WHITE GRASS HERITAGE PROJECT

"Sharing the Legacy"

INTERVIEWEE: Sheila (S) Bricher-Wade Interview June 2017

INTERVIEWER: Roger Butterbaugh (RB)

LOCATION: White Grass Ranch, Grand Teton Nation Park, Wyoming

DATE: August 21, 2014

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Note: This transcript has undergone minor edits, e.g., false starts and minor text were removed to make it more "reader friendly". Sheila's complete interview transcript is below.

RB: This is an interview with Sheila Bricher-Wade. The date is August 21, 2014. My name is Roger Butterbaugh. I'm the caretaker at White Grass Ranch in the Grand Teton Park. This interview is part of the White Grass Heritage Project which began in 2014 - designed to collect relevant information about the history of the White Grass Ranch. We're talking with Sheila Bricher-Wade of Cheyenne, Wyoming today. After the ranch closed in 1985, she played an instrumental role in discussions about the future of White Grass Ranch, i.e., whether it would be saved and preserved, or whether it would simply go away. So, we're here to talk about some of Sheila's experiences and knowledge over the past few decades related to this important event. Welcome Sheila.

S: Thank you (corrects pronunciation of her name- as ' brick' er)

RB: Sheila, can you start us off with a little bit of background about your work in historic preservation – how you came to it and some of the things you did in that field as you began.

S: Well, I guess I was an accidental preservationist. I went to the University of Wyoming, at that time, the largest history department west of the Mississippi. So, I had a really good education from really good teachers. After doing that for about ten months there was an opening at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Wyoming for someone to handle the National Historic Register which I knew very little about. (The job) meant you needed to do historic building inventories. So, I applied and got that job. When I got my history degree, I knew nothing about historic preservation but once I fell into it, I knew it was what I was supposed to be doing. So—

RB: What attracted you. You say, "I knew I was supposed to be doing this."

S: Well, I sort of had this idea that I would sit in an archive or something. And, I like research and I like reading about history and writing about history is OK. But, writing about history gave

me the opportunity to sort of apply it somehow – in the bigger picture actually applying the stories; providing context; and the whole idea of landscape, both city landscape, cultural landscape – and that just appealed to me. It felt like what I was supposed to be doing. So, I became the National Register Historian. That was my title I think – for the Preservation Office in April of 1980.

RB: This is called SHPO of course…

S: Yeah – State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The idea of the State Historic Preservation Office (is that) every state has one. It came as part of the Preservation Act of 1966 which came out of that movement in the '60s for recognizing the importance of cultural things (and included the) humanities, the arts all of that during that time period. The Urban Renewal movement had created a lot of problems in urban communities where the federal government came in and started knocking down parts of cities because it was blight. That was part of the peoples' heritage and there were lots of little old ladies in tennis shoes running about saying, "Why are you tearing down these important things?" So, the Park Service was tasked with managing the Historic Preservation Office. When I was there, the National Park Service used to refer to their programs as "In House" and "Out House" and SHPO was "Out House." (laughs) And sometimes, it felt a little like SHPO was the bastard step-child, something that they had to do but that they found distasteful.

RB: (4:38) The Preservation Law said that the National Park System had to have what kind of interaction with SHPO?

S: Well, as part of the National Historic Preservation Act, the State Historic Preservation Offices were under Section 106. So, the offices were given the authority to comment, and federal agencies were required to go to the SHPO and identify actions, undertakings and determine whether those undertakings were adverse or not. If they were adverse, they were to mitigate the facts.

Many federal agencies that I worked with during my time at SHPO - the BLM, the Forest Service, their management seemed to willfully not understand the rules and regulations and choose not to follow them. And then, (they would) be upset and angry when the SHPO would accuse them of not following the law and not doing what they were supposed to be doing. Ultimately, the federal agency was responsible for their actions. But the key to that was the commenting, (i.e.,) if they went through the whole commenting process and identified, (and) theoretically worked with the SHPO to mitigate the effects in some way, they could still do whatever they wanted. But, most federal agencies just didn't like the idea of it. So that caused a lot of problems.

Another thing, I don't know if this is still true but the federal agencies liked to say, when they didn't want to do something, "Oh, SHPO won't let us." And, when they did something that other people didn't like they would often say, "Oh well, the SHPO made us do that." And, that created the false image of the SHPO as having some capacity for enforcement which was sort of hilarious because it was more of "the little man behind the curtain' that you paid no attention to. (Laughs)

RB: That's interesting – in Bob Righter's new book about the Grand Teton Park, "Peaks, Politics and Passion," he makes reference to this law and that prior to that many of the superintendents in the National Park Service kind of operated as they chose to operate. And, the Historic Preservation Act challenged some of their decisions which lead to a period were there was a lot of antagonism from the superintendents towards SHPO or organizations like SHPO because they impeded their ability to do exactly what they wanted.

S: Well, I think that's true. I also think that in Wyoming we have a park, the Yellowstone, which the Park Service calls the crown jewel. And, Grand Teton which is a very interesting and complex park, (e.g.,) it's the only park that had cattle ranching or cattle legislation written into the legislation and it's the only park with an airport – very complex! So, the people who get promoted to those positions often are the old guard.

The park service was originally established on the model of the military and their bureaucracy, their planning, a lot of the way they function sort of follows that model. I think, for some of what they do, (it) can be a bit cumbersome. But a lot of those superintendents, who get these plumb jobs, think that they have earned the right to do what they want.

I think that there was also a perception within the Park Service – I think there was a guy – I can't remember his full name, I think it was *Hurtzog* (?), I think it was in the 70's – the late 70's who wrote a bunch of directives, saying, you know historic resources are important and we must preserve them. And, I found it interesting that that does exist. So, there were some directives from the top, there were some indicating but clearly, I think these particular superintendents… I don't think Wyoming is the only place some of them landed. (But) there was this perception that in the West there were 'natural parks' and 'historic parks' were in the East. And, that perception lasted for a really long time. When I was at SHPO, we frequently got those kinds of arguments, you know, well this about nature and the animals and those buildings interfere with that.

RB: (9:46) So, the Historic Preservation act again the date is 1966…

S: 1966.

RB: So, White Grass itself ended as a dude ranch in 1985 and you were working for SHPO during that period. Can you zero in, if you will, on White Grass and your experiences at White Grass in the Grand Teton Park as part of the SHPO Office and what you discovered as you started interacting. Who was superintendent at that time, do you remember, was it Jack Stark?

S: Yeah, as I remember, it was Stark in here. I, my very first visit was in (gap in tape) turned over to the Park in that point. So, we started looking at Park resources. I believe it was '85. I recall it was '85 that the White Grass was no longer in use and I suspect that that has a little bit to do with the fact that it was still here.

The Bar B C, I can't remember when they stopped using the Bar BC, that was the Corse family. When the park realized that they were coming up on the end of their tenure, they (the Corse) stopped taking care of the properties. So, that by the time the Park acquired them (Bar BC and White Grass) they were often in sad shape and already, you know, trouble to maintain. And, even

though the Park knew they were going to be acquiring, often they didn't have plans. Well, often their plan was to use them as fire training. Or burn them or remove them or whatever.

When I very first started at SHPO there was a ranch, the Three Rivers Ranch (in the Tetons), and the owner, Burt, who was the first son of the original Struthers. He contacted our office and said "the Park's going to make me take these buildings out. They're going to give them away. Please help us." So, we (started) working on the nomination and the day we were leaving to go to the Review Board meeting, cause the state had a board that reviewed comments on the nominations to the National Register, I got a letter from Burt. He said, "Well, I had to sell off a couple of cabins to get some money and it became so profitable that I sold them all." So, the Three Rivers was gone. It was just gone! And, at that time, it was sort of encouraged by the parks. They didn't want to deal with this stuff. And, I knew that a lot of properties and ranches that existed - there were buildings at the Triangle X from all kinds of properties. It really was the standard of the day to remove the cabins and have them go away.

So shortly after the Bar B C closed. I don't remember the exact date, I think it was 86, 87 perhaps, or rather the White Grass – I'm sorry – the Denver office of the National Park Service hired a guy by the name of Steve *Mells* (?) to do an inventory of the Park. We (had previously) worked with a guy called Greg Kendrick who had worked in our office prior to going to the Regional Office. So, we had a pretty good relationship with him. But we frequently found it frustrating because before the buildings were inventoried, you're supposed to collect data. You're supposed to evaluate them according to context, or whatever.

Instead, we were told these buildings were not eligible before they were properly evaluated. And then, so as this thing went on, we would get these massive document dumps of "Here's a bunch of stuff we want you to say is not eligible." And, we would start looking through it. There would be a lot of missing data and properties weren't evaluated according to proper context. So, there was a lot of back and forth during that time of us trying to get very specific additional information and also us trying to say you can't just decide to get rid of things because you want to without properly going through this process.

So, I think it was, looking back on it, the people in SHPO thought, they're messing with us. "Why aren't they giving us the data? Blah, blah, blah." But, I myself had worked in a bureaucracy. The state of Wyoming is no shining example of anything. So perhaps, it was just too much, not understanding, being assigned to get rid of these buildings or whatever it was. But it was ineffective and inefficient and pretty significantly so, (poor use of) public money. (The idea) was well conceived but it wasn't well done. And, I don't think it was necessarily the consultant's fault. Rather, my impression is it was the consultant who was told at the beginning "Here's what you're going to do and here's what you're going to find."

(15:14) I didn't have the impression at the time that the consultant was getting access to a lot of the information, but it may be that the park records were just not complete. I mean the building numbers didn't match. The Three Rivers Ranch was included in the inventory but the Three Rivers Ranch was gone! That kind of stuff. So, you get a list of, I don't know how many kinds of

buildings (but) you're being asked to evaluate (buildings) that don't exist! And then, you start thinking, "OK, what else is wrong here?" So, it was that kind of stuff.

RB: So, the SHPO Office became very concerned about the information – what was it being sent, accuracy, was there an underlying motivation I suppose became questions were asked?

S: Right.

RB: But the end result was that it was a very cumbersome process. Bogged down with…

S: And became ….not confrontational…difficult. We would receive letters from the regional office, "Here's a list of the things we think aren't eligible, please sign off on it." And, we would write back and say "We can't, because here's all the documentation that's missing, these weren't evaluated in the proper context" and then, nothing – for months. And then, 10 months a year would go by and we'd get the same exact letter again!

RB: OK.

S: "You must comment!" It's like… "We did!" So, I'm not sure why, it's like it was a combination of ignorance and apathy and sort of somebody being assigned to do something and not being fully equipped to follow through. Yeah – just thinking they were going to get the SHPO to sign off on stuff.

RB: During that time…'85, let's say for the next decade - do you have a feel or an opinion as to what the administration (in the Grand Teton Park) felt or thought about cultural resources, preserving cultural resources generally?

S: Well, I'm sure, I mean I know, I mean it's really weird because Jack Stark (Superintendent) made no secret that he hated a lot of this stuff and wanted to bulldoze it. I think he told Righter (*Dr. Robert Righter*) because I think he puts that in his book. He said similar kinds of things to the SHPO staff about similar kinds of things, about, you know, properties, you know were going to be gone. I think Jim Brady was the assistant superintendent then. Jim Brady told Reba Massey and I, "The White Grass is gone and the Lucus Fabian was gone – and we could go in the bathroom and snivel about it or we could sit there and talk about things that were important."

S: (18:08) So, there was a real attitude, this wasn't really important and why are you bothering us with this? And so, I think it was a combination of the guys that got promoted into these positions were kind of the old guard. I actually went to a Preservation and Parks meeting in Massachusetts and met a lot of Park Service guys, superintendents, who said, "Oh you, you got all of the dinosaurs!"

RB: In the West?

S: Well, in Wyoming and it was very interesting because I met some guys. I can't remember what state they were from, but they kept looking at us like they were talking about us. So, we were on a bus trip looking at something and so we introduced ourselves and said, "Why do you keep looking at us?" The one guy said, "We're trying to figure out where you keep your horns and your tails!" They had heard about these evil SHPO people. We spent the rest of the week

with them and by the end of the week they were like, "Well, come to our park and help us!" So, I think it was sort of that old, you know, that transition, when things start to change…

RB: So, you were trying to save White Grass…

S: White Grass. At SHPO, we had a list of "willing to die for" in GTNP. White Grass was on the list.

RB: So, can you talk about the struggles that were the happenings that represented SHPO's attempts to "die for?" I mean how did you go about, what were the efforts?

S: Well, in the '80s, there was a woman in Montana, Marcella *Sherfy*, I think was her name. She had worked for the National Register for Historic Places. She came on with terminology that allowed us to consider ranches as a historic district. At that point, the National Register had not really grasped the concept of considering nominating… they got historic districts in terms of downtowns, but they didn't really get a ranch or some of those kinds of things until Marcella came up with this terminology of an inter-related complex, functionally related complex. That was like magic to the Historical Register! So, we started looking at these things both as functionally dependent, inter-related complexes, as part of the cultural landscape. So when, you came to Grand Teton and you started looking at the Park with those concepts in mind - the White Grass, Mormon Row, Lucas Fabian - you began to see these things in a different way rather than as a barn, as a house…

RB: More as a district…a historical district…

S: Yeah, and it was a district because of the way it functioned as much as the architecture. There was a time when it was all about the architecture and everything had to be special. Although there are some special things about the architecture at White Grass, it also was the place, and that communal history and what this property, White Grass, brought to Grand Teton. It was kind of the overflow ranch for the Bar BC and the Three Rivers.

You know the rich people would come there (Bar BC) and if there wasn't room, they landed in here (at White Grass). And, a lot of people coming to White Grass ended up buying other properties in the valley. And the Sky Ranch next door (to White Grass) is one of those - you know, where the people (the Baldersons) came here. And, that seems to be such a common theme not just in Teton County history but all over Wyoming. People come here and fall in love and come back.

(22:33) So, identifying that as a significant component within this park, and part of the development of the park, the architecture. We know there were the homesteads and log cabins (in the Park) that sort of influenced the hobby ranches. The rich people came in and built these magnificent log structures which then were imitated by park in buildings. (These newly built) magnificent log structures no longer imitated the homesteads but imitated the imitation homesteads (laughs).

So, there's this whole really interesting architectural history and cultural history, that bringing of community, (which is how) people first experienced the West. Because so many people came

here to be dudes and then had their own hobby ranch or their own properties, or however it worked. And then, there were the other properties that were real ranches that failed and/or that semi failed and became some sort of recreational property which then became part of that tourism thing. So those are the kinds of contexts we wanted to have these kinds of places evaluated under, not just tourism or not just architecture but to look at them as sort of that interesting amalgam of the two.

RB: And so, you're speaking of that because that became one of the things SHPO did – was a part of that movement that helped?

S: Right because in the 80s that was happening to the initial inventory, where they said write off on these, they're not eligible. And, one of those properties was the White Grass because it's not special architecture. And so, we said— hmmm -- maybe not but it's got other qualities and that's probably not the context that it needs to be looked at under, so there was a lot of back and forth and trying to get the properties evaluated under the proper context – in the way that they fit.

RB: My understanding is that in the Grand Teton Park there are numerous historic districts that are firm and confirmed and well recognized…

S: Right. Beaver Creek is one where the housing for Grand Teton staff are. There's some wonderful architecture there and the superintendents house. And what are the others? Mormon Row was a district and historic landscape. And, that's the thing you can say about any kind of historic district or landscape as long as you identify what qualifies it.

Part Two of Sheila Bricher Wade interview starting at 24:56. Transcribed by Meghan Wiemer, June 4, 2018. Part One was transcribed by Sharon Kahin.

R: So that was instrumental in the movement to preserve more structures and entities at White Grass?

S: Well, the idea was to evaluate the structures and identify what's significant. Once you know what's significant – theoretically, according to the park process – then you're supposed to be able to plan and decide based on what's significant whether or not you can use it, how you can interpret it, etc. You're not supposed to be able to say, "Oh, we don't want all of this old stuff," and then evaluate it as not eligible with that being your plan before (a systematic evaluation). There's a process you're supposed to follow. So that was sort of what happened, i.e., it seemed like within the park they wanted to skip some of those steps in that process. That resulted in some contention.

R: And, you were holding their feet to the fire to say, "Whoa, wait..."

S: Right, we felt there were many eligible properties that they were identifying as not eligible for the wrong reasons.

R: Which in fact became eligible –

S: Yeah, I was looking through a list of properties in that first inventory they sent to us and I

can't tell you how many of them are now listed in the National Register – a bunch!

R: Just for the record, Sheila has brought with her several memos and letters and documentations related to this whole process that you're describing, which are very, very interesting and which are important to go through also. Were there public events related to historical properties in the park that were going on during this particular time, too?

S: Throughout the process, they, I'm not sure they're required to get public input at the eligibility and nomination stages, but we did have some public meetings, especially when the initial "not eligible" lists came out (even though they were in-house documents). People around Jackson found out about them and were up in arms – "How dare you say that's not significant and that's not important."

R: The challenge was to the park system.

S: Right, and so there were some public meetings. Sometimes the park organized (the meetings) and sometimes the SHPO organized them. We frequently came up and met, had a public meeting where we would provide some local history and ask for some input. We found out that in the course of the first study there was a lot of information lacking, for example, the Luther Taylor Homestead (which is a part of the set used in the movie *Shane*) was identified as a homestead where nothing really happened, that wasn't very important. So initially that was written off as not eligible and then later people came to say, "Wait, Luther Taylor was a bachelor homesteader when that was unheard of. Everybody had a wife to help and he lived there with no running water until the '50s, which is another amazing thing. Oh, and by the way, it was the set of the movie *Shane* (laughs)."

These are important things to consider when evaluating a historic property! So, as we were going through the evaluation process and we're talking to locals and asking for information, we're learning that we had identified information that's missing and we are finding out that there's a lot more that's missing. So, that inspired us to have more public meetings and to go through the records at the historical society and visit with people and find out all sorts of very interesting local (things). There's nothing about the national register that says it has to be nationally significant to be eligible; local significance can be a factor. So, a lot of local significance was left out of the early evaluations.

R: (29:59) Would it be fair to say that if it hadn't been SHPO asking questions that a lot of this wouldn't have been brought to light?

S: That would be my guess, but that was our job. The process worked exactly how it's supposed to. It's just that a lot of people never had to deal with it before. Up until I started at SHPO in 1980, there was only one guy – or maybe two – and then, when I came, there was an archeologist, there was an architectural historian. We had people who were able to do the job that SHPO needed to do. So, I think that was a part of what happened – people were used to having it one way and then there was this change. We were young, and we were excited, and we were enthusiastic. We were going to do what we were supposed to do – and that hadn't been done before.

R: And, here was SHPO, raising awareness, generating interest, giving it an outlet – what was the park's response to that?

S: Well, they didn't like it. I can't remember the date. We were with a local woman named Deborah Wilson Lopez who told me this lovely story about when she was in Kuwait during the Arab Oil Embargo. She had been at White Grass as a child and as a teenager. She and her family had come out here every summer and she loved this place. When she was in Kuwait, every day they have a 'call to prayer' and they would have pictures of paradise. So, she would sit in her house because she was an American woman married to a Kuwaiti, in Kuwait during the Arab Oil Embargo. They shut down all of the TVs. so all you can do is watch the call to prayer and pictures of paradise. There would be a picture (on TV) of the Tetons and she would say to herself, "What am I doing here when I could be there?" And so, she left her husband and came back here with her mother. I think they were here right during one of the last hurrahs. I am not certain, but I believe she met her husband Manuel here. It was such a wonderful story. I don't remember which cabin porch we were sitting on when she told us that story.

R: (32:52) As a footnote, Deborah Lopez and her current husband are going to do an oral history here in a few days and we will certainly be asking her about that story.

S: When I was here with her, she is telling me this story and she is pointing out where she had her first kiss and on and on and on. We're walking up here and there are trees lying on buildings and clearly no one had made an effort to do anything about this property and it didn't seem as if they intended to. The federal law says that the eligible buildings are the responsibility of the federal agencies. So, if the buildings have been identified as eligible, or even if they don't know yet, they're supposed to figure it out and then they're supposed to address adverse effects. So, I wrote a letter saying that a tree on the roof isn't benign neglect. It's neglect and it's an adverse effect and constitutes for closure and oh goodness (laughs)...

R: And you wrote this letter to the park system?

S: Yes, and a lot of people were very upset. The advisory counsel agreed. (The advisory counsel and historic preservation were sort of the referees. They're supposed to step in.)

R: So, they were a referee between SHPO and the park agency.

S: Right. They have another role, but that's the best way to describe it. They're supposed to assist and you can appeal to them when you're not getting satisfaction from the other end. The federal agency can appeal to them as well, but anyway, they weren't very happy. And, they wrote a letter about me saying I was emotionally involved. My contention was, "Why would you have a job you didn't care about?" (laughs) Anyway, that was not the last time I was going to hear that I was emotionally involved.

That began a series of "Okay, maybe we'll let you do something at White Grass." There was a period – again, I'm a little sketchy on dates – they came in and removed some of the trees and some things. At this point, in this decade we're talking about, they let us put some roofs on. I

knew when Mike Johnson (cultural resources specialist) was here in the park, before Pam Holtman (cultural resource specialist), he was very good at getting the locals involved and doing workshops and generating money. We got money from a woman in Sheridan named Kristy Love; we got money from one of the Forbes children to buy supplies – I bought some supplies. So, when they let us, there was a lot of interest.

R: When you say, "They let us do some things to preserve buildings," the park system was not doing it?

S: Right. The Grand Teton allowed their staff to supervise the local preservation board and some volunteers. They did start to let a few things like that happen. And then in the '90s, the State Historic Preservation Office was working with American Studies at the University of Wyoming and we began bringing in groups of students to work on historic buildings. And, we were allowed to do a little work up here at White Grass, a little bit at Lucas Fabian, a little bit down on Mormon Row. There was some change in that attitude. I don't remember the exact date they let us in down on Mormon Row. One of my favorite memories was there was a sign on the back door in "park-legalese" that basically said, "Don't think this lets you do anything, we can still burn it if we want to." I mean, that's not the wording, but that's sort of the message. So, all of the Mormons (the Molton family) had to have their picture taken with that (laughs). Clark Molton was still living then; Hal and Iola (on Mormon Row) were still running the bed and... whatever that is. It's a bed and no breakfast, right?

R: (38:12) A series of cottages where tourists stay.

S: Yeah, but anyway we got in there – they let us into the T.A. Molton barn and I have pictures of Clark Molton, who must have been in his eighties, standing over my 75-year-old mother, pointing at some manure she missed on the barn floor. And he said, "We gotta get everything out because we don't know when they're lettin' us back in." (laughs)

There were these bright spots in between less happy places where we were butting heads a lot. The thing that really troubles me is that there were a lot of people in the park who cared about historic resources and were trying to do something to preserve resources. Every time we worked at Lucas Fabian, we had park staff who sneaked in on their day off because they didn't want to get into trouble. I always thought that was just really sad. We often got letters from park staff asking if there anything to be done to take care of the Hunter-Hertford, the buffalo dorms and other places.

R: It's very interesting that there was a movement happening, mostly grassroots which SHPO organized, that relied on you, and looked to you to be helpful to park officials, but those officials not at the top of the hierarchy.

S: Right and we were told that the climbing rangers really wanted the Lucas Fabian gone and we couldn't understand that because why would they care? There's a picture of Geraldine Lucas on the Grand (Teton peak) with Paul Petzel, a bunch of other guys that I guess dragged her up there (that's sort of their story anyway), and so it was, like, "Why would they want that gone?" When we brought a group of students, we made it a point to stay at the climbing ranch and talked with

them. We ended up getting climbers helping with the roofing project. They thought it was a great project. So, there was a lot of this misinformation about things I never quite understood.

Was it just to get us to not talk to people? I don't know, but one of the wonderful advocates for the White Grass (I never quite understood what his connection was with the place) was a man named Lee Ordenberger who was a climber and wrote a book on climbing the Tetons. He was an invaluable resource. I don't know exactly how he found out about it, but he got copies of the documents we were looking for. He was the first one to say, "They've given you a list of these properties that they've inventoried, but there aren't any of the ranger stations on there. You better ask them about it."

He was concerned about the White Grass ranger station because that was left out of the original documentation. I don't know if that was intentional or if the guy who was doing the inventory didn't know about them because that would be a big chunk of time to go visit all of those – so I don't know if it was an intentional oversight, but it didn't make anyone very happy when we said, "Here are a thousand buildings and where are the ranger stations?" But, he was a great resource. He died in a fire in California, but, while he was alive, he was very useful. We would call and ask him about stuff. I think he may have had a summer home up here and we'd call and say, "There's tar paper up here flapping at the White Grass, can you get someone to go nail it down?" That kind of stuff.

R: (42:21) So, in your story as you are telling us today, we're to the point where some preservation is actually taking some place on the (White Grass) property. Was there a use for it identified?

S: No.

R: Why were people interested in saving it and where was that going? What was the direction of that movement?

S: Well, the use was always a problem. We had a thing called "Dial an Excuse." We made a big wheel and whenever the park gave us an excuse, we would write it in there and then, it was like a big wheel of fortune. Sometimes it was laughable. One of the reasons that White Grass could never be re-used and we couldn't have people in here doing anything because of this meadow out here, which apparently they used for their horses. And then, after they moved the stock out in the fall, they had some sort of bleachers out here where folks would come and watch the elk. And, because the elk would come in here and breed, apparently, this would be too disturbing for the elk to have people here (according to the park system). But we were, like, "But wait, they had bleachers!" People apparently still come here in the fall to watch the elk. But, there were a lot of reasons given why we couldn't do anything here, "The snow's too heavy," the access, "We want to close the road," "We'll move Moose-Wilson road." There were lots of reasons why nothing could be done here and there were lots of suggestions for things that might happen.

R: Which were...?

S: Well, there was one woman here who thought it would be a great place for artists to spend a

month or two to read or write or to create art or whatever. There was a woman – I think here name was Becky Stroup, but I'm not sure. She wanted to bring in service dogs for the blind. Her idea was to have people live in the cabins with their dogs while they're learning about each other and have a course here. There was one public meeting where that came up and I remember Reba with her lovely little Oklahoma voice saying –

R: (44:55) Reba...?

S: Reba Massey. She worked at SHPO. At one point Jack Stark said, "You're just trying to get me to do that." And she said, "I'm sorry, Jack, that's not what we're here to discuss." She was really fun. (laughs) And, he stormed out of the meeting.

It was actually a great success because many of the local people were being misinformed about what we were trying to do in the park. For example, part of the evaluation for cultural landscape on Mormon Row was to understand about the irrigation ditches, the irrigation system. So, we'd ask for a map of the irrigation ditches. Somehow the local people had heard that we were demanding that the irrigation ditches be filled with water, so of course they were outraged and showed up at this public meeting. When they found out what we were really talking about, they said, "That didn't sound so bad." So, it was actually very successful, but it felt kind of icky at the time.

But, there were other suggestions (for use of White Grass). I don't remember them all, but I do remember at one point, Ed Brown, who has a group called the Michigan Volunteers who in 2015, will have been coming to this park for 20 years to do volunteer work. I believe it was under Mike Johnson, the cultural resources specialist, that they started coming and working on buildings in the park. But, Ed was here and we decided to go for a walk. Mary Holmston (who at that time worked for the National Trust) and I and some others in the group were sitting on the deck of the building down at the end (the main cabin at White Grass). I guess we were sitting on the steps, but we were talking about things that could happen and that's when it was said it could be cool if the park service would have a place where you could train people to do historic preservation. You could bring them here and have them fix all of the buildings and teach others how to fix the buildings – we were very excited.

R: (47:18) So who were the people...?

S: Mary Holmston and Ed Brown. I think Betty Ann Byerlee was there, but I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure she was. Betty Ann Byerlee, Mary Holmston, Reba Massey, and I had a group called "The Preservation Dream Team." It's not what you think. It was about getting together and talking about things that might be possible. No one in the room would say, "That can't happen because..." We spent 3 or 4 times – what is that place on Snake Creek? There's kind of a ritzy bar on top of a hill?

R: Spring Creek?

S: Spring Creek, yeah. We'd go up there, have a few drinks, and talk about all the possibilities in the Grand Tetons. (laughs) Some years later, apparently, we told everybody about that idea (the

training facilities at White Grass) because it just seemed like such a possibility and I remember visiting with Mike Johnson about it and him saying, "Oh, they'll never go for it." Something about the snow load on the building, that there was too much snow. And so, we were just thinking and talking about possible things, hoping that eventually something would stick. And apparently something did. (laughs)

R: Eventually something did. Thank you for coming up with those ideas. Do you know about the evolution of that idea beyond your group? You said you shared it with a lot of people –

S: I really don't. I have to tell you, I was quite surprised when I heard that they had decided to do (the preservation training at White Grass) because there were so many ideas. Something had to stick, right? (laughs) I mean, we had every idea there ever was, so something had to happen. But I don't know the history of that, how that finally took. I do know that when I was working – I quit my job in 2005 at SHPO, went back to school, and worked on my master's degree – and I came up here with a group.

The place wasn't finished yet. One of the student groups that we (SHPO) worked with was the American Studies (University of Wyoming) and SHPO (the SHPO no longer did them after I left, but American Studies was still doing them) – so when I was working on my master's degree, I was actually signed on as a student in some of the groups that I used to help run. And so, I got to come up here and spend a day daubing. When I asked to use the restroom, they let me into 1165 (which had a restroom) and I went in and sniveled into the bathroom and texted Mary and Reba and Betty Ann and showed them pictures – like, "White Grass has a bathroom!" (laughs) It was very exciting.

R: Wonderful. So here you are sitting in the Hammond Cabin (at White Grass for this interview), which has been totally redone. You are here (this week) as a part of a volunteer group –

S: Well, here for the second time.

R: And, presently working on some historic buildings over on Mormon Row.

S: Bummer for me. (laughs)

R: Bummer for you, but a joy for us in terms of the progression of ideas in the preservation of not only the park, but specifically in White Grass. So, you're surprised it happened?

S: (51:54) I was very surprised. I don't know how it happened, but I guess I was surprised that Barbara Paul chose this project to attach onto – I'm delighted.

R: Barbara Pahl of the National Trust of Historic Preservation?

S: Yes. I'm just thrilled that she (chose this project). It just surprised me.

R: It might be important to note that the National Trust raised close to a million dollars for the rehabilitation here at White Grass and we hope to interview Barb Paul and others like Pam

Holtman (Cultural Resources/Park Historian at Grand Teton Park) that you have identified to pick up the story at the point of actually making decisions to turn this into a training facility.

S: Well, you know, the first rule of preservation is – I learned this a long time ago – when you find yourself in a battle you can't win, stop, declare victory, and leave. (laughs) So that's what I did in 2005 and look! (laughs)

R: Victory! (laughs) Are you pleased with what you are seeing? Are you as pleased with and as committed to and as supportive of the idea of this becoming a training facility as you were back in '85?

S: Yeah, it manifests itself a little differently than we imagined. I was just talking to somebody last night who said, "You know, people in the park didn't really understand that this was going to be for the whole park service." I think we had hoped so.

R: Meaning that White Grass would become a training facility for at least the western half if not the greater park service.

S: Right, that the people who trained here – well, they would come from all over – but that the people on staff would be able to go all over and do training. It was silly, really, when you understand the park bureaucracy. We thought there would be a different relationship between the park, culture resources staff, and this staff. And I understand all of that, but you can dream. (laughs)

R: (54:20) Well, thank you for dreaming. That is... things coming true.

S: Yeah, and I've gotten to stay at the Murie Center, which was another (one) on our list of "willing to die for." Marty McMurty (sp?) told me to my face that that was going to be torn down, that that didn't need to be there. But, I tried to explain to her why it was important. Apparently, somebody else tried to convince the right people and that has become a wonderful center and resource. I'm hoping in the future to organize something there. We'll see.

R: As we begin to wrap this up, why is preserving these places important to you? Not only you personally, but to the culture?

S: Well, I think that that's changed over time. This is one of those "humanity things." I know I work for the (WY) Humanities Counsel (now), so I try to look at the broader perspective, but preserving buildings involves a whole lot of things that are very important - it's a vision of the future, it's a comprehension and perhaps some understanding of the past. It provides opportunities to engage in empathy, to use imagination, to consider yourself in a different role, to perhaps consider the lives of others – and I think those are really important things in our society and culture. You can't really do preservation by yourself; it's a group thing. And so, by doing that, you build community. You share with people you don't know and never will and probably a lot of people you might not like. I think that's an important part of our society and culture is needing to be able to do that and be part of it willingly and understanding that.

One of my favorite preservation moments was when we drove up to the Lucas Fabian and there was a truck with a James Watt (Former Secretary of the Interior, 1983) sticker (which was a really old truck). Parked next to the truck was a convertible with an (President) Obama sticker on it and I was, like, "I love preservation!" (laughs) because we were all doing what we were doing and nobody was talking politics.

As a kid I spent a lot of time in the first Carnegie library in the country (in Cheyenne, Wyoming). When I was about 8 or 9, they decided it had to be torn down because they needed more room for their long plane records. I was completely heartbroken. I knew that library inside and out and I was waiting for the day when I was old enough to go upstairs into the grown up section and then they tore it down and I was devastated. I was really upset that nobody stopped them. I think somehow that (experience) came in (to play).

My father flew for United Airlines and he flew a lot and when he quit flying for United Airlines he said, "I'm never flying again." So, we drove a lot and we drove all over Wyoming, all over the western United States. I would see these places, that in the preservation world, we call "historic dumps." The White Grass was a historic dump for a time. You know, (these places) kind of have potential, something interesting went on there, but who knows what will happen (to them) in the future. I would see these places and think, "Someday, I'd like to go in there and see what that's about." When I got into the preservation office, I can't tell you how many of the historic dumps from my childhood I ended up getting into and writing nominations for, tax projects. It was really, very strange. I hadn't spent any time in Grand Tetons. None of these places were from my childhood, but same kind of thing. I got here and felt a responsibility.

R: (59:22) You started early on in this interview saying that preservation and the SHPO office and those sort of things – it was just where you needed to be.

S: It was where I was supposed to be, yeah. It's funny – last night Rachel Adams, who's a part of this volunteer team (she's a historic preservation student), was telling this story about how she got here. I think she had to take out all of her savings to get here, to make this trip happen. She had to take off work for a couple of weeks – she works in a grocery store. She was describing them as old hippies and she had something else, some other person that was saying, "We're going to make it happen, you just have to do this." And, the old hippies were saying, "This is your path, you're on your path." And, I was going, "Yep!" (laughs)

We used to have a saying – we talked about people who were on a mission from God. A lot of preservation people seem like they're on some kind of mission from God – you just have to go with it because if you ignore them, it gets harder and they get noisier and things get more tangled up until you just say, "Okay, you're on a mission from God: what do you need from me?" And then, once you do that, it seems like doors open and money comes from wherever money comes from. I mean, I don't know how it works, but that seems to be the rule.

R: That's your experience.

S: Yeah, well... look at White Grass! (laughs)

R: (laughs) Hard to argue with reality.

S: Well, I just sit here and think, "This is just pretty amazing!" I don't quite manifest this same thing in my own life, but maybe it's my only talent.

R: Well, you wrote in the registration book here at White Grass, July 14, 2012, "This is a new era at the White Grass Ranch" (this is when you came as a volunteer and a part of the first volunteer group to stay at the renovated White Grass)

S: When we signed on, I had no idea – I thought we were staying at the Murie.

R: Well, here you are. You wrote, "I hope that somewhere, someone will tell the story of the passionate professionals and volunteers who fought like hell to keep the White Grass standing and hopefully used." You named several people, which will be included in this documentation of this interview. (They include) Harrison Goodall, Lee Chavez, and Mike Johnson and several folks you've already spoken about. (You wrote in the registration book,) "These and others had a commitment and dedication to White Grass that believed in the possibility of a new future for White Grass... Thanks to all who believed and imagined what can be, a fight for what should be, and new beginnings with history roots." Thank you for telling this story.

S: (1:02:33) I think (I got his name wrong) – it's Lee Chavez (not Chaney)

R: Oh, my mistake.

S: No, it's my mistake, I spelled it wrong, (Lee) Harrison Goodall's wife.

R: Oh, okay, now that makes sense.

S: You kept saying that and I was, like, "Who is that?" (laughs)

R: Okay, thank you. Anything else you'd like to add before we close for now?

S: No, I'm good. Like I said, it runs together, but you can see there was a lot.

R: A lot in your notebooks indeed. Thank you and my thanks also to Greg Dobson, a staff member at the Western Center for Historic Preservation, for being here and taking some documentation. This concludes the interview.