken by the home and made sure that we got all the support that we needed from the Harpers Ferry Center. And we certainly did in many ways: The historic furnishings people, the historic furnishings plan was done; there were some repairs to furnishings that we felt had been damaged, that had either been done by the guards themselves or else damage by nurses or something after Mrs. Truman was so ill. So yes, I think it was the two factors: one, that a lot of lead officials of the park service were able to make visits on site; and, second of all, the fact that we were so close to Omaha helped us out. Andy Ketterson's commitment and John Kawamoto's was of immense value. And then I think just the site itself and the fact of all its possibilities just got people enthusiastic.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe your duties as chief ranger?

RICHTER: How would I describe them?

WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm, your major duties, concerns . . .

RICHTER: I guess two-fold. One was on-site, as far as providing quality experiences for the visitors, making sure that our system ran adequately. Mostly behind

the scenes, making sure we had adequate budgets for staffing to provide these visits in a good way. And then I spent a lot of my time on external things, duties, primarily with the ticket center, being first run by the Jackson County Historical Society and volunteers from the city. And also the fact that the Truman Library remained an important part of our overall plan, because a lot of visitors would continue to visit the Truman Library first, and so it was important that the Truman Library staff be informed of the proper way to get tickets to the Truman home and the fact that they needed to get down to the Truman home ticket center to get those tickets. I spent a lot of my time working with these cooperative groups.

WILLIAMS: Speaking of one, how did the Jackson County Historical Society get to become the operator of the visitor center?

RICHTER: Well, I think first of all with their proximity being right next door with them operating the Marshal's Museum, and again this urgency, this sense of urgency that we had to get operating underway, the support that they had already given us. I mean, they basically were the lead agency in terms of support for historic preservation. Sally Schwenk was always at every one of these town meetings, giving very direct and very blunt statements about historic preservation, the need for preserving the neighborhood. A lot of this though at that time was being negotiated by Norm. You know, I really wasn't in the main loop, as far as those sort of things. The thing that's important to realize, though, is that it was a joint operation. It wasn't just

the historical society, it was also the volunteers from the city that really were the backbone of that operation, although Tony Gentry, who was an employee of the historical society, was just first class as far as being able to work with the volunteers. He just had a certain way with volunteers that was just very motivating, and he was able to get good performance out of them.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever desire a ranger presence in the visitor center?

RICHTER: I looked on that as sort of the ideal situation. But on the other hand, I was more concerned that we have an adequate number of rangers to be able to operate the home itself and the tours, and so I basically, with the available budget that we had, my point of view was we should put that down at the home and I guess use my influence with the people running the ticket center to do a good job. I might add, I spent a lot of time working with various operators of the shuttle bus system. There were several different managers of the shuttle bus system, and of course that was a major either plus or minus for the visitor experience was the way they were treated by the drivers on the shuttle bus, and we had mixed results on that.

WILLIAMS: Did you feel that the historical society operation of the visitor center was a temporary expediency, or did you foresee it going on and on?

RICHTER: I saw it being a little more permanent than it ended up being, although again I didn't have quite the big picture that Norm had about all the different political situations within the Jackson County Historical Society

which were causing turmoil. And because there was turmoil within the society, that was causing stress on the operation in the visitor center. The society really reflected, I think, just the nature of the town of Independence, which . . . I never have lived in a town that loved their politics like Independence—almost a throwback, I think, to Jacksonian democracy—because they love their town meetings, and everybody had his say-so even if it went till 2:00 in the morning or whatever. And the society, for a number of reasons, and not just related to historic preservation I mean, there were money concerns and all kinds of different factions, I guess I'd call them, within the society that were causing problems. So, with hindsight, I think it was a wise decision to move over to the Eastern National Park and Monument Association.

WILLIAMS: The original park headquarters came to a catastrophic end.

RICHTER: Burned to the ground!

WILLIAMS: Were you involved in the choice of headquarters?

RICHTER: I was out of the loop on that one. I mean, that was more between . . . Joan and Norm looked around with GSA at different sites. I remember once early on in the process filling out a form from GSA. It was sort of a questionnaire that would come up with this magic formula of how many square feet you needed for office space. You had to list how many desks you were going to have, how many bodies in this place and that sort of thing.

One interesting thing, really, very early on we were offered the use of what used to be the Secret Service house across the street, which the Secret Service had leased, and the owners wanted to know if we wanted to buy it. And on some very early trip, I can't remember exactly when, it was very early on, Andy Ketterson and I, and maybe Lee Jamieson, looked it over, and we saw that the state of repair of the place was not adequate. It was too small for what we saw our needs being. The basement, the foundation was poor, literally crumbling apart—I mean, we could have reached out and grabbed a handful of foundation—so very quickly we gave up on that idea.

WILLIAMS: So you did do some preliminary investigation.

RICHTER: Yes, but not an awful lot.

WILLIAMS: Did the burning of the proposed headquarters put a crimp in your interpretive program?

RICHTER: Well, it certainly didn't help matters any, although I guess it was more in terms of the fact that suddenly we were kind of like orphans, or looked upon that we were not going to have a roof over our head. I know that we spent some very restless nights thinking about what we were going to do after that disaster happened, and so it was very fortunate that the city offered us the space that they did.

WILLIAMS: Another community organization that has a relationship with the park service is the Junior Service League. How did that come about?

RICHTER: The Junior Service League, of course, had a very close relationship with the Truman Library. In fact, they sort of had a first right to give tours of the Truman Library for school groups and everything. You had to almost be a member of the Junior Service League in order to be able to volunteer to give programs at the Truman Library. So they were very interested in having a role to play at the Truman home. Norm set up a deal where they were going to give special beforehand tours of the home before we opened to the public to raise money for this Bess Wallace Truman Memorial Floral Fund, which would then set up a fund to provide fresh flowers on the dining room table in the home as sort of a memorial to Mrs. Truman, who had also been a member of the Junior Service League. And, in addition to that, Norm allowed them to have a donation box in the Truman home ticket center to keep the fund going.

WILLIAMS: So this relationship was established after Norm became superintendent?

RICHTER: I think in more clear-cut ways. I sort of danced around that one beforehand. There were some people within the Junior Service League that expected that we would work out a similar relationship with them, as far as them giving the tours of the home, but that didn't really work out.

SHAVER: Let's take a break.

[End #4127; Begin #4128A]

WILLIAMS: There are a couple of things I'd like to go back on, and one is Ron Cockrell's historic resource study and historic structures report. Was he

doing those while you were ranger in charge?

RICHTER: Yes, because I remember one time we had all kinds of region people down for one week. I was doing a lot of entertaining after hours—I saw that as one of my roles of diplomatic relations with the regional staff—because I remember we had Lee Jamieson and Fran Krupka and another historic restoration person, and then Ron Cockrell was on one of his research visits. He spent a lot of time researching at the Truman Library, and particularly their photo collection, and certainly worked closely with Liz Safly in getting a lot of background material also. You see, his first project was writing the “history and significance” section of the historic structures report, and that whole bandwagon got underway with Andy Ketterson’s support. That was going along with the same time the Solomon, Claybaugh and Young “existing conditions” section of the historic structures report. So as I said, Ron started out . . . He was at that time a seasonal historian in the regional office.

WILLIAMS: During Mrs. Daniel’s visits before the home opened, she did remove things from the home. Is that correct?

RICHTER: In a manner of speaking, yes.

WILLIAMS: What was your understanding or the park service’s understanding of the ownership of objects?

RICHTER: Well, as I said before, I mean it really was a very hazy situation. The will was hazy. I guess I would have interpreted the will in terms of only very

personal objects. If I were to go to my parents' home today, I mean, I might have left behind a weight lifting set or something or a stamp collection, those sort of things that I might have just left behind because I didn't have room in my car to take them with me. But Mrs. Daniel's point of view was sort of twofold. She identified some objects that she felt belonged to Mrs. Wallace, and actually gave Dr. Zobrist, who then gave me a list of things that were to go to Mrs. Wallace. Then there were some things that Mrs. Daniel just wanted for safekeeping up at the Truman Library. She had more confidence in their security for objects up at the library. And then there was this third category of things that actually were to be shipped back to New York to the Daniels' residence or to their storage room that they had. And part of this I'm not to this day really clear on because some of these things were taken out of the home before I ever got there, like the Winston Churchill painting and the Grandma Moses painting.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever put up any resistance or discourage her from taking things?

RICHTER: I didn't discourage her particularly. Certainly when I was reporting the situation to the regional office, I'm sure they . . . or they definitely knew I was dismayed to a degree. In particular, I can think of some objects that were taken out of the study that I felt changed the whole atmosphere of the study, the icon being one example. But even like there was a chair in the study that we were ordered to take back to Mrs. Wallace's, also a little tiny child's chair that Mrs. Daniel said belonged to one of her sons. With those

three things being missing from the study, it did to me change the condition of the study. And then, of course, if you realize that . . . my understanding, the Truman Library staff had, quote, “cleaned up the study a bit,” in terms of there not being quite the helter-skelter of books that there used to be in there. I did have a little bit of qualms of conscience, in terms of the visitor when they saw the study, that it really wasn’t quite what it could have been.

WILLIAMS: Were you around when Mr. Truman’s armchair was removed from the study?

RICHTER: That was before my time. That was in that hazy period around by the funeral when Mrs. Daniel was in town.

WILLIAMS: Did anyone explain the circumstances?

RICHTER: Well, first of all, what I understood—the story from Liz Safly, so this is all hearsay—was that Mrs. Daniel thought the chair was hideous and basically wanted it thrown in the trash. However, before that was done, a local furniture store, and I can’t even begin to remember the name of it, anyway they claim they had only loaned the chair to the Trumans, and then they claimed ownership of it, and it went back there. Well, later on, Norm Reigle attempted to . . . We were hoping the chair was still there somewhere in the furniture store [chuckling], and Norm did make an effort, and with no success, of getting the chair back.

WILLIAMS: How involved were you in the plans for dedication week?

RICHTER: The overall planning was really much beyond me. In fact, we even brought

in a gentleman named Dave Herrera from the regional office who, in theory, was planning the event. He turned out to be a lot less useful than we had hoped, in terms of his planning ability. Norm sort of saved the day for us, and Norm again, that was one of his real strong points was planning. Joan Sanders had a lot to do with it. Norm was in charge of all the big arrangements, things like working with Dr. Zobrist on having the Truman Library Institute sponsor a lunch for the dignitaries and that sort of thing. My level was more at an operational level, coming up with a plan, where to have rangers positioned up at the ceremony, having a plan for how the other rangers would show the home to the dignitaries immediately after the event, and that sort of thing. So I was down more at the level of planning the operational part of things.

WILLIAMS: What do you recall about that day?

RICHTER: Well, I think the first thing was a sense of panic because there was a prediction of rain and everything, and we really weren't really hoping that it would be raining that day. We were scrambling around to get raincoats and have them stashed at strategic locations up at the site, at the library, in case we had to quickly hand out raincoats to all the rangers.

I think two things stood out. One thing, overall I was a little disappointed with the turnout from the local community. We had a lot of empty seats. I was pleased with my role. I felt, if anything, I'd over-planned things. I had little lists to do for every individual, a timetable: "At

one o'clock you should be here in the parking lot, at 1:05 you should move over to this point," and that sort of thing.

A little anecdote: I was also in charge of getting the dignitaries ready to march out onto the podium, and was real nervous and had this list and had to pair off everybody. Well, I managed to pair them off, but it was in a mirror image: Everyone that should have been in line on the left-hand side was on the right-hand side, and vice versa. It all worked out in the end.

They were all on the stage, and then in terms of how close they were to the podium it was fine, except everybody that should have been on the left was on the right, and vice versa. Only a few people knew about that faux pas. And also I had forgot to tell people that when I led them onto the stage that I would be walking off the stage and that they should stay put at their chair, and so a couple of them started walking to follow me off the podium, but they figured it out.

Ron Cockrell was pretty nervous. He had written the speech for the director, Mr. Dickenson, to deliver and everything, so he was real nervous as to how the speech would be received and whether anyone would find any fault with the speech or with historic accuracy or whatever.

WILLIAMS: What about down at the home?

RICHTER: Well, we had everything, I think, well in hand. That part of it worked well. We had an arrangement . . . Superintendent Schoeber was in charge of as soon as Mrs. Daniel went out the back door that we were going to put her in

a car and take her back to the Alameda Hotel, and meanwhile the press were all waiting to interview her out at the front. So we put one over on the press because we got her out of sight without any difficulty.

WILLIAMS: Was that at her request?

RICHTER: Pretty much so. Also, as she was going out the back door, at the kitchen table she said, "May I?" and sort of rearranged the table setting a little bit.

WILLIAMS: So you were with her when she was going through the home?

RICHTER: I was not. See, I was still up at the aftermath of the public ceremony, because immediately after the ceremony we then had the premiere showing of our audiovisual program, which the Truman Library gave us their big theater to show. And the idea was that we would give several showings of that till everybody that wanted to had seen it. That was a little nerve-wracking, in that the show made it to Independence in only about three or four days before our big event, so that was a little nerve-wracking. So basically I just was confident that we'd work through the scenario of the rangers that were going to be at . . . Basically we had some rangers posted at the home that were not present at the dedication ceremony, and then we had other rangers that were up at the [library] for the ceremony.

SHAVER: You didn't do all this with your staff? You had to import some, didn't you?

WILLIAMS: Oh, we did. I know we borrowed the chief ranger, Larry Blake, from George Washington Carver National Monument, and Superintendent Gentry Davis even helped out, and I really can't recall who else. We did

bring in some outsiders, though, to help out with . . . Tom Danton from the regional office in interpretation, I know we had him posted in a parking lot at one point in the festivities. He helped out. Obviously we had a lot of regional office dignitaries there, particularly those that had had a role in the restoration of the home or getting it ready in time for the dedication and grand opening.

WILLIAMS: Were there some kind of special tours for a few days after the dedication?

RICHTER: Well, as I mentioned before, the next day there were tours for . . . I guess you'd called them "Class B" dignitaries. The "Class A" dignitaries got a look at the home the first day for a couple of hours afterwards. Well, actually there were three sorts. There was the platform guests, the number one dignitaries. They were taken down immediately and shown the home. Mrs. Daniel—

SHAVER: There were different-color tickets involved. [chuckling]

RICHTER: There was even different-color tickets involved, depending on what rank you were. Anyway, the one rank of dignitaries that were invited, invited guests, their color tickets enabled them to go down and get a tour that very day. And we shuttled them down, which was another nerve-wracking situation because there were a lot of elderly people and the van that we were using had a high clearance, so it was a little tough to get them in and out of the van.

WILLIAMS: Were these genuine tours of the home?

RICHTER: They were more walk-throughs. And then as I said, then there were these other people that held the other color tickets, they were shown through the next day. And then my memory holds then it was the following day was this day for the Junior Service League, who sold tickets to raise money for the flower fund.

WILLIAMS: And that summer there were also evening tours. Why was that?

RICHTER: Boy, you have a good memory. That's great. It's all coming back to me now. We did feel that . . . again, I guess that was also part of this fund-raising activity. That's right, and we used Junior Service League personnel.

SHAVER: To take reservations and such.

RICHTER: Right. I guess that it was also a way . . . I guess we didn't raise, I can't really remember exactly the circumstances. I guess it was a concern for the people of Independence to be able to get into the home, because we had envisioned that during the day we would be so overwhelmed by visitors from out of town that residents of Independence who work for a living during the day would not have an opportunity to get a ticket during the day, and that's why we then came up with this idea, with the help of the Junior Service League, to have these evening tours by reservation. And the Junior Service League was kind enough to take the reservations through a phone-in system for two very active days of phone calls and sort of swamped their telephone number. And it did work out well because I think we won a lot of friends that way. I remember one night it was sort of First Baptist

Church of Independence night. They had all the reservations for that night.

WILLIAMS: Speaking of which, I'd like to talk more about that controversy and your participation.

RICHTER: Oh, I had a feeling you might.

WILLIAMS: In your last interview five years ago you promised that that could take a whole other tape. [laughter] It may not do that, but . . .

RICHTER: Although now with time things have mellowed a bit also, tempers have cooled and that sort of thing.

WILLIAMS: Was this controversy already in progress when you arrived?

RICHTER: Oh, very definitely. The reverend had definitely had plans for a new sanctuary. His church basically served the whole Kansas City community. It was not just a little neighborhood church for Independence as it was in earlier years, and with that sort of a congregation, he certainly had need of a larger sanctuary. When I arrived, there was a lot of rumors, some of which I think were just created for my benefit to scare me into overreacting. There were rumors that he planned to totally demolish the old sanctuary, which of course would have a drastic impact on not only the neighborhood but even the view out the porch in the back. And of course, as much as possible we were hoping that we would be able to offer visitors an experience similar to what Mr. Truman or Mrs. Truman would have been seeing out the back porch. But by the time I got there, they definitely had their plans for the new sanctuary underway.

WILLIAMS: What was the city's reaction?

RICHTER: You mean city government or city in general?

WILLIAMS: City government. Were you rowing upstream on the issue?

RICHTER: That's a pretty good analogy. Again, the whole idea of property rights in Independence is just a very basic, fundamental ethic within Independence, as I could perceive it. And then the whole issue of the church's rights was pretty fundamental, as it is in this country in general, and of course it's a major historic preservation issue whether churches can be compelled to live up to historic preservation codes or whatever. On the other hand, there was also great concern within the neighborhood and other elements of the local historic preservation movement about the ultimate result of these plans for expansion and for putting in a parking lot in what was then a vacant area, but also nearby residences and . . . What I gathered was the fear that this was just the beginning, that this was just the first of many plans for expansion. I remember somebody telling me they eventually planned to put in a seminary and a high school, a senior citizen home, and just all kinds of things. As a result, there was a lot of hot tempers on both sides of the subject. The church members looked upon the neighborhood . . . In fact, one church bulletin talked about the mean-spirited neighbors. I mean, the tempers were that point on both sides. The church looked upon the situation as definitely being an infringement of their rights to expand, and as the reverend liked to say on many occasions, "A church that doesn't

expand will die ultimately.” And so they saw their basic interests as a church being at stake in their right to put up this new sanctuary.

WILLIAMS: Was your primary concern with the landmark district or the city heritage district?

RICHTER: Well, as I said before, I guess I took more of the bigger picture. I was interested in the whole ambiance of the area within eyesight of the Truman home. And as you said before, it was sort of rowing uphill, realizing that progress is going to take place, but trying to temper that as much as possible. Obviously we were all very grateful that the church did not demolish the old sanctuary. That was one of the hot rumors, that they were going to demolish the old sanctuary. I guess my concern was in terms of the precedent, that would it ever end? Would they continue to buy up . . . There were rumors that they had purchased other property. There were a couple of elderly ladies that owned some property on Delaware Street. The property was rundown because these were elderly ladies who didn't have the financial means to keep up their property. There were rumors the church had purchased their property and was going to destroy those two homes to cut in a new entry point to their parking lot facilities off of Delaware Street. Well, then you're getting into some major concerns about the nearby ambiance of the neighborhood. So, as I say, with time and hindsight, I mean the drastic fears didn't take place, but at the time it was some tense times.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever meet Reverend Hughes face to face?

RICHTER: I did make a meeting with Reverend Hughes while I was still working by myself up at the Truman Library. In fact, that's when he made his offer to me about the parking lot. And he did ask me if I had any opinion about how he could cool the tempers or the hot times that were going on. As I recall, my advice to him was to try to talk to people as individuals and try to avoid the town meeting approach, when everybody is just up in arms and coming at loggerheads in both directions, and to try and be as informative as possible about what his plans were.

WILLIAMS: As it turned out, are you relatively pleased with the neighborhood as it is now?

RICHTER: I guess I would like to have seen the general management plan implemented with the neighborhood trust fund initiated. I felt that was a really innovative idea that Mr. Odegaard had come up with, a compromise between the National Park Service getting heavy-handed and buying up all kinds of property, and yet on the same way guaranteeing . . . I mean, the one example I gave you is a good example. It's an older neighborhood. I mean, the people in the neighborhood, many of them are getting on in years, and I saw the neighborhood trust as being a good way to provide that long-lasting support for keeping up the neighborhood. To be honest with you, I have not been in the neighborhood since the shuttle's demise. I don't know how that all worked out. I was a bit alarmed when I heard there

would be no shuttle, as far as how that would impact the neighborhood. As I said before, at least the old sanctuary of the First Baptist Church remained. Obviously, the view out the back porch is much different with the new sanctuary, but on the other hand, we haven't had other buildings going up as were feared at the time.

WILLIAMS: A lot of the stories that interpreters tell, there doesn't seem to be documentation for.

RICHTER: Oh, really? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And we all assume that they were passed down from you early interpreters.

RICHTER: Kind of an oral history but not being recorded.

WILLIAMS: Yes, and if you don't mind, I would like to just go through and maybe document some of those stories.

RICHTER: Oh, I won't mind. Now remember again that it's been a few years since I've been there and . . .

WILLIAMS: I guess the easiest way would be roughly to go room by room, and I know that you gave a few tours in your time.

RICHTER: Oh, yes, there were a few budget crises, or if somebody . . . one ranger became ill, I would be down there giving my fair share of tours.

WILLIAMS: So, say for instance, on the back porch, what would you usually tell people about the back porch? What did you consider the important interpretive story there?

RICHTER: Oh, okay. Well, I think again it was sort of the informal part of the

Trumans' life. I mean, so much of the home, on the first floor especially, except for the kitchen and the back porch, it was a pretty much formal impression. And yet, from all I've heard, a lot of the Trumans' lifestyle was very informal, and so to me the porch had a lot of benefit, for a number of reasons, particularly again as I said earlier, you could almost put chills up peoples' spines saying, "Imagine Mr. Truman and Mrs. Truman sitting right here and having a cold drink on the back porch, or Mrs. Truman's bridge club meeting." You could really get to more of the family atmosphere. And particularly when we did the home, when we reversed the tour route and the porch was the first part of the tour, I saw that as very important in establishing sort of the privacy, informal kind of part of the Trumans' lifestyle. Because you could also talk about the porch, the fact that they deliberately let the plants grow up to protect their privacy. Also, I used to talk about "Imagine that this view that you're seeing here out this back porch is very much like what Mr. Truman would have seen." And also, I know this is getting a little long-winded, but you also could talk about the family compound from back there and talk about the significance of the two Wallace homes. And quite often I was pretty lucky, Mrs. Wallace would be out getting her newspaper or going off to the beauty parlor, and of course that was a special treat for the visitors, and without interfering with her privacy. I mean, she usually didn't know that she was being pointed at and people were waving at her. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, while we're on the subject, I believe it was the summer of 1985 that the tour route was reversed. Why did you make that decision?

RICHTER: Well, it came about that the superintendent did what he called an "internal operations evaluation," where he personally questioned each of the rangers behind closed doors to get their candid views on things. It was the unanimous decision that people hated being the trailer.

WILLIAMS: I think I remember that conference, now that you brought it up.

RICHTER: Talk about being nervous, I was quite nervous myself. So anyway Norm then had a session with me, and so he brought up that there really was a problem of morale, that people hated being the trailer, particularly the way we scheduled things, you'd end up trailing the same ranger for the whole day, and hear the same stories, the same jokes, over and over again for the whole day. It meant for kind of a tedious day. So Norm felt that we had proven now that we weren't going to have this Keystone Cops approach, where we'd be out chasing down theft day after day after day, and we just had a little more confidence. And we also reversed the tour route because we felt, in terms of the line of sight for the interpreter being by themselves, that it was just going to work out better by going through the home that way. That had some fringe benefits, in that in the old days it was very difficult at the end of the tour to get people back out to the front. They would tend to dawdle in the back yard, and it was just really difficult. By going the other way around, they were anxious to see the home, so they just

walked right . . . You know, they almost trampled you down to get to the back porch. In addition then, at the end of the tour you opened up the front door, and if your timing was accurate, the shuttle was just coming up and you'd say, "Well, look here, the shuttle is here. Do watch your step as you go out the front door, it's a bright light," and they would hustle onto the shuttle. We didn't think of that ahead of time, but it did work out in terms of making life a little easier for the interpreter, because the ultimate challenge was always how to get a meaningful program done in fifteen to twenty minutes.

What that did also then, of course, in terms of manpower or womanpower, you eliminated one position on the schedule. Rick Jones came up with the idea of compressing people's day. If the guideline was eight tours during the day, instead of spreading those out through the whole day, that maybe have them go back-to-back and have half the day at the home and the other half at the ticket center to either work on a special project or work in the ticket center or do something special, as a way of motivating the permanent rangers in particular.

WILLIAMS: Was that a problem originally to have the interpretive staff solely at the home almost?

RICHTER: I think it was sort of a burnout situation, particularly for our permanent rangers who, after all, they were being paid GS-5 rather than as seasonals who were GS-4. So, therefore, as Norm would frequently remind me, we

needed to treat them a little different, to provide them with some meaningful projects or responsibilities to not only keep up their motivation but then in other ways just justify the way we were using them.

WILLIAMS: What were those special projects?

RICHTER: Oh, a lot of standard operating procedures needed to be done, safety considerations, bomb threat procedures. We did have our, at least from my knowledge, our one and only bomb threat was that first summer. We didn't have any big disaster. I really admired Steve Harrison's courage to go in with the dog that was brought in to sniff out for the bomb. I mean, after all, he did have a wife and children, and he went in with the dog so as not to . . . trying to protect the home, the objects, from the bomb search squad, as you might say. As I say, there were other special projects, research projects, ultimately research for exhibits within the ticket center. When Eastern National Park and Monument Association came in and we had the opportunity to completely rehab and improve the ticket center, part of that was also doing exhibits, small panel-type exhibits within the visitor center. And also it then gave the rangers time just to have more opportunities to do basic research themselves and read the books, the important books on the Trumans, read the books written by the Trumans themselves that would give them a more family outlook on their interpretation.

WILLIAMS: Well, back to the tour, I guess.

RICHTER: Okay, yeah, we're into the kitchen. Now please interrupt if I'm leaving out

one of these legends that you want to pursue or whatever. The kitchen went right along with this informal—

WILLIAMS: Let me interrupt.

RICHTER: Go ahead, interrupt.

WILLIAMS: Often on the back porch people talk about Mr. Truman's dislike for air conditioning.

RICHTER: Okay. I guess I got that from Liz Safly and Pat Kerr. It was sort of funny though, somehow I got that idea that he disliked air conditioning and he liked the nice breezes on the back porch. But then you get to thinking for a moment. In his later years he had an air conditioner in his downstairs bedroom, he had an air conditioner in his study where he spent a lot of his time, and my impression, what I understood that he did in the morning hours . . . This was after he no longer was able to get up to the library every day, but he would chew the fat for a while in the kitchen in the morning, which also had an air conditioner. So, if it gets down to it, perhaps that sort of story was overblown a bit, at least in his later years when he wasn't in as good a health, and maybe it was more with doctor's orders. The story I heard was that the doctors insisted on air conditioning in the downstairs bedroom when he was recovering from gallbladder surgery. Apparently that was the time when the fan went in on the back porch, also. Some friends got him that fan on the back porch.

WILLIAMS: Well, I've heard the expression used that he said, "You shouldn't monkey

around with the weather,” and I have yet to find a documented source.

RICHTER: [laughter] That sounds something that Rick Jones would have put out. You got to realize one of the bad parts of this trailing business was that if one person kind of embellished their tour, the word would get around. I guess that was a challenge to keep from ending up with this hybrid tour. You know, having everybody’s little story. It would be difficult to keep that from happening when people were doing the trailing.

[End #4128A; Begin #4128B]

RICHTER: Yeah, the kitchen. Well, certainly the kitchen just about interpreted itself, although with hindsight maybe we overdid the kitchen, I mean in terms of people’s memory of the home. You know, they talk about the wild color schemes and that sort of thing; of course there’s a lot more to the home than just that. Again, just as with the back porch, I would touch on sort of the personal touch. Sometimes I would talk about the role of this 1950s image and the so-called improvements, the modernizations that the Trumans made were actually rather limited. You could talk about things being behind closed doors in the pantry. I tried as much as possible to paint a picture of the lifestyle of the Trumans, instead of identifying every bit of furniture and everything, which was very difficult, particularly if people were conditioned to what I call “bad home tours” that were nothing but a category, an itemized list of furniture and everything.

Oh, you could talk about the story of Margaret painting the kitchen

and that sort of thing. There at least is a letter in one of the books about Margaret writing to her dad about painting the kitchen, so . . . What in the kitchen have you heard that is sort of legendary?

WILLIAMS: Well, most people now still talk about the colors and Mr. Truman's favorite sandwiches, getting toast out of the toaster with the metal tongs.

RICHTER: Mm-hmm. I was always wondering how he kept from electrocuting himself that way.

SHAVER: The wallpaper, the selection.

WILLIAMS: The wallpaper, but that's in the structure report. He picked that out when he was . . .

RICHTER: I don't know, again it could be a Liz Safly story, but my understanding is they took the wallpaper sample book into him in the study, and he just sort of pointed to this one sample and said, "That's what should go up." My memory was that was later on in his life—I mean, maybe even by '70 or '71. It was real late in his life when they did that, when he picked out that patriotic wallpaper scheme.

WILLIAMS: As far as you know, those stories are fairly accurate?

RICHTER: I think so. No, it certainly is not something that suddenly was embellished by one of our original rangers.

WILLIAMS: Going into the butler's pantry and the dining room, what would you emphasize?

RICHTER: I think the main thing was I always had difficulty . . . people would tend to

dawdle in the kitchen and in the butler's pantry, and it was just getting them into the dining room. Talking a little bit about the . . . Well, there was sort of a natural progression then if you talked about preparing meals and then "Let's go see where they had their formal meals." You know, I would talk about the fact that they would most of the time have breakfast and lunch in the kitchen, and then talk about dinner, and tie in that to the family traditions and the fact that family traditions were very important, and continued even when it was just the two Trumans, having dinner in the formal part of the house in the dining room.

WILLIAMS: So was your impression that they continued that in their retirement years?

RICHTER: That, again, I think I got a lot of my information from Liz and Pat from their time when they were doing this inventory. I don't know, there again some of this is sort of legendary. But my impression was that even when it was just the two of them that they would continue to have the evening meal in the dining room.

WILLIAMS: What about the people sitting at the table? There seems to be some confusion.

RICHTER: Apparently so. My memory, at least, I went with the version that Mrs. Daniel had. But I apparently—

SHAVER: Which version? [chuckling]

RICHTER: Well, and that's a good question, because she had different versions. I went with the story that Mrs. Truman's mother was at the . . . The head of the

table was by the kitchen so they could keep an eye on the hired help, and then Mr. Truman was at the other end of the table, and Mrs. Truman was at the right-hand side, and then Margaret was on down by Madge or whatever.

But as I say, I mean that apparently is a bit of a mystery now as to where they sat. Has anyone maybe called up Mrs. Daniel again to get a clarification of that?

WILLIAMS: She might have a whole different version.

RICHTER: Well, maybe once and for all, just tell her it's one last chance to . . .

SHAVER: That's no worse than the period after the *S*.

WILLIAMS: There are stories about the chandelier, and I believe we did work on the chandelier before the dedication.

RICHTER: That's right.

WILLIAMS: Were you around?

RICHTER: I'm pretty sure it was Lee Jamieson and maybe Fran Krupka. It seemed to me though it was a regional office staff effort of reinforcing it. And then later on, as part of the overall rehab, I think they went back and even did a better job of it during the formal contract period. It's a little . . . I'm sorry, just a little hazy to me.

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Wallace tell you stories about the chandelier?

RICHTER: Well, that her husband helped unpack it and he put it up with a few screws. And then we discovered later he kind of missed the joists, and it's a miracle that . . . Our story was that it was a gift from Margaret, or Mrs. Daniel,

from New York.

WILLIAMS: In her last visit she said that she helped unpack it, and one of the crystal bauble things was missing and she had to dig around in the box and finally found it. She said she helped hang it up.

RICHTER: I see. I don't remember that one.

WILLIAMS: Well, that was just in her May visit.

RICHTER: I see.

WILLIAMS: And the high chair?

RICHTER: Well, you got the story that as Margaret got bigger they cut the legs down—again, Uncle George, the handyman, approach.

WILLIAMS: Did she tell us that or did Aunt May?

RICHTER: I first heard that story from Mrs. Wallace more so than Mrs. Daniel. I don't remember Mrs. Daniel really sharing that.

SHAVER: You and I had talked about this several years ago, that you had seemed to get the impression that Mrs. Wallace was trying to find a niche for her husband in her stories, trying to almost find a place for him and give him some sort of . . .

RICHTER: Status or whatever, sure. I think so, in a way. I once attended some sort of program by a doctor or something who was talking about why elderly people tend to repeat the same stories over and over again, and it is sort of a way where they're reinforcing either their importance or the importance of the family members, or just making it clear what their status was, and that's

very important to elderly people. And so perhaps that's why the pie plate story would come up every visit, and things like George Wallace being the handyman, that in a way that Mrs. Wallace was sort of establishing his importance within that family compound atmosphere or whatever. I mean, you know, if you think about it, Mrs. Truman certainly overshadowed things there being the wife of a President of the United States, and so maybe there was something to that about why Mrs. Wallace would return to certain favorite stories over and over again.

SHAVER: And you would hear so little about the other Wallace girls, almost nothing.

RICHTER: Right.

WILLIAMS: I guess the study is the next room.

RICHTER: And as I said before, in little ways I felt a little guilty about that, but I would appeal to people's imagination of Mr. Truman being there. I would try to fill in the missing link there and talk about there being piles and piles of books, using as my reference point that photograph that was taken while Thomas Hart Benton was doing the preliminary sketching for his painting called "The Old President."

WILLIAMS: Which, by the way, the painting was on exhibit at the Truman Library the whole past year—

RICHTER: Oh, on my last visit, yeah, I did see it up there.

WILLIAMS: It's nice that you can mention that.

RICHTER: Right, that's right, and make a connection that way. Well, one thing that I

did forget earlier on, and it goes along with both the dedication ceremonies and just the cooperation of the Truman Library, is that they had a long-lasting exhibit on the home, using artifacts that were from the home that were in their care, you might say, and definitely enhanced the visitors' experiences that summer being able to see that exhibit also.

Anyway, in terms of the study, I would talk about the importance. I had heard from a number of Independence residents that the shade was up enough. They claim to have seen Mr. Truman through the window. As I say, "claim." But it was from a number of different sources, that they could see him, and at night they could see his silhouette in that study.

WILLIAMS: And is it true that many of them thought it was a bedroom?

RICHTER: Apparently. Yes, several have said that to me, too, perhaps because it was one of the last lights to go out in the home in the evening. There is one bit of controversy, that some people had told me that Mrs. Truman, after the president's death, that she just kept it the way it was, felt very bad about even being in that room because it was so intimately connected to Mr. Truman. And I gathered that it had even been a refuge for Mr. Truman back in those early years when he was living with the in-laws there, and that that was his small little niche in the home. So, anyway, I had this one point of view that Mrs. Truman never set foot in there after the president's death, and yet I know for a fact, because he told me, Senator Eagleton on his first visit to the home, said that his last visit with Mrs. Truman was in

that very study and that she was real concerned about George Brett, whether he was going to hit .400. That was the year that George Brett nearly hit .400.

WILLIAMS: That was 1980.

RICHTER: And so that seems to be contradictory, that if she felt that way, then why would she invite in Tom Eagleton? Even though Senator Eagleton claimed to be one of the last of the Truman protégés in politics, I can't believe he was considered a close family friend or anything. And I remember, I think it was General Dawson . . . I sat next to him one year at the Truman Week ceremonies, when I was invited to the dinner out at the Stephenson's Restaurant, and he claimed to have visited with Mrs. Truman within the study. So I just thought I'd further confuse the issue a bit.

WILLIAMS: That goes against the standard line that visitors really didn't get past the front room.

RICHTER: Well, it does that, too. It certainly does, and I mean I know that those two individuals were very clear about the fact that they met with Mrs. Truman in there.

WILLIAMS: Visitors often ask which chair the Trumans sat in. There are photos, but . . .

RICHTER: Well, and of course that was a tough one, and I admit I told a white lie. Of course, though, I usually worded it in a little different way. I'd say, "The president sat over in that location." I did not say, "He sat in that chair." Now, everyone would say, "Oh yeah, there's the chair!" I normally would

say, “In that location the president sat.” One thing though, this thing about the study, though, just to further cloud the issue, like these visits with Tom Eagleton and even maybe General Dawson might have been at the point where the nurses were really running Mrs. Truman’s life and she didn’t have much say-so when she was wheelchair-bound. Very likely that could have been another situation.

SHAVER: That’s not the easiest room to roll into.

RICHTER: You’re right, you’re right.

SHAVER: And I don’t think she was totally committed to the wheelchair until ’81 or something like that.

RICHTER: Okay. So anyway I just thought I’d cloud the issue a little bit there on that.

SHAVER: Well, Rufus [Burrus] and the air conditioner, too, in the study. He talked to you at the Truman farm home dedication once upon a time about the air conditioner in the study. Do you recall that one?

RICHTER: Boy, I sure don’t.

SHAVER: He had claimed to help put it in and take it out.

RICHTER: Oh, I only remember that some sources had maintained that it was a seasonal sort of thing, that the air conditioner wasn’t around year-round, and therefore I certainly advocated that that should be one of the seasonal changes at the home, that we remove the air conditioner in the wintertime and then put it back in. Maintenance staff probably didn’t look too kindly towards that kind of suggestion.

WILLIAMS: While I think about it, did you have any stories about the Secret Service?
That seems to be still a hazy issue as to when they left.

RICHTER: You mean after Mrs. Truman's death?

WILLIAMS: They were certainly gone by the time you arrived.

RICHTER: Right. My understanding was it was real quick after Mrs. Truman's death, and that was the problem then with the executor of the will, Mr. Chisholm, having to bring in a security force.

I remember early on I, in a way, might have saved the day. The telephone people came in and wanted to rip out of the barn—or as we called it, the garage—wanted to rip out some of the telephone switching equipment that had been used by the Secret Service, and I convinced them not to. And I'm not sure if it's still there or whether it later disappeared anyway. And they literally just cut cables and stuff. I mean, it seemed like they made a really hasty exit after Mrs. Truman's death.

SHAVER: Did you talk to Bob Lockwood much and get any impressions from him, especially when you hired him to mow the lawn?

RICHTER: He was very tight-lipped to me. It was sort of like he was observing the code of silence of the Secret Service or whatever. I mean, he would talk a bit about his role in cutting grass, but he didn't have much to say about overall operations inside or whatever. Although I do think he was the one, or at least he told me about them eventually spending the night inside the home, and thereby sort of beating up the sofa that's in the living room. And

of course we all would talk about the beat-up sofa being this homely touch of the Trumans, and maybe Mrs. Truman would have been appalled to have had the lumpy sofa in that condition.

WILLIAMS: Did he ever discuss the Trumans' attitude toward the Secret Service in general?

RICHTER: You know, not directly. As I said, he was pretty tight-lipped with me, unless we were talking about mowing the grass.

SHAVER: What brought you to hire this former Secret Service chief—

RICHTER: Well, it's real simple: the former experience. I mean, he had experience going for him. [chuckling] I actually hired somebody else for the first lawn-mowing. Several civic leaders, including the Junior Service League, wanted to have a ceremony to honor Senator Eagleton for his role in, quote, "saving the home," unquote, as far as getting the park service to take it and everything. And so before that ceremony, I arranged for just a local . . . I almost literally looked through the yellow pages for a lawn-mowing man. And they did an okay job, but in fact the guy, I think, didn't want to ever do it again, because the bid he gave me was way under the amount of time it took to mow all that grass. So, after that I went and looked up Mr. Lockwood, and he was agreeable to taking it on for a while, particularly with his son working for Mr. Lockwood. And then later on we had the Dan Cortes Lawn Mowing Service, and Antioch Lawn Mowing Service after that, and then we went back to Dan Cortes, and we've had a whole series of

lawn-mowing situations.

SHAVER: But he was faithful to it?

RICHTER: For whatever reason. I think it was mainly this aspect it was a way for his son to earn some money and everything.

SHAVER: Oh, so it was really his son that was doing it?

RICHTER: They worked together as a team, but I think the money ended up in his son's pocket.

SHAVER: Okay. I never realized that.

WILLIAMS: Well, back to the home. From the dining room you go into the foyer.

RICHTER: Well, there we would certainly talk about the more formal side of the Trumans' life, which obviously it looked very formal. Everybody would be stretching their necks to look up the staircase, and be very disappointed that we weren't going up the staircase. My point of view, I really hope someday that there is a way to show the upstairs, because I think it would give a more balanced view of the Trumans' lifestyle. Because the upstairs in many ways is a more informal part of their way of life, and I do think it would balance it because a lot of that downstairs is a very formal look. The parlor, very formal.

Sometimes I'd talk about the LBJ photographs. Of course, probably as other people have said, when Mrs. Daniel visits there are certain treatments to the home. She came in on one of her visits and said that her dad didn't like President Johnson that much and took away some of

the photographs. Because there are several photographs of President Johnson on the piano.

It was a good opportunity there to talk about again the extended family. Parts of that parlor and the living room go back to the old days when Madge Gates Wallace was in charge of the home. Sometimes I would talk about Margaret being disappointed with the piano when she was expecting the train set, that story. Perhaps that's been a bit overblown. I would try, though, to put some chills up people's spine by saying, "Imagine the president sitting there and playing the piano." And of course they'd all say, "Oh, the 'Missouri Waltz'!" And then I'd say, "Well, you know, he didn't really care for that tune, but he was too polite not to play it if asked," and that sort of thing. And in the living room, you know, I would play again on the idea of "Think of the Trumans sitting in those chairs and receiving guests, or else Mrs. Truman going through her mail in her later years in that one particular chair." So what particular legend . . .

Oh, and of course the hat and the coat being the climax to the visit. As you probably have heard from Steve Harrison, we've always wondered if the hat doesn't have any kind of sweat stains inside of it as to . . .

WILLIAMS: Well, television watching? Some people say she watched baseball, wrestling matches, the Olympics, all sorts of different—

RICHTER: Well, and also I heard one story that she got up real early in the morning to watch Prince Charles's wedding—this was in her later years. My

understanding was that she was quite a fan of TV, and then the story is Mr. Truman would only watch the news and public affairs events. Or if there was something where their daughter was on television, they'd be sure to watch that.

WILLIAMS: Well, once the home opened, what were your major projects and problems as the chief ranger the next three and a half years?

RICHTER: Well, I spent a lot of time, as all chief rangers do, with a never-ending flow of paperwork and reports. A lot of it had to do just with . . . We had an adequate budget in order to do business. As I said before, it was really done on a shoestring, in terms that if one ranger was sick or on annual leave it was pretty tight sailing down there. As I said before, I spent a lot of my time just with coordinating visiting with these cooperating people. I spent a lot of time downstairs, particularly that first year it was an all-volunteer force. Genrose Welch, who was the original person in charge downstairs, hired by the Jackson County Historical Society, had some difficulties with her job and eventually was dismissed, which caused a great kind of turmoil.

I spent a lot of time . . . There were a lot of pros and cons about the shuttle. I mean, there were a lot of complaints or shuttles not . . . individual drivers. The overall management was okay, the scheme of things was okay, but those day-to-day problems usually fell into my lap. The superintendent expected me to resolve things that he perceived as being problems quite quickly. There was a lot, as I said before, a lot of standard operating

procedures as a new park, doing research for exhibits, or else directing the work of other permanent rangers in doing research.

One project that I never saw to completion that Mr. Shaver remembers was doing sort of a “statement of condition” of the surrounding neighborhood homes and everything, sort of for documentary purposes. A “statement for interpretation,” which became real in vogue there by the end of my time at the Truman home, that every park needed a “statement for interpretation” to document the plan of action for interpretive services. It’s real strange. I was very busy there. It’s hard to give you an itemized list of everything. I spent a lot of time working with the curator on different . . . either projects or else concerns that Steve would have, working with the two facility management specialists and their . . . getting things fixed. There would be some wear and tear on door handles and . . .

WILLIAMS: We haven’t talked much about the facility managers. How did you get along with the two, Skip Brooks and Mike Healy?

RICHTER: Well, they each had their talents. I mean, I think Skip certainly was the right man for the job to get things underway, and particularly he was magnificent in working with the large contract, the rehab of the outside of the home. He had had an experience previously as an interpreter, so I think he understood our point of view on things. He learned a lot in the process here. I remember when he arrived he was ready to put, as code would have required, neon exit signs for fire and safety in the home, and a few of those

things. So it was sort of an educational process to compromise on those sort of things so that we kept the integrity of the home's experience, and yet we weren't neglecting the safety of the visitors and of the home itself. Certainly I did have occasion to work with Skip and Dink Watskey's flower gardening arrangement and so forth. And certainly Skip, it's to his credit, we wouldn't have the rose bed the way it is today [chuckling] without Skip having been there working with Dink.

WILLIAMS: Did Dink come out of the blue as a volunteer?

RICHTER: As I recall, he came by way of Lisa Bosso's father. There was some kind of . . . Or wait, again memory is sort of failing me. It was either Lisa Bosso's father, or it could have been Warren Orville at the Truman Library. There was some connection there that either of those two gentlemen knew Dink and set him in the right direction to contact the park. As I recall, I think it was a direct contact to Skip, from Dink to Skip, and then they got Norm's blessing for the project.

WILLIAMS: And as chief of interpretation, you had no objections?

RICHTER: I was leery [chuckling] about the overall result, because I was concerned about the color of the roses. I would like to have seen them kept more their . . . whatever documentation we did have from Mrs. Wallace or whoever about the color of the roses. And if indeed in the later Truman years they didn't have any problem with the roses being planted helter-skelter, I would like to have seen them planted helter-skelter. So I did have mixed feelings.

Because, as a world-famous rose expert, Mr. Watskey took good care of the roses, and much at a greater level of care than they would have received by Reverend Hobby or other people tending the grounds. On the other hand, I think it was important that there was a rose bed of some sort. If the choice was either Dink's rose bed or no rose bed at all, then I would vote for Dink Watskey's rose bed.

WILLIAMS: Did the exterior restoration pose any problems for your division?

RICHTER: Well, actually, you should come to Charleston, South Carolina, and the National Association for Interpretation's annual meeting. I'll be giving a program on how to cope with a major rehab of your primary resource. We worked around that. Fortunately, most of their work was done on the outside of the home, and we used it as a really good opportunity to promote historic preservation and explain to visitors the correct way to do such a project. We basically interpreted the project while it was in progress. We sometimes lost access to one of the porches and so had to reroute the visitors to get around that. But that's where Skip was so good. I mean, he worked real closely with me, and we just worked as a team on providing visitor services while that project was going on.

WILLIAMS: You said that the two facility managers were different. How was Mike Healy different?

RICHTER: Well, Mike was more of a traditional maintenance person, in that he came up through the ranks of maintenance. In some ways he liked to chew the fat

a little more. I think again it was just the climate of the times: Skip had so much of a workload that he wanted to just get the stuff done and not really spend a lot of time deciding or chewing the fat on what should happen. Mike Healy's role was more of a traditional maintenance role, in that the major rehab work had been done and it was more a sense of keeping the home up to the condition that it was after the rehab job. Mike had to deal more with the state of the rehab of the ticket center, the Eastern National project, but I thoroughly enjoyed working with Mike. You know, if anything, with Mike I had to deal When I would be alerted, the superintendent would alert me to a problem that he saw in the visitor center or down at the home, or mostly in the visitor center, and I would work with Mike on correcting it. I would say, if anything, I had a more day-to-day contact with Mike than I did with Skip, Skip dealing more with contractors.

WILLIAMS: Did visitor comments and complaints come under your supervision?

RICHTER: Oh, did they ever.

WILLIAMS: What were some of those in the first year?

RICHTER: Well, particularly that first year when many days we would be out of tickets by eleven o'clock or 11:30 in the morning. As with most national parks, we tried to resolve complaints at the lowest level of authority so as not to reinforce to the visitor how important . . . that their grievance was very justified. If you bring the superintendent in at the very beginning of a complaint, that just reinforces the idea that it's a very important, unusual

complaint. The complaints were primarily the fact that we were either out of tickets or else we were inconveniencing people by too long of a wait. People complained about inadequate signs. They didn't understand why they couldn't get their tickets at the Truman Library. They would have some complaints against staff members, particularly the shuttle bus drivers. Occasionally a complaint about someone in the ticket center or a ranger at the home, not very often; usually it was shuttle bus drivers.

WILLIAMS: Did these comments and complaints have any major effect on management policies?

RICHTER: We tended to hold the line. I mean, as I say, we did experiment with even one extra person on the tours, and decided afterwards by unanimous verdict of the interpreters unanimous verdict of the interpreters that it wasn't a good idea. The, uh, shuttle bus drivers, it was just a matter of me spending a lot of time with the various managers of the shuttle bus system. And they basically were trained to be drivers. Their forte' was really not customer relations and as a result we would have hurt feelings.

WILLIAMS: Take a break.

[End #4128B; Begin #4128C]

WILLIAMS: We were talking about visitor complaints, I believe?

RICHTER: Right. There would be a few complaints about how people were treated at the Truman Library, and again it's always with such hearsay, it was really tough to resolve the complaints. Whenever you deal with a volunteer staff,

particularly one that works . . . most of our volunteers would work, at most, one day a week, it's a bit difficult to keep up the quality of the standards. So some of the complaints would be directed towards them. But on the other hand, we had some excellent volunteers—some of which I understand are still here to this day—true-blue, quality people.

I'd say the majority of the complaints were either because the tickets were out, there was a long wait, or this business that they would go to the Truman Library first, because that's where the signs from the interstate directed them. They would spend time enjoying the Truman Library, then realize they had to get tickets for the home, and then they would say, "Well, we could have gotten our tickets first and been enjoying the library second." Then we'd say, "Well, that's what we try to get people to do."

WILLIAMS: What was the rationale behind requiring people to come in and sign, everyone had to be there?

RICHTER: Well, first of all, we did have some fear at the very beginning that there would be ticket scalping going on, or else at least a tour broker could come in and just say, "Okay, I want 256 tickets." And if we didn't have a system, what could we do but give them to him? We did want visitors to get the experience of the slide show. We felt very strongly at that time that the slide show was an important event to see before the tour, and it would set the stage for the home tour, and it would also enable the interpreter not to

have to start from scratch about the Truman story. But it was primarily just sort of to make the system as fair as possible for everybody, so again you didn't have somebody run in and bag twenty tickets and go running out the door and maybe distribute them down the street.

SHAVER: As you recall, originally there was always some intention to have the ticket center downtown away from the house. Is that the way you recall it? Or were they going to have it at the—

RICHTER: Well, actually, when we were going to have the funeral home as our site, there was some discussion about having the tickets distributed out of the funeral home, as I recall. That was just a momentary thought, but then very quickly we thought of having the ticket center downtown. And then certainly once we were all going to be down there, then certainly we were going to have the ticket center downtown. But my memory, for a short while we thought of having the tickets come out of the funeral home, around the corner. It's very hazy to me. I mean, even thinking maybe of working out a relationship with the RLDS parking lots, and having people park over in the RLDS parking lots.

WILLIAMS: Since you mention that, was there a little bit of controversy with the Mormon and RLDS churches, as far as neighborhood preservation also?

RICHTER: Well, as you can see this day, as far as what's happened in other areas of Independence with the expansion for the temple, the RLDS temple, when I first arrived, there were some feelers that went out to me by way of, I think,

Bill Bullard, the RLDS wanted to know if we'd be interested in taking over the Center Stake Building as headquarters and a museum or whatever. And again we were a bit concerned about the future of that building, because of course we would like it to stay as it was and not have it be changed or torn down or whatever. The building around the corner, that for a while was owned by Park College—I don't know who owns it now—we were concerned about its fate, again because it's a major dominating feature on the urban landscape, you might say.

SHAVER: It's William Chrisman High School, the old one.

RICHTER: Yeah, the old William Chrisman High School. We at one time, and I don't know if this is going to materialize or not, when the Reorganized Church first put up their idea of having the great temple actually being built, they were talking about a mall going all the way down to Truman Road and taking out the houses that would have been just one block to the west. And I know that that made Norm and me nervous because that would be getting very close then to the immediate area of the Truman neighborhood. And there was some talk of relocating Lexington Avenue and relocating the street scheme of things to accommodate the new temple, so I know that that was a complaint Reverend Hughes had that the preservationists always focused on the Baptist church as being anti-preservationist. And he says, "Well, what about our friends over at the RLDS?"

And even the Latter Day Saints after I had first arrived . . . When I

first arrived, there was still a sanctuary standing that had been the very first Latter Day Saints sanctuary. In fact, their president at that time had served time at that very center. Anyway, it had fallen into disrepair and was torn down, I think the first year I was there, in '83. So is that what you were referring to?

WILLIAMS: Was that as an immediate threat as the Baptist church?

RICHTER: No, long-term. I mean, we were a little more nervous in terms of the long-term effects.

WILLIAMS: You didn't get embroiled in public meetings and controversies?

RICHTER: Nothing like that.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned the slide program, and I've always wondered, since it seems to be such a well received program, who actually wrote it.

RICHTER: Well, I'm glad you asked that question.

WILLIAMS: I always assumed that you did.

RICHTER: Well, it was a very fortunate chain of events. I had been selected for a training course at the Mather Training Center, which is just a stone's throw away from the Harpers Ferry Design Center, where a lady named Shirley Wilt worked. She was another one that just really loved Truman. She was of that generation and was really anxious to be involved in the Truman home project. So, in January of '84 I knew I was going back to Harpers Ferry, and so I worked with Shirley, and what we arranged was that I would stay a couple of days after. The training course was a Monday-through-

Friday course. I would stay through Tuesday or Wednesday, as I recall, and work with both Shirley on the audiovisual program and with an editor named Jane Hanna on the brochure that we wanted to be designed. So, coming to Harpers Ferry, I first of all took all kinds, mass quantities of slides that I could think of, and also took along prints of photographs, historic photographs that I thought would be appropriate, and came up with a script. The photographs pretty much came out the way I had selected them. Shirley sort of had the last word on that, but pretty much as I had come up with sort of a story line, we went with that. Shirley took my script, as far as the narration, and changed it a bit. So I mean it certainly was a team effort. I mean, I cannot claim to be the sole person behind that show, but it certainly was a team effort. One of those things very quickly, I mean, as I say, literally in just a couple of days Shirley and I had the script and pretty much the story line worked out, and also made arrangements for Tom Gray, who is a photographer at Harpers Ferry, to come out and do some slide work for some other slides for use in the slide program. Basically, my kind of amateur slides at least gave her an idea of the potential and sort of camera angles and everything, and then she gave Tom Gray some instructions on some additional work and more professional quality.

WILLIAMS: And then she chose the music and the narrator and all of that?

RICHTER: Right. Yeah, that was all done back at Harpers Ferry.

WILLIAMS: And you say the finished product—

RICHTER: And please don't ask me the name of the narrator, which everyone asks me, and I kept . . . I called her a couple of different times, wrote down the name, and then promptly lost it, so please don't ask me. Hopefully, someday we will have it enshrined somewhere where we'll always know. He had been used on many projects.

SHAVER: Did you have the site bulletin . . . Did you have the four-color site bulletin on site when you opened up?

RICHTER: Well, no. You did have to ask me that, didn't you? That was the one disappointment, that that project did drag on quite a bit. It was almost a full year later before we got our finished product. The production schedule at Harpers Ferry is very tight, and we were like an add-on into that production schedule, and we kept getting kicked backwards. And to be honest, until the actual opening of the home, we had a lot of leverage saying, "We've got to have this by the time the home opens." Well, when we missed that opening on the brochure, then we lost a lot of clout about "We need it just this instant." And there was also some problems, in that a lot of the . . . I did write a lot of the copy, but then also did Jane Hanna, and some of it we weren't too pleased with and we wanted it rewritten. I rewrote most of the captions below the little tiny photographs that are in there, because they started out being pretty inadequate. So things went back and forth, and that dragged things out also.

WILLIAMS: In your division originally there was a lead park technician, and we've

talked a little bit about Palma.

RICHTER: That's correct.

WILLIAMS: But that position no longer exists.

RICHTER: Yeah, for a while it even got stronger. She took on more of a supervisory role of front-line supervision at the home, because it was . . . at least while I was there at the very beginning when we were still doing a lot of these paperwork kind of exercises, operations plans. And also in a new operation there was more time being spent with the cooperating agencies, like the library and the volunteer force and the shuttle bus system and the Jackson County Historical Society, and then later on I spent a lot of my time with Eastern National Park and Monument Association, for a variety of reasons.

WILLIAMS: So was that position envisioned as a temporary position?

RICHTER: Well, see, then by then I left. It was still, I felt, needed when I left. But then Mr. Reigle and Palma decided that it wasn't necessary and that the money would be better spent with more front-line people.

WILLIAMS: When you moved back to Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in 1987 . . . Right?

RICHTER: Right.

WILLIAMS: Did you feel like you were leaving things unfinished at the Truman home?

RICHTER: No, I thought it was a good time to leave. I did feel I had pretty much contributed what I was going to contribute there, and that they . . . I think national parks do need a fresh perspective from time to time, and that it was

a good time. I just thought things were pretty well in order at that time. I thought the visitor services was pretty solid. The Eastern National operation had gone through a lot of hard times, but I felt it had pretty well settled down also, that we had a quality selection of sales items. We had . . . at least the exhibits were on order. Not all the exhibits were in yet, but at least they were in the finishing processes of being prepared, so I felt it was an appropriate time.

WILLIAMS: Are there any gaps in the operation of the park now or since then that you can identify, as more the distant observer?

RICHTER: I'm not sure I'm distant enough yet, you know, because there are still several personalities Hardly any now, but there still are a few that are still involved in the project, and in most of my visits I've tried to be very polite and noncommittal.

I'm not sure how the walking tour is doing. I thought that was an important aspect in our offering to the public, not so much to give visitors an opportunity to do something while they were waiting for their tour of the home, but just to make a point about what we see as important of the whole national landmark district.

And I guess, as I say earlier, I think the one thing that I regret is the fact that, at least up till now, that we have not been able to implement a key part of the general management plan, being the neighborhood trust and ensuring sort of the longevity of the neighborhood.

WILLIAMS: Do you think there's a need for any additional staff in the park?

RICHTER: Well, I guess it all depends on how you're going to handle the Haukenberry house and the Wallace homes, and again, I'm not really up-to-date on what the plans are or how that's really going to work its way out. Even though we do have a couple of exhibits at the Truman home ticket center, I see the need to use one of those homes sort of as a museum. If you think about all the artifacts that are now down in storage, in curatorial storage, I could see a never-ending series of special exhibits on life at the home, particularly until someday in the future when we have the upstairs. And as I said before, I see that as the other thing, that someday I really think that that's a relevant part of a visitor's experience. Even though the logistics would be very difficult, it would just really, to me, enhance the overall story of the Trumans.

WILLIAMS: As a historian, did you ever argue for a historian staff position?

RICHTER: Oh, not myself. Again remember, I was there at the ground floor when I was more concerned about just getting enough interpreters to do the job right. Ron Cockrell had done a really fine job, I felt, in the work that he had done, and so I felt more in terms of having summer historians there, giving them specific projects. I think the oral history project needs to really be on the front burner, with a lot of the eyewitnesses departing the scene, that that needs to be an important focus of park management over there.

And certainly I was glad to see the "historic grounds study and

plan” see the light of day. That was a long process, and of course that’s the most challenging part of interpreting a historic site, that you can’t freeze the grounds in one certain time period. You can’t stop trees from growing into bigger trees and that sort of thing.

WILLIAMS: Mike, do you have any other questions?

SHAVER: A capsule summary of some of the folks at the Truman Library that you dealt with.

RICHTER: A summary?

SHAVER: Well, your impressions of them and how they kind of played a role in the development of the site, or at least your—

RICHTER: Well, certainly as I said, Dr. Zobrist was a key player, and particularly when I was there as ranger in charge, you know, a lot of good, solid advice on sort of the lay of the land, you might say, and the different players in the community. Liz Safly was just a delight, and of course, with her role with the inventory and having been in the home, and her longevity as far as being an Independence resident, she provided a lot of insight. Pat Kerr in the first few months had a lot of advice also.

SHAVER: What kind of advice?

RICHTER: Well, just more in terms of . . . maybe not so much advice. I take that back, more . . .

SHAVER: Observations?

RICHTER: Observations maybe. Also her point of view about sort of the history of the

home, because again she was the other key person that had been in there doing the inventory. So her opinions of . . . or not so much opinions, but her memories of how Mrs. Truman was being cared for and that sort of thing, or just the way life was at the home in the later years.

The support staff, I couldn't say enough, you know. The secretaries, which I consider much more . . . They do much more than a secretary. They're more like office managers. Mary Jo Colley, and at that time Diane Farris worked there. She was tremendous to work with. Vicky Alexander, who is Dr. Zobrist's administrative assistant, was totally supportive when I was there, in terms of support, office support, that sort of thing.

SHAVER: Mary Jo had worked for Mr. Truman. Did she ever share any of her reminiscences?

RICHTER: She felt honor-bound not to disclose such things, but she was a secretary to Mrs. Truman for some years. But she doesn't want to reveal anything.

SHAVER: So you never got any impressions or insights from her?

RICHTER: Nothing, no. Also, Pauline Testerman, of course, was of great help, the photo archivist, and certainly a great help to Ron Cockrell. There was a remarkable collection of photos of the early days, at least mostly of the exterior of the home.

WILLIAMS: From the attic of the Truman home that the library removed for safekeeping. [chuckling]

RICHTER: That's right.

SHAVER: Any of the archivists that you remember more than any that played important roles in things?

RICHTER: Well, John Curry for one, mainly because he had a delegated authority also. He was sort of a public programming person for Dr. Zobrist. So things like planning the opening of the home, the dedication ceremony, I worked with John. There were several times where Dr. Zobrist hosted us to have planning meetings at the library, or even Norm had a zone meeting of the superintendents at the library, so John Curry was real helpful in that regard.

Warren Orville, another Independence resident, he provided some insight into the way the nature of Independence, what makes residents of Independence tick, you might say. He tried hard to get me to join the Lions Club, but unfortunately at that time it was a closed society to men only, so I chose not to join his organization. [tape turned off]

WILLIAMS: You were talking about Warren Orville.

RICHTER: Right.

WILLIAMS: Any others?

RICHTER: Well, the others, I guess, was more in terms of moral support, or else establishing that climate of just receiving me right away as a colleague, you know, instead of as an outsider. People like Harry Clark and J.R. [Fuchs] just went out of their way to be friendly. And Phil Lagerquist, of course, a great memory. I mean, he goes back to when the documents came out from

Washington to Kansas City. And Mary Jo primarily worked for Phil, so when Mary Jo would do favors for me, of course it was taking away from her time for Phil, so he was very understanding about that. And Dennis [Bilger]. I don't want to forget Dennis, was very friendly and supportive. And I know I'm forgetting some of them. Again, it's—

WILLIAMS: There's Neil Johnson.

RICHTER: Neil was sort of an interesting fellow because he did have a background in western history, and of course that's my background, so we sort of had a kindred interest there in that regard.

WILLIAMS: He has a keen interest in the farm home.

RICHTER: Oh, I see, okay.

WILLIAMS: Would you say that your original impressions of the Trumans and Independence were from the staff at the library?

RICHTER: Oh, just before I answer that question, I don't want to forget Irwin, also one of the other archivists, was also quite, quite friendly and interested in what we were doing down there. Okay, could you repeat your question?

WILLIAMS: Would you say that your original impressions of Independence and the Trumans were from the Truman Library staff?

RICHTER: I'd say more or less. I think so. Plus what Andy Ketterson . . . his impressions over time.

WILLIAMS: And would it have been much more difficult for you to jump right in without the—

RICHTER: I'd say almost impossible.

WILLIAMS: —people there that actually knew the Trumans?

RICHTER: That would have been just almost impossible, and particularly with the complexities of Independence and its politics and its different interest groups, it would have been a pretty tough situation. Although not to slight the role that Bill Bullard and Pat O'Brien and Sally Schwenk played, and even Millie Nesbitt. I mean, there was support. I don't want to say it was just the Truman Library. I mean, there certainly was some good support and advice. Basically, I measured and weighed this different advice and then tried to be as noncommittal as possible until Norm Reigle showed up.

WILLIAMS: I'd like to thank you for your continuing interest in the Truman home.

RICHTER: Well, it's been my pleasure.

WILLIAMS: And for spending the afternoon with us.

RICHTER: And certainly I think where I feel best about is the fact that I think we really do have a solid visitor service program there and it does continue. I'm confident the visitors are getting a really unique experience down there.

WILLIAMS: Thanks.

RICHTER: You bet.

END OF INTERVIEW