

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mill Creek Park Project

O.H. 2080

William G. Addington, III

Interviewed

By

Heidi Scott

On

February 26, 2003

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INTERVIEWEE: William G. Addington, III

INTERVIEWER: Heidi Scott

SUBJECT: Mill Creek Park

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P: This is an interview with William G. Addington, III for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Mill Creek Park, by Heidi Scott, at Easter Seals, Edwards Avenue, on February 26, 2003. At 9:40 a.m.

S: Thank you for doing the interview. The first few questions we'll talk about your background. The first questions is where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1946.

S: Could you tell me about your family?

A: I have twin sisters who are four years younger and my mom and dad. My dad worked, my mother was a stay-at-home-mom.

S: Are you married? Just any Basic information you'd like to share.

A: I'm married to a Youngstown native. We were living in Chicago and Milwaukee at the time. We came back in '72 because we thought it was a nice place to raise our family. We had two children who are grown and both left the community.

S: What was it like growing up in your community?

A: The fifties and sixties were a safe time – well, the fifties were a safe time to grow up, the sixties were interesting being in college because of the Vietnam War and a lot of the social changes that were going on. So it was kind of like a night and day transition. The fifties were fairly passive, and the sixties started to be a little bit more tumultuous with the Vietnam War and the protests.

S: So you experienced a lot, there were protests, and you felt that split in the national feeling even at the local level here.

A: Yes, because Youngstown had a lot of World War II veterans. And a lot of the younger people who were protesting the war in Vietnam, there were a lot of emotional conflicts because the veterans felt they were being unpatriotic.

S: How far from Mill Creek Park did you grow up?

A: About a block-and-a-half.

S: Oh, so you were nice and close.

A: I was very close.

S: So you were there a lot as a child? Did you spend a lot of time there?

A: Yes. I lived just about a block from the Old Mill Museum so we spent a lot of time down at Lake Newport, through the gorge area and down by the flats and the old Landeman Falls.

S: What did your parents do?

A: My dad was a claims adjuster. My mom was a stay-at-home mom.

S: And what is your educational background?

A: I graduated from Youngstown State and I did thirty-two years in insurance and risk management, and then the past two years I've been with Easter Seals doing developmental fundraising, marketing, and public relations.

S: Can you tell me what your first memory of Mill Creek Park is?

A: It's probably just a safe, fun place to be. We used to ride our bikes on the trails a lot and that was always fun because of the hills.

S: Go into your work experiences with Mill Creek Park. What were your work experiences prior to Mill Creek Park?

A: Just mowing yards. And then when I was in junior high school I became friends with some other college guys that worked at Lake Newport and I'd go down and putter around with them and do odd-jobs to see if you'd get a chance to use one of the boats for free.

S: Why did you want to work there? Was it primarily just so you could use to boats for free?

A: That was all donated labor. I didn't get paid for any of that. And then Mr. Scholl, who was Assistant Superintendent at the time, saw me down there daily, and figured there was something there. So when the position at the Old Mill Museum of janitor or custodian or whatever it was opened up, he gave me an opportunity to work there.

S: And how old were you?

A: I was I think fourteen or fifteen when they hired me. I worked from like seven to ten in the mornings mopping the floors, cleaning the bathrooms, washing the glass in the display cases. The Old Mill Museum opened at ten. It was open from ten to six. Bill Whitehouse was the Assistant Naturalist at the time and Lindsey Vickers was the naturalist. It was neat being around those two guys because you picked up a lot of knowledge from just the experiences they had.

S: Was there any specific training you had to do before they hired you?

A: No, it was very basic custodial work. But it was money and it gave me a chance to save some money for college.

S: Did you ever change your position when you were there?

A: My senior year I got to work with the lawn crews. They had some high school kids and college kids who would mow the road sides with the hand mowers. I eventually moved up to the point where I was driving the tractor with the brush-hog mower, and we would mow everything from Lake Glacier down to the golf course, but didn't do the golf course properties.

S: Could you describe a typical day at work?

A: Well, if you were on the morning crew you went out to the building that was on Bear Standen Road, load up the truck with mowers, you'd go out to the sight and mow. It was a monotonous day. There wasn't much routine. You'd break for lunch, mow, and come back into the service building. So it wasn't much of a mental challenge, but it was money.

S: What changes have you noticed in the park since you started working there?

A: When I was there it was just Mill Creek Park, now its Mill Creek Metro Parks. They've always been conscientious of the parks image and appearance. Probably the

biggest change has been in the Riversides Garden. It was kind of an afterthought at a point, and now they've put a lot of focus in on it, and its kind of its own entity. It draws a lot of people to the park. Back in the sixties, Lake Newport and Glacier were big because you'd go down and rent rowboats and go out and fish. That's kind of fallen by the wayside a little bit because Newport is more of a wetlands than an actual lake, and Glacier is still used for the rowboats. And the Old Mill Museum in the sixties was basically just an exhibit for stuffed birds, and butterflies, and bugs, and snakes, and all that. Now they've taken it back to being an actual mill. That was one of the biggest transitions too. And then the covered bridge over the gorge above the Old Mill Museum and the Landerman Falls.

S: That's new?

A: That's new. Because before it was just a bridge, a concrete bridge with metal railings, and now they've actually made it the covered bridge. And then they put in the wood walkway from the museum, to the Landerman Falls, down through the gorge. That wasn't there in the sixties either.

S: What's your favorite part of the park and why?

A: Then it was probably Lake Newport because you could go out and ride around the lake in the boats. Now it would probably be the Riverside Gardens because of the beauty. I think it's impressive; the amount of volunteer work the park has been able to garner to keep that place as beautiful as it is.

S: Have you ever participated in any of the volunteer work?

A: Yes. In 2002 they had twelve-thousand hours of volunteer work, which I think is pretty impressive. And when you see the small staff that they have there that explains why the grounds are as well-kept as they are. The staff is outstanding to work with. So it's a great experience. When you work with the staff they share their knowledge and experiences. So it's kind of a win-win; you get a chance to give back to the community plus pick their brains.

S: What did you do? Did you volunteer in the gardening?

A: I volunteered – you can volunteer wherever you want. I do weeding, trimming, planting. I'd rather do the hands-on stuff.

S: Can you describe a meaningful experience at Mill Creek Park? Either work-related or personal?

A: Probably one of the greatest experiences down there was with a gentleman named Walter Scholl, who was assistant superintendent. He was just a great guy. He had the knack where if you did something wrong he could discipline you without making you feel demeaned. We used to call him "Farmer Scholl." Everybody liked him. He was just a

nice guy that had been there virtually forever, and he was just a great person to be around. He carried a lot of history with him. He was just a neat experience. He was kind of one of those unforgettable characters.

S: Has he since passed away?

A: Yes.

S: In your opinion, what is the most important part of the park?

A: I'd say probably the whole park, because Youngstown's unique to have an actual metro park that runs through the city itself. And I forget, there are some statistics on how many cities have it, but I think we're blessed to have something like that and I think we tend to take it for granted. It's probably one of the gems of the area.

S: How important are the park programs?

A: I think they're very important, because it gives people, especially city people, a chance to be exposed to nature without having to go very far. The Ford museum is phenomenal. I know a lot of school groups go down there, and it gives kids a chance to see and experience nature the way they wouldn't otherwise. So I think that every aspect of the park is important.

S: Have you ever taken part in any of the programs?

A: Yes. Last year I went through the Master Gardener program. That is restricted to twenty-five people per year. You go, I forget how many class hours, but the classes run from six until eight-thirty at night. Then they'll do labs on Saturdays from eight until noon. During that time you have forty hours of volunteer work to complete, plus a project, and its hands-on experience. And then after that when you graduate they like you to do twenty hours of volunteer work a year. It's a neat experience. You meet some neat people, to get an opportunity to experience first hand how to plant, how to trim, whatever. So it's just a phenomenal program, and Keith Keiser and Karen Petrovich are the two that basically oversee it, and they're just phenomenal people to deal with.

S: Of the programs that you're aware of, which ones do you think are the most effective?

A: Well, between what the Ford Museum does with the kids and the public on educating people about the park itself, and then the gardens as far as educating people about specific plants, and flowers, and trees, I'd put them both as probably being equally important.

S: What impact do you think the park has on Youngstown?

A: I know through the fifties, sixties, and seventies it gave a lot of kids a chance to go to college. I'd say probably the biggest thing is to give young people some tuition money to go to YSU.

S: Through working there you mean?

A: Yes.

S: So a lot of the people working there, are they a lot of younger students and younger people?

A: Of course that would be a typical work force, but in the summer time, I'm not sure if they still do it now, but in the sixties they hired a lot of college kids for the mowing crews, the garbage crews, roadside cleanup. Not all of the kids went to Youngstown, some went away, but the majority of the students went to Youngstown State. And then you could work over through early fall and sometimes early spring to mow if you were in town. I think they gave a lot of young people a chance to go to college.

S: Okay. I wasn't aware of that, but that makes sense. What do you think the city would be like without the park?

A: Probably from a visual standpoint a lot worse off. I think it's a major asset. And to drive through it people realize that there is something pretty in Youngstown.

S: What effect does suburban sprawl have on the ecosystem of the park?

A: Hopefully none. The area off of 224, where the walking trail is, it seems like since the urban sprawl that area is more heavily used, the area that runs from 224 down to Shields Road on West Park Drive. I think if anything the suburban sprawl has increased the usage of the park a lot more. It seems like the golf course is heavily used. Rocky Ridge is heavily used. The walking trail is used a lot. So I don't think the suburban sprawl has had a negative impact on the park.

S: What environmental concerns do you think there are for Mill Creek Park?

A: Probably the biggest would be littering. People drive through and just throw paper and wrappers, and whatever out. Beyond that I don't think there's too much. I'm not aware of any environmental issues other than just plain litter.

S: To your knowledge, what difficulties are there in maintaining the park?

A: From my perspective it's probably the heavy usage and the smaller workforce there, just trying to keep up and to keep things repaired, and maintained, and cleaned. But I think they do a great job of what they do.

S: Do you feel that it was necessary to drain Lake Newport?

A: From what I recall reading, I think they did justify doing what they did. I've been down there a couple of times, and it looks like from a wetlands standpoint it's doing well.

S: Do you think the closing of Idora Park impacted Mill Creek Park?

A: No. It was a shame to see it close, but I think even though they were adjacent properties, I think the two were totally separate.

S: Do you know why the park didn't buy Idora property?

A: No. Well, if my memory's any good, from when the Calvary Baptist had bought it, the park was – and again, this is not a strong memory, but the park was in need of major repairs, and I don't think Mill Creek Park, if they did look at it, had the finances to keep it going, and no one else did either.

S: So funding made it a non-issue, really.

A: My thoughts would be funding, because it was, just from what I remember there, it was a lot of major upkeep for the rides and the surrounding property.

S: Do you feel the steel industry affected the park?

A: Maybe a little bit if there were any of the steel mills that were donors. But otherwise I don't think they had a negative impact.

S: Were you employed by the park in 1988 when it changed from a township to a metro park?

A: No.

S: Do you have an opinion about that change?

A: I think they did what the board of Directors at the time felt what was necessary to move on. And the directors from what I read in the paper and the couple I know seem to be very proactive. They have to do what they feel is in the best interest of the park and the city. To keep it more dynamic versus static.

S: Can you tell me about the newer park features, such as Yellow Creek, the wetlands, and the metro park farm?

A: I know they exist, but beyond that I'm not much help there, I'm sorry.

S: That's okay. How has the acquisition of snow making machinery affected the public use of the Wick Recreation Area?



A: It appears from what I've seen on TV and read in the paper that it's given people a chance to use it when the snow wasn't there. I think it's probably been a plus.

S: Do you know what the future plans for the ice skating rink are?

A: The last I read in the paper is that they are going to replace the piping that had rotted and reopen it at some point. I think it was two or three years down the road if my memory is any good.

S: Do you think the thirty-six hole golf course is important to the park?

A: Yes. I'm not a golfer but I've heard a lot of people who golf say its one of the nicest and toughest courses to play that they've ever played. I think that's a real asset to the area.

S: Really?

A: Yes.

S: I'll have to tell my father that. If Volney Rogers were alive today, what do you think he might like to accomplish in the park?

A: Probably to have more people go. It's amazing the number of people in Youngstown who have not been to Riverside Gardens, and have not walked the walker's trail. He'd probably just want to create a greater awareness. That would be my thought. I think it's a phenomenal asset that we take for granted.

S: What do you think the future of Mill Creek Park is?

A: Hopefully it will continue to grow. I met Susan Dickens, who is the new director. A very impressive young lady. I think she's going to do great things for the park. The experimental farm, the bike trail that runs through Canfield, all the way up into Trumbull County now. She's got a great staff. I think she's a great visionary, and I think the park's going to continue to grow and grow.

S: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: Just that hopefully people will continue to enjoy the park.

S: Well, thank you for your time and for the interview.

A: You're welcome.