

An Interview with

James Grassham

at the Carter County Courthouse in
Van Buren, Missouri

01 April 1998

interviewed by Will Sarvis



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri

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Collection C3966

Missouri Environment a.c. 15, 16

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PREFACE

James Grassham was born on April 2, 1928. His ancestors go back several generations in the eastern Missouri Ozarks, where Mr. Grassham himself has lived all his life. Mr. Grassham has a long history of civic, business, and political prominence in southeast Missouri, particularly in Van Buren and Carter County. At the time of the interview he continued to operate his long standing car dealership, and more recently had expanded into the hardware business. He served as the mayor of Van Buren, 1962-1978, and as presiding commissioner of Carter County from 1986 to beyond the time of the interview.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mr. Grassham was among the supporters favoring Park Service management of the Current River. He testified before Congress during both sets of hearings, in 1961 and 1963. In 1964, President Johnson signed the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) bill. This interview offers observation of events extending from the open range of the 1950s and 1960s up to more recent topics concerning the ONSR, such as the controversy over horses running loose in Shannon County, or the limiting of tourists staying in the former Big Spring State Park (now part of the ONSR). Although generally satisfied with the ONSR's presence, Mr. Grassham has experienced some dissatisfaction with the ONSR's limited economic stimulus and related Park Service public relations, details of which he describes in several passages. Like many other community leaders, Mr. Grassham has been pleased with the ONSR's latest superintendent and generally how the ONSR has functioned during the most recent years.

The interview was recorded on Sony type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) and a Shure VP64 omnidirectional microphone attached to a floor stand. The audio quality is generally quite good, and completely understandable throughout.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses () are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [“ ”] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [. . .] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editors, Will Sarvis and N. Renae Farris.

[Tape meter, 000. Begin side one, tape one of two. Begin interview.]

WS: I'm sitting here in Carter County courthouse, in Van Buren, Missouri, with the Honorable James Grassham. We're going to talk about the Current River and quite a few other things, I guess. Well, to get started, I wanted to ask you your birth date.

JG: April the 2nd, 1928. Tomorrow's my birthday.

WS: As I mentioned, I'd like to get some family background from you, if I could; your family history.

JG: My ancestors came from Ireland. Scotland and Ireland. We were really Scots-Irish. They came to America and ended up in Paducah, Kentucky. Then they migrated west to Missouri and Texas. One family migrated to Coos Bay, Oregon. But most of them are in Missouri; ended up in Missouri from Kentucky. There's one family in Paducah, Kentucky, yet today. But most of them are in Missouri. One family went to Texas, and of course they're still there. But, we're Scots-Irish.

WS: Would that be your grandparents or great grandparents?

JG: Great grandparents.

WS: That came to southeast Missouri.

JG: Yes.

WS: I see. You mentioned a moment that your father, I believe, had quite a bit of acreage at one time. Had that been passed down from your great-grandfather?

JG: No. He bought this land himself. There were two farms together. One was owned by his sister, 400 acres. Then she and her husband moved away to Poplar Bluff. So she sold my

dad her 400 acres, and then ended up with 800 acres.

WS: I guess that was mostly livestock and grazing.

JG: Livestock, yes. Grazing. We raised some row crops for a few years, then finally went just to grazing altogether.

WS: And what county was that land in?

JG: That was in Reynolds County.

WS: How'd you end up down here in Van Buren?

JG: Well, that's an odd deal. We were seven miles from Piedmont, Missouri, and we were about twenty miles from Van Buren. But we were in the Van Buren school district. So we were bused forty miles a day to Van Buren school. My older sister (who was a school teacher; she taught school for forty years), in her high school days, she graduated from Piedmont. At a later date they changed those school districts. The rest of my brothers and sisters, we came to Van Buren. We rode an old school bus. Back during World War II, of course, you could hardly get tires, gas, and all that. It had to be a government entity or something that rated top priority or you couldn't get tires and gas. We rode an old school bus. It was really a panel truck, but the seats were made out of rough-sawed boards with no padding. I rode that thing. Finally, after a while, your clothes would get those boards slick and they weren't so bad. You'd get away from the splinters. But, at that time, we didn't know any different, I guess. It was very happy. I was happy to have something to go there at all. It was quite an experience.

WS: Once you started working, have you worked in the Van Buren area all your life?

JG: Primarily. We were only two miles from Clearwater Lake. It was started in 1939, then closed down during World War II. After World War II it started back up. I worked one summer on the Clearwater dam. Then I worked on the farm. Then I started working in Van Buren for a Kaiser Frazier dealer. I became manager of it. The owner took a job in St. Louis as zone manager of Kaiser Frazier. His name was Jim Hendrickson.

[Tape meter, 050]

I operated that for him until I was about eighteen, nineteen. Then I bought my own place. I started out with Chrysler-Plymouth, for about seven years. I've had my Chevrolet [dealership] for about forty-six years. So, that's how I got to Van Buren. I've been here ever since I was about eighteen, I guess.

WS: When did you branch off into the lumber business?

JG: About 1990.

WS: Oh, recently.

JG: Recently, yes. We'd had a lumber yard here for years and years and years. It was home-owned. Then they sold out to a large lumber corporation. They operated about a couple of years. They couldn't keep a manager. So they closed the yard down. We were without a lumberyard for about ten years. Even to get a 2x4 you had to drive a hundred mile trip, fifty each way, to Poplar Bluff. So, a good friend of mine who is the state representative now, Bill Foster, he was over here. He had a window manufacturing company there in Poplar Bluff. He came up to put some windows in and needed two 2x4s, and he had to drive all the way to Poplar Bluff to get two 2x4s back. A hundred

mile trip. He said, "You've had to do everything else here in Van Buren. Why don't you put that lumberyard in?" I'd been talking to Bill about it for a long time. So that kind of put me over the hump. I asked everybody here, carpenters and others, to put in a lumber company. Nobody wanted to do it.

So, I ended up taking that big step. It has really grown. I have enjoyed it, and am still enjoying it. The people are glad I did that. They're doing more remodeling and building houses that they wouldn't have ever built before, because it was too hard to get materials. And it took too much time to drive a hundred mile trip. So it's encouraged a lot of people to build houses. We've had one of the biggest growths in house building since I put that in, ever, in this county. So it's been good for everybody.

WS: When did you first start getting involved with county politics?

JG: I started out with city politics in 1959 and '60 (I think it was). The job of mayor became available. Mr. McSpadden built a new house in Van Buren. It was the first house built in thirty years. And he needed the water hooked to it, which was about 150, 200 feet. The city didn't have the money to run him water to it. So his old house was next door. They would take their baths over in the old house and live in the new house. He told me one day, "Why don't you run for mayor and get me water for my new house?" So, I thought about it. Of course, I was young and energetic and starting a business against a lot of older dealers. I said, "Well, I'll do that." I was elected.

I went to the hardware store here, then, and bought the water line; 150 feet of : galvanized pipe, on time. (Laughs) I think it was 12¢ a foot. So I borrowed the county

motor grader and cut the ditch myself with the motor grader. I laid the pipe in there and hooked up Bob McSpadden's new house up. Then I got the company to sell me six water meters. I put one on my garage first. I went down the street on the heavy users. I bought six more, and they finally sold me forty. So I built the revenue up. I got a grant and we got a new water system, new sewer system.

[Tape meter, 100]

I was mayor sixteen years. Water collection was about \$5,000 a month when I left -- in 1978, I believe, was when my term was up. I didn't run anymore.

Then, in 1986, the office of presiding commissioner became available, and everybody asked me to run for it, so I did. I was elected. So I've been presiding commissioner since 1986.

WS: I guess even when you were a boy there must have been quite a few tourists coming up into this area to float the rivers and all, and go fishing?

JG: Yes. There were lots of tourists. In fact, that was one of our main industries, was tourists. And secondly was the forest products; saw milling. But those three or four months -- sometimes as much as five months -- fishing, tourists, were our main income.

WS: Do you remember when you first started hearing about these plans the [U.S.] Army Corps [of Engineers] had of damming the Current River and the Eleven Point?

JG: Yes I do.

WS: Was that in the 1930s or '40s?

JG: '40s, yes. And the early '50s. It finally came down to we had to make a decision, either

go for a dam or go for the National Park Service to protect our river. The reason why the people here made this decision [to oppose the dam], it would cover the Big Spring. It's a beautiful spring; world's largest single spring. It's quite an attraction. It attracts lots of tourists, and that would be damaging to our economy here in Van Buren and Carter County. So we decided we'd rather have a Scenic Riverways than a flood control dam.

WS: Now I imagine you had some people in the region that were in favor of that dam. I just wonder if you could describe the group that may have been against, and who was for the dam.

JG: Yes, we had opposition. There were some who wanted a dam. They said, "Well, it would be better fishing. It would develop faster with vacation homes all up and down the shorelines of a flood control dam." But we didn't want to see this beautiful scenery [inundated] and beautiful Big Spring covered up with water. So it would have damaged our scenic natural beauty here. We had a group of people that believed that way, and we prevailed.

WS: Would it be that the people for the dam, against the dam, tended to be downriver and upriver from where the dam would be built? Or was it more complicated than that?

JG: They were concerned about the location that the Corps of Engineers had chosen. It was downriver, all right, but it wasn't far enough downriver to keep from covering up the Big Spring. So we asked them if they could move it on down. They said it wasn't feasible to move it on downriver. So there we were. We said we'd rather go with the National Park Service. They formed this national river. It's the first in the United States. I believe they

called it the Ozark Monument...

WS: At first, right.

JG: Yes, and then they changed it to Riverways.

[Tape meter, 150]

In order to keep our spring, the beautiful forest we have here, the beautiful scenery on this river, why, we chose to go that route.

WS: I guess you were mayor when a lot of this was going on.

JG: Yes, I was. I was mayor at the time it was going on. And, took a lot of flak. There were two elements. One thing that really made things more complicated is, we had a state representative, and they had a challenger. The challenger took the side for the Corps of Engineers building a dam, and the representative at that time, he chose to go with the Riverways. So it was quite a hassle.

WS: Of course, also at that earlier stage, you had a group that wanted the [U.S.] Forest Service to expand their management. I just wondered why you favored the Park Service instead of the Forest Service?

JG: Because the Park Service is involved in recreation. That's their main cup of tea, is recreation. Forest Service was timber management, and had some recreational areas throughout the Mark Twain forest. But that was not their main thing. So, we just felt the Park Service could do a lot better job.

WS: Do you want to retell that story you told me the other day about down in Ripley County with George Hartzog?

JG: Yes. We were trying to take in Ripley County and get them involved in this Riverways. They were fighting back. Their congressman, Paul Jones, decided Ripley County didn't want any part of it. But we were invited to Doniphan with Mr. Hartzog. He was an outstanding speaker. He was from Georgia, originally, and he had that Southern drawl. He was an attorney; an old country attorney. We went to this hostile meeting at the armory in Doniphan. And I mean, it was just like walking into a den of lions. I'm not kidding. They were hostile.

So George was the main speaker. He got up. He told them who he was; director of the National Park Service, and he would take questions. He had this one guy on the front row or sitting pretty close to him. He jumped up and asked a question. George said, "Well, that's a very good question. I'm glad you asked that." And he talked for fifteen minutes or so, around the barn, and never did answer the man's question. And the man was satisfied and sat down.

So it was really, really funny how he handled that hostile crowd. After he attempted to answer that man's question, why, they all calmed down and we had a good meeting. But the congressman, he was against it strongly. Finally, we just cut Ripley County off of our plan. But it was an unusual meeting. It was just amazing that George Hartzog could handle a hostile crowd. He did it so easily. It really was an unusual meeting.

WS: Do you think the reason Ripley got taken out of that, was that mostly because of the different congressional district, or was Ripley County that much different from Shannon

and Carter counties?

[Tape meter, 200]

JG: I think it's just the different congressional district. The congressman, he was adamantly against the Riverways. He wanted a dam.

WS: Oh, he was in favor of the dam. I didn't know that.

JG: Yes, he wanted to build a dam. He said Doniphan would prosper from it. He thought that was the correct thing to do. At the last, in order to keep the project going, we had to make a choice. Either fight on for no telling how long, two or three years, or cut them off and just continue on to keep our project alive. So we chose to cut Ripley County off.

WS: Now you actually went to Washington during those Congressional hearings? The two years? I guess it was 1961 and '63.

JG: Yes, that was it.

WS: You went both times.

JG: Yes.

WS: Did you testify?

JG: Yes.

WS: What was that experience like?

JG: It was quite an experience for someone from a little country town, to testify in the Senate hearing, and also the House hearing too. Quite an experience. There were times it was funny. These two gentlemen that were running for state representative, one of them was quite an orator, by the name of Jim Allen. The chairman of that meeting, he said at the

beginning, “I’m just going to give you about five to ten minutes to speak, so that both sides would have an opportunity.” Well, Mr. Allen, he was, again, kind of humorous; and an Ozarkian. He got up and he just carried on until the chairman had to cut him off. He finally just cut the sound system off, and he [Allen] kept *on* talking. So we had a hard time getting him stopped.

But anyway, he said some real unusual things. The funny thing, I think; I refer to them every so often to people -- I know one was, that he said, from the illustrations and sayings he had, he said, “Even the dark tribes of Africa deserve to be heard,” when he cut him off. Another one was, “People were more divided over this Riverways issue than the days of the jayhawkers and the bushwhackers.” Those were funny sayings that he said. Those senators really got a kick out of that. They’d never heard anybody quite like him before. But we like to *never* got him cut off. Yes, it was quite an experience.

[Tape meter, 250]

I enjoyed it, even though at the time I wasn’t enjoying it too much. But later I did. I enjoyed going to Washington D.C. and see how our government works.

Then we brought those committee members down to Van Buren; Current River. We floated them on the river. They stayed longer than they were supposed to stay, because they enjoyed the river and the scenic beauty so much. So they stayed longer than they planned to stay.

WS: Of all the superintendents that have come, maybe you could describe and compare and contrast how some have been able to work with the community; and maybe there’s one

that's outstanding in that regard. I'm sure it's more complicated than just better or worse. But you've had about five or six, I guess.

JG: I think that's right. The most outstanding superintendent we've ever had, in my opinion, was Dave Thompson.¹ He was a farm boy from Omaha. He was a commercial pilot, and later went to work for the National Park Service, and then became superintendent. But he could relate to the local people, and people liked him. He was involved in the community in different clubs and different activities. He made you feel part of the National Park Service.

The second superintendent; he'd been with the Park Service a long time, and he was just here to mark time. He didn't become involved, and people didn't like him very well. So he moved on to St. Louis, I believe. Then we got another one; I can't remember whether it was [Vernon] Hennesay.² We had two Davenports. And then he [Hennesay] kind of revived the relationship back up again with the local people. People liked him real well. Of course, later he got a promotion and moved out west; I believe Yellowstone, or somewhere like that.

Then, we had another superintendent that people liked. He became involved in the community and involved people in the National Park decision-making. The last one we had was Art Sullivan, who the local people did not like at all.³ He didn't want to expand or develop or improve the parks; the Big Spring Park, and all the other parks

1 For an interview with Mr. Thompson, please see C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 49, 40.

2 Mr. Hennesay was interviewed in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 11.

3 Sullivan's interview may be found in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 46-48.

involved in the Riverways.

[Tape meter, 300]

He was a good individual, but when he was on duty, he was strictly G.I. There was no compromise to him whatsoever. Just his way or no way.

Then, we got into the big controversy over the wild horses. He was determined that they were going to remove those horses, and made an attempt to. He shipped the first load of horses out to a soap factory. They jumped on him with both feet. They formed this Wild Horse League group, got Congressman [Bill] Emerson involved. He got a law passed in Congress to let the horses run free. Then, a short time later, Art Sullivan retired.

WS: Mr. [Coleman] McSpadden was telling me, one day I guess you had maybe hundreds of people on horseback here protesting that.⁴

JG: Yes.

WS: Do you remember when that was?

JG: Let's see; that was a short time before Mr. Sullivan left. Time flies, but it's probably five or six years ago; something like that, maybe. There were hundreds and hundreds of horses. We prepared even down in the river bottom places for them to load and unload their horses. Golly, I'll bet you there were, I would say, probably close to a thousand people here; people and horses. They had their horses in their trailers. We provided a place for them to park and all. All over town. They liked it down in the river bottom

⁴ In C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 12.

here real well. But you couldn't even move for horses and people. So that kind of broke the backbone of Art Sullivan's demand that there wasn't going to be any horses. So you aren't going to get rid of the wild horses. It was quite a controversy.

[Tape meter, 345. End side one, tape one of two.]

[Tape meter, 000. Begin side two, tape one of two.]

WS: When these thousand people and their horses came to town, were they all [Missouri] Wild Horse League members, or were they people from all over the region?

JG: Mostly Wild Horse League members. But then lots of horse lovers joined in from other parts of the country. From other states, even.

WS: Have you ever seen them, the wild horses?

JG: Yes. From a distance. It's really unique. It just reminds you of the old West. It's really unique. The tourist people, they enjoy it. There's a good friend of mine, Jim Smith from Eminence, who runs a trail ride.⁵ Those trail riders, they love to see those wild horses. So one Sunday, Greg Brannum out of Emerson's office came by and picked me up. He said, "We're going to have a trail ride and we'll get to see the wild horses. They're going to cook breakfast out on the trail, like the old West." So we drove in cars to those points, then rode about two miles on horses and had breakfast with the trail riders. It was pretty unique.

WS: Were there any other groups involved besides this Wild Horse League?

JG: Yes, there were lots of people from other towns, and just individuals, but believed in

⁵ Mr. Smith was interviewed in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 22, 23.

letting the horses remain free. They realized the public and a bunch of tourists enjoyed seeing them. Even the local people enjoyed them, too. So they joined in from adjoining counties. Several counties.

WS: Did anyone like the Sierra Club or anyone get involved? The national groups?

JG: Yes. They had, really, protested to the National Park Service to have those horses removed.

WS: Oh, they were *against* the wild horses?

JG: Oh yes. They were definitely against them. They said they would pollute the water when crossing a stream, that they trampled down wildflowers and all sorts of things like that. But other environmentalists proved them wrong. They did not, and had not. We had horses here for many hundreds of years, I guess. Our river was about as clean a river as in the world. So they shot that idea down real quick. But anyway, they were pushing the National Park Service to do away with the wild horses. They were demanding, but they didn't prevail. The horses are running free, today.

WS: Do you think Mr. Sullivan was against them because of this greater environmental pressure? Or his own personal opinion?

JG: I think it was both. I think primarily environmental pressure. Secondly; well, Mr. Sullivan was an extreme environmentalist himself. That's the reason why he didn't really fit in the community, because he was an extremist when it came to the environment. He couldn't hit a happy medium. It was just his way or no way, and that was the environmental way. There just wasn't any compromise about him at all.

WS: I'm kind of curious about the Park Service as an agency, because in the 1960s they seemed to be more mass recreation oriented. But of course, in some places they've seen the damage that groups of people can do, and I guess some maybe emphasize the ecology more than they do tourism.

JG: Yes.

WS: But I suppose the superintendent's philosophy or personality makes a big difference with how the community is responding to the Riverways at any given time. Would that be true?

JG: That's right. That's absolutely right. There's a way to get rural communities (especially rural communities) involved, and some of those superintendents had those skills, such as Dave Thompson.

[Tape meter, 050]

He got them involved in their policy making and projects. Everybody worked hand in hand. Everybody enjoyed it, and they had a lot of support. They gave the National Park a lot of support. Everything was really going along very smoothly until Art came. Like I said before, he was an extreme environmentalist. There was no compromise.

The people of Van Buren, the Van Buren area, and Carter County -- they believe in the environment. And I think we've done a good job maintaining a good environment. I think what Art Sullivan brought here was the idea, like, from Yellowstone; some of the big park where they're heavily used. And they do do, probably, a lot of damage because of erosion, and beat down a lot of the wildflowers, and all this. But here, it's different.

We were concerned about all of our natural beauties and the environment. But he tried to push that on these local people, like they do out in some of the big parks; Yellowstone. It just doesn't work. People rebelled, and that's what caused all the friction. (Chuckles)

WS: Would you say that wild horse issue was the most controversial during his time here?

JG: Yes it was. And I told you before, Art and I were good friends, one on one. I'd go to him and tell him we need to expand some ideas in our Big Spring Park, to entice more tourists to use the park. They were so G.I. (I use the term, "G.I.") to the tourists; they made it so miserable that the tourists wouldn't stay. They would run them off; more or less run them off. They had curfews. They moved them back from the river, way out in an old field that had no shade or anything like. It was discouraging them from using their camping areas.

To give you an example, my sister had a canoe rental and a campground, which she would have on holidays; Memorial Day. She would have, probably, five or six hundred campers. The Park down here can handle, probably, 2,000. They would have maybe fifty. And I brought that to Art's attention more than once. I said, "Now here are statistics that show you something's wrong here. The public is telling me that you're too G.I., and you're running them off. And you force them out in this big field where there's no shade." And there was all this beautiful shade, running water, and all this; river. "You're pushing them back out in these fields. And they say, 'We're not going to do that. We're going to go somewhere where we've got shade and we can watch the river run.'"

He discouraged campers, because, he said, they did a lot of damage to the

environment, “stepping on the wildflowers.” He used that term a lot. Wildflowers, vegetation. And that they would eventually erode the banks of the river and all that. That was not so, but that was his philosophy.

WS: Now I understand Mr. [Ben] Clary has got quite a different philosophy; the current superintendent.

JG: Yes he has. He’s more of a people person. He gets involved in the community, the community activities. His wife also does too. They fit in real well. People have more respect for him.

[Tape meter, 100]

But what we need is another Dave Thompson, who would really get this thing going again, make it more enticing for people to come to our community. But it gave us (the old saying) a “black eye” for several years. It’s going to take a long time to overcome that. Damage was done. The campers were treated rudely; very rudely. He wanted to force them *out* of the park. When you have at my sister’s five or six hundred campers in a real small area -- there’s over 2,000 acres down there. There’s a campsite per campsite, and fifty campers for Memorial Day. Well, that tells you something was wrong.

WS: In order of influence after the superintendent, I imagine the rangers that are patrolling the river itself would have a great deal of influence, in terms of their attitude.

JG: Yes. They had a very bad attitude.

WS: Oh, they did?

JG: They did, then, back under his [Sullivan’s] administration. Of course, they were forced, I

guess, to be that way. But they had bad attitudes. They were very rude to people. They would watch people through binoculars open up a can of beer in a boat. And if he happened to throw the tab out in the river, why, they would arrest him. They harassed them. The canoe rental contractors, they fought with the Park Service constantly, because they were so rude to their customers, and arrested them. They'd be from out of state. And it's quite an inconvenience for them to even pay their fines. Their fines were excessive -- like a beer tab, \$300 to \$500.

So it was bad deal all the way through there, just altogether. The rangers were rude. The superintendent was rude. They ran off lots of business. But the canoe contractors, concessionaires, they were very good to their people. It kept a lot of them coming, but they lost lots of business. We are a tourist town. We depend a great deal on the tourists. That's about four or five months a year. At least four months. We don't have any year-round industry, hardly at all. We have a cap factory and a handle factory. But they don't employ all that many people. So, wintertime, it's pretty slim pickings around here.

WS: I understand recently there was a controversy over the trapping along the Current River.

JG: Yes. The National Park Service was really sort of objecting to trapping. But in the original plan they were to allow trapping and hunting on this Riverways property. So that group, they protested the way they were being treated by the National Park Service. And they kind of relaxed that problem. But yes, it was quite a controversy over trapping.

WS: How did that compare in magnitude to the wild horse topic?

JG: Nothing compared to keeping the wild horses. Nothing compared to it. It was one of the biggest. It was a big deal. Of course, it got a lot of national press.

[Tape meter, 150]

There are lots of horse lovers. At Eminence, the trail ride is one of the largest in the country. They have several rides a year. It's quite a deal. It really adds to our economy, and there's hardly anything like it in this area. It also gives us lots of recognition throughout the country. They come to this trail ride all the way from Colorado, Arizona, Texas; golly, Alabama, Louisiana, Minnesota. They come from all over the country. So we get lots of recognition, lots of advertising there. It's tourist country. That trail ride is really an asset.

WS: I realize when they came in and acquired the land -- of course, anytime you have eminent domain there's going to be some bitter feelings about it.

JG: Yes.

WS: But after that time, would you say that wild horse issue was the biggest controversy of the Riverways?

JG: Yes I would. People just don't like the words, eminent domain. But the National Park Service, in my opinion, was fair with buying out these landowners. They gave them a good price for their land; probably four or five times more than they could have gotten locally. Of course some just didn't want to sell, period. They offered life estates, so that eased the tension quite a little bit. But all in all, in my opinion, it was a good thing for the community. Of course, a lot of people were wanting to sell and couldn't find a buyer.

The National Park Service was a good buyer. They gave good prices for the land.

WS: How about this option, the scenic easement? Did that cause confusion or any problems?

JG: Not as much as you might think. It caused some problems. Actually, once it was explained to people and they understood it very well, it didn't cause too much problem after that. They explained how it worked, how it was effective, and it could be passed on to another generation. After that there just wasn't too much controversy.

WS: What would you like to see them do differently than they have to manage the Riverways?

JG: I would like to see them make an all-out effort to bring back our campers. We've got the facilities. We ran our campers off, and now we need to bring them back, where they can camp two or three days or a week or however how long. That generates lots of money to our economy. When we go from 2,000 down to fifty; why, we're losing. We're missing. We're losing a lot of income. And I think they should encourage campers to come back. It would be a different attitude. And they were treated real rudely; very rudely, very rudely.

[Tape meter, 200]

I was down there down night with some friends of mine. They were from all over; St. Louis, and some other states. They invited me down. They were going to have a barbeque. One guy was a singer and keyboard-type pianist. He was very good; a professional. So we were sitting around the campfire. He was playing the piano and singing. And every so often a ranger would come by and say, "Well, don't you think you played the piano long enough?" And the campers that were close, they were all gathered

around, too. So we had quite an event going on there. And they kept coming and saying, “Well, don’t you think you ought to hang it up for the night?” I said, “Well no, the people are enjoying this.” They kept coming, and finally we just had to leave. You can’t even have any fun.

But the campers there that were enjoying it, they were all joined in. It was about nine o’clock. He said, “At ten o’clock we’re going to close the gates on you anyway. But we’d like for you to leave now.” So I thought that was pretty rude. Those campers just couldn’t believe we were being treated that way. Just couldn’t believe it. It actually happened.

WS: One thing I forgot to ask Mr. McSpadden more about was this commission that they established, right after they passed the law. The ten-member Ozark Riverways Commission. Do you remember that?

JG: Yes, I remember a little bit about that.

WS: I think they were supposed to last for ten years, and I guess help get the whole thing off the ground. But I didn’t know if that turned out the way they planned it or not.

JG: Well, they had a master plan. I was involved in this master plan. They pretty much stuck by the master plan. Pretty much. There were some things they weren’t able to do, but basically they stuck pretty close to it. But there were things that they failed to do. They were to build more facilities, more camping areas, more accesses into the river. They got real lax on that part. I was on the advisory board. Governor [Warren E.] Hearnes appointed me to two years, I believe it was. The advisory board was comprised of people,

lawyers, judges, people from all over the country. The first meeting they had was up at Welch Cave. The chairman of our board was an attorney from St. Louis.

[Tape meter, 250]

The first thing he proposed was, he wanted to make it a wilderness area from Welch Cave all the way down to include Big Spring Park. Everything would be walk-in areas. Of course, he got shot down real quick, there.

It kind of got sort of going downhill after that. The committees were not active anymore. In fact, they wouldn't even have an advisory board, I believe. You're on there for two years. That was the limit you could serve on it. Different organizations would appoint one, and then the governor appointed one. So that's how it all started. But it just finally dwindled away.

WS: Now that advisory board, was that pertaining to the rivers of Missouri?

JG: To *this* river.

WS: Was Mr. Ed Stegner on that board? From the Conservation Federation?

JG: He might have been. I don't remember for sure.

WS: There was one advisory board; I can't remember, exactly, the name of it. But I knew Mr. Stegner was on it, and Leo Drey was on it. They were on it together. It might have been the same one you were on, or not. I don't know.

JG: I think it was the same commission, but you serve two years. They probably were on it a different time than I was on it. I don't remember those guys on it, the time that I was on it. I'm sure they were on it, yes.

WS: As time goes on you always regret not having a chance to interview some of the people from the older period. I'm sure you remember them all. I noticed in the research people like J. Ben Searcy and C.P. Turley were prominent people that, I imagine, certainly had an opinion about all this if not an active role.

JG: Yes they did. C.P. Turley was the magistrate judge here in Carter County, Van Buren. He was opposed to it, primarily because of politics. It was going back through Mr. Allen, who testified before the Senate and House committees on this Riverways. He was opposed to it. He was for a dam on the river. He said he thought that would be more beneficial to the community, and there'd be more development in the way of houses and businesses, using some other dam for an example. Well, as I said earlier, I was raised near Clearwater Lake; two miles. And I saw the development there. It was very slow. To me, we've had more development here since this was formed than they did in 1947 (I think it was) when it was completed. There's just not a big development at the Clearwater Lake. There's some, but very little. I think the Riverways has attracted lots of people that are retiring. They come here. They enjoy the river, they enjoy the scenic beauty. And it's a reasonable place to live.

[Tape meter, 310. End of side two, tape one of two.]

[Tape meter, 000. Begin side one, tape two of two.]

WS: Were you involved with issuing that parade permit for them to assemble like that? The horseback?

JG: Yes. Anyplace they were on county property. Of course, I worked with the city. We

coordinated, and set the efforts.

WS: Did you ever happen to meet Mr. Hall? Leonard Hall?

JG: Oh, yes.

WS: He was actively involved in all that.

JG: Oh yes, he was. He was a good guy. We went on two trips to Washington, D.C. Then lots to Jeff City. He was always with us. Yes. I'll never forget, we chartered a plane from TWA [TransWorld Airlines.] We had a good friend from our next county who was a ticket manager for TWA. His name was Brawley. So he gave us quite a deal. He gave us a chartered TWA plane. And I don't think any of us had ridden on a big airplane, I don't think. So Hall, he had about two fifths of whiskey in his briefcase.

So this Bill Bailey we were talking about, he had never flown before either. We got over in the mountains there in Virginia. They were turbo-prop planes. They were flying about 16,000 feet. It just tossed that plane this way and that way. So anyway, Leonard Hall, he broke out all this whiskey. Bill Bailey drank about half of it. He said, "Man, if I ever get my foot on the ground I'll never get off of it again." It was so funny. Old Leonard was kind of scared too, I think. So everybody had a shot of whiskey and they calmed down. (Laughing) So, we went to Washington, D.C. That was so funny, looking back over the years; how funny it was to see how scared the guys were.

WS: So did Mr. Bailey take the bus back?

JG: Well, he got about half drunk before he got up the courage to get back on the plane again. We made it back. (Laughs)

WS: Now he was a pretty unusual person, I guess, in that he was a native, and yet he had a long and early career with the Riverways.

JG: Yes.

WS: So I guess he could act as sort of a liaison between the Park Service and the local people. Would that be right?

JG: Yes. Then, he had a lot of political connections on the state level, at Jeff City. I was able to help on transferring the state parks to the National Park Service. My good friend, that I was raised up with, he was state representative. He was chairman of the State Parks Committee. With him helping us, why, we -- that was quite a controversy getting the state to turn over [those parks] to the federal government.

WS: Oh, it was?

JG: Oh, yes.

WS: I thought they had agreed and all that, before.

JG: Well, they did. And then some of their constituents protested. It got into politics, as I said before. And they didn't want to do that. Then they had to work out something with the Missouri Conservation Commission where they would allow hunting in the park, and trapping. So it got slowed down right there for a while. But it finally got worked out.

Then, we hit a snag again up in Washington D.C. with this [Congressman] Rutherford.⁶ I think he was from either New Mexico or Texas, one. I think it was Texas. Of course, the lawyers drew up the agreement between the National Park Service and the

⁶ Probably referring to U. S. Representative J.T. Rutherford of Texas, who was in Congress from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s.

State Park Board. I'll never forget this as long as I live -- the words "shall" and "will."

This U.S. Representative Rutherford, he was a lawyer himself. He found a little discrepancy in this contract. It was the "shall" and "will." "Shall" means that you will by all means transfer the parks. "Will" is "maybe."

So, that delayed us one year. One year, that one word; shall and will. It delayed us one full year. Then, he got defeated the next year, so we didn't have him to worry about anymore. But boy, he was a stickler. He slowed the process down to a crawl.

[Tape meter, 050]

WS: Why did he care one way or the other?

JG: I don't know. It didn't affect him at all, his state. But I guess he wanted to flex his muscles. But that was quite a controversy there. I never forgot that legal term, what "shall" and "will" means, the difference. (Laughs)

We got staggered several times; sort of setbacks. One of them was this contract, the wording. Another one was the boundary lines. We had to cut off at Ripley County. That congressman just would not give in at all. So those delayed us probably a year a piece. But we kept on working. We never did quit working. But it slowed our process down.

WS: Have you been satisfied, overall, the way things have turned out these last three decades?

JG: Primarily I've been satisfied. As I said before, if you've got good superintendents, it's strictly an asset to the community. When you have someone who is an extreme environmentalist that doesn't want to see it grow, doesn't want to see people come, well

then that's kind of aggravating. It's devastating to you that you've got an operation this big and then you're running away business for your community, hurting the economy. That hurts. But, right at this present time it's running smoothly and I'm very happy with it.

WS: Did you ever have any influence with getting the headquarters located in Van Buren?

JG: Yes.

WS: I heard that for a while they were considering a number of other places.

JG: Yes.

WS: So how'd you do that?

JG: Through our state representative. He was a real close friend of mine. We worked with George Hartzog. We had several meetings with him, just we three. Then we got other people involved, like Mr. McSpadden and all those. He got involved. We just kept gaining momentum, and finally we got the commitment out of them. George Hartzog was the key to all of it. George liked it here. He liked everybody here, that lived here in Van Buren. He thought it was the most logical place to have headquarters. But, of course, pressure was being put on. They wanted it at Eminence, and I don't know where else; Birch Tree. Several towns were really after it. But, by having our state representative in here -- he and George were real close friends; *had* been, even before the formation of the Riverways. So, that was our key right there. George said this was the most logical place for the headquarters, so we got it.

WS: So far as I've been able to tell, these other state representatives in the neighboring

counties tried to keep, looks like, a pretty low profile in terms of whether they were for or against this. Whereas, Mr. [Walter T. "Dunie"] Bollinger, [Jr.] obviously was outstanding in his support of the Riverways.

JG: Yes, he was. They had a lot of admiration for Mr. Bollinger. But yet, at the same time, there was a lot of controversy going on, because of the politics that got involved. They did keep a pretty low profile. But they still would give us that support we needed. They did keep a low profile, over politics. That's politics for you. In any issue there's exaggeration. Oh, my God, I heard some of the most ridiculous reasons why we shouldn't have the park. It was unbelievable. But it all stemmed from politics. And then they would tell these big lies, really. A lot of people would believe that.

WS: Can you think of some?

JG: The one thing was that they would eventually take over the whole, entire county. You'd be thrown out of your house.

[Tape meter, 100]

They'd use the power of eminent domain to get you out of your property, and all that kind of stuff. Then high taxes was something else; that taxes would be so high. And then there would be the undesirable peoples coming in. It got exaggerated out of reason. I heard it all. (Chuckles) But that has not been the case.

WS: When they first came here, they located the land acquisition office up in Eminence. Is that correct?

JG: Yes, that's right.

WS: I wonder if there was a reason for that?

JG: Another compromise, over the headquarters.

WS: Now there isn't any office left up there?

JG: No.

WS: I see.

JG: That was a compromise.

WS: I've got a slightly different topic to ask you about. I've done some research on the open range. I understand in 1964 [1963, actually] they got a [fencing] law passed in Jefferson City. But the only way they got it passed was to allow it on a county option basis. But, from what I understand, the counties here in the eastern Ozarks pretty quickly voted in the fencing law after that. I don't know if you recall that or not?

JG: Yes, I do. What I think, some of the farmers started practicing fencing, and they would raise a higher quality cattle and hogs. Open range, they inbred; cows and hogs, primarily. Horses, the same way too. They would say, "Well, John Doe, he's fencing and he's got better quality than I've got. He's got better quality of hogs than I've got. He's getting more money out of them." Then he started fencing. It was kind of a slow process, but that's how it happened. Then traffic started picking up more on the highways, and there was stock getting run over. I ran a wrecker for fifty-some years. They were just having wrecks right and left, the summertime, especially. A cow laying on the road, crossing a road, and people driving seventy miles an hour hitting a cow. That's pretty bad. It pretty much totaled the car out every time they hit a cow. And people go injured. So, it just had

to be taught slowly, that it was the best thing to do, to fence and raise higher quality livestock. Therefore they were able to make more money.

WS: So the county voters never actually voted on a referendum or something to make it the law, that you had to fence.

JG: No. There was some opposition. The state had encouraged it, see, to have a stock law. At first, there was a lot of opposition. Buses of people went up to Jeff City and protested against closed range. Well, I think if you got educated by someone just starting fencing a farm, and they raised higher quality livestock, the idea caught on. That lessened that tension, and people got a different idea about the concept.

WS: So it's mostly, I guess, just been voluntary and based on example.

JG: That's right.

WS: Is that so?

JG: Right, yes. But it was really controversial for a while.

WS: I guess so. Yes, I've found some of the accounts from the early '60s. Someone called it a Hitlerian technique to force the closing of the range.

JG: Yes!

(Laughter)

Boy, there were busload after busloads of people from all these Ozark counties here.

They went to Jeff City. Our state representative, of course, there was a lot of support for him. But later on, by example, just like you said, it finally just fizzled out.

[Tape meter, 150]

WS: I guess compared to the Park Service, the state parks, the Missouri Conservation Commission, and the U.S. Forest Service have had a pretty minor role compared to them. Or maybe not. I don't know. But, of the government agencies, you hear a lot more about the Park Service.

JG: Yes, you do.

WS: Well Mr. Grassham, I believe that's all my questions for you, that I can think of. I don't want to leave anything out in case I've failed to ask you something. I'd like to give you a chance to make any closing comments or anything.

JG: Well, I know at the beginning of this Riverways we took a lot of flak. They boycotted our business. But we prevailed, and now I think most people -- as I told you before, the people on the House and Senate committees came down here and made the visual tour. They said that the opposition probably would have prospered more from it in the way of jobs than the people who were for it, and that is exactly what did happen. But there are several people that have been employed by the National Park Service in 1978-9 and '80, during the recession. If it had *not* been for the National Park Service, I think there would have been lots of businesses closed here in Van Buren. So, all in all, I'm real happy with the effort and all the flak we took. (Chuckles)

WS: Yes. I've heard some of the stories; the violence and all.

JG: Yes.

WS: Did anybody ever get killed over anything?

JG: No. They shot at us. We were going into Two Rivers at night. The fire from the guns

shooting over top of the car -- I think George Hartzog was in there. I was in the car with him and several others. They got a pretty good reception there at night with gunfire. But nobody shot [anybody]. It was just a scare tactic, is what it was. But we just never did slow down. We never did take those things very seriously, I guess. Finally they just left us alone. (Laughs)

WS: Up here at the ranger headquarters they were telling me one ranger has been burned out a couple of times.

JG: Yes. I think that's happened.

WS: Was that near Van Buren, or further up river?

JG: Eminence.

WS: Oh, up there.

JG: But he was a local guy, and he got real tough on the local people. So they resented that. They gave him a burn out. (Chuckles)

WS: I don't know if this can be told, but I wonder if you sense if there's a difference between the local reaction to the Riverways based on the downriver (more Carter County) compared to the upper river; Jacks Fork, Shannon County? If they felt more or less hostile, or anything like that? I just thought about that when you mentioned that he was up from that area.

JG: I think they're a little more hostile upriver.

WS: Is that right?

JG: Yes. They're a little more redneck than we are down here.

(Laughter)

Yes. So, there's a difference. But -- I think they employ more people from up there. I think that was a reason for it, was to try to make peace with the people. And I think it probably worked out all right. But they went through a period when it was pretty hostile. That's when that ranger was burned out. Of course, again, it comes back to that individual. You can hang a gun on someone and his personality changes. Authority -- some people can handle it, and some can't. So I think that was a lot of it. They couldn't handle authority. But he learned to.

(Laughter)

[Tape meter, 205. End side one, tape two of two. End of interview.]