

## White Grass Heritage Project “Sharing the Legacy”

INTERVIEWEE: Barbara Pahl, Fundraiser for the National Trust for Historic Preservation

INTERVIEWER: Matthew Heiss, Volunteer for the Grand Teton National Park

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

DATE: September 6, 2014

Transcribed by Julie Greene 2020

Note: Though this transcript has undergone minor edits, e.g., false starts and some text were removed to make it more “reader friendly.” Barb’s complete interview transcript is below.

Note: Barb Pahl can be seen speaking at the Opening Ceremony for White Grass Ranch in 2016 at [www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) under Collections/Videos/Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.

M: (:50) Tell us about who you are, where you born and raised, and your education.

B: I was born and raised in Rochester, NY. The first time I came West, as families often from the East do, was in the 60s. You would put your kids in the station wagon and drove West. In our case, we flew to California and drove up the coast; flew to Salt Lake City and drove up here. We spent some days in Grand Teton in 1969 and then went to Yellowstone. Our last stop was Denver. That was the first time I had been in the West. I was impressed by all of it, obviously, the beautiful scenery and the weather. I was very sick in Denver because I made mistake of ordering lobster, so I was up all night. Even then I remember thinking Denver would be a great place to live.

A couple years later, my family came back to Colorado to ski. We spent a week in Aspen and Vail. Then, I went to Skidmore College. I graduated from high school in 1971 so I went to Skidmore in the fall 1971 and graduated in 1975. My major was American Studies. My interest has always been history but what always peaked my natural curiosity were buildings and places. I would see a building and wonder who built it and why; how was it used; how is being used now. That was my natural curiosity.

The reason I chose American Studies as a major as opposed to American History was because American Studies in the 1970s was about viewing history through the stuff that people made. My courses were the history of American painting and architecture. It wasn’t about who was president and how wars were fought but more about the impact those events had on people. It was more about how everyday people were living and what they were living with; what they were doing; what their dreams and hopes were. That appealed to me.

I think the American Studies movement started around the 1930s around American literature. By the time I was in school, it had evolved into material cultural. I went on to graduate school at George Washington University in Washington, DC., where I also majored in American Studies. At the time, my thought was I wanted to be a museum curator, but I thought a degree in American Studies would be broader in the case the museum curator thing didn’t work out.

M: (4:11) What years were you at George Washington?

B: I took a year off, so I was in George Washington in 1976 (the centennial year), so I was taking a lot of courses with and through the Smithsonian and we were looking at all the exhibits that had been put together for the anniversary. I spent the summer before going to college, working on the New York Bicentennial project. That project was outfitting a barge to be a museum about the revolutionary history

of New York - before, during, and after the revolution. I dressed up as Betsy Ross, so we were in the exhibit. There were people in the exhibits opposed to mannequins. This was on a floating barge that started in New York City, went to Plattsburgh, across the Buffalo and back. I had to leave early to get to graduate school that summer.

M: After 2 years, you got a master's degree?

B: Not exactly after 2 years. I was done with the coursework after a year but not with the thesis. The passage of the first tax credit to encourage historical preservation was in 1976. One of the last courses I took in the summer of 1977 was through the University and was field historic archeology. I met some people who were on this dig and they encouraged me to try to get a job at the National Historical Registry with the National Park Service. They introduced me to Bill Levovitz (sp?). I had an interview with him, and I was hired through a student appointment and ended up spending 2 ½ years with the NPS and the National Registry. It was during that time I wrote my thesis.

M: (6:11) What was your thesis topic?

B: The year after I joined the National Register of Historic Places Program, I went on a Historic American Engineer Record doing a project out of Danville, Va. I spent the summer there and the focus was tobacco factories that made tobacco products out of bright leaf tobacco that was grown in Virginia and North Carolina. I did my master's thesis on the evolution of the factory and how one goes from the original Slater's mill that was really a barn looking building to how it became a full-fledged factory. I came back and thought I needed to get experience. I concluded that historic preservation was going to be my career and I was not going to be a museum curator.

M: What made that shift?

B: I like that historic preservation allows you to live in the past and you get to do something that is valuable to the future. When I was doing museum work, I was always living in the past. When I was at Skidmore in Saratoga Springs, NY (a very rich 19<sup>th</sup> century town in terms of architecture), I got a lot of internships working at museums and I was constantly looking at Saratoga the way it looked in 1860. The nice thing about preservation is that you are trying to make sure that these places are still there and will be in the future. I liked that.

Also, there was a lot of cataloging involved with a museum and I was in the basement most of the day. My personality is better suited being in the public and trying to persuade people into saving places.

M:(8:30) So, 2 ½ years in the NPS with the National Registry of Historic Places.

B: The National Registry of Historic Places was created in 1966 National Preservation Act. Lyndon Johnson had extra money from various sources, and he was convinced to put forward a bill to create a national preservation program. It would give every state a person called the state historic preservation officer (SHPO). This person does not exist in many state laws but does exist in this national law. The program was funded at 50% from the Historic Preservation Fund and states had to match it. Surveys would be done across the states and what was identified would be evaluated against 4 criteria. Those that met at least one of the 4, including White Grass, would be included on the National Registry of Historic Places.

M: What are the 4 criteria?

B: It is really simple. (1) association of significant events; (2) association with significant people or groups of people; (3) architecture, either because of the style or the architect; or (4) archeology that is likely to yield information that is important history or pre-history.

M: Back to your career path. You finished the thesis and then, you worked for the NPS?

B: (11:20) When I was at Skidmore, I encouraged my dad to let me transfer to the University of Colorado and that was the fall of my junior year. It was agreed that it would be a leave of absence so I could go back to Skidmore my senior year and finish there. He saw that I was liking Colorado and agreed to buy me a car if I went back to Skidmore. I did that and I graduated from Skidmore and I got in my car and drove to Colorado and then I went back to go to graduate school.

I was working for the NPS. Kate Stevenson, who was my mentor there, was the deputy chief of the National Register Program and she went on to become the Associative Director of the NPS before she retired. She told me that I needed to work at the state level as preparation for a career on the national level, a career in Washington DC.

I looked around at states including Wyoming, Colorado, Virgin Islands, and New York. I looked at Wyoming but eventually ended up in Colorado and worked there a couple of years. Then, I took a little stint as a museum curator of Material Culture for the Colorado. I did that for a number of years and after my boss left, I did a huge exhibit on mining. Then, the National Trust for Historic Preservation moved its office from Oklahoma City to Denver. I applied for that job in 1984 and have I worked for the National Trust for 30 years this year.

M: (13:47) Explain what is the National Trust, how does it function, and what is its relationship to the federal government and NPS?

B: Sure. I like to explain with a grid with a public side and a nonprofit/private side. At the top of the public side is the NPS, because that is where the National Register of Historic Places lives, i.e., all the regulations in terms of putting sites on the National Register, evaluations written by the NPS, and Secretary of the Interior of standards for rehabilitation. We all need to comply with the standards that they have written.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was created in 1949 and chartered by Congress. The idea was that a nonprofit could find property quicker, as opposed, to making it a national park. The original mission for the National Trust was to acquire property that were usually mansions, large homes, mostly in East. The stories attached to them were mostly about successful white men. Some are plantation houses that we still own and some are iconic architecture like Lyndhurst, or Draughton Hall. That was really the focus of the Trust. We looked at local zones and what local governments could do to try to create zoning laws that would allow them to deny demolition for places like Grand Central Station.

The National Trust had to change too. We didn't loose our collection of historic places, but we started to take on more advocacy work around good policies at the national, state, and local levels. Once these tax credits were passed in 1976, we were looking at making sure people understood the tax credits. We got engaged in helping states pass tax credits laws, and then to fight to make sure such program were not eliminated. We became an advocacy organization first and then a manage/holder of historical sites second.

M: As a holder of historical sites, do you eventually deed them over to the NPS or do you continue to retain and maintain those sites?

B: There may be one case where we owned something for a short while to hold it and deed it over to the NPS but for the most part we have a set of sites that we own outright. We have others that we call our 'cold storage' they may be held by someone else, but we manage them. We have another group that we do none of the above, but we help promote them.

M: (17:29) In terms of advocacy, is the National Trust funded from federal dollars? Please explain its relationship with the NPS. It is my understanding that NPS people cannot solicit funds for national park projects; they can accept offers but they have to turn outside to get some funding. Am I understanding that correctly?

B: I am not completely certain about that answer because it has turned from black and white to gray. The NPS does not hire people because they have expertise in fund raising. For the most part, they have not seen themselves as fund raisers. The National Park Foundation, which was also chartered by Congress, was specifically chartered to be that fund raising arm for the NPS. They helped spawn groups like the Teton and Yellowstone Foundations. Some of those were directly created by the National Parks Foundation. That was meant to be the private fundraising arm for the NPS. The National Trust was not meant to be a fundraising arm for NPS.

Initially, we were privately funded but since the 1966 Act was passed, we actually became eligible to receive funding through that act. Prior to 1996, we did receive federal money and the largest federal grant we ever got was 7 million dollars. At the time, it was 20% of our budget and 50% of our unrestricted money so it was a huge important piece of our funding. When trying to renew our funding, we just talked to Democrats because the Congress was controlled by Democrats. When the change occurred and Newt Gingrich became the Speaker, our then President, Richard Moe, felt like he saw the writing on the wall. So, he went to Gingrich and offered to be weaned away from that federal money to help with the budget balancing. It was our way to help with the budget balancing. Newt agreed but the appropriators did not and the next year our money from the government was cut in half. We had not fully developed ourselves as a fundraising organization. Our board wasn't really fund raisers and weren't capable of writing big checks because prior fund raising was lobbying for federal money. We were weaned off in 3 years, 1996 being the last year. Our current president would say we haven't currently restored the loss money.

M: (21:40) Let's use White Grass as an example of how the National Trust operates and get the history of the restoration of this place. Were you the first National Trust person to be made aware of White Grass and tell me the rest of the story.

B: Frank Galey died in 1985 and 25 years earlier, he had sold White Grass to the NPS. I am not certain how those conversations went; I am not sure there was a lot of choice when those conversations occurred. I think you had a choice to be a willing seller at fair market or probably condemnation discussions came up which is why people were forced to sell. These places were not acquired because the NPS wanted to protect these buildings; they were acquired to restore the wilderness. They were required to remove these buildings and to restore that landscape to when people were not around. However, Section 106 of the 1966 National Historic Act was written to address that a federal agency cannot spend federal dollars or get a federal permit/license on a project that could impact a place that is listed or is eligible for listing on the National Register without a long conversation with the state preservation officer and with a group called the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

A lot was happening in national parks without compliance with the federal law, especially in the western parks. They were perceived to be natural parks and the organic act says to include the wildlife and historic objects therein.

M: That includes both the natural resources and cultural resources.

B: Yes, it said AND unimpaired (which is an important word) for future generations. The organic act is a wonderful piece of legislation. We are preserving resources for the enjoyment of people today and the future; unimpaired. It is worthy to note that if it can be shown that a place can exist and not impair (the organic part of the park) then you can do both and that you don't have to lose one resource to save the other. You can save them both. But we were battling park superintendents that did not see it that way.

Some saw their jobs as being about the protection of this wonderful, natural place that is absolutely one of the most beautiful places on earth and leaving buildings interfered with that goal. After the park acquired it (White Grass), Grand Teton National Park Superintendent Jack Stark believed it interfered with the park's mission. At the time there were over 600 buildings in this park. Jack burned a lot of them to the ground though we were fighting, along with the folks in town via the Teton Preservation Commission, but to no avail. What was tricky for us was that we were recipients of federal money that came through the NPS. Even though the National Trust has waged in the past successful lawsuits, it didn't seem to be a good idea to do it here. It worked for the environmental movement. They used it to great effect.

I feel that we might had been able to avail ourselves of that if we had been freer financially, stronger financially. I was grateful that Dick Moe made the decision to take us off federal money. So many times, we would take a position and Congress would zero our application for our funding. It freed us up to do what we need to do. It was a good thing for us to make that move but at the time that wasn't the case.

(28:27) The next superintendent of Grand Teton Park, Jack Nichols, opened the door a little bit. There was an architect here that was the lone voice for preservation here in the park. He convinced Jack to allow a group from Michigan called the Michigan Volunteers to come and start preservation work on Mormon Row. They camped out and took showers in the architect's house. Jack provided materials for the restoration work and they came back every summer and did more work. So, Jack Nichols opened the door to allow some of these buildings to be saved.

M: This was between 1985 and 1990?

B: I think it was around 2000. The regional director in Denver was Karen Wade. She came to Denver from being superintendent at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Pam Holtman, who was the voice for preservation here in Grand Teton, tried to keep preservation moving in a positive direction. She got us (White Grass) on the National Register. Later, Dick Moe, Karen, Pam and myself and new Grand Teton National Park Superintendent Steve Martin did a trip of historical sites in the Teton Park. White Grass was the last site visited.

Note: Pam Holtman's oral history can be reviewed at [www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) under Collections/Oral Histories/Post 1985.

M: This was in 2002?

B: Yes. Karen said the NPS should save White Grass and we should turn it into a historic preservation center. We just finished raising money for a preservation project in Colorado. So, in 2003, an agreement was signed in Denver between Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, and Dick Moe, President of the National Trust, that said the National Trust would have a partnership with the NPS and that training is important for American history and preservation. The National Trust agreed to raised funds to help rehabilitate White Grass as a training center for historical preservation.

M: The thought had already evolved to change this place into a national training center and bring people in to rehabilitate it in the old way and not just to tear down buildings.

B: Correct.

M: Was there ever the thought to turn it into a living history museum or a dude ranch?

B: Never. Many people here asked it to be a dude ranch again. The NPS was very sensitive and it was hard to explain to the Galey family that we were going to end their dude ranch operation and then turn it into a dude ranch with someone else running it.

Also, Jackson community has people passionate to the protection of the natural resources in this valley who were concerned seeing a lot of change and growth. We wanted to be sensitive and to demonstrate that we could protect both of these resources – natural and cultural. We think cultural is as important as natural. They had not been protected here up to that point until Steve Martin said so. Steve Martin, as superintendent, said it is part of the Park's mission to do this. It was important to keep this as part of the park that park service would manage. This was never the National Trust Project; we were but the private partner. It was always going to be a NPS place. It was never about just saving these 13 buildings; it was an opportunity to re-institutionalize preservation and be a place where people could come.

M: It became the Western Center for Historic Preservation.

B: We always called it that because there was a preservation center back east in Frederick, Maryland.

M: After the 2003 agreement was signed and commitments were made, you (the National Trust) needed to raise a million dollars. When and where and how did that happen?

B: At the time, a million dollars was the cutoff point that would avoid a committee review. So, we avoided going before a review committee by staying just under a million dollars. We had Directors Orders 21, which says you had to have fund raising plans and I was doing those myself so it took a long time to get all the plans and agreements in place. Then the recession hit which hit this town really hard.

M: In 2002, you made that visit; 2003 the agreement is signed; 2005 the work of rehabilitation actually begins. Is that 2 years period or the recession of 2008...

B: We got some stuff done, focused mainly on rehabilitating the Hammond Cabin, but we were short ½ million. We were fortunate enough to get a gift from the Forbes family. The connection was Bernie Forbes came here in the 1930s and knew Frank Galey. I think her family actually built a cabin here called the Laidlaw cabin and came to it every summer. After the ranch closed in 1985 and the auction had taken place, the Laidlaw cabin was moved to a site of the Forbes family choosing along the Snake

River. It was the Forbes sister who convinced her siblings to make the initial gift of \$200,000. That was our first gift and that went into the Hammond Cabin.

M: What was the role of the former White Grassers in terms of donors?

B: We think of the Forbes as White Grassers because of their mother. I appealed to them early and I spoke to Deborah Lopez (former White Grass dude of many years) and she helped me think of people who might be in a position to make a gift. That went slowly and we picked up steam towards the end. A lot of the funding from White Grassers came towards the end.

M: Did they play a significant part or a minor percentage?

B: I think we raised \$665,000. Almost everybody had a connection to it. The first gift I got was \$100 from Bob Righter (Jackson, WY author of Peaks, Politics and Passion: The Grand Teton National Park Comes of Age). Some folks gave again. A lady in Pennsylvania, who had been to the ranch as a teenager, finished it off with the last gift of \$50,000 in early February.

M: Were you spending your time fund raising, being on the phone, etc?

B: The nice thing about a feasibility study is that you talk to people about if it is feasible to raise money. You would think raising a million dollars in Jackson would be a no brainer. We did not do well with Jackson, which surprised me. I did get a \$50,000 gift from someone in town who did not have a connection to White Grass but had a connection to historic buildings. Joel Albright inherited Flat Creek Ranch, which is a very nice guest ranch. Yes, I did spend a lot of time fund raising.

M: (47:30) What does your role become once the funding is done. You have raised the \$965,000; now what happens to you and the National Trust?

B: There has not been a budget passed by Congress for the NPS since 2010. They can make commitments but cannot be sure they can honor those commitments for money they don't have. When we first scoped the project, it was going to be 3 ½ million and I think that it is more than that now. For every dollar the private sector was putting into it, the Feds were putting 2-3 times. If that money is not there, it will not go. I wrote letters to people saying that the project would be done by 2016 and was not feeling great about it. The NPS just got its last money (from the Trust) in June (2014) because I wanted to see some commitment on their part and to make sure it was going to be a priority. In the past, there was a lack of will and I wanted some assurances on behalf of donors. I felt that our credibility as well as the Park's credibility was on the line. I needed to be sure on behalf of the donors and the National Trust that this project was going to happen.

M: You are still monitoring this very closely. Has it met your expectations and donor expectations? I know you cannot speak for the NPS, but maybe assume NPS expectations?

B: (50:24) I think it has. This project has taken a long time; partly because the money didn't flow from us and the Federal side as quickly as we had hoped. Then, there is the weather and a short building season; many winters they were shut out. When one donor here agreed to donate for a single cabin, he asked if it would be finished in his lifetime. I was mindful of that and I wanted to make sure that all the buildings would be finished by September 2016.

I think some people in the NPS have been surprised by what has been accomplished here and we want them in here to use and value it not just for the old logs but for the way this facility suits their purpose. We learned long ago that you can't save everything by turning it into a museum. In fact, a lot of museums are trying to become something else because it is too much of a drag to raise the money to keep them going. That is why we never considered this being a museum.

The best way to save something is to use it. Have you ever seen what happens to a beehive after the bees are gone? When the bees are there, it is vibrant and when the bees are gone, within hours that hive disintegrates. That is what happens to buildings. It doesn't happen that fast, but buildings start to look like an abandoned beehive when they are not used. Use is good. You noticed things that need to be fixed and they get maintained and repaired.

I hope the lesson that White Grass will provide is the greenest building is one that is already built. How can you be sustainable and discard trees that were cut down 100 years that can be used again? There is no better place to share stories than where they happened. Hearing those stories is more meaningful here than through pictures or stories told by an interpreter in the future. Historic places are about creating a connection to a place; a connection to your history; a connection to a shared history and that is what these people had. All White Grassers were not here at the same time, but they all have this place in common. That gives them connections that they didn't have before. These are the connections and where it means something. If we remove all these places, it is like ripping a page out of our nation's history book-never to be read by anybody again. Why would we do that?

M: Do you have any connections to the Vanishing Treasures or those folks in the NPS system?

B: Vanishing Treasures (the teaching program) is a federal program, and it is a NPS program. The National Trust doesn't have any official role in it. I think they (Vanishing Treasures) have been waiting for more work completion here to start fully activating White Grass for educational/training purposes. I just got the training module with some of the things they are going to teach here. We have a new project called HOPE Crew and I think that will be the best intersection.

M: (56:03) Talk about that.

B: I think part of what we have not successfully done is recruit more people. We need an army of folks who will be passionate to speak out about these historical buildings; whether they are in the National Park, in their neighborhood, in their city or wherever they live. We need to encourage people to view them in a different way.

If we can start engaging younger people, diverse people, I think that is how these HOPE Crews can make a difference. HOPE stands for Hands On Preservation Experience. Our chief partner is the NPS. At least 5 of the 10 projects we have done have been with the NPS.

Our partner is the Youth Conservation Corps so they already have these folks, the system, and so we connect the dots between the park service and the projects they have. We are promoting it and providing the experts and the Youth Corp is providing the kids.

There will be a HOPE crew project here at White Grass this summer so there is a lot of opportunities for the Trust to be a partner with Vanishing Treasures here. I hope we can introduce a new generation of folks to historic buildings, historic trades, and to their National Parks. It is a win, win, win.



In 25 years from now, that would be the great result of this place. Visit [www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) for a video presentation of the HOPE crew working on White Grass cabins under Collections/Videos/Hope Crew.

M: Is there another important topic about White Grass and your involvement that we have not covered?

B: (59:40) When we first started doing this, it was focused on the architecture. When I came to my first White Grass reunion and I heard people talking about the ranch, I began to understand the true value of their stories. The true value is the people and the places and not just the buildings but how they were used. We are still planning on how the buildings will be used in the future. I was not expecting the fact that these people have come back to a 5<sup>th</sup> reunion (2014) and their attachment to this place. The stories on the website ([www.whitegrass.org](http://www.whitegrass.org) under Collection/Documents/White Grass Ranch Compilation; Collections/Oral Histories; and Share Your Story) has reaffirmed for me the attachment and the importance of places to people.

M: Could this become a model for other kinds of preservation?

B: I think this is preservation. People have attachments to place and that is why they need to come back to those places.

M: What is it like for you to come back in 2014 and see the progress made and be a part of it?

B: Since I am staying here, I am in a small way sharing the experience for myself. I know the stories and yet I know when I turn on the hot water, I have it. There are no skunks under the bed; I haven't seen a bat yet and drunken Frank is not shooting holes in the ceiling when someone says it is too hot.

Nothing had been done when I came to the first reunion. We just were sitting out on the steps of the Hammond Cabin before the corner fell off; it was just in terrible disarray. When we were here 3 years ago, we were in the Hammond Cabin because it was the only one done. And now this year, we are in the Main Cabin and these cabins are in use and I am actually in one. You start to see the preservation is in use for what was envisioned....and it is the use we had initially envisioned.

I am having my reenactment and seeing what it was like to be here during the dude ranch period but also, I can envision the next phase of the history of the White Grass.

M: Thank you so much.

B: Sure.