

George B. Hartzog was appointed NPS director in January 1964. He quickly established three new principals for park interpretation: 1) The prime requisite for park interpretation is the ability to communicate effectively with visitors rather than subject matter expertise; 2) New investments in audiovisual media will supplement personal interpretive contacts; and 3) Museum work will undergo reorientation, especially in respect to exhibit policy. In February 1964, Hartzog hired William C. Everhart to implement his vision and lead a new Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services. As a result, Everhart emphasized newer media techniques for audiovisual presentations, demonstrations, publications, and museum exhibits to support ranger interactions with visitors. He also wanted to invigorate NPS interpretation with people and ideas from the Mid Century Modern design movement.

Within six weeks of beginning his new position, Everhart held an interpretive conference at Harpers Ferry. Shortly after that conference, on April 20, 1964, NPS Publications Chief Vincent L. Gleason submitted a written suggestion to the NPS Incentive Awards Committee that the NPS “locate the creative functions of its Washington Interpretive staff in a shop, built exclusively for that purpose, at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.” Gleason noted that a new shop at Harpers Ferry would enable the interpretive staff to “meet its assignments far better in a building designed expressly for the purpose” and that the new location would enable the interpretive staff “to take a more direct and active part in the Stephen T. Mather Training and Research Center.” Gleason referred specifically to the interpretive functions of publications, museum and exhibit skills, audiovisual presentations, and motion pictures. In his proposal, those areas would retain their alignment within the NPS organizational chart and each branch would continue to function as it had up to that time.

Gleason’s suggestion, which earned him a \$400 cash award, outlined several advantages of the proposal. The new building would provide “a modern plant for modern work.” Gleason argued that co-locating the facility with the Mather Training Center would “amplify NPS training programs...by providing a scientific laboratory for learning within easy reach of the student body.” He argued strongly for the economic and educational advantages that building a new interpretive center adjacent to the training center would provide. He believed that an increase in creativity would result from consolidating the interpretive functions in a single location and more unified products would be a tangible result. Perhaps most importantly, Gleason saw a new center as something that would build the NPS’s stature in the creative fields. He stated “the theme at Harpers Ferry should be excellence.” He closed his proposal by again stressing the relationship with the Mather Training Center, stating “By locating the interpretive shop near the Training Center, the NPS increases its already vast capacity for the job. The two installations, properly developed in tandem, can equip the National Park Service with tools of the 21st Century for the problems of the 20th.”

Although Gleason certainly deserves credit for submitting the suggestion, there are hints in the historical record that indicate NPS managers may have already been predisposed to the idea. In 1962 the NPS acquired the Storer College campus (land and facilities) to protect what was then called Harpers Ferry National Monument. That same year Everhart was part of a two-man team that visited Harpers Ferry, ostensibly to become familiar with campus facilities and their condition. During the inspection tour, they mentioned that one of the facilities might accommodate the NPS audiovisual lab which was then located in Washington, D.C. It is likely

therefore, that behind-the-scenes discussions were taking place for some time before Gleason's fully-formed proposal was submitted just three days after Mather Training Center's dedication.

Be that as it may, Everhart and Hartzog enthusiastically supported Gleason's suggestion, which came at a time when the Federal government was looking to reduce its concentration of employees in Washington, D.C. The economic conditions in West Virginia at that time combined with its powerful Congressional representatives made the Harpers Ferry suggestion very appealing. It should also be noted that Harpers Ferry NHP had hoped that the Storer College property and facilities would be used to address park's needs. However, with the Storer College land already available, Congress appropriated \$650,000 to start the project in 1966.

In early 1966, with plans for HFC on the horizon, the NPS Branch of Museum Development was directed to prepare a plan to close out the NPS Western Museum Laboratory in San Francisco. In January 1967, Everhart contracted with Ulrich Franzen to design the new Harpers Ferry facility. In March of that year the Audiovisual Branch moved to temporary quarters in one of the Storer College buildings and from there they were able to photo document much of the construction work when it began. In August 1967, two exhibit planners (Ray Price and David Ichelson) from the Western Museum Laboratory also relocated to Harpers Ferry. More urgency was placed on closing the Western Museum Lab in February 1968 as GSA was determined to vacate the Old Mint building which housed that operation. In March and April 1968, Herbert Martin, Joseph Rockwell, and John Segegren also transferred from the Lab to Harpers Ferry. The Western Museum Lab terminated on May 10, 1968 and the staff that transferred to West Virginia worked in makeshift offices as Harpers Ferry Center had not yet been completed.

Construction bids for the new building were opened on March 19, 1968. Construction began in April. As the new building neared completion, the Department of the Interior formally approved the establishment of the center, effective November 1, 1969. The approval abolished the position of Assistant Director, Interpretation, in the Washington Office. Instead Everhart became director of the new Harpers Ferry Center and its five divisions: Audiovisual Arts; Museums; Publications; Administration and General Services; and Environmental Projects. Construction finished in December 1969. The entire project—design, construction, and furnishings—cost \$1,218,000. Staff moved into the building and Harpers Ferry Center became operational on March 2, 1970.

The new facility had not been designed to include museum conservation labs or museum collection storage areas. As a result, HFC's Museum Operations Branch had to function with its staff scattered among five buildings and objects stored in eight separate facilities. In response to these issues, Branch Chief Art Allen proposed acquisition of the 60-year-old Shipley School building at the edge of the HFC campus, which was soon to become vacant. This expansion of HFC's footprint alarmed the superintendent at Harpers Ferry NHP, who argued unsuccessfully that HFC and Mather Training Center should move out of the park. After some essential renovations, staff began moving into this facility in July 1972. The Shipley School building served HFC for 20 years before its deteriorated condition made it untenable and the conservation labs and collections were moved to a GSA-leased facility in nearby Charles Town, WV.

In its first 50 years, HFC had only six directors or managers. Everhart served as director from January 11, 1970 through August 30, 1973 when his title was changed from director to manager. Everhart, his assistant director Doug Hubbard, and the HFC staff developed the Center during its infancy. The administration of Harpers Ferry NHP and Mather Training Center was transferred to Everhart and the former was sometimes used as a testing ground for many of HFC's interpretive ideas. During this period the NPS Archives (now the NPS History Collection) was also established at HFC. Everhart left the Center on October 2, 1973 to become again Assistant Director, Interpretation in Washington. As such, he retained line authority over HFC but was not active in its management operations. Marc Sagan served as acting manager until he was appointed manager on March 17, 1974. That same month, Harpers Ferry NHP transferred into the National Capital Region.

In 1977, Vince Gleason made another groundbreaking contribution to NPS interpretation. To support of his need to develop a more efficient and cost-effective approach to NPS publications, Gleason enlisted modernist designer Massimo Vignelli to create what became the NPS Unigrad. The Unigrad is a comprehensive graphic design system that standardizes formatting and production, allowing designers, writers, and cartographers to focus on content and creativity while providing the strong visual identify for the NPS which is still in use today.

Sagan reorganized several programs within the Center. As the chief of the newly created Exhibits Division, Russell Hendrickson oversaw three branches: Exhibit Planning and Design, Exhibit Production, and Waysides Exhibits. The former Branch of Museum Operations became the Division of Museum Services, losing historic furnishings planning as part of its function. The new Branch of Reference Services within Program Management assumed responsibilities for historic furnishings planning and procurement, the staff still stationed at Springfield, VA, the HFC Library, and the NPS Archives. These changes occurred during the large workload associated with the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. From 1974-1976, for example, HFC exhibit staff completed projects and managed contract work that resulted in 92 museum exhibit plans, 45 museum exhibits, and 50 waysides projects. HFC work included high profile Bicentennial projects such as the opening of the Museum of Westward Expansion at the Arch in St. Louis and the National Visitor Center at Union Station in Washington, D.C.

Although the Mather Training Center had been supervised by Everhart, Sagan "couldn't see why the training center should be under us. It was a central office job and not our job." Without opposition, management of the training center was removed from HFC. Sagan strongly believed that the conservation staff was integral to HFC's exhibit program and he successfully resisted a plan to move them to WASO Cultural Resources Division after Ann Hitchcock was hired as chief curator in 1980. During Sagan's tenure, HFC's staff increased to 122 permanent employees and c. 20 seasonals. He retired on June 3, 1986.

David Wright became HFC's director on August 17, 1986. For a period of time, he also had supervisory responsibility for the c. 50 employees at the Williamsport Historic Preservation Training Center. In 1990, HFC's building was rededicated as the William C. Everhart Interpretive Design Center, known to staff as the IDC building. In 1994, HFC began to reassess its core functions and a series of workshops and interviews with the field began. During his tenure Wright emphasized the importance of training and his goal was to have ten trainees at the

Center at any time. During this period, HFC had c. 250 employees. Wright retired in 1997. He was followed by Gary Cummins, who was given the title of HFC manager.

By the early 2000s HFC had lost some of its reputation with field staff as the center of interpretive media excellence for the NPS. Several initiatives and internal reorganizations were undertaken in the early 2000s to try to address the issues. In November 2004, HFC launched *HFC On Media*, a newsletter designed to provide information about media projects and products HFC provided to NPS employees. In July 2005, a WASO reorganization moved HFC from the Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands Directorate (supervised by Sue Masica) to the Partnerships, Interpretation, Education, Volunteers, and Outdoor Recreation Directorate under Chris Jarvi. HFC began to transition away from being a producer of interpretive media to a “facilitator of the production of interpretive media” as Cummins described it.

Cummins retired from HFC on July 3, 2005. Gary Candelaria served as acting manager until he was formally appointed to the position in September 2005. With Candelaria’s appointment, HFC’s center manager title was changed once again to director. Reorganization continued at HFC under Candelaria but his directorship lasted less than one year; he left in c. June 2006.

Interpretive Planner Don Kodak became HFC’s acting director after Candelaria left. He was then named HFC’s deputy director in November 2006 and finally director in January 2007. Beginning in c. 2006 many long-term HFC employees began to retire and, as a result, HFC lost decades of expertise and administrative history. In June 2007 *Harpers Ferry Center’s Service Plan*, a business plan, was released. The Center was reorganized again, this time from the expertise-centered approach (e.g., division of exhibits, division of historic furnishings, etc.) to one that split those traditional divisions into teams organized by NPS region. *HFC On Media* ceased publication in 2009. At HFC’s 40th anniversary in 2010, Kodak estimated that the employees numbered c. 150; 100 fewer positions than just 13 years earlier under Wright.

Kodak retired in July 2016. At that point, HFC staff numbered around 80. Almost two years of internal acting assignments followed. In May 2018 Brendan Bray was hired from the National Atmospheric and Oceans Administration (NOAA) to serve as HFC’s latest director. Bray inherited an ongoing re-visioning of the Center’s mission and services, completed in 2019. He continues efforts to rebuild the Center’s staffing levels as another round of retirements by long-term HFC employees began in c. 2018 and continued into HFC’s 50th year in 2020.

Throughout its first 50 years, and across various reorganizations and initiatives, HFC staff continued to serve as an NPS service center, providing a wide variety of services and products to parks across the System. Examples include planning efforts such as interpretive plans, historic furnishings plans, and museum collection condition surveys; Unigrid brochures, handbooks, and other publications, as well as templates for park use; “start up” brochure templates for parks; wayside exhibits and wayside production grids for parks; maps and other cartographic services, including map starter files for parks; exhibits in museums, visitor centers, and furnished historic structures; Service-wide sign management program; award-winning films; conservation of museum objects; best practices for museum exhibit guidelines; emergency response after natural disasters; the HFC Commissioned Art and NPS History Collections; best practices for accessibility standards; accessible interpretive media such as low-vision brochures, Braille

signage, and tactile displays; Service-wide databases such as the Media Inventory Database System (MIDS); NPS training courses; the NPS Graphic Identity Program standards; special projects such as coordinating the Yellowstone collection move; graphics research and reference services; NPS Museum Digital Imaging Project; audiovisual equipment support; project management services; new products featuring emerging media technologies; and much more.