

AN INTERVIEW WITH HISTORIAN MERRILL J. MATTES

ON SCOTTS BLUFF, AGATE FOSSIL BEDS, GRAND PORTAGE

NATIONAL MONUMENTS AND OTHER AREAS

LITTLETON, COLORADO MAY 24-25, 1983

By

Ron Cockrell

Research Historian

Midwest Regional Office

National Park Service

Omaha, Nebraska

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PREFACE

Contained herein is an interview with Merrill J. Mattes, former Custodian of Scotts Bluff National Monument, Nebraska, (1935-1946) and Midwest Regional Historian (1949-1966). The interview took place in the subject's residence in Littleton, Colorado, on May 24 and 25, 1983.

I was assigned to interview Mr. Mattes at the suggestion of National Park Service Chief Historian Edwin C. Bearss who felt that Mattes could make significant contributions to several of my projects, among which are administrative histories of Scotts Bluff, Agate Fossil Beds, and Grand Portage National Monuments. Mattes did indeed prove to represent a wealth of information on these and many other subjects as well. The concentration of the interview focuses on the above areas primarily, but other areas like Fort Laramie, Chimney Rock, Bent's Old Fort, Grand Teton, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Voyageurs, and more are mentioned. A segment of the interview deals with the subject's long career as he worked his way up the ladder of the National Park Service. A career resume, prepared by Mr. Mattes, is included at the end.

I decided to transcribe this rather lengthy interview for my own use, to incorporate the comments in my draft histories. I came to realize as I was typing these many pages, however, that the individual areas mentioned would also benefit from this transcript. Certainly other Historians, both in-Service and out, researching these parks could learn much not only about their specific topic, but about the early years of the National Park Service as well.

As with most veteran Historians, Merrill J. Mattes was well-organized and prepared, a master storyteller relating names, dates, and facts. As a journalist-historian, I was content to interrupt his concentration only to ask for clarifications.

Ron Cockrell
Research Historian, Midwest Region
National Park Service
Omaha, Nebraska

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Interview
May 24, 1983
Littleton, Colorado

COCKRELL: Mr. Mattes, could you please give a summary of your education and early career?

MATTES: I got into history real early. I was born in Congress Park, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, moved to Kansas City fairly young, and attended public schools there in Kansas City. Then I went to the University of Missouri and received an A.B. degree, and went on to get a Masters Degree at the University of Kansas. I majored in history at the University of Missouri; this was in 1929 to 31. The Depression was on full-swing, so I had a notion I'd go to the University of Kansas and I switched over to English literature.

I couldn't get a job teaching in 1933, but I was tipped off about the Civil Service Examination for a Junior Park Naturalist in Kansas City. I got my transcripts from the Universities of Kansas and Missouri and I took that examination in October 1933. I didn't get a firm offer of permanent employment until October of 1935. In the meantime I had employment in Kansas City and forgot about this deal until the summer of 1935 when I was offered a Seasonal Ranger position in Yellowstone National Park. I was on the Civil Service Register; I had passed the Naturalist position with a History option.

So I did go to Yellowstone Park and spent the summer there, and it was while I was at the park that I finally got the telegram offering me the job at Scotts Bluff. That suited me right down to the ground because I had majored in history and I was very much keenly interested in Western American history and Scotts Bluff was a virgin field. Nobody had been there to develop the historical background of it.

I reported for duty on October 1, 1935, at Scotts Bluff as the first permanent full-time employee. I might mention that prior to your call, I took Earl Harris's [administrative] history and went through it again, and I might have conveyed the wrong impression to you in terms of its accuracy. I felt that it didn't go sufficiently into depth on things that occurred. I would say that on the whole, Earl did a fairly good job. There are a few little things that are questionable or in error, but it's a bird's eye view. My feeling was to do justice to the subject, especially during the ten years that I was there; I thought I'd like to have the chance to add to your supplemental report.

COCKRELL: Yes, I was hoping to use the information from this

interview to fill-in spaces in error or areas needing clarification.

MATTES: I would think that if you're going to complete this, it should be re-written from the beginning, but a large section of it will be pretty much verbatim from Earl's version, because he had access to documents about the establishment leading up to the time of my arrival there. I found a few little areas in there and I could list those now if that would be convenient.

COCKRELL: Sure. Certainly.

MATTES: On page 8, the statement is made that the Mormons used the north side. This is true, but there is the common fallacy here that I have learned as I have gone into depth on the overland migrations. The fact that the Mormon Pioneers of 1847 went down the north side did not make it the Mormon Trail. The Mormons went down both sides of the river in later years, and during the gold rush years there were far more non-Mormons using the north side than the Mormons! So, I think that statements like that are over simplifications, or misleading.

Another thing on page 8, there is an error in a statement made that it was the American Fur Company that set up the trading post at Robidoux Pass. This is not true. It was never the American Fur Company Post at Robidoux Pass. That was the Robidoux family of St. Joseph, a family of fur traders. Joseph Robidoux and others were involved there. They, too, had been in the neighborhood of Fort Laramie earlier, but it was the Robidoux's trading post at Robidoux Pass. The American Fur Company went to Helvas Canyon, which was eight miles below there. I might mention parenthetically, in my book, The Great Platte River Road, I have a whole chapter on Robidoux Pass and the Robidoux Trading Post.

On page 34, this relates to my arrival there. It says that Cook was relieved of his position and Mattes was appointed there. There are two things that the administrative history does not mention. Point number one is that Harold Cook was fired by Secretary of the Interior Ickes because he refused to accept the appointment of a foreman on his CCC crew. He was canned. I've read the telegram and there was no ifs, ands, or buts; he was out on his ear. It was that incident that created the confusion there for awhile, and then the Park Service decided we've got to get someone in there on a full time basis for the CCC camp.

Now, the second point I want to make is that there is a technical error there that Charles E. Randalls was not a Custodian to begin with replacing Harold Cook. I got the appointment as Custodian.

I still have the telegram. But, what happened was, after I had been in Scottsbluff a few weeks and Mr. Randalls realized how green I was as far as running the construction project, I think he got it fixed for him to continue as "Acting Custodian", and then I was given the title as "Junior Historian." So, throughout that period, I held the appointment of Custodian, but he became "Acting Custodian," and I would concentrate on the interpretive and research programs.

In 1938, when the CCC camp folded up and Charlie Randalls was shipped down to Denver, I got a telegram stating that I was now the full time Custodian for Scotts Bluff. That was early in the spring of 1938.

COCKRELL: Was there any difference pay-wise?

MATTES: No, it was the same. I started out getting \$1700 a year, and after two or three years, I was given a one grade raise and \$1820 a year.

Those are the principal things. There are other things, but I felt he didn't go into William H. Jackson as much as he should have. I wanted to assure you that I thought it was fairly well done, but that I thought there was so much that had been omitted that would be of real interest.

When I got there, several things were in place. They had started the construction of the Summit Road. It was just rough graded. They had built the museum, the brick building in 1935, and then the later additions were adobe. That's important to note because it will probably show up; the adobe buildings will probably fail long before the brick building.

Our office was in Gering, on top of The Gering Courier. I had absolutely free hand to take care of the public and develop an interpretive program and do any research that needed doing. Mr. Randalls had a tough job. He was the one that had to knock heads with the politicians and the CCC foreman and discipline. He was an unpopular man because anyone that administers or lays down the rules is going to have people unhappy with him, but he was an engineer of great ability and great administrative talent. It was a good division of labor. He was the nominal Custodian for the whole show. I did the rest of it--the public, the museum, the interpretive program, and had absolutely no restrictions. We had no travel money at all, not a dime. Again, I was unmarried at that point and operating under no handicaps.

A word about the CCC camp. For awhile I lived in the CCC camp in the officers quarters, but eventually I found a room in Gering. My only involvement with the CCC camp was to advise in those

matters where there was some interpretive facilities. I was given some CCC enrollees to help me in handling the visitors and with the interpretive program. So I picked out some of the brighter kids who could speak well and had some kind of a decent education--and there were some pretty good ones there. They in effect acted as Rangers during this period when we got some pretty heavy visitation, long before we were able to supplement with any additional positions. I was by myself as a permanent employee for about the first five or six years. After 1938, they gave me some Seasonal Rangers. I didn't get a permanent Ranger until 1940--Lynn Coffin, who transferred from Rocky Mountain National Park--and then I also got a Clerk. This was Ethel Meinzer, a middle-aged widow. Her husband had been killed in a CCC truck accident. She was quite competent. She was the first lady in the National Park Service to be photographed in a uniform. She was helping out at the front gate, meeting the public, so I asked if we could put a uniform on her, and they said, 'Sure, go ahead.'

COCKRELL: Was it unusual to have a woman wearing an NPS uniform then?

MATTES: Yes, very unusual. She's the first one that I know of.

In the CCC camp, one of the foremen was named Charlie Humberger. He became my first Seasonal Ranger by appointment. Then in the winter of 1938 and 39, I got a leave of absence. I got a fellowship at Yale University Graduate School, so I was gone nine or ten months. During this period, Mr. Humberger was Acting Custodian. Since that time, or subsequent to that, he was picked up as a permanent Ranger at Rocky Mountain National Park and followed a career in the Park System. He's now retired and living out in California.

Perhaps I should dwell on the Oregon Trail Museum because that was our number one project there. The present exhibits are quite different from the original ones. There have been three different sets of exhibits. The first exhibit was a combination of two things. On the one hand, the Western Museum Laboratory at Berkeley, California, had received some WPA money and they had hired some unemployed artists and also historians to develop a pictoral sequence. So those were delivered and installed in time for our grand dedication of the museum in 1936. Now, the exhibits that they provided were almost all two-dimensional watercolor paintings. The important thing to keep in mind was that this exhibit did not restrict itself to United States westward expansion. Carl Russell, another patriarch in the interpretive field, explained it to me, that at that time there was no other Western museum in the Park Service that was devoted to history. So, they had an opportunity to cover the whole field of westward

expansion. The second thing that was done was the accumulation of artifacts that I did in preparation for this opening.

In the course of events, I met all sorts of old-timers, and most notably, T.L. Green of Scottsbluff, who was a retired banker. His hobby was historic sites and archeology. We got along beautifully. He donated to the museum his whole collection of artifacts, including those things that had been obtained from the Robidoux Trading Post site and the American Fur Company post site in Helvas Canyon. These are priceless because these represent some very bona fide artifacts from the California Gold Rush period that were found right there in that neighborhood. We also got guns and oxbows and buffalo robes and things of this sort, from various sources. Wind Cave sent us a buffalo robe. We had a very nice display for the grand opening in July 1936. Earl's book does tell about the ceremony. The main speaker was William H. Jackson. Present were other officials of the Oregon Trail Museum Association. Howard R. Driggs was the president. I was there interviewing people right and left, but not on the platform. I wasn't a big shot at that time.

COCKRELL: Even though you represented the Park Service?

MATTES: Mr. Randalls was the "Acting Custodian" at that time. However, I got acquainted with all these fine people. Mr. Jackson presented the National Monument with an album of black and white reproductions of his paintings. This was way before the Jackson wing was put in. It was a grand celebration. We had a band and it was hotter than the dickens. Nobody minded. Jackson was 93 years old at that time. Just as spry as a bedbug. He had gone through with an ox team with a freighting outfit in 1866, and had achieved fame as an artist of the Oregon Trail and also as a photographer of Yellowstone Park and other scenic wonders of the West.

The Oregon Trail Memorial Association, of which he was a member, and Howard Driggs, President, would come by every year and make Scotts Bluff one of their major stops. The next big celebration that I remember was in 1938 when they came through. I remember several things quite vividly. One of them is that I asked Mr. Jackson to show me where his campsite was just beyond Mitchell Pass. He mentions it in his own diaries. We went over there, several of us, and I had a stake and a hammer and a camera. I put the stake in the place where he said he was camped out in 1866, and I also took a photograph as he was hitting the stake. It is still in the picture collection. It's an interesting photograph because it makes a good connection, 1866 to 1936.

The other thing that happened--and I'll tie this all together

because it is all related to the Oregon Trail Memorial Association in 1938--that same year, Fort Laramie National Historic Site was created. Actually, it was called Fort Laramie National Monument to begin with. It was created by presidential proclamation. So, after we were through with our ceremonies at Scotts Bluff, we went on up to Fort Laramie and had a nice picnic and bonfire. There was nobody stationed there, you understand, there was just the deserted buildings. We had a CCC camp that was just some boys doing some cleaning up. I had been appointed Acting Custodian of Fort Laramie at the same time. I held that position briefly until I went off to Yale University that winter. That ties together the Oregon Trail Memorial Association. They came through also in 1940, but they decided to have their annual get together at Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I got permission from the Omaha office to go with them. That's when I started getting interested in Jackson Hole and the Western fur trade. That was the last meeting that I recall having with them for awhile, and at that time they changed their name to the American Pioneer Trails Association. They wanted to broaden their horizons. That organization went out of existence in 1954. They ran out of steam; it's been revived in another form. It's known as the Oregon-California Trail Association.

Now, back to the museum. In 1938, we realized that one room was insufficient so the architects put together a plan for expanding the building. What they built in 1938 with CCC money was the additional museum wing and the office which is presently there. Those units were of adobe, real massive adobe, with stucco cover. I guess that adobe keeps up pretty well if it is shielded from the weather.

COCKRELL: I think the stucco is painted nearly every year.

MATTES: They have to keep it covered very well and they have a good roof on the building. I should mention that also in 1937, I was married to the niece of the fellow who was the highway administrator helping build the Summit Road. She was from California. It wasn't until 1938 that our house was completed. That is identified by Earl Harris as a three room house meaning it had one bedroom. We had two kids; the first boy born in November 1939, named Warren. He's now a school teacher in Omaha. The second boy born in January 1941, named John, is now with a trucking firm in Dallas. When the second boy was born, his mother died in childbirth. I met my present wife, Clare, soon thereafter because she was stationed in Estes Park on the staff of Superintendent David Canfield who was designated "Coordinating Superintendent" beginning in 1940 or 41. I was remarried in October of 1942. I have a third boy, Dave, who lives in San Francisco.

Because of the small size of the residence, when the third boy arrived, I hauled off and bought a house in Gering at 1230 M Street, right on the highway and commuted. One of the temporary Rangers moved into the "mud hut" as we called it. Now that same building is there, but they have since expanded with an additional bedroom. They have another residence. We put the first house next to the gate so we could control the traffic going up on the Summit Road.

One of the difficulties we had in the early times was the fact that we were so under-staffed and yet the public wanted the place opened all day long and half the night. It wasn't until about 1941 or 42 that we had to crack down and start closing the place at sundown. We didn't have any toll. There was no toll gate on the Summit Road until sometime during the war.

COCKRELL: What was the purpose of the toll? Maintenance?

MATTES: It was required by the Bureau of the Budget that some of the parks produce a little revenue. It was at the same time... you see, there was always a fee for entrance to Yellowstone National Park. It used to be two dollars. A little place like Scotts Bluff, they said to collect a fee from people going up this road. We started out charging two bits a car, and they've collected it ever since even though it was uneconomical. It costs far more for personnel to do the collecting than the revenue, but it is still required by the Bureau of the Budget.

COCKRELL: Was there a special toll booth built there?

MATTES: For a long time we just collected at the gate. It wasn't until I had left that they put in a temporary toll booth. Now I understand they have a permanent one.

While we were there, I wanted to mention something about the weather because I think it tells a lot about Scotts Bluff's environment, and this is still a problem to people living there. As you know, Scotts Bluff is about 4,600 feet; the bluff is about 800 feet above the river. The problem we had, we had several. One of them was the dust storms. We haven't had dust storms like there were back in the 30s, but some of those good old fashioned dust storms would come through there and the dust would be real fine, real dust, and not sand. With the wind at a terrific force, it would drive it right through the windows, through the window sash. It would work into the room, the same with the museum, and that was a problem. Also, we had snow. At one time we had the snow clear up to the roof of the buildings. The drift

was up there! We were hopelessly marooned there for brief periods.

We wouldn't get a lot of rain, but when it did come, it was likely to come all at once. I remember two things in particular. We kept a weather rain guage there for awhile for the National Weather Service. One day we had 7 inches coming down all at once--a real cloudburst. We were safely inside. Afterward, I stepped out and heard a roaring sound. What it was was water from the bluffs rushing down and into the badlands with tremendous velocity just like it was going through a steam turbine into a reservoir. I walked over there and here this water was just roaring through there in the badlands which are normally dry. That is how these badlands are formed. That was a very dramatic demonstration of erosion you get which is only occasional, but when it happens, it's violent.

Of course it was the erosion, the badlands formations, on the north side of the bluff between the bluff and the river that made it impossible for covered wagons to go along that side. At first they went through Robidoux Pass because that was an easier grade, but later, as my book shows, they went through Mitchell Pass. We think, and there's no proof of it in the record, either Fort Laramie soldiers or traders, the people who were making their money off of the immigration, excavated Mitchell Pass sufficiently to permit covered wagons to go through. The eyewitness accounts that I've read, when they go through Mitchell Pass they always speak in awed terms of the scenery and of the narrowness. There's just barely enough room for one wagon which is just like it is today, except it's been modified a lot by further erosion.

One other thing on the weather. In the Oregon Trail diaries and other later diaries, there's many references to the strong winds on the western plains that would rip off the wagon covers and knock wagons over and make travel very disagreeable. One traveler, and I believe it was Richard Burton in 1860 who, on his way to Salt Lake City--he was an English globetrotter--referred to Scotts Bluff as the "Home of the Winds." That's by way of preamble of telling you about a wind we had one night. It blowed like fury. When I woke up the next morning, I walked out and all of a sudden I stopped. We had an equipment shed behind the house. It's still there, but has been modified several times. It was an adobe structure with a timber roof. The roof was gone! The wind had picked up the entire roof and carried it up onto the Summit Road I'd say about 200 yards or more away. It's a miracle it didn't remove the roof on the museum or the house as well. Apparently, the equipment shed roof had some steel rods which were anchored into the ground. It just ripped them off of there and it just took off.

COCKRELL: Do you think it was a twister?

MATTES: I doubt it because had it been a tornado, it would've been much more severe. The other buildings would've been effected. I think what happens is that the winds come through the pass with great velocity and swirl, so we got caught in a cross wind. The CCC people got busy and put the shed back together again.

After the CCC camp closed, we had a terrific hailstorm. The hail came down in the size of golfballs or bigger. It battered the shake roofs, knocked out all windows on the west side of the buildings, and it sent hailstones into the bedrooms and into the tower in the lobby section of the museum. It knocked out the windows, and there were hailstones piled up against the dioramas that were at the far side of that museum. There was considerable damage to the structures which the Park Service had to repair.

Scotts Bluff was a wonderful opportunity for a young Historian. It was a virgin field. Very little had been done. It was understood that the Oregon Trail went through there, but nothing was known, for example, about Hiram Scott. Who was he? Where did he come from? Much less about Robidoux. Here was Fort Laramie further up the line setting there going to wrack and ruin and nobody doing anything about it. I fell right into that. It was a real blessing for me to have the opportunity to start moving on this and try to answer some of these questions. All this research was done on the side because I had plenty of things to do in the way of administration--paperwork, maintenance, the museum, visitors. God knows what else. When I got there in 1935, I was told by Mr. Randalls that I would work seven days a week. And I did. I didn't have a family, and I loved the job, so I didn't mind. After I was married, I put up a squawk. I said I'd have to have one day off. He very grudgingly said, 'Well, maybe you can have one day off during the week, but you can't have Sundays off' because that was the day when all the people come out there.

The CCC camp built a picnic area in the southwest corner of the monument which turned out to be a big mistake. They had to bring water there so they had to trench right through the Oregon Trail ruts. They'd already done this before I got there. They could have tunneled underneath it. What happened was I suddenly realized that here was a trail, a priceless asset. Where else do you see magnificent remains like this? So I raised a bit of Cain about it and Randalls didn't think it was anything to fuss about. I got into a little bit of dutch with him because I sent a letter to the Chief Historian complaining that they had done this and nobody seemed to think anything of it. I should have gone through him. It was the only time we'd had a disagreement. The upshot was Washington set down the law about some of these

features were sacred, so to speak, and not to be trifled with.

Geographically, I became interested in Fort Mitchell which was down by the river. In 1938, we put up a marker, not at the site of Fort Mitchell, but across the road where it used to be. I gave the dedication talk there. I had to do all the research on it. That led to my publication of "Fort Mitchell" in the Nebraska History Magazine. I wrote to the National Archives and they sent me a lot of stuff that nobody knew existed that threw out a lot of light on who built it, when they built it, some of the personnel who served there. Then, of course, I was real curious about Hiram Scott. I'd learned a lot about the Western fur trade to know that he had to come from St. Louis. They all came mostly from St. Louis. He was hired in 1822 and was with Ashley's expedition that went up the Missouri River, one of the most famous of all the Western expeditions. He was not just one of the trappers. He was one of the two lieutenants. William Sublette was one and Hiram Scott was the other. He was not just a run-of-the-mill employee. He had enough ability one way or the other to get that recognition. The next thing you hear about him is his death, when they named the bluff for him.

I was terribly curious about all this. In the different Oregon Trail journals that I'd read, I would see different versions. No two of them were ever alike. I read the Ferris journal of 1830 and it gave a totally different version. Ferris went down the north side of the river so finally it occurred to me, we'd had an area called Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. I just asked the Superintendent. You see, there was never anything like travel money in those days. I wrote to him and asked 'could you get somebody on your staff to check out in the Missouri Historical Society about Hiram Scott? Sure enough, John Bryant, who was an Architect, did go there and did dig up a few facts, not much. He established what township he lived in, that he apparently was born in 1805, and it told how much money he owed to somebody. This was all out of the old county records. He did a pretty good job of discovering there was a real person by this name.

Nowhere was there an official account of what happened out there, and there isn't to this day. I have, in my Great Platte River Road and Mountain Men of the Fur Trade, it all laid out. There are many different accounts. The ones that count are the ones closest to the time, 1828, which had to be the year because he was on the payroll in 1828 for the fur company, and his name doesn't show up again. We know that William Sublette came back from Salt Lake rendezvous in 1828, and undoubtedly that was when he [Scott] fell ill, or was shot by Indians, or whatever, and was left to die at Scotts Bluff. So I put the story together as best I could from all that and it was published in Nebraska History.

Then you get to the Robidoux, and nobody could tell me who

Robidoux was. There was a History of Western Nebraska by Grant Shomway that purported to identify him, but he has it completely wrong. He didn't know anything about it; he was just guessing. He'd read some books, but he just leaped to conclusions. He really didn't have a solid fact in there at all. It was very misleading. He had some wild guesses about Robidoux. I had been accumulating from emigrant journals all the accounts of this trading post which was the first Scotts Bluff pass. That's where they moved, and later it was in 1851 that they began going through Mitchell Pass. All these interesting accounts of a blacksmith at Scotts Bluff pass.

Finally, a breakthrough came when some Indians visited Scotts Bluff, Sioux Indians from the reservation in South Dakota who were working in the potato and beet harvest in the North Platte Valley. One of these old Indians asked who was in charge, and he told me his name was Robidoux! The way he put it was that his uncle had a trading post. I pumped him for all the information I could get, and then I wrote to the historical society in St. Joseph, Missouri, and what I finally put together was written up in Nebraska History and the second version in Mountain Men of the Fur Trade, but the most complete version was in Great Platte River Road because by that time I had all the facts. I'd been at the National Archives for Fort Laramie, and I checked out the Indian trading licenses. So what did we find but the Robidouxs. Joseph Robidoux and three or four others, Joseph, Jr. We knew where their trading post was.

Tom Green, the banker, had identified the location. It was undisturbed. It had never been dug archeologically. The footings were still in evidence. It was a wood building, but was on stone footings. There were two springs in Robidoux Pass. We finally got them figured out. We figured out where the trading post was located and it was totally different from what it said on the bronze marker. If you go there today, it says trading post right here. They've got it in the wrong place because Robidoux's post was down by the second spring. Down by the ravine. It's at least 100 to 200 yards below, north of the big spring. That's where the two ravines come together, where the Robidoux's post was located.

We've never been able to do anything about interpretation out there because the Park Service has never shown the faintest interest in adding Robidoux Pass to the National Monument. It should have been. It was a bad mistake because Robidoux Pass was every bit as important as Mitchell Pass. In fact, the Oregon Trail--if by Oregon Trail you mean the people who went to Oregon in the 1840s before the California Gold Rush in the 1840s--they all went through Robidoux Pass. They didn't go through Mitchell Pass. So, Robidoux Pass is more of the Oregon Trail, and Mitchell Pass was more of the California Gold Rush. Most of the land could have been acquired easily in the early days. Now

I suppose it would be impossible because of the ranchers who occupy that pass would scream their bloody heads off. As hard as I tried, I never got beyond first base to convince anybody that we should add it to the system. The Oregon-California Trial Association will advocate picking that up, but not right away.

So, Robidoux Pass was a pretty important site. Not only because the trading post was there, but because the Oregon Trail went through there. Everybody camped there up through the year 1850, including the first two years of the California Gold Rush. Everybody described the fabulous scenery. It is every bit as important as Scotts Bluff National Monument itself, and should have just been added, as maybe a separate unit. It may not be too late.

The reason that Robidoux wasn't included originally in 1919 was that nobody knew about its historical importance. Nobody realized that that was the main Oregon Trail and it wasn't until later years that we discovered--I say we because T.L. Green of Scottsbluff and I were together on a lot of this; he's the one who discovered this and Stansbury, Howard Stansbury, in History of the Great Salt Lake. Howard Stansbury was a government surveyor. He was sent out to map the Great Salt Lake in 1849. He didn't come back until the fall of 1850 when he came to a Horse Creek which is just to the west of Scotts Bluff. One of his guides pointed out that there's a new trail here. The main trail went to Robidoux Pass, but the new trail was closer to the river. This indicated that late in 1850 was the first use of Mitchell Pass. This is how we were able to determine that initially from Stansbury's log, but subsequently in all the overland diaries that I've read it became abundantly evident. If it's in 1850, they're still going through Robidoux Pass and they describe it and you can tell it's Robidoux Pass. If it is 1852, or even 1851, all of a sudden it's Mitchell Pass. Because that was supposed to be a short cut.

COCKRELL: Because it had been excavated by the fur traders?

MATTES: We can only guess they or the soldiers had to excavate it. Just to broaden it, to widen it out so a wagon could get through. Prior to that time, wagons couldn't get through. It was considered impassable. It didn't take a lot of work. It took a couple of guys with spades to get busy and do something with it. All of a sudden, everybody was going that way.

COCKRELL: So Robidoux Pass just faded away?

MATTES: Robidoux Pass continued in use but it fell off. I have

some journals from a later period which shows that they did use Robidoux Pass, but the vast majority used Mitchell Pass even though it was a pretty rugged route. You can imagine taking a wagon through the badlands approaching the museum. Remember you come in on the highway and if you look to your left, there's some ravines. They had to get in and out of those ravines before they went past what is now the headquarters and into Mitchell Pass.

Another subject which I was impressed by is Chimney Rock which is now associated with Scotts Bluff nominally and is still owned by the State of Nebraska. Incidentally, the administrative history is in error when it says the Superintendent of Scotts Bluff "administers" Chimney Rock. It's not true. It's "administered" by the State of Nebraska, the State Historical Society. We just have a nominal association. It was designated a National Historic Site and that's the end of it. I don't think we've done a blessed thing unless its to publish a leaflet.

COCKRELL: Probably not.

MATTES: So what are we "administering?" I was impressed by the fact by these overland journals--by that time I'd read almost every one I could get hold of. I'd get them from local libraries and then I started getting them from other places. The biggest breakthrough was when the government sent me to the Newberry Library in Chicago during the war to get as much information as we could on Fort Laramie from original journals. That's where I made the big breakthrough. I must have accumulated over 150, maybe 200, journals they had either in published form or manuscript form, and they were all microfilmed. I had those transcribed. From that, it directly broadened the information. Of course they were supposed to be used for Fort Laramie, but they were equally useful for Scotts Bluff. From all of this it was evident that Chimney Rock was far and away the most famous of all the landmarks. Nobody failed to mention Chimney Rock and they'd either climb it or put their names on it or do something. Scotts Bluff also was pretty important and Courthouse Rock was important farther east, but among the landmarks, Chimney Rock was really outstanding. I wrote the article that was published in Nebraska History on that subject and I now have a chapter in my book Great Platte River Road. In due course of time after I'd moved to Omaha, it suddenly struck somebody that Chimney Rock should be a National Historic Site, so I prepared the report that led to the establishment of Chimney Rock as a National Historic Site.

COCKRELL: Had you yourself suggested that it should be a National Historic Site?

MATTES: Yes. I did all the research on it. I don't know if I personally named it. I probably did because the Regional Office did the nominating. I think I must've mentioned that it should be nominated. No argument. In very short order the National Parks Advisory Board said 'fine', and they got the bronze plaque, and we went out there and had a big ceremony much later. I forgot the exact year.

COCKRELL: Was it 1956?

MATTES: It was in the 50s when we put the bronze plaque on the roadside. Nebraska has operated it. I've always thought if the Park Service took over Robidoux Pass they might as well throw in Chimney Rock because it was part of the famous trio of landmarks. But that's not as important. Robidoux Pass is ten times as important. Chimney Rock was merely a landmark even though a famous one. Robidoux Pass was the key to getting through the bluffs. The bluffs made a great big curve and you have to get over them. It was a barrier. Robidoux Pass was the first place to do that. Chimney Rock of course was a landmark of such dimensions and so unusual that it invariably drew a lot of attention.

COCKRELL: So it was mainly important for its great psychological impact?

MATTES: I would say yes. You see, you came up the Platte and then the South Platte, crossed the South Platte and came into Ash Hollow. As soon as they hit Ash Hollow, they were in a different world. At that time it would have been the high plains and at Ash Hollow you got a heavy concentration of timber, some magnificent springs. Then you go up the road to Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and Scotts Bluff. As soon as they hit the North Platte Valley, anybody who kept any records started getting very flowery with their language. You'd get some very fascinating language by these people.

Incidentally, Ash Hollow is a State Park. There was agitation for Ash Hollow to be added to the Park System in my time during the 30s and 40s, but of course nothing ever came of it. More recently, as mentioned in your draft, there's the Western Trails National Park proposal which also came to nothing. The problem with all these proposals is that they don't have enough realism in their proposal. This is probably the best place as any for me to say that I think a good case could be made for a North Platte-Oregon Trail Landmark Historic Park including Scotts Bluff, Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and Ash Hollow. More space

was devoted to this section than any other place on the trail by and large. It would take an awful lot of doing to convince the Park Service and Congress. I would much rather just settle for Robidoux Pass and extend Scotts Bluff and have a much more complete thing. Then you'd have the best of all worlds because then you'd have trail remains, the two important passes, the trading post site, the whole works. Then you have Fort Laramie already safely sewed up. I don't feel strongly about Ash Hollow. It's in the State's hands. I think it might just as well be left there. The Park Service could probably do a lot more with it, but sometimes I think the Park Service tries to take in too much, more than they can handle.

COCKRELL: How about the rock slides on the Summit Road at Scotts Bluff? Did you have many problems with them?

MATTES: We had rock slides. We had more than one occasion before I left when the road had to be closed. Obviously, it's a great hazard. If any car was ever trapped beneath one of them it would be mashed beyond recognition. The only comment I have on that is the larger question of should the road have been built in the first place? I would say this. I don't think the road would have been built if we acquired the area today. I don't think there'd be any road to the top of that bluff because you compromise the natural historic bluff. Since it was already in existence when I got there, it never occurred to me that it shouldn't have been built. Harris' history points out that [National Park Service Director Stanley] Albright was brought in and they twisted his arm and they brought in the Bureau of Public Roads. Albright was entranced by the marvelous panoramic views to be obtained from the summit. What happened to make the road possible was the Depression and the Emergency Relief measures-- Civil Works Administration, WPA, and so on. Everybody was looking for ways to put these unemployed to work and Scotts Bluff was the crown jewel of that neighborhood. They said, 'We'll built a road to the top.'

That's what did it. It was politics, plus well-meaning, good intentions on everybody's part to make it more accessible. From an engineering viewpoint, it was a very touchy thing. You have Mitchell Pass and then you have that knife-like ridge before you come to the main part of the bluff, and it's that knife-like ridge that is always sloughing off. If you keep talking about dynamiting that to make it safe, the first thing you know you're going to destroy the silhouette of the bluff. It's a terrible dilemma because we don't want to lose any taxpayers up there, but I would hate to see some engineers come along and say, 'Now to make this safe, we're going to have to peel this thing down' to the point where the bluff loses much of its original contour. It is a classic dilemma from a planning viewpoint because heaven

knows people love that marvelous panoramic view and you can appreciate the history more. You can see Chimney Rock and Laramie Peak.

If you didn't have the road, who'd go up there? Just the able-bodied, young people, locals on Sunday, just like it used to be. We have the road now, but I'd say there's going to be a real dilemma on how to resolve the slides. The nature of the Brule clay is such that I think we're always going to have slides. If you tried to fix it so there weren't any, I'd say you'd probably destroy a good part of the profile of the bluff looking at it from east and west. My view is that it is something you live with and adopt all the security measures you can. If you can have geologists go in there and try to predict where and when slides will occur, I don't know. I question that.

COCKRELL: The suggestion has been made to build a tramway from the valley floor up to the summit. Do you think that is practical?

MATTES: That is preferable to the Summit Road. A tramway, unnatural though it might be, would be far less damaging. In fact, it would hardly damage the bluff at all. It would have been a beautiful alternative. But it wouldn't have employed anybody back in the 1930s. It was because of the Depression and unemployment that the Summit Road was built. The parking area was more than doubled after the original parking area was woefully inadequate. So we doubled it. In doubling, we had to start slicing away at the top of the bluff. Now I think they're agreed that they shouldn't attempt to widen or enlarge it further.

COCKRELL: Was the parking lot on the summit concrete just like it is today?

MATTES: It was gravel to start with, but they paved it when they paved the whole road. We enlarged the parking area one time, I forget the year, but it was within two or three years. The jam was such, it couldn't accommodate. We enlarged the parking lot in about 1940, within two or three years after the completion of the road. It was such a hopeless jam. Somehow we found the money to expand it. We had to peel away an awful lot of the bluff up there, but not enough to seriously impair the profile of the bluff than you would if you attempted to eliminate all the slides. If you eliminate all the slides, you eliminate a lot of the bluff.

COCKRELL: From the original parking area, it doubled in size then?

MATTES: It almost tripled it. It was just enlarged once. It became apparent in such a hurry. We had some terrible traffic jams. You'd have cars waiting to get up there and Rangers trying to encourage people to get on out of there. People didn't want to. They'd spend the day. Part of the problem is that since it's near a sizeable community of 15,000, and 40 to 50,000 people within a radius of 50 miles, it's enormously popular locally even though you can't picnic up there. You can bring your sack lunch and eat in your car and you can spend the day. That's been one of the dilemmas.

I think we've covered the trail pretty well. The trail that goes from the museum to the tunnel. Did you hike that?

COCKRELL: No, I didn't. It was windy and cold the time I was there in January [1983].

MATTES: It's a nice trail, well-designed. I think Harris covered that pretty well. The old original trail on the country club side, what they called the "Zig-zag Trail." It turned out it wasn't in the National Monument to begin with. It is now, but when they put all that original effort into it, it wasn't even within the park!

COCKRELL: When did they find out that it wasn't within the boundaries?

MATTES: That was determined while I was still there. We had a boundary survey made by the Geological Survey or somebody who made it official--U.S.G.S.--and they discovered that the boundary sliced off that part of the bluff. It was really part of the country club property.

COCKRELL: And they [the country club] didn't know that?

MATTES: Nobody noticed or paid any attention, I guess.

COCKRELL: The country club. What sort of relationship did it have with the National Park Service?

MATTES: It had no relationship at all during my day except as a neighbor. It was a neighboring property. It was the social center of the jet set of Scottsbluff. They'd have dinners and parties there and they'd play golf. I knew some of the people, but there was no connection except socially. We all knew that to reach the badlands area, we had to go through the country club, but that was no problem. I was pleasantly surprised after I left there to learn that they'd acquired the country club. The reason they did was the country club people found a better location. I don't think we had any hope of acquiring that, but they suddenly decided to build a new golf course. The old one was only a nine-hole course and they had to use sand as greens, so it wasn't much of a golf course. They had water supply problems for their country club. So they finally offered to sell it to the Park Service and the Park Service had enough sense to pick up the option and that way round out the boundaries.

I might mention the paleontological aspect of the museum which is mentioned in the administrative history. It has an interesting history. When this new wing was made available, the Ranger and I had fossils, quite a collection of them which the CCC had accumulated. We made a rather good display of fossils with some interpretive labels. We had some miniature figures of dinosaurs with various types of prehistoric mammals. That constituted the initial exhibit there. The cases were homemade by the same Mr. Humberger whom I mentioned earlier. He was a natural-born craftsman. That was our new museum and that lasted for quite a few years. That brings us back to the changes in the exhibits of the museum overall. I mentioned about the first exhibits. The second exhibit, I suppose it's pretty well the one they have now in the History Room. It was recognized by all that the original exhibit, in an effort to cover the whole westward expansion, had failed to tell very much about Scotts Bluff itself.

As Regional Historian, I came up with a prospectus that would focus on the Scotts Bluff neighborhood and the Oregon Trail overland migration period, primarily. We'd leave out the fur trade and the cowboys except as they related. My plan was modified to some extent. The final revised exhibit is the one that is there now. I'm not aware of any further alteration in the History Room. They retained a few of the watercolors that were in there originally that pertained to Scotts Bluff and neighborhood, say Chimney Rock pictures. Fur trade subjects went up to Grand Teton National Park and became part of the fur trade museum that is now featured at the headquarters building at Grand Teton National Park. Other paintings are probably in storage in the basement. A few other people had some ideas of what to stick in there and that's the present exhibit which was an improvement over the other in that it has a focus on Scotts Bluff and the Oregon Trail. It touches on the fur trade mainly as it relates to Hiram Scott, and it touches on cowboys to bring it up to date after the Oregon Trail. There were some marvelous pictures in

there on the early railroad, the "wedding of the rails" of the Union Pacific in 1869. And a lot of good stuff on the Indian Wars and I don't know what became of them.

That was the second major change in the History Room. I can't give you the date when that was completed, but it was while I was in Omaha as Regional Historian. I would guess somewhere in 1958 or 1962. It was at the same time that they made changes in the Fossil Room, what I used to call the Paleontology Room, what they now call the Landmark Room. I had nothing to do with those changes. I don't know if they're good or bad. I don't remember the exact theme, more like Scotts Bluff as a landmark. There was some fossil story there. Paleontology loomed pretty large there at Scotts Bluff because the profusion of fossils in the badlands and subsequently because of its affiliation with Agate Fossil Quarries. The fossils we had on display in that initial exhibit were obtained by a CCC crew from Agate Fossil Quarries. We had a huge slab of Diceratherium which was the two-horned rhinoceros. It was the best specimen around. The Natural History Museum in Lincoln [Nebraska] has a specimen not nearly as good as ours and they finally got it because when the revision was made--it weighed about three tons, a huge slab with all these fossils exposed--one way or the other it got shipped to Lincoln and turned over to the Natural History Museum. Now that we have Agate Fossil Quarries, I bet they wished they had it back. I was with the crew when they brought in a huge skull of a Triceratops which was an armored rhinoceros creature. It came from Harrison near the Wyoming line in the extreme northwest corner of the state. We had a magnificent set of fossil collections. If they're not there, they might have been moved to Agate Fossil Quarries for future display.

A number of emigrants noticed the fossils. They referred to them. They were just laying there exposed on the ground or they would wander into the badlands and find them. So Scotts Bluff was very important paleontologically, so it was very appropriate that it be built. I don't know for sure if the exhibit that is there now represents the second revision. It probably is.

COCKRELL: You said that the CCC workers found these fossils up at the quarry beds. Why were they so far away from Scotts Bluff?

MATTES: They had fossils from Scotts Bluff, they had quite a few fossils from Scotts Bluff. They got the Diceratherium slab from Agate because it was quite spectacular, right in the center of the room. We wanted the Triceratops because it made a real spectacular exhibit. They were all fossils from the region. Now that they've got Agate Fossil Quarries, it is more appropriate that they be displayed up there.

Let's touch on the William H. Jackson Room. That's the third major component of the museum. I mentioned that Jackson was through there in 1936 in my time. He was back several other times. He was a gentleman of remarkable personality. Small in stature. Real clear, bright-eyed and had a goatee which made him look real distinguished. A full head of gray hair and when he got in the badlands, he'd jump around like a kid. He was very agile, even in his 90s. About 1940, he was in Cheyenne and he fell down and hurt his back and was in the hospital. I heard about it and went to visit him. He came out of it. It didn't break his back, but he damaged it and from that point on he was hump-backed. He lived for three more years. If I remember correctly, he died in 1943. If he'd lived one more year, he'd have been 100 years old.

After I had moved to Omaha, the proposition came from the American Pioneer Trails Association to memorialize William Henry Jackson at Scotts Bluff. For several reasons. He wanted to leave all his artwork there for display or protection. Scotts Bluff loomed very large in his memories of his overland passage, and Scotts Bluff seemed to be the headquarters for the Oregon Pioneer Trails Association when he went west every year. And we already had a museum so all we had to do was tack on a wing.

First of all we had to get an agreement. They said we'll donate the collection and \$10,000 from Mr. Julius Stone, a New York manufacturer and philanthropist. Ten thousand was pretty big back there shortly after the war. In due course of time the Park Service okayed the plan, and said, 'Great. We want it.' Ten thousand dollars didn't quite do it, so they got supplemental funds from local donations. The dedication was in 1948. Clarence Jackson, his son, was an only child. He didn't look like his dad and didn't have the personality of his dad. He was present with other dignitaries. Originally, they displayed some original sketches as well as his later watercolors. As you know, he took his pencil sketches and then would make several color variations. He wouldn't make just one. Take Chimney Rock or Mitchell Pass. He'd wind up with half a dozen versions of each. That's why you'll find so many Jackson pictures all over the country. What was sent to Scotts Bluff were the original pencil sketches and some charcoal drawings as well as most all of his original watercolors. I would hate to guess the value. With the tremendous emphasis today on Western art, it's worth millions at an art auction.

COCKRELL: Do you think it is adequately protected now?

MATTES: I don't think you can adequately protect them. I think they have a pretty good security system. I read about that, what you wrote. It sounds like when they lost the one Colt revolver,

that shook them up pretty good. From the standpoint of locks and bars and personnel on the premises--you have to have someone on the premises, there's too much invested in that layout.

There's one security lapse you didn't mention. But I'm going to tell you about it because I don't think you'll find much of it in the records. This occurred in 1957 while I was Regional Historian. I had spent the entire summer or more than two months at Jackson Hole at Grand Teton National Park doing the groundwork for the fur trade museum there. When I got back to Omaha, I'd heard they'd hired a new Historian for Scotts Bluff named Earl Harris. Then I'd heard that Clarence Jackson, the son, was interested in borrowing a few sketches because he had a book with publication in mind. The book project was by the Pioneer Museum at Minden, Nebraska, owned and operated by Harold Warp. It is a magnificent museum and Warp is a wonderful guy and it was a perfectly legitimate project.

The only problem was how far are you going to go to loan pictures out? The arrangement was--this was all done while I was gone--he'd pick out the ones he wanted and take them over to Downey's Studio in Scottsbluff. He'd photograph them, and Clarence Jackson would get the photographed copies. What actually happened was something else.

It was really quite unsettling. Frank Anderson, who was then Superintendent, was in the hospital. I don't know what his problem was. A car drove up to the museum that included Clarence Jackson and a couple from Omaha, John Cristlieb, a doctor, and his wife. They went in the museum for a visit and Earl was there. Before it was over with, they took the entire Jackson collection with them to Denver!

COCKRELL: You're kidding!

MATTES: All the original sketches--not the watercolors--but the original pencil sketches. There was a great big, black, trunk-like type of a container. You see, only a small portion of the original Jackson sketches were on exhibit. Only a handful. They were all in this over-sized suitcase or trunk. Apparently, Clarence Jackson said, 'If it's okay with you, I'll borrow these.' Obviously, Earl said, 'Okay.'

In Earl's defense, I'll say this. He was new. He was green as the hills. His boss was in the hospital. The only fault I'll say is that he should have had enough native wit to say, 'Well, I'd better call Omaha,' if Frank Anderson was in the hospital. Before he let even William Jackson's son walk off with the whole collection, he should've checked with a few people. He didn't do

that.

When I got back [from Jackson Hole], I read in the Superintendent's Monthly Narrative Report that Clarence Jackson had borrowed the collection! And nobody seemed to give it a second thought! So, after collecting myself, I went in to see Howard Baker, the Regional Director, and I laid it out to him. I said, 'You may not know what's happened here, but I know what's happened and it ain't good.' I said the Park Service is going to be in real trouble here if something isn't done in a hurry.

Well, he called Raymond Gregg who was my boss as Chief of Interpretation. Raymond didn't quite realize this; they'd known what had happened, but it didn't occur to them that anything terribly much was a problem. I said not only were they of unique historical importance, but they were given to us and under no circumstances should they be loaned out to anybody, even the son of the fellow. I said, 'If it will help you realize it, I would judge that this collection is worth at least \$100,000.' That was in 1957. I ventured that guess. Suddenly, they started picking up telephones.

To summarize this, it took them two years. I don't know how many trips Frank Anderson and Earl Harris made down to Denver. Clarence Jackson was holed up in an apartment there and apparently he was being very difficult. He'd tell them, 'That collection really belongs to me.' He gave them that sort of story. Then they'd be able to come back with two or three pictures. Then they'd make another trip to Denver. I don't know if they got an attorney in on the case or what. I wasn't in on it. I just knew having been alerted to the problem, they went to work. I guess that Earl must've felt terrible about it, and Frank Anderson, too. There's an instance where tragically the collection could have been absconded with, or this crummy rooming house he lived in could have burned down.

COCKRELL: Was he kind of a down and out sort? Was he trying to extort money from the Park Service?

MATTES: No, no. He wasn't asking for money. He was just asking for pictures for the book.

COCKRELL: But he wasn't going to give them back.

MATTES: Oh, no. He didn't want to give them back. He told Frank Anderson, 'Those pictures really belong to me.'

COCKRELL: Were all the pictures finally returned?

MATTES: I understand that all the pictures were all returned finally. This is the book. You'll find that most of them are reproduced in there. I knew Clarence. He was with the Denver Westerners here and he was a kind of a colorful guy himself so he made this inscription. You see he didn't spell my name right. It was '61 when the book was finally published. Here Clarence says, 'All rights reserved.' The pictures belong to the Government! His acknowledgements say, 'Thank the National Parks [sic] Service for lending me the paintings.'

COCKRELL: I'll bet Mr. Harris was glad when that was all over with.

MATTES: Yes. I felt sorry for him. I had no choice. I had to alert the powers that be that their wonderful collection flitted out of the museum building. I know Dr. Cristlieb. My wife and I both know the Cristlieb's very well, but they were babes in the woods. They didn't know what was going on. They were just providing transportation for the guy. They didn't have any part in convincing Earl that he should relinquish the collection. Earl and I never spoke about it. I knew it was a sore point with him and since then he had an honorable career and he's retired. I think it should be in the record, nevertheless.

COCKRELL: No, it's not in the other administrative history.

MATTES: He sure as hell didn't tell it all!

I'd like to make just two or three other observations on William Jackson since we're on that subject. He published himself an autobiography called Time Exposure. He had an extra copy with him in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1940. I bought it from him and I got his autograph. It's the only copy I know of, or anyone else knows of, which has his autograph in it. There's been several books on Jackson such as the one I showed you published at Minden, but none of them are very good. I don't think his stature has ever been given. His own diaries were published by Arthur H. Clark Company, The Overland Diaries. I have that in my library here. Of course Jackson's fame goes far beyond Scotts Bluff. He's most famous as the first photographer in Jackson Hole and getting all the fantastic pictures of the Tetons and here in Colorado, and all over the West. My complaint is that nobody, no historian, no art critic has ever really done justice to him, but it was a great privilege to know the guy and be considered mutual friends from age 93 to 99. What did him in

finally is that he slipped in the bathtub at his New York apartment, and that did him in. It was too much for his system. He did not die of natural causes. He'd be living yet if he hadn't gotten feeble and toppled in the tub.

There's one other visitor to the bluff that I'd like to mention because he was very extraordinary, also. I refer to Chief One Bull. He was a Sioux Indian. Chief One Bull was a nephew of Chief Sitting Bull. I was in the museum in the front office one day and it was either 1940, '41 or '42. I couldn't say exactly. It was an off-day, and here was a pickup truck full of Indians. As I'd mentioned, the Sioux Indians would come down from Rosebud in the Pine Ridge Reservation for the harvest and they'd all come out to the museum because they were all interested in their ancestors. It wasn't a big truck. There was a lady in there and some kids. In the rear I noticed this feather sticking up. She came in and said, 'My grandfather is here. He was at the Little Big Horn.'

I went out there and helped the old guy out of the pickup truck. At that time, I hadn't done enough on Custer Battlefield to know anything about One Bull. He couldn't speak a word of English. He never had bothered to learn. So all I could do was talk to her a little bit. Well, he'd been there as a young man. This was in 1940 and the battle was in '76, so he could easily have been. What I did, I couldn't get too much out of her other than he'd been there. I took photographs, and those are in the files. It was later, when I was in Omaha, that National Geographic came out with one of their articles on Indians and one of their full page color photographs was of One Bull. His was one of the prominent pictures there and I recognized him right away even though he was a much younger man in the portrait. Subsequently, a story was written on One Bull by Stanley Vestal, a prominent writer of Western Americana. He was with Sitting Bull when Sitting Bull escaped into Canada. He was repatriated with Sitting Bull in 1883. One Bull was with him at that time.

So here he was coming into Scotts Bluff. At that time he was almost one hundred. He had a cane. I thought that was interesting as anything can be.

COCKRELL: Yes, it's not everyday that you have a figure from history visiting the park.

MATTES: He just breezed right in. I've never written that up, but I've interviewed several people like that, and I thought I'd write something up one of these days before it's all forgotten.

We've covered enough for one day. I was going to touch on Fort Laramie and its connection administratively. I want to touch on

what I've done since I've left Scotts Bluff, particularly on the Oregon Trail, writing, and publishing. That includes this Oregon-California Trails Association that has just been invented. Then maybe we'll have time to do a little bit with Agate and my acquaintance with it. Grand Portage, just my primary involvement there.

Interview
May 25, 1983
Littleton, Colorado

COCKRELL: The tape's rolling. From yesterday, we were going to finish up this morning on the Fort Laramie connection and then go to Agate Fossil Beds and Grand Portage.

MATTES: I think it's interesting that not only are Fort Laramie and Scotts Bluff related historically, because one was the great landmark and the second was the great way station on the California-Oregon Trail and they're only 50 to 55 miles apart, meaning about two days travel time between them. They were connected in many ways. In 1849, after Fort Laramie was sold by the American Fur Company to the United States Government, the fur traders had to look for other quarters. The American Fur Company itself, which owned the adobe quadrangle at Fort Laramie, at first moved down to Scotts Bluff, and in my chapter on Scotts Bluff in Great Platte River Road, you will find the details of all three locations of the fur post there. The only one we've been able to pinpoint archeologically, is the one at Helvas Canyon which is south of the monument headquarters approximately six miles. That was called "Fort John's Scotts Bluff" and that shows up in 1850, and it's referred to in several of the journals. There is also some correspondence to be found in the Missouri Historical Society on this subject. The Robidoux family, Joseph and his uncles, established themselves at Robidoux Pass at Scotts Bluff having been transplanted from Fort Laramie. In other words, they were not in the adobe quadrangle at Fort Laramie. They had their own makeshift establishment and we don't know exactly where.

In my tenure at Scotts Bluff, Mr. T.L. Green of the city of Scottsbluff who was a very knowledgeable local historian made a great point of getting me up to Fort Laramie. He said, 'You have to see this place.' My first visit there was in the fall of 1935 and I was astonished to see the extensive remains of the original fort even though they were in wrack and ruin and some of the buildings looked like they were ready to collapse. At that time, many of the buildings were occupied by people who were living in them during the Depression years and were trying to make a go of it by some gardening in the neighborhood. It just looked like a shantytown. What it was of course was the remains of one of the most important historic sites in Western America.

There's no point in my going into the history of Fort Laramie here; that's been pretty well covered in my Fort Laramie Park History. I wanted to mention here that I developed a correspondence with some of the editors in the area, particularly a man by the name of Pat Flannery, editor of a newspaper in

Torrington, Wyoming, and also the editor of the Guernsey Gazette. These two gentlemen were interested in doing something to save Fort Laramie. I made many representations to the Regional Office in Omaha which was set up in 1937, and to the Chief Historian's Office in Washington, D.C. I said, 'Look, this is a place that the Park Service should have and should preserve.' You may not believe this, but the Omaha office and the Washington Office, while showing polite interest, never sent a single person out there to look at the place.

COCKRELL: Why was that?

MATTES: No time. No interest. Weren't impressed. I was just a P-1, that was the classification. A nobody out at Scotts Bluff making noises. The reason why Fort Laramie became a unit of the National Park Service was not because of the big shots in the National Park Service or anybody they sent out to make a formal investigation. It was the result of actions taken by the State of Wyoming. That story is told in my park history. When the chips were down and the State of Wyoming offered to donate it to the National Park System, then they had to be polite to the Governor of Wyoming. They still couldn't make up their minds.

Then, Hillory Tolson, Associate Director of the National Park Service, came through one day. He wanted to take a look at Scotts Bluff, and then he was going to go to Grand Teton National Park. His wife was with him. Tom Green and I conspired to get him up to Fort Laramie. We told him what a marvelous place it was. To be polite, he said, 'Okay. We'll stop by there on my way to Grand Teton.' Hillory Tolson, who, incidentally was the brother of Clyde Tolson, who was the number one man under the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was an attorney and an extremely intelligent man. We walked around there and he got just terribly enthusiastic. The upshot was when he got back to Washington, D.C., things started to happen. The Omaha office sent a man to Cheyenne to meet at a high level with the Governor, and then the Advisory Board put their stamp of approval on it. In 1938, the Proclamation of Establishment went through and, bingo, we had a national monument up there.

The reason I cite this in connection with Scotts Bluff is that at least I laid the groundwork for the Park Service to be receptive. Following the creation of it, there wasn't a nickel in it, but they made me Acting Custodian while I was still in Scotts Bluff. I arranged with the Regional Office in Omaha for a CCC camp out of Guernsey, Wyoming, to move over to Fort Laramie. They sent a 20 man detail under the direction of G. Hubert Smith, an archeologist. I gave them instructions to start cleaning the place up. I made frequent trips from Scotts Bluff to check up on their progress and to make sure that they weren't tearing down

historic buildings. G. Hubert Smith and I went over and identified the historic buildings as against those shacks and old fencing and other junk that had been built around there while during the temporary occupancy of these squatters.

In the fall of '39 I went to Yale University on this fellowship and that was the end of my immediate involvement. However, beginning in 1941 and after they approved a permanent Custodian at Fort Laramie, I was drafted and given an additional grade. I was upgraded from P-1 to P-2. That translates today from GS-5 to GS-7. But I was given the upgrade by virtue of also serving as Historian for Fort Laramie and starting to generate research work on it. I was able to develop a bibliography. They did give me money to come to Denver and go through libraries here, and also Lincoln of course.

I mentioned previously I was also sent to Chicago to the Newberry Library where they had two or three hundred overland journals which shed much light on the fort. Also I was able to obtain from the National Archives a great deal of information pertaining to Fort Laramie. Much of it was on microfilm. That was the beginning of the research project that was necessary in order for us to do a proper restoration work on Fort Laramie. Several reports on file which I developed at that time included one on the evolution of the public buildings at Fort Laramie. One that I did on the Sutler's Store was published in the Annals of Wyoming.

After I left there and while I was in Omaha, I worked closely with the Superintendent there on research work and also on restoration plans. I was intimately involved with Fort Laramie during the twenty years I was in Omaha. I suppose I made over 100 trips out there and practically served as coordinator for Fort Laramie matters. When I got to San Francisco, I was further involved in the Historic Preservation Office with archeological projects and other restoration projects there. I mention it because it was an incidental part of my responsibilities while I was at Scotts Bluff.

I want to throw in also that for awhile there was a nefarious proposal by the Regional Office to combine both Fort Laramie and Scotts Bluff under one Superintendent because they had similar interests and also because of their geographical proximity. Nothing came of that. That was vetoed on the Washington Office level. During my tenure at Scotts Bluff, however, both areas fell under the coordinating superintendency of the Superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, David Canfield. He had Scotts Bluff, Fort Laramie, Devil's Tower, and Dinosaur National Monuments under his wing. We didn't go to Region, we went to him on everything. He was very helpful in managing the areas, obtaining the supplies and maintenance equipment, and personnel. It was a good arrangement at that time. That arrangement was

terminated when Budlong, my successor at Scotts Bluff, arrived on the scene in 1946.

COCKRELL: Was the reason why these areas were combined under Rocky Mountain National Park because of the war?

MATTES: It was because our resources were rather inadequate and our funding was pretty low. Rocky Mountain had been established since 1915, so they were able to help out morale-wise mainly, but they were also able to supply personnel on occasion and they were able to help out with equipment that we might need and just give us general guidance. Especially at Fort Laramie which was poverty stricken. The grand total annual budget at Fort Laramie was about \$4,000. The Superintendent's salary was about \$3,000, and that left \$1,000. People were swarming all over the place. My Fort Laramie Park History illustrates the rather desperate situation there.

More recently--I can wind this phase up--when the Western Trails National Park was proposed, they wanted to include Fort Laramie. That proposition was reborn. Combine Fort Laramie and Scotts Bluff and all those other landmarks. The idea fell like a lead balloon in Wyoming because the Wyoming people have always felt very jealous about Fort Laramie and rather, I wouldn't say hostile, but skeptical of combining it with Scotts Bluff. They didn't like the idea years ago and they didn't like it more recently because they're afraid. You see, Nebraska got all the gravy during the Depression years and all the money was spent at Scotts Bluff while Fort Laramie was going to wrack and ruin. Of course that wasn't the fault of the Park Service because we didn't have Fort Laramie then. This irrational fear that if Fort Laramie ever fell under the general jurisdiction of Nebraska areas or the Omaha office, it would be the Orphan Annie of the Park System.

The latest thinking on this Western Trails Park, at least the Park Service recommends, to forget Fort Laramie because it is too much of a crown jewel of the Wyoming people to become part of the larger park in Nebraska. And I would agree. I think that Fort Laramie is of such transcendent importance in Western history--fur trade, overland migrations period, military history, the whole gambit--it is a major historic area and doesn't need to be tied in administratively. I would agree on the other hand that if we could ever acquire Robidoux Pass, I think that should be combined with Scotts Bluff as a major national historical park. If they want to throw in Ash Hollow and Chimney Rock someday, I think that would be a good idea, too, but those are kind of visionary. I think it would be eminently practical to acquire Robidoux Pass and combine that with Scotts Bluff; you wouldn't be creating a new area at all. You would just be expanding an existing area. As I've mentioned, the only obstacle to that is

the Park Service itself, the people at the top who have shown a supreme indifference to the idea of adding Robidoux Pass.

COCKRELL: This effort for Western Trails National Park, do you think it will be successful anytime soon?

MATTES: If I had to bet money, I'd say no, it will not be successful. There's not enough steam built up. There's not enough interest. There's not enough organized effort. The Scottsbluff Chamber of Commerce is pushing for it. Some of the newspapers plugged it, but then they forgot about it and you don't hear anything more about it. Much more practical is to put it into the platform of the Oregon-California Trail Association because that's tied in with everything we've said before about Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie history.

This Association is a very recent development and it is of great importance to the National Park Service, and in particular to the areas that they already hold, like Scotts Bluff, Fort Laramie, and Whitman's Mission. Earlier I had mentioned about the Oregon Trail Memorial Association and their first appearance at Scotts Bluff in 1936 to help dedicate the museum with William Henry Jackson. It faded and the last activity I heard of was in 1954. There are several of us Historians or people who are interested in history, the trail, the California Gold Rush. There are quite a number of interested private citizens and of course I am now a private citizen and have been since 1975 when I retired. Several of us feel very strongly that the Oregon Trail and related trails--I refer to the great corridor of westward expansion, the Platte River Road to South Pass--that not enough attention has been paid to the preservation of trails and historic sites along the trails, and that much more can be done by the Federal Government, States, and communities.

In 1976, Congress passed the National Trails Act and, more recently, they created several National Historic Trails which includes the Oregon National Historic Trail running from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City. I was among those who was horrified that they left out any reference to the California Gold Rush Trail which was the greatest migration trail in American History. It was as if they never heard about the California Gold Rush or ever wondered how in heaven's name these people got there. You know and of course anybody who has ever read American history knows that there was this tremendous migration of covered wagons to California beginning in 1849 and several hundred thousand people followed the Platte River via Scotts Bluff, Fort Laramie and South Pass on their way to California. I would say as many as 100 times more people went to California in 1849 and into the 1850s as went to Oregon in the 1840s. Many people continued to go to Oregon in the 1850s, but

the vast majority went to California. The Federal Government failed to recognize this in the legislation. So this was another error which concerned many of us.

In August 1982, 13 of us who are keenly interested in the preservation of the old trails, but in particular the Oregon and California Trail, met here in Denver. We were invited to use the offices of the Denver Service Center, National Park Service, because they have already as a unit in their National Park System the Oregon National Historic Trail. I believe they also have the Mormon Pioneer Trail and the Santa Fe Trail. We made several important decisions at this meeting. We decided it would be called the Oregon-California Trail Association. We organized a group to assist in any way we could in preservation and heightening public awareness of the overland migrations. We focused on Oregon and California, because the Oregon Trail was on the books and was the center of the overland migrations, and the California Trail because it was the most important of the overland trails, yet had been greatly neglected as far as Federal recognition was concerned.

We set forth our objectives and the organizational pattern. Everyone present became a member of the board of directors. Officers were selected. Our President is Gregory Franzwa, publisher of Oregon Trail guidebooks living near St. Louis. I was selected as Executive Vice President to assist in management decisions and contributing to and editing our quarterly publication called The Overland Journal. We have just gotten underway with some of our programs.

The major plank in our platform is to go to Congress and have them add the California Gold Rush Trail. We won't have any problem. I'm sure it will get done to rectify a great omission in the first place.

COCKRELL: Do you have any Congressional support for that?

MATTES: Oh yes. I think in time you automatically get the support of all the Congressional members of these states. There are eleven states involved with these trails. It includes the Oregon Trail, the California Trail or Road--it was called the California Road, not Trail during the migration days--the South Platte Trail to Denver for the Pike's Peak Gold Rush; it would also include or be parallel with the Mormon Trail to Salt Lake City because they all followed the same route. It would include gold rushes in Nevada and Montana as well in the 1860s. Therefore, we have this new organization and we plan to light a lot of fires, tweak a lot of whiskers to get things done. We're having our first annual convention in Independence, Missouri, in August. We have over 200 people signed up already for the

convention.

I think Robidoux Pass should be added to Scotts Bluff National Monument and I believe in time we'll get around to making a lot of fuss about that. You can see that this will have an impact on Scotts Bluff National Monument as well as Fort Laramie because we will feel free to speak up about things that we feel should be done, what should not have been done, or things that are being done wrong.

COCKRELL: Do you have Park Service representation at your convention?

MATTES: We have Park Service representation in the form of John Latcher who is a Historian with the Denver Service Center. He is, in fact, Secretary of this organization and that is with the consent of the Park Service because they are into it already by Congressional authorization. Of course, John uses his home address, but, in effect, we have that tie in. Regional Director Jim Tobin of the Pacific Northwest Region is the nominal coordinator of the Oregon National Historic Trail and he's promised to be at our convention in Independence. I have been on the Secretary's Advisory Board for the Oregon National Historic Trail, but it has proven to be a rather meaningless appointment because we've never had a meeting. In other words, the NPS managers just can't stir up enough interest to do anything with it.

COCKRELL: Another area we were going to touch on was your subsequent career, and particularly how it coincided with Scotts Bluff, Agate Fossil Beds, and Grand Portage.

MATTES: In 1946, I was given a two-step promotion and transfer to, of all places, Chicago, Illinois, which was the wartime office of the Director. I went from grade seven to grade eleven in one big jump. I was making all of \$4,300 a year at grade eleven. I didn't get any travel allowance, but I survived that. What I did was assist the Chief Historian in research projects. Then I got transferred to Omaha in short order in August 1946, no, it was in June. I was only three months doing penance in Chicago when I was transferred to Omaha. The reason they were able to move me there was because of the Missouri River Basin Surveys and I was assigned as the Historian for the Missouri River Basin Surveys. This was a huge project relating to the Flood Control Act of 1944. It provided authorization for the construction of dams, water control projects of the Missouri River Basin. They needed a historian and archeologists because the inundation of land from the construction of the dams and

reservoirs would destroy a great number of archeologic and historic sites.

From '46 to '49, I was heavily involved in the Missouri River Basin survey and salvage work. I was also during that time coordinator for the archeological program, most of which was handled by the Smithsonian Institution with offices in Lincoln, Nebraska. During those years, I was sidetracked on research relating to reservoirs including primarily the ones in the Dakotas. Much of that was published. It continued for another twenty years. It was the largest archeological salvage project in American history.

I became Regional Historian in 1949. My predecessor died in office so I was picked to fill that job. Another man, Ray Mattison, was brought in from Theodore Roosevelt Park to become the Historian for Missouri River Basin Surveys.

Throughout the period I was Regional Historian, I also continued as coordinator for Missouri River Basin Surveys in an administrative capacity, coordinating, making up budgets each year, and reviewing projects and working with the Smithsonian and other museums and historical societies which also contributed to the salvage work.

I was sent to the National Archives. My first visit there was about 1948. I was going to dig up information on these various places which were being inundated on the Missouri River, mainly military posts and military agencies. While I was there, I was there for several weeks and I wanted to see what they had on Fort Laramie, which was always my first interest. I was staggered by the volume of material on Fort Laramie. They brought in two trucks which were just loaded with post records of every description: Guard Reports, Morning Reports, Clothing Reports, Adjutants' Reports, Court Martials, an incredibly rich assortment of things. What I did was make a listing of things because at that time, being overly conscientious, I was being paid by the Missouri Basin and I had to work on this other stuff. What I did was make a list of what they had, and that was that.

A few years later, after I was working closely with Fort Laramie and their research and restoration program, I had mentioned to the Superintendent what they had there. Money was awful hard to come by and for several years we couldn't order any microfilm of this stuff because money was tight. Finally, along about 1952, we decided we had enough money to send for some of the microfilm. Much to our horror, we were told by the Washington Office that they had declared a lot of this stuff surplus and it was destroyed, no longer in existence. Research data that would be priceless, they didn't even bother to microfilm! They didn't just do it with Fort Laramie, they went categorically through all the Western military posts, and certain categories were simply

sent to the trashpile and burned. The only thing that was left was my checklist of what they had!

I'm going into this because it is vitally important to Fort Laramie as well as Scotts Bluff. I raised Cain about this to my Director; I raised hell about it with the Chief Historian. I made frequent trips to Washington, D.C., on Regional historical matters. The first time I was back there, Herb Kahler, the Chief Historian, set up a meeting with the Archivist of The United States, named Wayne Grover. We had a conference with them and I showed them my list. Well, the fellow that was the coordinator for such matters said it in two words: 'We goofed.'

I would blame also a lot of other people in the Archives who didn't have brains enough to recognize valuable research material. If these things had been auctioned off, these things would have raised a million dollars in a hurry from collectors.

Nothing was to be done about it, of course. Later on, they denied it. They covered it up. They never wanted to hear about it. I stick to my guns. I know what I saw. I have my checklist of what I saw. It's ancient history, but they promised that everything else that was not burned, would not be burned, but I wouldn't trust them anymore.

COCKRELL: Was there much left?

MATTES: There was some material left that was still interesting and useful, but I would say that more than half of the valuable material went down the drain. I cite that as an example of the gross error in assuming that if it's in the National Archives it's going to be safe for posterity. Our research program at Fort Laramie was greatly impoverished because of that.

Let me just give you one example of what I saw in the Guard Reports which were totally destroyed. They would identify wagon trains coming into the fort. They would identify Pony Express riders, the time of day they came and went. That's the stuff they destroyed!

At any rate, that's incidental to what we're talking about, but it does give you an idea of the pitfalls of research. There's some real tragedies in the mindless destruction of terribly important records. People that should know their value don't take the time or trouble to make a study of it.

There's another instance of record keeping which impinges on Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie. Some years ago, the General Services Administration issued orders that all Federal agencies should review their records because many of these records were

taking up space. So the idea was, 'Let's see what we can get rid of.' At the same time they set up Record Centers. There's one in Kansas City, a Regional Record Center. In due course of time, all the areas of the National Park System got the word of 'See what you've got, and see what you can get rid of.' They had two alternatives for getting rid of it. They could (A), if in their judgement it was important enough, it could be sent to the Regional Record Center; and (B), if it was of no importance at all, they could destroy it. Set up a bonfire. The little areas like Fort Laramie, Scotts Bluff, and Bent's Old Fort, I am very happy to say, had Superintendents who had sufficient intelligence to pay no attention to this mandate. They recognized that in these little historical areas, almost everything that had happened was of historical significance.

I am please to advise that Fort Laramie records, even though they were piled up in the basement and not in ideal archival conditions, their records were almost complete. That was one of the reasons which made it possible for me to develop a very comprehensive administrative history for Fort Laramie. The Scotts Bluff records likewise. They paid no attention to this order to get rid of things, and so Earl was able to work from Custodian's Reports and Montly Reports and subsequently most all of it was transferred to the Nebraska State Historical Society as old records which were no longer administratively required. They were saved. The same was true at Bent's Old Fort. I wrote the administrative history of Bent's Old Fort, published in the Colorado Magazine in 1977. This was a dangerous directive. If people weren't qualified to do the judging, they could do a lot of damage.

Do you know what happened at Yellowstone National Park? They destroyed the bulk of their records from 1917 until around 1956-57. In 1957, in the same bad year that I discovered the Jackson paintings had migrated to Denver, I heard about this destruction of records at Yellowstone. Again, I went to the front office. You see, I had this reputation for being a troublemaker...

COCKRELL: Good for you!

MATTES: So, I went to the front office, to the Regional Director, and said, 'Look what's happened in Yellowstone, for Christ's sakes. Some idiot up there has fixed it to destroy a large part of Yellowstone's records from A to Z.' They didn't go to any Regional Center. They had a huge bonfire. The Chief Naturalist griped to me about it. He was in Omaha on other business and when I pumped him about it, I found that's what happened. Who was the Superintendent? Lon Garrison, who became Regional Director here and there. One of the great men of the

Park System. The hierarchy was such that he didn't even know what was going on, or so he claimed!

COCKRELL: He didn't know!?

MATTES: If he knew, he didn't care. Of course he was scolded by the Regional Director, but what the hell, who cared? You know, in the Civil Service, you can commit all kinds of crimes and nothing will ever happen to you. You get promoted in all likelihood. The same destruction of records occurred at Grand Teton National Park and to a lesser degree at Rocky Mountain National Park. At Rocky Mountain, they saved their Annual Reports and put them in their library. At Wind Cave, they were destroyed.

Well, enough of that. It is another hideous example of what happens when mindless bureaucrats decide what should be done and other mindless bureaucrats execute it without giving it a thought, and the Historians are left out of the picture. I had been appointed "Records Disposal Officer" for the Regional Office. In effect, it was a meaningless appointment because I was not consulted on anything. When the destruction of records at Yellowstone occurred, they never even notified the Region, just on their own initiative. I later talked to the Chief Clerk there who was responsible directly for that, and he said, 'Well, it said to dispose of them.' I reminded him of the alternative a year or two later, 'Why didn't you ship it to the Records Center?' He said, 'We didn't think they were important.'

Now, you're a Historian, and I'm a Historian, but I have discovered in the Park Service that people who are not Historians--and this is not true of all of them--but Landscape Architects, Engineers, Managers, they tend to be abysmally ignorant and unaware of the value of history. At Scotts Bluff, my boss, Charlie Randalls, told me one time, 'I don't understand history; it doesn't mean anything to me.' To me, that gives you the mindset.

COCKRELL: It is discouraging.

MATTES: I'll mention several other things about programs of the Regional Office which have a bearing on Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie. We had ten states, mainly Missouri Basin states, controlled by the Regional Office. It used to be from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains; that changed when they established the Rocky Mountain Region in 1973.

While I was at Scotts Bluff, during the war I had been named as

Acting Regional Historian, and I made several trips by railroad to Omaha to do certain chores that they asked me to do. The number one thing I was concerned with was research on Jackson Hole. In 1944, President Roosevelt had proclaimed Jackson Hole as a National Monument as a way of preserving it and with the thought of ultimately adding it to Grand Teton National Park. What you have today is that Grand Teton includes Jackson Hole. The Proclamation assured that it would be preserved until Congress could get around to appropriate legislation. The connection with Scotts Bluff is simply the fact that I was dragooned as Acting Regional Historian to do the research necessary to defend the President's Proclamation.

The State of Wyoming and many of its citizens were terribly unhappy about this and fought the National Monument every way they knew how, and attempted through Congress to nullify the Proclamation. In 1944, they brought suit against the Superintendent to enjoin him from enforcing the National Monument's rules and regulations.

The Government had to defend the President's Proclamation. I was drafted to do the research and to appear at the court trial in Sheridan, Wyoming, in August 1944. I had done a lot of research on this subject because I was keenly interested in the Western fur trade and exploration. This was closely related to my assignment at Scotts Bluff. Scotts Bluff was named for one of these fur traders.

I became very excited about this subject. The upshot was I worked up this lengthy list of expeditions that had gone through there beginning with John Colter in 1807 clear on up to 1840 when Jim Bridger led an Army brigade through there. My original paper on this was published in the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, "Behind the Legend of Colter's Hell", around 1950. In my testimony before the judge, I took about three hours running through this whole list of great historic figures who had gone through Jackson Hole, "Crossroads of the Western Fur Trade." By the time I got through, the judge and everybody else was pretty limp. It took a long time. I remember one nice lady--and everybody in Wyoming at this time thought it was a holy war to prevent this from happening--she said, 'That was a real nice talk. It's too bad you're on the wrong side.'

The judge found in favor of the President and the Proclamation stood. Actually, it was a technicality. He said it was not in his jurisdiction, that the President had his privilege and it was not his to judge. He weaseled out of saying it was historically justified. He just said it was not a judicial matter, but a Congressional matter, if Congress wanted to nullify it.

I will only say one thing in postscript. Grand Teton National Park today is one of the crown jewels of the State of Wyoming.

Today, everyone in Wyoming just loves Grand Teton National Park, just as they love Yellowstone. You'll have a hard time finding anybody who will admit that they were against Jackson Hole, which was the future Grand Teton National Park in the 1940s. Recently a book was published, called The Crucible of Conservation by a professor up at the University of Wyoming, and he tells this whole story of the great battle over the establishment of Grand Teton National Park. He has some brief references to my participation in it. This all happened while I was Superintendent at Scotts Bluff. This was just one of my incidental duties as a Grade 7 making \$2,700 a year.

I want to add one more little footnote. You've heard of people getting Special Achievement Awards. I did all of this as Custodian of Scotts Bluff because they asked me to and I enjoyed it. The Superintendent at Rocky Mountain recommended that I get a \$200 bonus. The blankety-blank Regional Director, Lawrence Merriam, said, "No. We can't do that, and I won't do that because it would look like he was paid for giving this testimony!" Subsequently, I did receive Special Act Awards and in-grade promotions. While at Omaha, I got to Grade 14 before it was over with as Regional Historian. I transferred to San Francisco and became a Grade 15 as Chief of Historic Preservation, first in the Western Service Center, and then, later in the Denver Service Center in 1971. So I don't miss the \$200!

COCKRELL: When did you leave Omaha for San Francisco?

MATTES: I left there in '66.

Before we leave Omaha, there are some things I want to mention. One area closely related to both Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie, of course, is Jefferson Memorial Expansion Monument. I was heavily involved in the early stages of planning and research in development of exhibits in the Old Courthouse; in meetings with Eero Saarinen, the architect; the development of the Arch and the underground museum. I made innumerable trips to St. Louis in the 50s and 60s representing the Regional Director on all kinds of things, including the period when George Hartzog was Superintendent there, the man who later became Director of the National Park Service.

The only point I want to make here is, in our exhibits that we developed in the Old Courthouse and the exhibits that we developed later in the underground museum under the Arch, the theme of westward expansion deeply involved the fur trade, the overland migrations, and the military. All of this was echoed out West here at Scotts Bluff, Fort Laramie, Bent's Old Fort, and the Fur Trade Museum at Grand Teton National Park. While I was

in Omaha, I developed the exhibit plan for the Fur Trade Museum at Grand Teton which is still in existence after 23 years.

Not so much has happened at Scotts Bluff since I left, very little actual development since I left. I tried to move the Reclamation power lines there twice without any luck, and as far as I know, the Reclamation power lines are still there. Is it, do you recall?

COCKRELL: It's still there, but it is in the process of being removed.

MATTES: I'm pleased to hear that. I noticed in the recent planning that there is talk of moving the headquarters out of Mitchell Pass. I would agree that if you were doing it all over again, you might put it elsewhere, and I would agree that you wouldn't ever build a concrete road with tunnels up to the top of Scotts Bluff for reasons we've already discussed. But my reaction to all of this is now we have the headquarters. It's beautifully designed architecturally. It was designed by Landscape Architect Howard Baker who later became Regional Director. The Summit Road is in place and I don't think we'll ever take it out. Frankly, I would be very skeptical about eliminating the headquarters out of there and putting it out on the edge of the monument somewhere. You'll have transportation problems and parking problems and so forth. You've already destroyed by the trans-monument highway, the State Road, some evidence of the Oregon Trail. I'd say the deed is done. I don't see any danger of a new headquarters area in the near future anyway. I would only say that philosophically, it is a mistake to even talk about it. It's beautifully designed for where it is; you've left most of the trail intact and you can walk right from the museum into Mitchell Pass. Sometimes the planners get carried away with a compulsion to change things. No matter what they find, they want to do something different.

COCKRELL: You've made a good point there. What about your experiences in San Francisco?

MATTES: I was there for six years and for two different phases. First, I'll say that I was sent out of Omaha. I was not anxious to leave at that time even though I'd been there for 20 years. The Director abolished all the Regional Historian positions for very irrational, personal reasons. One of his Napoleonic decisions and nobody could argue about it. They created a new Office of Resource Planning in San Francisco. They needed a Historian and somebody who knew how to write reports, not only my own, but other reports. I had a very enjoyable six years there

even though it was a very traumatic experience to get uprooted from Omaha to go to this great, wicked city. Including three years as Park Planner for the Alaska areas, I helped lay the planning groundwork for areas which later became national parks.

Suddenly, they had another reorganization. You know, the Park Service has gone through thirty or forty reorganizations. They decided to set up the Western Service Center and the Branch of Historic Preservation. I was tapped to head that up mainly because I was the only one in sight. It was in that job that I got the promotion to Grade 15. This covered all the historic preservation activity west of the Mississippi River. It included planning for the Cavalry Barracks and the restoration of the Old Bakery at Fort Laramie, the reconstruction of the Great Hall at Grand Portage, it even included some master planning at Scotts Bluff. I had the good fortune also to get sent to Guam, and we did the basic planning for War in the Pacific National Park which has since been established. I had several opportunities to visit Hawaii in connection with the National Landmark Program. When Russ Apple was sent to the South Seas, to the Mariannas Islands out there, to investigate historic sites, I was supposed to coordinate his activities. Unfortunately, I didn't get sent along.

COCKRELL: That's too bad!

MATTES: After six years in San Francisco, George Hartzog suddenly had another wild idea. All of a sudden, out of a clear, blue sky, they announced that both the Service Centers, the Western Service Center in San Francisco and the Eastern Service Center in Washington, would be abolished and would all come together in a unified, National Service Center in Denver. I would be the Chief of the Historic Office or Team, as they called it. I was transferred here and continued for three years before I retired. In '71, I got the notice and moved here in '72.

Now I had the whole United States, including Eastern areas involved in the American Revolution Bicentennial. It gave me some opportunities! We had the task of reconstructing Bent's Old Fort in time for the Centennial. I was involved in that heavily. We didn't have a great deal to do with Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie, but obviously there were some things that came up. I was able to give a lot of continuity to Bent's Old Fort because I had been involved with that as Regional Historian.

COCKRELL: What day did you actually retire?

MATTES: My last day of employment was December 31, 1974. Then,

I was rehired for a few months to tie-up some loose ends. Then I took off for Lincoln, Nebraska, and that was my first major project after I retired. The State of Nebraska engaged me to write their Historical Resource Management Plan. I spent most of the year in Lincoln going back and forth and developing this real handsome document in which I told them what was wrong and how they were operating between the State Game and Parks Commission and the State Historical Society who were at loggerheads. It was a matter of settling things between them. I wrote their plan which has been essentially followed. I attempted to draft some legislation so it would be clarified forever in the legislation. You had two conflicting laws over who would manage the State Historic Sites. The upshot was the legislation fell through, but they've agreed to live in harmony because they've sorted out who does what. The Historical Society does the research and archeology, but the State Parks people run the areas.

COCKRELL: But that's not the situation at Chimney Rock, is it?

MATTES: The State Historical Society has places of their own, like Chimney Rock and Courthouse Rock. The State Park people have Fort Kearney and Fort Hartsuff and Buffalo Bill's Home in North Platte, and so on. Now they're working together instead of fighting one another.

At the same time I recommended ten areas that I thought should be added to the Nebraska State Park System. These included Robidoux Pass and Courthouse Rock, which has since become a Historical Society responsibility. It also included what I called the Naracissa Whitman Wayside Exhibit which would be on the north side of the trail not far above Ash Hollow. It would have given some recognition to the north side of the Oregon-California-Mormon Trail. I also recommended a unit be established at Horse Creek where the great horse trading grounds of 1851 area. From there you can see Scotts Bluff in one direction and Laramie Peak in the other--a magnificent opportunity.

The only things they've acted on is they've acquired Rock Creek for the State Parks and they've acquired Courthouse Rock for the Historical Society. They haven't done a lick on the other suggestions, but at least it is on record and I thought it was a very worthwhile project.

The Denver Service Center asked me to write up the history of the American Revolution Bicentennial in the National Park System. I spent eight months on this under contract. It has never been published. I interviewed everybody on their particular projects and I thought it was a pretty nice record. They spent over \$100,000,000 the Denver Service Center alone! It's never been copied or reproduced! I can only say there's been a vast amount

of indifference on it. They scraped up the money to do it with because somebody thought it was a good idea. Nobody has taken enough initiative to urge that it be printed. In Washington, they were going to print it in hardcover and sell it in areas like Yorktown, but nothing came of it. To this day, it just sits there.

COCKRELL: How many pages was it?

MATTES: I'd say there were about 500 pages. I finished it in '77.

COCKRELL: What was the title?

MATTES: The American Revolution Bicentennial Project. This was an accounting of all the money that was spent by the Denver Service Center, \$100,000,000. If the Historians had anything to do with it, they would have pushed for it, but this was between me and the front office and no other Historians were involved. It wasn't the responsibility of the Branch of History. They took off on another big spending project when President Ford came in and all of a sudden they forgot the American Revolution Bicentennial.

The next thing I did was a contract with Rocky Mountain Regional Office for a park, or administrative, history of Fort Laramie. At the same time they asked me to write a revision of the historical handbook. As you know, I did the historical handbook for Scotts Bluff and it is still sold today. It's needed no revision whatever. I drafted a revision of the Fort Laramie Handbook to bring it up to date. The upshot of that was it was never printed because the people at Harper's Ferry who are responsible for interpretation, said, 'No, we've decided that we want a new publication and we want it to be written by a professional writer.' That was five years ago and they still don't have one!

The major part was the administrative history. Here's the irony of it. Administrative histories are for in-Service use. I called it a "Park History" because that seemed to fit it better since I went back to 1890. They had wobbled around on whether to call it a park history or an administrative history. I called it a park history. The irony is it was written for in-Service use, but when the Government Printing Office got ahold of it, they ran off 1,000 copies for the general public. So, the Fort Laramie Handbook, which was supposed to be for the public, never got printed and vice versa!

The last big operation is something I'm still working on. This is of vital importance to both Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie. Ever since I was at Scotts Bluff, I have wanted to write a book on the California-Oregon Trail. Not just of Scotts Bluff, but the whole business. So, while I was still in Omaha as Regional Historian, I had an opportunity to write that book which became the Great Platte River Road published by the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1969. I have a bibliography in there of over 50 pages.

My current project is an extension of the bibliography that I had developed initially. I had this brainstorm that there was a real need in the history profession for a comprehensive bibliography for everybody that went West over the Platte or Central Overland Route. No such bibliography had ever been attempted. There have been little bits and pieces of it. I was wondering how to go about this knowing it would be a colossal job. I got tipped off that the National Endowment for the Humanities might shell out some money for this. I got the necessary forms and advice from them. I told the Nebraska State Historical Society that I needed a sponsor. That was a requirement since this would be classified as a reference work, and I also needed a sponsor that could kick in 25 percent of the cost. They agreed to shell out \$10,000 from their endowment fund, and the National Endowment agreed to shell out \$30,000, so I had a budget of \$40,000 to cover all expenses and a token amount of reimbursement. They were very enthusiastic about it in Washington, so I started in April 1979. I completed my manuscript which is over 1800 pages and turned it over to the Historical Society in June 1982. It represents over 1800 entries of eyewitness accounts of people who followed the Central Overland Route past Scotts Bluff and, beginning in 1834, at Fort Laramie. It ends in 1866 because at that time the Transcontinental Railroad was almost finished and transcontinental wagon travel was almost over with.

It will be published by the Nebraska State Historical Society and we're looking for a co-publisher with more experience in technical editing, printing, and marketing. A professional reader at the Endowment for the Humanities has determined that I should revise the manuscript and edit it down from 800,000 words to around 500,000 words. Now I am in the process of revision and it will take me until January 1984 to finish it. I don't expect the book to be in print until 1985. It will be an enormously important reference work for students, scholars, writers, and collectors. I can't think of any library in the Western United States that pretends to have any collection of Western Americana, not having a copy. That brings us up to date.

COCKRELL: You have been busy! What was the extent of your involvement at Grand Portage National Monument?

MATTES: Grand Portage National Historic Site was one of the first projects that I became involved in after I was named Regional Historian in 1949. Lawrence Merriam, the Regional Director, called me in one day and said it was necessary for representatives of the Omaha office to go up to Grand Portage, way up there near Canada, and visit with the Indians. He wanted us to examine the historic site up there and see if we could make an agreement with the Indians to see if we could get it labeled a National Historic Site by the Secretary of the Interior. In those days, a National Historic Site didn't have to be owned by the Federal Government. It was a category of special recognition and it could be owned by the State or anybody else. In this case, the thought was the Indians will own and operate it, but it will be dignified by this title.

Before I go further, I'll tell you about the background of this which wasn't told to me at the time. The background is that the conservationists, led by a gentleman by the name of Sig Olson, a prime mover in the Wilderness Society, were anxious to establish a National Wilderness Park along the international boundary. They wanted to do this because the hunters and fishermen and others were making so many inroads against the wilderness area; too many animals were getting killed and too many motorboats were disturbing the serenity of the scene. I didn't realize it till later, but I realized it before long that the main thrust for establishing Grand Portage National Historic Site was an anchor. The National Park Service would get a toehold up in that part of the country and then they'd be in a better position to go to work on the wilderness project. By way of proof of that has been the establishment within the last ten years or so of the Voyageurs National Park. The Voyageurs National Park is the end result of that line of thinking. I'm perfectly happy to see Voyageurs National Park established because of the history connected to it.

In the spring of 1950, George Ingalls, who was a Landscape Architect and Planner, and I were told to team up and get up there and visit with the Indians to see how they felt about a National Historic Site with the argument that this would be to their best interests economically. If we could possibly come home with their signature on an agreement, that would be fine. I had never been in that part of the world before so it was a very fascinating trip for both of us to go up through Minnesota, to Duluth, and drive along the North Shore of Minnesota to the Chippewa Indian Reservation. What I'm not able to give you at this time is the names of these Indians, except a Paul LeGarde, on the council. This represented the tribal chairman and others on the Tribal Council. It's a small band; I doubt if there were more than two to three hundred in the Grand Portage community, but they had maintained a lot of their native ways.

We had written them so they were alerted to our coming. What existed then was the Great Hall that had been built by the

Minnesota Historical Society in the 1930s, and as it turned out in retrospect, it had been poorly researched. I might add parenthetically, when I was in San Francisco it burned to the ground and nobody knew what caused it. Probably arson. It led to our reconstruction of it along the lines of improved research on the Great Hall in recent years. They had a fence, or stockade wall, that was ready to collapse. It was a sorry looking thing. The village of the Indians which was on the plateau above the lake looked like a poverty pocket. All these people had to live off the land and get supplemental checks through Welfare and so on. There was some subsistent hunting and fishing, but they were happy; they loved it there. If tourists could be induced to go there, their lot would be that much happier. I might add that the scenery is magnificent--one of the most fabulous views to be had this side of the Rocky Mountains.

The Tribal Council was very generous with their time when we met. We met for three days and two nights, and I had been given a list of promises and principles to agree upon. My report on all this was among the papers that appear to have been lost. A copy must exist somewhere; if I find a copy, I'll let you know, but I don't think I have one. A copy may be in Lincoln, in the Regional Historian's files [at the Nebraska State Historical Society].

The upshot was that we got a signed agreement. I don't think George Ingalls and I got sufficient recognition for our achievement because you don't go in to visit with a bunch of Indians and come out with a signed agreement! They raised all kinds of questions and all kinds of objections, and voiced all kinds of concerns, but, in essence, it was agreed that the Secretary could proclaim a National Historic Site. I believe we laid out the boundaries on maps that were available, and in such a way that we would not include the village, but we would include the historic area. It was a pretty limited area, but it was all that they would agree to. They agreed it could be established by proclamation. It would not be Federally owned; it was still Indian land. They also agreed that they would be kind to visitors. They would entertain visitors. They would develop a facility of their own in the village to provide accommodations and meals. What they had then was pretty awful. They had an ancient log house that served as a hotel which was a pretty sorry affair. The meals weren't bad. We could get blueberry pie and whitefish from the lake.

In broad terms, that was the agreement. I was able to type it with an old typewriter we brought along with us. I must have typed at least six drafts that I tore up before we got one with everything they would agree to, and all six or seven tribal members signed it. It was to be co-signed, I believe, by the Regional Director. I don't think George Ingalls or I signed it. Then it would go to the Director and then the Secretary. While we were there, we said, "We've got to go to Fort Charlotte, at

the far end of the Portage.' Did you get up there?

COCKRELL: No, I didn't.

MATTES: One of the younger members volunteered to take us up there, and the trail was still visible, defined. We thought we had to lay eyes on it to see what we were committing the Government to. We hiked up there and had a good look around and came on back and went back to Omaha with this document in our hip pocket. Within a few months, the Secretary proclaimed it as a National Historic Site.

That was in 1950. The following year, in mid-summer, they had the grand dedication put on jointly by the National Park Service and the Grand Portage Band and the Minnesota Historical Society. It was put on in the Great Hall. There were all kinds of speeches. The featured speaker was Dr. Grace Lee Nute, the principal authority on its history. The Secretary of the Interior was represented by one of his Associate Directors. I forget his name. The Canadian Government sent representatives. The Indians were all decked out in their finery and their regalia and they staged war dances and entertainment. We had a band and a magnificent dinner of lake trout and blueberry pie--that's standard up there.

Also present for that occasion representing the Director was Ronald F. Lee, at that time Associate Director of the National Park Service who previously had been Chief Historian. He's one of the few Historians of the Park Service who've risen to a high position. Ronnie Lee was a very brilliant fellow and a great personality. We did not stay for the conclusion of the festivities because he had to get back to Washington, D.C. I missed a lot of fine things. I could have gotten a free trip to Isle Royale, all kinds of things were happening, but he said, 'Let's get out of here; I've got to get home.' I was chauffeuring him. That was the great celebration.

The rest of my involvement with Grand Portage was routine. I assisted with master planning at different times. I was very much involved with Alan Woolworth for his series of archeological projects. I can only say in conclusion about Grand Portage that we realized the National Historic Site agreement by itself was not a very effective thing because the Indians didn't pay too much attention to our agreement. On one hand, they didn't provide very decently for visitors, and on the other, beyond that, there was a real need to extend the boundaries to provide a more viable unit. It should be a National Historic Site in Federal ownership.

Guess what? A bill was finally developed establishing a Grand

Portage National Monument. I won't run into the series of Superintendents, but I'll say I helped as much as I could with their interim efforts, but we've never been able to get any heavy money to develop with, and we've had to have the headquarters in Grand Marais. We have been able to get the money for the reconstructed Great Hall, for the Gatehouse, for the Kitchen, for the fencing, and that's about as far as we've gone with actual development on the ground. The great breakthrough on the accommodations was this beautiful hotel. What do you call it?

COCKRELL: Grand Portage Lodge.

MATTES: I was up there in October 1981. The 4th Fur Trade Conference was there. Alan Woolworth was on the program. I was pleased that the Minnesota Historical Society people who were conducting things invited me to introduce Alan Woolworth. I mentioned to the crowd about these events back in the beginning.

COCKRELL: Before Grand Portage became a National Monument, were you in on the negotiations with the Indians?

MATTES: Yes. Actually, as I mentioned to you, Howard Baker's philosophy as Regional Director was to let the Regional Historian have some input on anything that involved history. If it was a historical area, even if they were putting in a pipeline, I'd know about it and know where they were going and made sure they didn't disrupt something. The planning, the interpretive planning, the Master Plan, the archeology, whatever it was, I'd be involved, but mainly in a routine fashion.

The principle thing was the initial meeting with the Indians, getting the thing launched. I think that was an unusual accomplishment, especially from my general knowledge of Indians, and I've had a lot of exposure to Indians through the Missouri Basin Survey. They aren't easy to get along with. They'll say 'yes' when they mean 'no.' To get their signature on anything is unusual. In this case, I think they were swayed by the prospect of economic benefits, plus we stayed with them until they signed it. We said we weren't leaving until we got it.

COCKRELL: That's one way to get what you want! This Sig Olson who was with the Wilderness Society in the early 1950s. Was he in on the negotiations for the National Monument?

MATTES: No, he was in the background. He was the prime mover in the Wilderness Society who was pushing and shoving on the

Secretary to do something to get this wilderness thing and that was their strategy--get Grand Portage as an anchor and all of a sudden you have a vested interest in the wilderness proposal. The Voyageurs park followed that.

COCKRELL: Sig Olson wasn't an Indian then?

MATTES: No, he was a Swede. He's dead now. He lived to a ripe old age. He's been a prime mover in many park plans, including Alaska. I was with him up in Alaska in 1968 or '69.

COCKRELL: Where was his home? Was he a Minnesotan?

MATTES: Yes. He lived in Ely, Minnesota.

COCKRELL: Is that near Grand Portage?

MATTES: Yes. It is half-way between Grand Portage and Voyageurs National Park, International Falls.

COCKRELL: That about covers all my questions I had on Grand Portage. Before we turn to Agate Fossil Beds, I'd like for you to look over the draft administrative history of Grand Portage. Please feel free to make any corrections or comments on it and send them to me.

MATTES: Sure. I'll look at it. I'll write you if there's anything, but I suspect not. I was involved in the Great Hall as coordinator. We had the architect and foreman and so forth.

COCKRELL: I will supplement the early history and NPS involvement section with your comments from this interview. The records at Grand Portage were very scant on that period. Now, for Agate. What do you recall about Agate Fossil Beds?

MATTES: Agate Fossil Quarries came to my attention early while I was employed as Custodian at Scotts Bluff National Monument. There were two reasons for this. Aside from the fact that it was supposed to be one of the local attractions, it was 50 or 60 miles from Scotts Bluff, but the fossil quarries had quite an attraction for the local people. They'd go up there and kill a Sunday afternoon and also visit the museum at the ranchhouse of

Captain Cook. My predecessor as Custodian was Harold J. Cook, the son of Captain Cook, proprietor of the Agate Ranch. Harold Cook was also a ranch operator himself in addition to his work as an oil geologist and his various interests as an archeologist. For reasons that I explained on the Scotts Bluff tape, Harold Cook was relieved of his responsibilities by the Secretary of the Interior in 1935 and I succeeded him.

I knew about the Cook ranch in Agate and Harold invited me up there. He and I were on good terms because he recognized me as a Historian who had no interest in politics. I had nothing to do with him getting deposed and he was very liberal with his information. At first I was a little apprehensive thinking that he would hold it against me thinking that I had replaced him, but he was a very broadminded individual. No problems there. I did on more than one occasion go on up to Agate and visit there.

Another of my best friends was Paul McGrew who was the paleontology foreman for the CCC camp, a fossil-collector. He married one of Harold Cook's daughters. More than once I would go up there. I had many long conversations with Captain Cook who had served as an Indian scout and a frontiersman, a close friend of Red Cloud and Indians on the Pine Ridge Reservation to the north. He had accumulated a very large and rich collection of Indian artifacts which I won't describe because they're all now catalogued and have become the property of the Government, and housed at Scotts Bluff National Monument. At that time, in 1935, '36, '37, nobody had the faintest inkling that there might be an Agate Fossil Quarries National Monument. We knew there were fossils there; we went up to Agate and collected not only the great Diceratherium slab, which was the central exhibit in our initial display, we got a beautiful specimen of Stenomylus, the gazelle-like camel, which was also exhibited there.

I became initially familiar with the fossil quarries because as coordinator for the Scotts Bluff museum operation, I was up there on several occasions collecting the fossils and also socially to visit the Captain. The unmarried daughters of Captain Cook, one or two of them were still there, others had married. Wennie Cook was the wife of Paul McGrew. Margaret Cook married a rancher there whose ranch was right there within the present Agate Fossil Quarries. He became dispossessed and died soonafter. I don't know if it was from natural causes or from suicide. I know it was a terrible blow to him to have that property taken from him. Another daughter, whose name escapes me at the moment, lives on the ranch today with her husband and they run it as a ranch. The fourth daughter, Eleanor, is in the academic world somewhere.

I became well-acquainted with the family. Living on the ranch was Harold's wife at that time. This was his second wife. The four daughters were by a previous marriage. Harold's earlier wife was living in Chadron, Nebraska. On more than one occasion

I was over at Chadron with Paul and his wife when they were visiting there. I'm giving you this information because I think the history of the Cook family has some relevance to this.

While I was in Lincoln, Nebraska, I also visited Dr. Barbour, who was the father of the estranged first wife, and the grandfather of these four girls. I had more than one occasion to go to Lincoln; I always attend the annual meetings of the Nebraska State Historical Society. I went to visit him and the minute I got in his office, he asked me to sit down. He had a glint in his eye and he took off on a bitter diatribe against his son-in-law Harold for having maltreated or two-timed his daughter. Dr. Barbour died soon after that. There was that connection because he was also a paleontologist. He was head of the Natural History Museum.

COCKRELL: What was Dr. Barbour's first name?

MATTES: Erwin. Erwin H. Barbour.

The interviews I had with Captain Cook were of a social nature. I never attempted to tape an interview. I don't think there were tapes then. I never took any penciled notes. I remember he told me a lot about the principal artifacts. For example, he had rifles, old guns that the Indians had tied with rawhides and brass tacks. Some of them were split apart. They were associated with the breakout from Fort Robinson in 1877. They'd be associated with the Dull Knife Battle--all kinds of engagements that the Indians had. He had Red Cloud's portrait, a lot of the anecdotes associated with the artifacts. Also the fossils. The paleontological parties from all over including the Natural History Museum in New York City and the Carnegie Institute, would come out there almost every season to excavate. They'd camp at his doorstep; I suppose some of the key people lived in the ranchhouse and maybe had their meals there.

Captain James Cook died while I was still at Scotts Bluff and he was buried with due ceremony as one of the oldest of the old-timers. I don't recall if he was buried up there near Harrison or at Scottsbluff or somewhere in between. There's a book written on him published by the Yale University Press. He wrote it. Here it is. James H. Cook, Fifty Years on the Old Frontier. That book is worth about \$50 right now. He wrote it and it's a classic of Western American history.

COCKRELL: I wonder if the Scotts Bluff library has it?

MATTES: I doubt it. I didn't have brains enough to get a copy

and have him autograph it when I was going up there. If I had an autographed copy, it would be worth a lot more. He was pretty high in the pantheon of Western heroes. He isn't in the same league as Buffalo Bill, Kit Carson, or General Custer, but he played a very important role and he has written a very vivid story.

Harold Cook also wrote a book. It was published by the University of Nebraska Press. It's Tales of the O4 Ranch, as I recall. I didn't realize that the ranch had that name.

COCKRELL: 04?

MATTES: The O4 Ranch. In other words, 1904. I know that the ranch was established long before, so I'm mystified by the significance of that title. I reviewed that book for the Nebraska History Magazine. I have a copy of it somewhere. That's an important source of information on the paleontological parties that were there and other aspects of the ranch.

Harold Cook's wife was also named Margaret; that was also the name of the daughter who married the rancher. When I say Margaret, from now on I'm talking about Harold's wife, Margaret. They met in connection with his scientific interests. He worked for awhile with the Denver Museum of Natural History, in the Division of Paleontology. They met somehow in connection with his field trips.

She was the mistress of the ranch in the polite sense of the term during the years that I was up there. She was a very gracious lady and highly-educated, a brilliant woman. She and Harold made a great couple. We had them down to the monument a time or two and to the picnic grounds during the time that we had them. They were very active in the Oregon Trail Memorial Association. I had a good relationship with that family. He showed me around the premises and showed me some of the artifacts he had. He had some things from Fort Laramie, Army carts and saddles. He had things that he had liberated from Fort Laramie because for so many years it was up for grabs, a vacant place where anybody could help themselves. All of those things were returned to Fort Laramie when David Hieb was Superintendent. Harold Cook was very anxious that they be returned to Fort Laramie.

When I left for Omaha, the ranch was there and the Captain had died. Margaret Cook carried on. She operated the museum, the converted first floor of the ranchhouse, the study and the enclosed porch area, primarily. It was just loaded with Indian artifacts, clothing, regalia, scalps, and fossils of every imaginable description.

In the late 50s and early 60s, I began to hear talk of making Agate Fossil Quarries a National Monument. To be honest about it, I was not included in the discussion or plans except in a very limited fashion. In fact, this was looked upon as a scientific area; the history was incidental. Since it wasn't theoretically a historical area, it wasn't my problem especially. However, when the planners came around from San Francisco, they consulted me. I told them about the ranch set-up and gave them a perspective of the importance of Agate historically because of the paleontological use of the ranch. The ranch itself as a magnificent example of a headquarters and repository of this fantastic collection by a rancher who was a close friend of Red Cloud and the Pine Ridge Indians. The plan was to include the ranchhouse in the boundaries of Agate Fossil Quarries, which I thought was a marvelous idea. This is fifty miles off U.S. Highway 26 and fossils alone are no big attraction, especially when there's no fossils to see except 'Here's where we got it.' But, if they had the ranchhouse and the collection, you'd have something that a lot of people would go out of their way to look at. When I got to San Francisco, it was my understanding that it would include the ranch. If I'm not mistaken, the authorized boundary does include the ranch.

COCKRELL: Yes, it does.

MATTES: A funny thing happened. In spite of all the conclaves--we'd had Howard Baker go out to the ranch, and Chet Brown who was Chief of Park Planning, go out to the ranch, and umpteen others--there were countless conferences with Margaret Cook because Harold Cook died somewhere along the line. Margaret Cook was a prime champion of the National Monument and she fully intended that the ranch go to the Park Service with ample compensation.

In 1964, there was a Regional Superintendent's Conference at Fort Robinson near Crawford. On one of our field trips out there with George Hartzog as our revered leader, we went to the Agate ranch which now was established or was about to be established. Margaret made a speech, and I'm sorry that now neither I nor anyone else had a tape recorder. She ran through the whole history of the place. I saw Mr. Hartzog shaking his head. I don't think he was impressed by this place. Subsequently, Lon Garrison, who became Regional Director, was out there. He wasn't impressed. I don't remember his exact words, but he said, 'Now, I can't quite see that as a unit of the National Park System.'

That was after the Park Service was fully committed. Those reactions might be understandable to people who are interested in fabulous scenery or a national shrine. This is barren. It's a

valley of the Niobrara River. The ranchhouse, unless you appreciate ranches and know the associations, you don't give it a second thought. I'm not citing this except to point out there's nothing impressive to look at there. The only thing impressive about it is the history of the fossil-gathering and the history of the ranch.

Much to my amazement and dismay, I learned later that we weren't going to get the ranch because it turns out that by will, the ranch went to the four girls instead of his second wife, Margaret. I don't know what kind of settlement was made on her. To make a long story short, the girls wouldn't have any part of the ranch being part of the National Monument. To this day, they don't even want to talk about it. I won't say they'd shoot any Park Service man on sight, but they hate the Park Service because they destroyed that part of the ranch. The wife, Margaret, was the champion, and Harold wanted it, and apparently he failed to tell his daughters about the plan or to convince them. He died, and that left Margaret who thought the ranch was part of the deal. Maybe she was naive enough to think that the girls would happily relinquish it if they were paid. What the Park Service wound up with was the fossil quarries and most of the land on the east side of the road, but nothing on the west side and no part of the ranch.

When this became apparent, this was when the artifacts were retrieved. The artifacts were specified as going to the Government. The girls didn't have a hold on the artifacts so the Park Service was able to load up and transfer all the artifacts. You can understand that this whole plan had gone sour, but the ranch headquarters--the buildings--were to be part of this National Monument and for the artifacts to be displayed there.

The Indian artifacts have nothing to do with the fossils except that both of these stories impinge on the ranch. My reaction to all this is, Agate Fossil Quarries should now be disestablished. I don't think there's a damned bit of justification for a National Monument up there in a howling wilderness 50 miles from the nearest highway. I'll bet the attendance is extremely low. Half of it will be ranchers from the little neighboring towns and maybe Scottsbluff. Your transnational tourists aren't going to make trips up to Agate. Not if they're in their right minds they won't because there isn't a damned thing to see once you get up there that's worth a 100 mile roundtrip! But if you had the ranchhouse and the artifacts that went with it, that would be something pretty unusual. It would be on the level of the Grant Kohrs Ranch up in Montana. Agate Fossil Quarries would be of equal importance if we had the ranch. Without the ranch, they bought a pig in the poke, in my opinion.

The ranch family, the daughter's last name is Mead; his first name is Hudson. His wife's first name escapes me. They own or

manage the ranch; maybe all the daughters have a fraction of it. Their position is, not only are they mad at the Park Service because they busted up half of the ranch, but they think they've taken a lot more land already than they're warranted taking. Under no circumstances will they relinquish the ranch headquarters buildings because they need them to run the ranch with. How many acres they've got in their own name and how many acres are public land, I don't know. I think they must have several thousand acres. It's prosperous to make a living on. Hudson Mead was also a paleontologist in his day so you see, you had Harold Cook and two sons-in-law who were paleontologists. If this connection hadn't been broken, you'd have had a fabulous bit of interpretation there.

That, to me, is the sad story about Agate Fossil Quarries. The Park Service got it, but I don't think they have much of anything. If someday the family or descendants see fit to turn over the ranch, then they'll have something. The bottom line is, the Park Service should still aim to get that ranch someday, somehow, because I'm sure it's within the authorized boundaries.

There's an example of a plan that really went haywire. I don't think the Park Service people want to admit it, and if you're not a Historian like yourself, but to me, that was the main justification for acquiring Agate that it had this double-barreled historical significance and was associated with a primary fossil deposit. I'll take nothing away from this fossil deposit; it was one of the famous ones, but it was the activities associated with that plus James Cook's background that really was the nationally significant aspect of it.

COCKRELL: Can you tell me more about the Hudson Mead family?

MATTES: About four years ago, they invited me to a family reunion because I was real close to two of the girls. Unfortunately, I was so heavily involved in my bibliography project, I passed it up. I'm sorry now that I didn't go up to get the current picture. But they're still there on the ranch.

My view is that the Park Service, as a policy, retain the authority to acquire the ranch and bide their time until the family or descendants are willing to come around.

It's not unheard of to disestablish areas. It's not done often. We are an expansionist agency. When I retired, there were about 300 units in the Park System and I don't know how many there are now. Between the 12 Alaska areas and Harry S Truman [National Historic Site, Independence, Missouri], and I keep hearing of other things which keep creeping in, there's probably about 350

by now.

Now, for Agate Fossil Quarries, a pretty strong case for disestablishment could be made. I wouldn't attempt to make it, and I suppose nobody else will either. The equal half of the monument is not part of it; this is what the monument was all about! Congress is the only one that can disestablish once it is Federal property. In this case, I'd say Agate is nationally significant if you include the ranch. It's not nationally significant, and therefore it should not be a National Monument, if you leave out the ranch, the headquarters.

The only hedge from the standpoint of the people at Scotts Bluff National Monument is that if would make their area less of a crown jewel if they were deprived of their satellite up there in Sioux County. You're not going to get anybody on the park staff to agree with me that it should be disestablished. I wouldn't bet a nickel that it ever would be. I'm just saying they didn't do their homework when they determined what they were going to acquire, and how and when they were going to acquire it.

I visited Hudson and his wife the summer of 1975 before I got that invitation, and they expressed to me their bitterness. Clearly, they have no intention of turning it over in the visible future. In time, maybe something can be worked out. Otherwise, I don't think they have an area up there worth keeping.

COCKRELL: Yes, it hasn't been developed too much. It's just kind of sitting out there.

MATTES: Wouldn't you hate to be stationed there in the wintertime?

COCKRELL: Yes! In fact, the Ranger-In-Charge John Rapier told me when I was there in January [1983], that I was the only visitor so far that weekend--on a Sunday afternoon! It was very lonely out there.

Well, Mr. Mattes, that about covers all the areas that I wanted to touch on in this interview. Thank you very much for your time and trouble.

[END]

MERRILL J. MATTES

B.A. in History, University of Missouri, 1931
 M.A. in English Literature, University of Kansas, 1933
 Fellowship in American history and archeology, Yale University, 1938-39

National Park Service, 1935-1975
 Ranger, Yellowstone National Park, 1935
 Superintendent, Scotts Bluff National Monument, 1935-1946
 Historian, Missouri Basin Surveys, 1946-1949 (Omaha)
 Regional Historian, Midwest Region, Omaha, 1949-1966
 Chief Planner, Alaska Studies, San Francisco, 1966-1969
 Chief of Historic Preservation, Western Service Center, San Francisco to 1971
 Chief of Historic Preservation, Denver Service Center, 1972-1975

Historical Consultant and Contractor, 1975-present. Contracts:
 State of Nebraska, Historical Resources Management Survey
 NPS, Denver Service Center, Report on American Revolution Bicentennial Program
 NPS, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Fort Laramie Park History
 Colorado Historical Society, Bent's Fort Park History
 Nebraska State Historical Society, PLATTE RIVER ROAD JOURNALS: A
 COMPREHENSIVE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1812-1866, (publication planned)
 (funded by National Endowment for Humanities)

Honors and Awards

Nebraska Civil Servant of the Year, 1958
 Distinguished Service Award, U. S. Department of Interior, 1959
 { for GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD
 "Best Western Non-Fiction of 1969," National Cowboy Hall of Fame
 Award of Merit, State and Local History Association
 Silver Spur, Western Writers of America

Organizations

Charter Member, Western History Association (since 1961)
 Sheriff, Denver Westerners (1979)
 Sheriff, San Francisco Westerners (1969)
 Life Member since 1935, Nebraska State Historical Society
 Founding Member, Society for Historical Archeology (1967)
 Founding Member and 1st Vice President, Douglas County (Nebr) Hist. Society
 Executive Vice-President, Oregon-California Trails Association (present)

Publications

SCOTT'S BLUFF NATIONAL MONUMENT, Government Printing Office, 1955
 FORT LARAMIE PARK HISTORY, ditto, 1981
 COLTER'S HELL & JACKSON'S HOLE, Yellowstone Nature Association, 1962
 INDIANS, INFANTS, AND INFANTRY: THE WEST OF ANDREW & ELIZABETH BURT, Denver 1960
 GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969
 4 biographies of fur traders in MOUNTAIN MEN OF THE FUR TRADE, Glendale, 1960-72
 50 articles in various historical quarterlies
 200 book reviews

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