

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF DEB BOETTCHER

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

IN SKAGWAY, ALASKA

OCTOBER 11, 2018

ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-89

KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH SENSENIG

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. This is Karen Brewster, and today is October 11, 2018, and I'm here in Skagway, Alaska, with Deborah or Deb Boettcher, um, with the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project. And we're in her office here above the Pantheon Saloon in downtown Skagway. Thank you, Deb, for taking some time this afternoon. I appreciate it.

DEB BOETTCHER: You're welcome. I appreciate you coming here, too.

[00:00:34]KAREN BREWSTER: So, just to get us started a little bit, can you tell me where you're from originally and where you grew up?

DEB BOETTCHER: I was born in Anchorage, and I grew up in Anchorage. Went to college at Oregon State University. Graduated in zoology. Went into the Peace Corps. Came back to Alaska. Worked for the Department of Fish and Game. Then I worked for Dames & Moore, which was an environmental consulting company when I lived in Homer, Alaska. Worked in numerous canneries, and when I worked for Fish and Game I went to -- I did that also out of Homer. I went to Bristol Bay. [00:01:18]And what brought me to Southeast Alaska was when Fish and Game sent me down to Port Alexander as a fish sampler, and I ended up in Petersburg and lived there for several years. Worked for the hatchery, then worked for public radio. And then went to the Yukon for a summer and loved Skagway and ended up here in 1994.

[00:01:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. I should say, we're gonna get some noise in here. One, we have the noise of the heater and furnace 'cause this is an old building, but they're doing construction out on Broadway right in front of this building that all of a sudden now we just heard their big trucks, and so we might get some of that. Unfortunately, we can't tell them to stop.

DEB BOETTCHER: Not -- I'm afraid not.

[00:02:10]KAREN BREWSTER: So we will have to live with it, but at least we know what it is. So Skagway, 1994. Oh, um, so Peace Corps, you said you were in Iran.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: What -- and that was, um --

DEB BOETTCHER: 1971 to 1974. I was there about three years in Bandar -- I was in Bandar-e Pahlavi, which is on the Caspian Sea (now known as Bandar-e Anzali). And then we moved to Tehran for the last two years.

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[00:02:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And um, so when you were with Fish and Game and all that, you were doing zoology, biology?

DEB BOETTCHER: We were doing smolt out-migration counts. And then we also did counts of salmon coming up the river. And you'd count from a tower.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: And I worked in the offices in Dillingham as a scale manager, which is where you get scales coming in. Scales are taken from the fish. They're sampled -- when they're sampled, and they're sent to be aged and they can also tell what stream, what river they're going back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

DEB BOETTCHER: What river they came from, what river they're going back to. But actually, since you sample 'em from a river, that's -- you know, they're migrating up the river, and that's where they're going to spawn. But I would, yeah. I didn't age the scales or analyze the scales. I just made sure that all the scales were correct on the cards that we got back.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you were cataloging them, basically? Organizing the collection?

DEB BOETTCHER: Kind of organizing. Yep.

[00:03:43]KAREN BREWSTER: So when you came to Skagway in 1994, you just came as a visitor?

DEB BOETTCHER: I had friends who were here, and I didn't want to go back to Petersburg since I had quit my job at the public radio station, and I -- I came here right after the um, the last cruise ship, so it was pretty quiet in town, and there weren't any jobs to be had. So I volunteered at the Park Service, which was the best thing I could've done.

[00:04:14]And I worked for Claudia Rector, who was our -- she was our -- like a biologist at the time. I don't know if she got the title as our natural resources person, but she had a project, and that was identifying plant species, pressed plants. And I'd studied botany in college, so I was helping identifying some of these plant species she had. And while I was working there, and I worked for her for about a month, Doreen Cooper came in. Doreen was our archeologist at the time, and she needed help cataloging artifacts and asked if I'd be interested in learning how to do that. And I said, I'd really be interested in -- in that work. [00:05:01]And I don't recall how I got hired, but I did get hired, and I worked for several winters, cataloging artifacts, archeology artifacts. And we cataloged the artifacts from Moore House, Pantheon, and Block 39, which is where the maintenance building is.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Those artifacts. And so that gave me a background in cataloging. After they're cataloged, you enter the data into what at the time was called ANCS, and that was the catalog system that the museum program used.

[00:05:37]KAREN BREWSTER: And that was electronic by that point? It was on the computer?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. So I was taught how to enter this data into the computer. At the beginning, we were cataloging everything on paper. And when you catalog, you have several fields you have to fill out, like the name, and it's based on museum nomenclature. So you're calling all, for example, window pane glass "window pane" instead of "flat glass." You have specific names for things. You have to measure it, weigh it, describe it. [00:06:09]So it was -- there was a lot of paperwork involved. And at the time, we didn't

have digital cameras, so you'd draw out the patterns, for example, for the um, ceramics. We did -- Doreen actually had an archeologist on staff who was a really good photographer, so he would select, or she would select, what artifacts she wanted cataloged -- photographed. So we do have a really good -- we do have a really good collection of photographs of ceramic patterns.

KAREN BREWSTER: Nice.

DEB BOETTCHER: And of select artifacts. [00:06:44]But that was to me a fascinating project. Even though there was a lot of nails, and there was a lot of window panes, there were some really interesting other artifacts. Like, we got dog tags and little toys from the Moore House, 'cause they're children there, you know. And one of the fun things now, showing the children when they come. We have fourth graders come here. And in the -- sometime during the school year. They come from Haines. And one of the -- Jason, who is our chief of interp now, he used to be our education specialist, he asked me to show the children some of the artifacts. So I put several of 'em together, toys. And many of them are from the Moore House, but they're from the maintenance lot, Block 39.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:07:37]DEB BOETTCHER: And so there's a -- this box of toys, and one of the first things I ask them is, how are these different from your toys? And it gets them thinking. And then how did we get the toys up here? And they'd never seen mail-order catalogs, these fourth graders. They're usually fourth graders. Their toys, of course, are plastic, and the old toys are metal and ceramic. And they probably, I don't know how they order them, eBay.

KAREN BREWSTER: Amazon.

DEB BOETTCHER: I don't know how you order toys. Or go down to the store here. But growing up, when I grew up in Anchorage, we didn't have very many stores where you could buy toys. A lot of things came out of the Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And they'd never seen these catalogs. But we have the catalogs from like, 1898.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:08:24]DEB BOETTCHER: And so I can show them specific toys that they're looking at right there, and show them the toys in the catalog.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: That match those, the toys. So they learn that. And then they learn that they didn't fly them up here. You know, you ask them. You don't tell 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And they -- so they find out that they came up probably on boats, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[00:08:46]DEB BOETTCHER: It's really fun to go from having cataloged those exhibit items to showing them now, but there was kind of a progression. After cataloging for three winters, Debbie Sanders, who was our museum curator, asked if I'd be interested in working in her department to help store these artifacts. And so I learned to organize them numerically in bags by their lots and store them and give them a location in our Mascot collection storage room. So that was like the next step in the progression of learning how to do what I do now. [00:09:27]And for years, I worked with Debbie doing annual

inventory, where you have -- you have specific inventories, museum property inventories. You have controlled, random, and now we have accession inventories, but the random inventory is the biggest. And -- it generates -- the program generates numbers, and you have to go in and find these catalog numbers and account for all the artifacts. And if you don't find them, you have to write up a report, like, where they could be, and how you're going to find it. [00:10:04]So I learned to do annual inventory, and most of it was -- because it's the largest piece of our coll -- largest percentage of our collection, probably, is archeological artifacts. Well, archives probably are, but they -- they're done a little bit differently. You don't have individual items, like --

KAREN BREWSTER: In an archive -- in an archives?

DEB BOETTCHER: Archives, as -- like you do in archeology. [00:10:30]So you could spend several days on the annual inventory, just in the Mascot collection storage room, looking for those artifacts. And so it was really important to have correct locations, because if you couldn't find one artifact, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And --

DEB BOETTCHER: 'Cause they're in bags, in boxes, and in -- supposed to be in kind of numerical order.

[00:10:58]KAREN BREWSTER: And also if for some reason an artifact was used in an exhibit or loaned to another institution, in theory there's a paper trail for that?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. You put -- you document it in your -- in the computer. And where it is. You document that it's on loan.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: And also, you have an object removal slip that you put in the box. And then you're supposed to take it out of the box when you put the object back.

[00:11:26]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So if this inventory generated a number and you couldn't find the object, if it was out on loan, in theory, it would be indicated.

DEB BOETTCHER: It would say that. Yeah. It should say that because it's generated from what's called ICMS, Interior Collection Management System, and that gives you the current location of the object when you look in. And that's where the report is generated. The inventory is generated from that ICMS.

[00:11:54]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Oh, so it wouldn't ask you for a number on something that was out on loan?

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, it -- it does. Because we have a lot of objects that are -- I shouldn't say a lot. We do have objects that are on loan, for example, at Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Seattle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And so that is actually -- they fall under our controlled property, and we have to ask Seattle to look at these artifacts and tell us if they found them. And then we report that, I mean, that they found them, on our inventory.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

[00:12:33]DEB BOETTCHER: And our ran -- and our controlled inventory is property that is on exhibit or guns and objects that are really expensive. Things that you don't want to lose. You don't want -- you want to account for them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: So those things, um, in the Jeff. Smiths Parlor exhibit, for example, those artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: They're all controlled property. Moore House, Mascot Saloon. Those items on exhibit are all controlled property. So -- But the ones in Klondike Seattle, those are controlled property, and it comes up every year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Make sure you still have them.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

[00:13:16]KAREN BREWSTER: So I don't know if you have a general sense of numbers of items in your collections. Do you have a sense of like, how many archeological pieces? You said you --

DEB BOETTCHER: I could find that out because we generate a report every year. But I'll tell you, in our ICMS program, we have over 600,000 items.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. That answers my question. And is that --

DEB BOETTCHER: I think it's 600,000. I should look. Or is it 60,000?

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, but that's all archeological?

DEB BOETTCHER: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: That includes the archival?

DEB BOETTCHER: That includes everything. Yep. [00:13:54]Well, the archives, um-hm -- See the archives are being changed right now. And I -- you know, I should look that up, Karen. That number. But the archives were cataloged as historical objects before, as documentary artifacts. That is being reorganized now into a new, hierarchical system. But we still have a lot of -- all the old archives that we have stored in file cabinets are all cataloged with a number. And that is not a number -- it's a number for -- a category, for example. Let's say special events, and we have "Special Events 2015." That might get one number. And it might be several events, but it might get one catalog number. Then let's say we go to another part, let's say another record group. And it's "Dyea Excavations 1997." That would get one catalog number. But that's a lot of reports.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: That's a lot of archives. [00:15:05]Well, now we're turning it around into a different system. And what we will do is go back into the ICMS program and say, this archive, which had this catalog number, is now archived into a larger archival collection. And you get a lot of information from that old catalog number 'cause it has a description. In the archives, you will get maybe a briefer description, or in some cases, it's a more -- it's broader description. For example, it could say, "Fourth of July Photos and Slides." "Yuletide Documents." Then you can go in and describe in the archives more specifically. Ok, for Yuletide we have a calendar, we have a poster, we have communications. So it depends, but the one number doesn't indicate how many linear feet you have.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: Or how many archives and how many pertaining to --

KAREN BREWSTER: How many fold --

DEB BOETTCHER: How many folders, exactly. If it's one number, it doesn't tell you.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: How many.

[00:16:15]KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. It sounds like a huge project to have to redo it all.

DEB BOETTCHER: It is. And I hope, before I retire, I redo it because we have so many boxes of archives from people who have retired in like, the last I would say, six, seven years, that they can't be added in. Or they can't be -- you can't go through them and say, we already have this report. We don't need this. Until these are all reorganized.

[00:16:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Does this reorganization more in keeping with standard archival procedures?

DEB BOETTCHER: I believe so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: This started when we got our second curator. After Debbie Sanders left, Samantha Richert was our second curator. And she started -- oh man, I can't remember, about five or six years ago.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And when she came on board, that was one of her first changes, was the way we cataloged our archives. [00:17:22]And I thought, I will never learn this system. It's a string of numbers. A long string of numbers with periods in between the numbers. But now I think in those numbers, and I can look at a string of numbers and, oh, those are archeology archives. Oh, those are maintenance archives. Those are natural history archives.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: I can think that way now, but it was so different when I had to start learning it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:17:53]DEB BOETTCHER: And it was -- and when we got individual collections, called assembled collections in, every one's different. You might get a collection, archival collection, from somebody who's got all photographs. You might have photographs, ephemera, tape, um, reel-to-reel tape, for example, slides. And every single one's different. And those are a real challenge because there's no consistency, and you have to look at the collection over and over and over and think, "Ok. How am I going to divide this up? What are going to be -- what are my groupings?" And they're challenging, but boy, when you finish one, you feel so good because it's so much -- it's so manageable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: You can go in and find the photographs you're looking for.

[00:18:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah. I would think -- well, I don't know how even you can think about how many archives collections you have here. Do you have any sense of how many individual collections in the archives side?

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, I've -- I've cataloged at least, probably a dozen, and then there were ones that were already cataloged, so I would say there's at least twenty assembled collections. [00:19:10]And sometimes, we have -- when I go in and see these archives were, for example, from somebody, and they've been archived as with a catalog number in a record group, it just fits better as a collection, an assembled collection. So I'll reorganize it and make it an assembled collection because it just doesn't fit in our hierarch -- it's not from maintenance, it's not from natural resources, it's not from cultural resources. It's somebody's collection that was cataloged under "Skagway General," for example.

[00:19:50]KAREN BREWSTER: Or what if there's some person off the street who comes in or a local resident who says, "Here. I've got all this stuff." Do you take those collections?

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, first of all -- it depends. And I'm not the one who accepts it. It's our museum curator. And it has to fit our scope of collection. If it's -- our scope of collection is not as broad as the city's, as the museum's, the city museum's collection because they -- they're not just dealing with gold rush era collections. Ours are gold rush era.

[00:20:24]Our scope of collection is sort of gold rush era and pertaining to some of our buildings. And it goes up to about 1916. 1898, around there, to about 1916. So if somebody brings in a collection, and we look at -- for example, let's say a bottle collection. I look at the bottles, and I'll tell the museum curator, ok, these bottles pre-date 1916. These bottles are more modern. We might say to the donor, "Ok. We could take these bottles, but these other ones don't fit our scope of collection." It has to fit the scope of collection before we can accept. [00:21:07]And some of the, um, one of the decisions a curator has to make if somebody's going to just give you a collection and it's gold rush era, and mostly gold rush, are you gonna take it all? And if they -- if it doesn't match -- I mean, if it doesn't make your scope of collection, would they mind if we gave it to the library so they could use it for educational purposes? So you have to kind of talk to the donor and see what their expectations are. If they say, no, I want it all to go in the museum and be treated like museum property, then I think the museum curator has to decide, do we want to accept this whole thing, this whole collection, when part of it doesn't meet -- match our scope of collection? They have to make that judgment call.

[00:21:58]KAREN BREWSTER: But I didn't realize that the Skagway City Museum took in donations and collections.

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, they have a scope of collection also.

KAREN BREWSTER: OK.

DEB BOETTCHER: So if they -- if somebody brings them a collection, and that person can't tell them where it came from, it might not have come from Skagway, they probably wouldn't take it in. I'm -- I'm not --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: I can't say that.

KAREN BREWSTER: You can't say.

DEB BOETTCHER: But usually -- they have a scope of collection, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And it probably has to be artifacts that pertain to Skagway.

[00:22:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, like what, for example, you know, if a local person has photos from the World War II era in their family collection. The park would not be interested in those?

DEB BOETTCHER: We do have some World War II photos. They don't, um, fall in our scope of collection. We ended up with them. But the city museum would be the correct repository. And I don't know why we have those in our collection, but we do.

[00:23:02]KAREN BREWSTER: It just seems like by now, all of the gold rush history would've been discovered. Other than, you know, new archeological excavations, where you would get new material. But in terms of photo collections and archival things, you'd think it would already be here.

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, you'd be surprised. There are people who hiked the Chilkoot Trail, like in 1970's. See, the Chilkoot Trail falls in our scope of collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: So we'd be really interested in those photographs. And people come up with their grandparents', or their great-grandparents' memorabilia.

KAREN BREWSTER: They're still coming with that?

DEB BOETTCHER: Oh, they still do. [00:23:43]And at our visitor center, we have something called a stamper form. And the donor can fill -- or let's say, the relative can fill out the stamper form, which has the name of the relative, what the relationship is, what the relative did. And if they came through Skagway going up to the gold fields, we'll ask them also if there's anything that they know this person has in the collection. And it could be photos, diary, letters. If they check these boxes, then the curator will get back to that person, the one who filled out the form, and ask if they would be interested in donating any of these materials. And some of them say, "Well, we can send you a photocopy of the diary." Fine. Then we have something on file. [00:24:34]Because sometimes people will come and say, "I think my great-grandfather came through here. Do you have anything in your files?" And we say, "What is his name?" And then we can look it up in our files under the stamper files and say, "Oh. We do have some information on your great-grandfather." And it will be, maybe, a diary or photographs that we got from another donor that was probably a relative of that person also.

[00:24:59]KAREN BREWSTER: That's the whole challenge of archives and museum work, is organizing it all so you can find the items again when you need them.

DEB BOETTCHER: Right. And that's one of my -- one of the challenges, but also one of the rewards is when somebody calls up with a research question. And this happens a lot. We had over a hundred research requests last year. And some of them will last days. Some of them last just a few minutes. [00:25:27]But when you can find what they're looking for or the information, it is so rewarding, 'cause you organized your archives so that you could find what they were asking for. And somebody, for example, wanted -- let's say they want to donate something. A telephone insulator. Or let's say an insulator.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: You can look through your collection and tell them all the insulators that you have, but we don't have that one. I mean, you can do a search like that and say, "Well, we don't have that specific insulator in our collection, and it dates to 1898, so sure, we might be interested in that."

KAREN BREWSTER: That's very cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: So, it's very cool. [00:26:08]And the archives, um, the photographs are -- I get a lot of requests for photographs, and so we scan a lot of photographs and send them to people. But questions like, do you have this photograph in your collection? The library is really good, too. Our library. Because they have --

KAREN BREWSTER: The park library.

DEB BOETTCHER: The park library. Um-hm. They're hard -- they're harder to search, unless there's a number attached, like an inventory number from the Rapuzzi collection, because we don't have a good search mechanism like, it's a picture with tents and stampedeers going up the golden stairs on the Chilkoot Trail. Well, how many of those would -- I

mean, we have so many of those. To look through every single one. That's a little bit harder of a search.

[00:26:56]KAREN BREWSTER: So the park library also has collections of photographs and things?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct, but they -- they have photographs for educational purposes, so they may be photographs that are in other people's collections and not the park's. We have original photographs in the museum collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And they're -- usually we have the unrestricted use so that people can use our photographs however -- and they cite them with a catalog number.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park with a catalog number. The library has a huge collection of photographs, but they might be copies from other people's collections, so you would cite the collection that it came from.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And it's not in our possession. It's not in our park.

[00:27:48]KAREN BREWSTER: And -- 'cause I was talking to Karl Gurcke this morning. As the historian, he uses historic photos a lot.

DEB BOETTCHER: A lot. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And I asked him how the amassing of that collection, and he sort of said, well, Bob Spude, who did a lot of the building research early on, got photos from other institutions, and then Karl keeps amassing photos. Now are those photos part of your museum collection, or that's Karl's personal --

DEB BOETTCHER: That's part of the library collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Um-hm. They have more photos, a lot more than we do, because they have scanned other people's photos. But they have to cite them as other people's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: You know, from -- or by proper collection.

[00:28:30]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. If I wanted to use it, the park wouldn't give me permission. I'd have to go back to the state library in Juneau.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or Burke Museum or wherever, to get the official permission.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. And for the reports that are generated in the park? You'll see that, "Courtesy of." And also in our different exhibits, you'll see, "Photograph Courtesy of." And they're from other institutions.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they're not officially accessioned into the museum collection?

DEB BOETTCHER: They aren't at all.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. That's confusing.

[00:29:03]DEB BOETTCHER: Well ours -- if it was a Park Service photograph, it would say Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, KLGO, which is our acronym. KL, for the -- it's the first two letters of each -- ok. Klondike, and GO is gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Gold rush, right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then it would have a catalog number. [00:29:24]It would have three digits, four digits, whatever, catalog number. And that way, if somebody's interested in

getting a copy of that photograph, they can say, it's catalog number KLGO 81234, or whatever.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then you can go find it?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

[00:29:40]KAREN BREWSTER: So, where are all your collections stored? Are they in this building we're in right now?

DEB BOETTCHER: Different -- different buildings. Our archeology collection is stored in Mascot Saloon, upstairs. And I don't know if this is confidential information or not, but our archives are stored right here in Pantheon.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, they're all behind locked doors.

DEB BOETTCHER: They're all behind -- correct. Not only locked with a special key, they also have alarms.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I would think so. [00:30:17]Um, you mentioned the Rapuzzi Collection. Were you involved in that?

DEB BOETTCHER: That was my first -- that -- well, for years, I worked cleaning trains for White Pass, concurrently with working for the museum curator in the spring and the fall, and part time while I was cleaning trains for White Pass for eleven summers.

[00:30:45]And I resigned from that position when the Rapuzzi Collection was acquired. The Rapuzzi Collection was bought by the Rasmuson Foundation and given to the city to share with the Park Service. And the city actually manages the Rapuzzi Collection. And we, the park, hired two people, technicians, to inventory the Rapuzzi Collection. And the city had a couple of people to inventory this collection. And originally, it was, I don't know how many thousands and thousands, but we kinda narrowed it down. I think our curators decided it was about 30,000 items. And it -- I wouldn't say they're individual items because we would have a barrel of nails. Now how many nails, I mean you know, that would be maybe one inventory number.

KAREN BREWSTER: How long is a piece of string?

DEB BOETTCHER: So we -- so I was hired. I applied for the job of museum technician, and that was a four-year position to help with this inventory. It turned out the inventory took eight years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:32:06]DEB BOETTCHER: And in the end I was inventorying all by myself. And the descriptions got better with time because people were searching for things. And so we had to get better descriptions. In the beginning, it was like "Box." "Wood box." Ok, later on, "It's a wood box, but it has this printed on the side," you know? And then it got so that it had a patent date, so we had patent dates. And they -- those were important. Also, we did a lot of research on the artifacts because the two curators had to decide who got what. [00:32:44]The city decided what fit their scope of collection. Our museum curator decided what fit our scope of collection, what was gold rush. And also, she had to decide -- she had to look at the photograph of the -- what was really important. Before she retired, Debbie Sanders, was obtaining all the objects that went back into Soapy Smiths Parlor -- Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

DEB BOETTCHER: Because those were original artifacts that are in the museum now, and we had to find those all in this collection. And the collection was huge. It filled Jeff. Smiths

Parlor, the commissary, World War II commissary. It was all outside the yard of the commissary and the yard of Jeff. Smiths Parlor. The Alascom building, which is down by the maintenance building, the whole -- besides being in the Alascom building, and it was so full of stuff. The furniture was like piled on top of itself. And then shelving, like book shelves like you see in a library, filled with stuff.

[00:33:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Where had George Rapuzzi had -- have all of it before it got transferred? Did he have it in all these multiple places?

DEB BOETTCHER: I think so. And the Alascom building? Now, I think -- I don't know if he had things there. They were -- A lot of the artifacts and -- artifacts and paper items were moved out of the Fifth Avenue building, the one that they're restoring over there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that YMCA?

DEB BOETTCHER: The YMCA and the Meyers Meat Market, that complex there.

[00:34:12]There was a person who was a friend of Phyllis Brown, the donor -- and Phyllis Brown, by the way, was George Rapuzzi's wife's niece. She was the sole, like, survivor when -- George died first, then Edna died. Her niece acquired the collection. And Phyllis lived in the Alascom building. She had an apartment there. And then the Alascom offices were where a lot of the stuff was stored, but I believe that it came out of the YMCA, that Fifth Avenue complex. [00:34:51]And a person who was her friend, Ron Klein, who lives in Juneau, was one of the people that was instrumental, I think, in moving some of the materials over to the Alascom building. He came over early on when we first started doing the inventory, and he told us the importance of the different items in the Alascom building. And he went around to the different yards. And outside the Alascom building, it was big metal. Stoves and tractors, carts, wheeled carts, compressors, huge. I mean, big drills. It was all over, all these metal items outside. It was just so -- and there were three -- four trailers full of artifacts over there. Furniture piled on top of furniture.

[00:35:44]KAREN BREWSTER: I can't imagine. Well, and -- and from my understanding, it's not like, oh, George had one stove. He'd have how many of varying --

DEB BOETTCHER: Multiple stoves. And just the picks alone. I think he must have taken a pick home every single day from White Pass. No, I don't know how he acquired all these railroad picks and these shovels, but I understand he worked for White Pass, but he also went to the dump. He was a collector.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:36:10]DEB BOETTCHER: And before that, Martin Itjen had collected, but I think -- and Martin Itjen also made a lot of really amazing, uh, I don't know what you call them, automatons?

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

DEB BOETTCHER: You see, like, Soapy Smith.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

DEB BOETTCHER: Or Jeff. Smith in the parlor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And Lady Lou and Dan McGrew, he made all those.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

DEB BOETTCHER: Which were very clever.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[00:36:32]DEB BOETTCHER: So he -- he -- George Rapuzzi acquired all of these artifacts that were in the Jeff. Smiths Parlor when Martin Itjen owned it. He acquired that also.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then also his house was full of artifacts, nice artifacts, so. And he had a shop downstairs in the basement that you wouldn't believe was so full of stuff. Jars. And so when we inventoried, it could be a box of jars that were full of -- each jar was full of screws, washers, um, bolts, nuts. So this would get maybe one catalog number. It's not an indication of how many things there were. It could be a box of jars with hardware. So it took -- but it took a long time, and that was year-round.

[00:37:28]KAREN BREWSTER: And you had to catalog to that level?

DEB BOETTCHER: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Just to know what you had?

DEB BOETTCHER: This was inventory.

KAREN BREWSTER: Inventory. Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you had to say, this is a box of jars of hardware. You couldn't just go, no, we don't want this, and throw it away.

DEB BOETTCHER: No. Everything got a number. [00:37:43]And then the two museum curators decided who was going to get what. And Debbie had to make the decision of getting all the artifacts for Jeff. Smiths Parlor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: Which was really fun. [00:37:57]And then another part of the process, besides doing the inventory was if -- and we did this, almost on a daily basis, or maybe not daily. But we would inventory, but after they decided who got what, then we had to clean the artifacts. And the city and the Park Service, our technicians, would clean them over in the Mascot Saloon. And then -- and we had to track 'em. What came in, what went out, and where it went. And then once it went over to the storage area for the Rapuzzi Collection for our -- for the park, then we had to give it a location. And all of this was on paper and entered into the computer. So it was -- it was really involved.

[00:38:45]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And you were the only one doing it?

DEB BOETTCHER: We had always -- we had almost always two technicians until the last two years, and then I was on my -- kind of on my own.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: So it would go on paper, come back here, get inventoried. I mean, entered into the computer, then -- ok, I already inventoried -- computer -- I mean, the curator selected it. Take it out, clean it.

[00:39:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Then it -- once it's selected, yeah, then it has to be accessioned and cataloged officially as part of your collection.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. And it hasn't been cataloged yet.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, it has not?

DEB BOETTCHER: Some of 'em -- there's still a lot of artifacts that have to be cataloged, but everything that's on exhibit in the museum, Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum, that's been cataloged. Correct. And then there are a lot of artifacts that have been cataloged, but there are numerous artifacts that have not. [00:39:37]And also, along with the Rapuzzi Collection, we also got archives, which will not be processed for awhile. The ones that

were Jeff. Smiths -- I'm sorry, Martin Itjen archives, that I've processed. Most of Martin Itjen's papers, documents, records.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: His recordings. But we have boxes of ship manifests.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

DEB BOETTCHER: They have to be conserved before they can even be archived. Or cataloged, I should say.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: So that's, I mean, a massive undertaking right there.

[00:40:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And yeah, so there's all this Rapuzzi stuff just sitting someplace. I mean those boxes of jars with nails in them, did they get included, or did -- were there things --

DEB BOETTCHER: They went into storage. Um-hm. They had to come out of these different buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: So things either went to the city museum or you guys. There was nothing that got thrown out or not accepted?

DEB BOETTCHER: Some of the stuff was so deteriorated in the yards that -- and also some of the artifacts were, let's say, old sheet rock piled up. That was something that, you know, who was gonna store that?

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: So some of the stuff did get thrown out because it was so disintegrated, it couldn't be stored or selected.

[00:41:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. It sounds like an overwhelming project.

DEB BOETTCHER: It was fascinating. Every day I'd go to work, I thought, what am I going to get to see today? It was one of the most interesting, enjoyable, rewarding jobs I've ever, ever had.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

[00:41:30]DEB BOETTCHER: And the research on the artifacts was so interesting. We'd get a - - for example, a little, tiny tray with a little, little child -- like a little girl on it. What was that used for? And it's like, fairy soap. And you can see it in Jeff. Smiths Parlor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then we'd do the research on it. We'd go to the computer, go to Google, and look up fairy soap, and then we could find out when it was used, what it was used for. It's like a little advertising tray. And it was so interesting.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: And it came from England, for example. [00:42:05]We find, I mean, the most interesting things when we did, you know, some research on some of these artifacts. And we keep files of that. So when an artifact is cataloged, there is a field for, do you have a folder for it? And if you say yes, that means there's further research. And you can even say that in the description.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: That this is from England, and these are the dates. See the file folder.

[00:42:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Are there anything you came across in the Rapuzzi Collection that just had no idea what it was?

DEB BOETTCHER: We had lots of things like that. In fact, we had -- I think we had exhibits for three summers that were called a "What's It" exhibit. And they were in the visitor center. And we had forms that people could fill out to tell us what they knew about a particular artifact. And we had them all numbered. They were things that we didn't know about. What is this? And some of the answers were really off the wall, but that's how we found out what some of these artifacts were.

KAREN BREWSTER: So some of them --

DEB BOETTCHER: And people loved that exhibit.

KAREN BREWSTER: So some of them, the people actually knew?

DEB BOETTCHER: Oh yes. Especially the hardware and the tools and some of the electrical stuff. I mean, we have lots of books for those kinds of things. But some of them were not in the books, and we'd put it out there, and we got some really good answers. And then we'd look at it. We'd look up the answer, I mean, what the person had said, and sure enough, that's exactly what it was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

[00:43:48]DEB BOETTCHER: So we got -- we -- there were a lot of things like that. And I didn't know tools. I didn't know until I started working and using these books that we have. And what's really, really helpful were some of the mail-order catalogs, like Montgomery Ward, because they had the tools that people were using here at the turn of the century. And we had a really good exhibit. I thought one of the best ones, was "Dreambooks," where we took artifacts that we had in our collection, from the Rapuzzi Collection, and that we found actually identified from a Montgomery Ward catalog or Sears Roebuck catalog from 1898.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you'd have the object and then next to it, the image of the --

DEB BOETTCHER: We -- in some cases --

KAREN BREWSTER: -- page or the ad or something?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. In some cases, we did. And one of them that comes to mind was the shoe lasts. Like, we had these metal, like, little metal feet.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: They were shaped -- well, I can't say -- they didn't -- they were shaped like a shoe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: The base of a shoe.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know what you mean, yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then they had a stand. And I think it was Montgomery Wards was selling the whole kit, little cobbler kit. You could repair your shoes at home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we had all these little shoe lasts and stands, and that was one thing that we found in the Montgomery Ward catalog. And we had a picture of that right next to the -- that you could get the whole kit for the -- with different size shoe lasts from the catalog.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we had that right next to the item.

[00:45:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I was -- 'cause I was going to ask you, you know, such a huge collection, how can you be an expert on all the different types of things? I mean,

there are, you know, archeologists who become experts on, you know, the nails, or they become an expert on the ceramics or something. But a vast collection like that.

DEB BOETTCHER: I know. Well, I can now tell you a lot of electrical items that I had no idea the names of before I started because we have a Mesco catalog here, and you just thumb through it, you find the ceramic section. Oh, that's a rosette. Ok, that's -- that's a wire whatever.

[00:46:03]KAREN BREWSTER: So definitely an on-the-job learning experience.

DEB BOETTCHER: It was -- every day I was learning. That's I think what made it so fascinating. And I was seeing things I had never seen before, and probably never will again except in this collection. Posters. Beautiful posters from like, the '30's. And I mean, the advertising, some of the advertising was amazing from years ago, and we had lots of big, colorful posters. And I don't know how they were used in town or who used them. And I think the city acquired almost all of them, but the artwork was amazing. [00:46:47]And the hardware from the Victorian era, very ornate hardware. Beautiful doorknobs and um, I want to say, well, I'm thinking of all the door hardware, window hardware, the latches.

KAREN BREWSTER: Latches.

DEB BOETTCHER: And -- Yeah. Just very ornate and beautiful. Different kinds of doorknobs, materials. Ceramic, glass, and embossed metal doorknobs. It was -- yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Thank goodness for hoarders, I guess.

DEB BOETTCHER: I know. Yeah. [00:47:31]He amassed a million-dollar collection by hoarding all this stuff. And I think of his wife. I guess she just accepted the way George was because they had so -- they had buildings full of stuff. You know, but look at all the treasures that were saved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: Because of his hoarding, his collecting, you know? Things that may have been thrown away, discarded, burned, who knows.

[00:47:59]KAREN BREWSTER: So the inventory is done on that project, eight years later.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: But, as you say, it still needs to be cataloged, accessioned. How long is that going to take?

DEB BOETTCHER: Years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Somebody else's lifetime?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. No. If somebody could just focus on that. My focus right now is to reorganize the archives. But if I was to focus on cataloging that, I maybe, I don't know, I would guess maybe two years, three years, if that was all I was doing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: But --

KAREN BREWSTER: It's never all you're doing.

DEB BOETTCHER: No. And when you're a museum technician, that's what is fun, is you are doing a lot of other things. Because you have to put the exhibits together in the spring.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

DEB BOETTCHER: You have research requests, and that will put the brakes on everything that you're doing sometimes. And you have to clean all your collection storage areas. You have annual reporting. [00:49:02]And it's the museum curator who does the annual

reporting, but the museum technician's the one who goes and measures how many linear feet have -- of archives have been, you know, cataloged this year and reorganized, for example. And you're the one who does, kind of, the counting. And then the museum curator will do the reporting. [00:49:24]But there are a lot of other things that you have to do. If you do catalog, before you catalog something you have to clean it. And if you get new accessions in, which are like new collections, and the curator accessions them, then you might have several historical artifacts that you have to stop and catalog so you can give them a storage location. You can give them a --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: So there are a lot of things that, um, a person if they're just sitting down and just cataloging, like the Rapuzzi Collection, that would be in the ideal world.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: But that's not how it is in real life. You have so many other things to do in addition to what you want to focus on, so that you can get it knocked out. But that's not how it happens.

[00:50:16]KAREN BREWSTER: And there's -- the park is continuing to do archeological excavations, correct? So you continue to --

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, we haven't had any big excavations in awhile.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: So -- 'cause they haven't acquired any areas where they're gonna, for example, restore a building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: But usually, that's what they have to do before they restore a building. And they haven't done anything like that since the Fifth Avenue building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: So that was, maybe, 2010?

[00:50:47]KAREN BREWSTER: They're not doing any work out in Dyea that they're bringing collections in to you?

DEB BOETTCHER: Not this year. They did a salvage 2012 because the Chilkoot Trail, there was a site out there that was eroding into the river, and so they went out and did a salvage. And that was the last time, I think, they brought in any artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it's not like every summer, you're getting big archeological collections?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because that would be very challenging.

DEB BOETTCHER: Yep. And it used to be that archeology cataloged the artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

DEB BOETTCHER: This winter I cataloged artifacts that hadn't -- they had not finished cataloging, and there was nobody on staff to do it, so I finished cataloging those artifacts this past -- past summer. But usually archeology does the cataloging and then -- on a spreadsheet, and then our museum curator will import it into our museum collection system.

[00:51:53]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Now, you mentioned exhibits. So the museum curatorial staff does the exhibits? The interpretation staff doesn't do those?

DEB BOETTCHER: It depends. The exhibits that the museum is responsible for are the Moore House, Mascot Saloon, and Jeff. Smiths Parlor. Those are museum objects. The new exhibit in the visitor center falls under interpretation even though there are museum objects in there. When we do our annual inventory, those objects are controlled property, so we will inventory them. But as far as the care of that exhibit, most of those artifacts are not original, and they don't fall under the museum. They fall under the interpretation department.

[00:52:46]KAREN BREWSTER: So at the Moore House, Mascot, and Jeff. Smiths, do you do new exhibits every year?

DEB BOETTCHER: No, what we do is, we clean them. I clean those spaces every Monday, and I can get behind the railing and clean the artifacts -- well, I shouldn't say the artifacts. I can -- I get behind the railing and clean those areas, whereas the custodians don't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And so, that's once a week throughout the summer. We close those exhibits up. We cover everything up, we take -- oh, in the Moore cabin, we take the re -- it's -- we have panels of newspaper in there to show people what the Moore cabin used to look like when it was covered with newspaper.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

DEB BOETTCHER: We removed that newspaper years ago. I'm trying to think what year because I helped with that project. All the original newspaper, and it's stored here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we had reproduction vinyl newspapers put up. And we put them up. We put them on panels and Velcro, and they go up on the walls every spring. They come down in the fall. So we open and close the exhibits every year. [00:53:59]We used to have temporary exhibits in the visitor center and in the museum, Park Service museum over in the admin. building. And that was something that we did in the spring. One of us would be responsible for a particular exhibit. So I might have the one in the visitor center, and our curator might have the one in the museum. And those were the -- those were temporary exhibits, and they had a theme. And we also did the windows. We also put in exhibits in the windows over in the admin building. Those exhibits had to be -- until we got the Rapuzzi collection, they were usually metal items or ceramic. They were things that could tolerate light. But once we acquired the Rapuzzi Collection, we could select artifacts that were called educational artifacts. They did not have to be accessioned, and they did not have to be treated as museum artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: They could be used for educational purposes, and then we -- we acquired things like chairs, boxes that we could put in those windows. [00:55:09]And so every year we had different window exhibits, and those were really fun. We had a Chilkoot Trail tent exhibit that we made the tent and we put in boxes and silverware, all metal, you know, to -- to display. And -- but we were responsible for these temporary exhibits. And that's when we had the "What's It" exhibit every year for like, three years in the visitor center. And we had the Victorian hardware exhibit. [00:55:38]We had one exhibit that was natural history exhibit, and that was just an exhibit to look at to see what kinds of natural history artifacts we have. And people loved it. We had skulls, bird mounts, and let's say, study skins, fish.

KAREN BREWSTER: Plants? Plant samples.

DEB BOETTCHER: Plants. We had our herbarium specimens, lichens. It was a really fun exhibit, and you didn't have to do any reading. You could just look.

[00:56:09]KAREN BREWSTER: And you have all that kind of stuff in your collections?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: That natural history material also?

DEB BOETTCHER: The natural history material is stored in a different room from our archives and our historical artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you do have some of those items now in your collection?

DEB BOETTCHER: We do. It's not huge, but our herbarium is huge.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: And it's -- we have a really good, beautiful plant -- mounted plants. Pressed, mounted plants in our herbarium. And we also have, I think, the most lichens of any national park in the United States.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

DEB BOETTCHER: The biggest variety of lichens. It's because we go from sea level to alpine, and we've had US Fish -- no, Forest Service lichenologists come in here, and they've done air quality monitoring, and they've collected samples. And we have samples that they've collected. We have a huge collection of lichens.

[00:57:06]KAREN BREWSTER: And so those exhibits at the Moore House, and the Mascot, and Jeff. Smiths, are they -- they're the same every year?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or do you have a theme?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. They're the same every year. We just clean them and open them up in the spring. Uncover everybody. Like the --

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't --

DEB BOETTCHER: All the different artifacts are covered and the manikins are --

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't remove them from those buildings and bring 'em back into storage?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. The only one we do that to is the Moore cabin, and that's to take down the wallpaper panels.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: The squirrels can get in there, and they will.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: So we just remove those to protect them.

[00:57:48]KAREN BREWSTER: Because those buildings aren't heated in the winter, are they?

DEB BOETTCHER: The Moore House is. Jeff. Smiths Parlor, I think it's heated a little bit. And the Mascot, the heat's on. Correct. They are. Well, 'cause they have plumbing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. Yeah, they don't have to be heated to human comfort.

(Break)

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, let's -- ok. We're back from a phone call interruption, and we were going to talk about confirming how many objects. So you just went and looked at the last catalog --

DEB BOETTCHER: Number I assigned.

KAREN BREWSTER: And it was?

DEB BOETTCHER: 61,503.

KAREN BREWSTER: 503. Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: But that is not an indication how many artifacts we have. And I'll explain the difference.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:58:39]DEB BOETTCHER: When you're cataloging, for example, archeological artifacts. Say you have a pile of windowpane, and it's all 7/64 of an inch thick. And it's from the same, exactly the same lot, the same level.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it might be lots of little pieces.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. Let's say it's 105 pieces. 'Cause you've just -- you've just counted out this huge pile of windowpane, divided it into 4/64, 5/64, 6/64, 7/64 of an inch example. 8/64, 9/64.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's the thickness of the glass?

DEB BOETTCHER: It's the thickness. And you measure it with calipers. And you have piles of it, all different thicknesses. All the same thickness is cataloged as one catalog number, 'cause it's all the same -- it's all windowpane, it's all 6/64 of an inch thick. And there might be 105 pieces. That gets one catalog number because it's all the same thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then you measure it for length/width thickness. The thickness is all the same, just you have a range of lengths and widths.

[00:59:57]KAREN BREWSTER: So would you say, 105 pieces of 6/64 glass? This many are this long and wide. This many are this long and wide.

DEB BOETTCHER: No. You would just say, length: 0.1 cm to 10.1 cm length. Width: 0.4 cm to 1.5 cm, for example. And then thickness --

[01:00:27]KAREN BREWSTER: So 61,000 catalog numbers --

DEB BOETTCHER: Is not an indication of how many artifacts you have.

KAREN BREWSTER: The actual items?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. And you might have one catalog number for "Special Events 2016." But in the archives, that might be five file folders with correspondence, memorabilia, posters. You know, so it's not -- it's one catalog number, but it might have sixty-four objects in it.

[01:00:58]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Now you started working on all this in the mid-to-late '90's. Do you know what was happening with their museum collection cataloging before that? Did they have anything organized?

DEB BOETTCHER: Debbie Sanders, I think, was cataloging historical artifacts. And before she came, other people were cataloging. We had -- I don't know who exactly was responsible for this, but we have an accessions book which lists all the collections. And there are over 500 collections. Actually, we're up to, I'll tell you --

KAREN BREWSTER: Because they certainly were doing all those old --

DEB BOETTCHER: Over 644 accessions. So those are kind of like collections.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And there were accessions in the book before Debbie Sanders, our first curator, was hired. And I'm not sure who was responsible for that.

[01:02:01]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, they certainly were doing archeological work with all that historic building restoration.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: So obviously they were acquiring material, and --

DEB BOETTCHER: That was Denver Service Center who --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: -- was doing the original collecting around here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And they took the artifacts, I believe, back to Denver, cataloged them there, and then sent them back to us.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: So that was before we had our first curator even.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And they sent them back here to some building.

DEB BOETTCHER: Yeah. They're stored in the Mascot --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Collection storage area.

KAREN BREWSTER: They were put someplace.

DEB BOETTCHER: Yep.

[01:02:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um, what was I just going to ask about that? Now I can't remember. Um --

DEB BOETTCHER: You asked who was responsible for the collections.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well yeah, but -- anyway, I'll think of it again. Oh, I know one thing.

Karl mentioned when I talked to him, Martin Itjen -- one of Martin Itjen's old vehicles, is that familiar-sounding to you?

DEB BOETTCHER: Um-hm. We have one of his vehicles left, and that was the original No. 1 Skagway street car. And that was restored this past, not this year, but a year ago.

KAREN BREWSTER: So 2017?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: And --

DEB BOETTCHER: And we had a group of people come up here and work on it. It was moved to another building, over in the harbor, and they conserved it. They cleaned it up, drained some fluids, fixed things that -- actually, conserved it. They didn't restore it. And labeled what the different levels control.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

[01:03:48]DEB BOETTCHER: And it -- it's stored now, but eventually maybe it will go on display over in one of the Fifth Avenue buildings that they're restoring right now. I hope.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Yeah, can it fit inside a building?

DEB BOETTCHER: It could. It's not that big of a vehicle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: It's like a mini-bus size. You know, the little tour buses we have around here? You know the vans.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So like twelve-seater?

DEB BOETTCHER: It wasn't designed that way. It had like a carriage on the back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: So it could maybe hold twelve people, but it's -- they aren't regular seats like a coach. Like a, let's say, a bus. The seats are a bench seat on either side in the back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um-hm. Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then the driver was in the front. And that belonged to Martin Itjen.
[01:04:38]There were three street cars. Two of 'em were -- they were commissioned by the military. The two other ones, No. 2 and 3. And then I believe they were destroyed after World War II. And this is the only remaining one. And it was too small for their needs, so thank goodness. Or we maybe wouldn't have any street cars.

[01:04:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know how it came to the Park Service?

DEB BOETTCHER: It was in the Rapuzzi Collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, it was part of the Rapuzzi Collection?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. And Martin Itjen -- we have Martin Itjen's house.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: It's the blue building across from the visitor center.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's the Alaska Geographic store.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. That's his house. And then the museum used to be -- Karl probably told you this, over on Sixth Avenue? It used to be --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, the Jeff. Smith Parlor Museum?

DEB BOETTCHER: Parlor Museum. Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it was over by the bank.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: He said, yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then it was moved across the street, and it became the hose and ladder company. It belonged to the fire hall, I believe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: And Martin Itjen acquired it, and he made it into a museum. And that was at the end of his tour. People would get to go into his museum. That was moved by George Rapuzzi over to its current location.

KAREN BREWSTER: On Second.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. On Second, off of Broadway. [01:05:51]It -- he turned it -- he maintained it as a museum, added more artifacts, and he had tours. He died in 1986, and I think his museum was moved -- that museum was moved about 1963 or '64, to its current location.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And he had tours in there, but he also worked, so, I mean, I don't know how he did both. But I think he had somebody helping over there giving tours.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we have pictures of Edna giving a tour, too, so she helped over there. I don't know how long he was open, if he was only open when the ferry was in. I'm not sure.

[01:06:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and there weren't 10,000 million tourists coming in every day.

DEB BOETTCHER: No. Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it might've been easier.

DEB BOETTCHER: But he did give tours because we have posters in the collection that were painted by Bea Lingle.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: A local person. And I asked her, what -- where were these little posters used? They were small posters. And she said, they were used in different businesses to encourage people to come.

KAREN BREWSTER: To -- to --

DEB BOETTCHER: To Jeff. Smiths Parlor Museum.

KAREN BREWSTER: Fun.

DEB BOETTCHER: George's tours. [01:07:04]And we have, like, times, and the times would be whited out. Like one to three, ok. Nope. Two to four. You can see they were changed. So I guess it depended on his schedule when they could have a tour or somebody's schedule because they weren't open all the time. And we have one of the, I think, priceless things we have in our collection is the register, where people could sign in and then write their comments, when George had the museum. And people I know as adults, they signed in when they were children.

KAREN BREWSTER: Aww.

[01:07:43]DEB BOETTCHER: And you could ask them about what -- and we did ask people, 'cause we were trying to figure out, what did Lady Lou do? 'Cause we heard, you know, conflicting reports of -- 'cause these people -- these people. These automatons could move.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: And somebody'd say, "Oh, she was in the bathroom." So when you opened the door, she would raise her arms up and scream. And somebody'd say, "Oh, her eyes would light up." And you know, we didn't know, but they all had impressions that she did something. The people that were local people that I had seen their signature when they were children, and I asked them later. Or we had a meeting and invited local people in to tell us what they remember about Martin Itjen museum.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cool.

DEB BOETTCHER: Soapy Smiths Museum. And that's where, yeah, we got a lot of these reports, but just seeing these people's names when they were children, it was --

KAREN BREWSTER: That's fun.

DEB BOETTCHER: It was wonderful.

[01:08:41]KAREN BREWSTER: So also in your collections, do you have oral history recordings and old film?

DEB BOETTCHER: Oh, we do. We have so many oral history -- well, I shouldn't say so many. I don't know what to compare it to. We have a lot. And one of our volunteers organized them because they come in different mediums. We have oral histories on cassettes. Some are on video. Some have been transcribed. Some have DVD's and CD's made from them. They've been digitized. So they've been organized, and you can search by name and find out -- and what's really helpful is if it's been transcribed, you know. So we had -- we sent a lot of them out to Safe Sound Archives, and they digitized them and transcribed them. So they're very usable now. And we have some more that have been sent out to University of Alaska, I think, that are being digitized right now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:09:50]DEB BOETTCHER: So we have an extensive collection of oral histories, and when Frank Norris -- no. Frank Norris? -- was doing the administrative history, we have lots of oral history recordings from that period, as well.

KAREN BREWSTER: So he recorded -- when he interviewed people for that admin history, he recorded them?

DEB BOETTCHER: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Great.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we have those filed as well. Archived, I should say. And they're all kept in a building that has constant humidity and temperature. It's regulated.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: So they're in a safe environment.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:10:35]DEB BOETTCHER: We have a lot of film, and film in the form of negatives, slides, and reel-to-reel film. Not so many reel-to-reel films, but we have some, and all of those have been frozen. We had a project where Harpers Ferry conservation people came up here, and it was called, "Cold Storage Project." We had to measure how many feet -- cubic feet of film archives we had. Film meaning negatives, slides, and reel-to-reel film. They bought, or we bought -- somebody bought two freezers, and they are just full of boxes. Those are what we put them in. We put them --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, the archival boxes?

DEB BOETTCHER: Archival boxes. We put them in sleeves, all the slides and all the negatives in sleeves. And then you fill those boxes with foam. You double wrap them, put them in a metal sleeve, and then you put it in a plastic, you know, bag. And have to make 'em airtight, so you have to tape them up really well. And they all go into the freezer. And we have forty-seven boxes like that in the freezers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[01:11:59]DEB BOETTCHER: And if somebody requests a slide, we say, no. Please, please, can you look at a photograph instead. Because to take something out of the freezer and let it stabilize for a couple days, and then open the box, and then find the slide, and then scan the slide, and then put it all back together and put it back in the freezer is a very -- it's a very time -- it takes a lot of time. It's a long process.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I would think if somebody requested a slide, while you have the box out and reacclimated, just scan the whole box.

DEB BOETTCHER: Do you know how long it takes to scan the whole box of slides?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

DEB BOETTCHER: I've scanned some slides, and you do something else while you're scanning slides.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: Because they take a lot of time. You put twenty slides in a little bracket thing, and you scan it, and it takes, I don't know, five minutes plus? So meanwhile, you're doing something else.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And then you go back. And then you have to label your slides. I mean, digitally label.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right. You give 'em a file name.

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. It takes a lot of time. That would be a wonderful volunteer project.

[01:13:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so the years you were here, sort of the late '90's, early 2000's, I have an impression that things at the park were somewhat difficult administratively. Do you have any memory of that?

DEB BOETTCHER: I don't because I worked another job, and I just came here part time. So if there were problems, I wasn't involved. I just worked for the curator, and we got along just fine. And I started working full time when I retired from White Pass in about 2008.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[01:13:48]DEB BOETTCHER: After we required -- after we acquired the Rapuzzi Collection, that's when I was hired full time, for a term position. And then I got a second term position, a different position, so it was eight years. But I worked for the curator, and I wasn't involved in -- if there were problems in admin, I -- I wasn't affected.

[01:14:11]KAREN BREWSTER: It didn't trick -- the problems in leadership didn't trickle down?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. No. And when I was doing the inventory, I wasn't even in this building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: I was in the other buildings. I'd just check in in the morning, might enter my -- the data from the day before in the computer, and then go off and inventory and clean and then store. So, no. I wasn't involved in any park politics if there, you know, were problems.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's good.

DEB BOETTCHER: I wasn't involved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Thank goodness.

[01:14:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Were you ever aware of how the community felt about the park and what the park was doing?

DEB BOETTCHER: Initially, when I came here and I was volunteering at the park, I felt there was a real difference. The park -- some of the park people felt it was us and them. And I was one of them, actually, because I wasn't employed by the park when I first came here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And I liked being in the park because it gave me something to do and interesting people to work with, and I was getting to work in plants, so -- I had studied botany. I was really glad to be getting back to working with natural history items.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

[01:15:31]DEB BOETTCHER: And then I became employed by White Pass, like two years later, and so I was on both sides of the fence.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: And a lot of people -- I shouldn't say a lot. Some people at White Pass were really suspect because I worked for the Park Service, too. But some of them became good friends of mine. But I could feel there was an animosity by some people towards our park. Towards their park also. Towards the park. Because they didn't like all the tourists coming to town, and since the Park Service was responsible for restoring some of these buildings and was a presence in the park, that was why so many people were coming to Skagway. [01:16:22]And they felt they liked it the way it was before. But on the other hand, I don't know that White Pass would've been so successful if it hadn't

been for the tourism. And they were benefiting from all the tourists coming because they had jobs. Because White Pass was the biggest, probably, excursion, most popular excursion in town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: So there's still people that probably resent the Park Service having come in and establ -- well, because a park was established here, but I -- I don't think there's a lot of those people.

[01:17:00]KAREN BREWSTER: So you feel like it's changed since you first got here?

DEB BOETTCHER: I think so, but I -- I'm glad I got to work for White Pass because I think they -- that the people that I worked with that I became friends with saw that the Park Service was, you know, they weren't the bad neighbors.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. You were --

DEB BOETTCHER: I was -- and there were -- Park Service also employed a lot of local people. They employed people when the railroad shut down. And some of those people -- one of those people I know just recently retired from the park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[01:17:39]DEB BOETTCHER: And so the Park Service provided jobs for local people. So I think maybe the opinion has changed a little bit since I came here because their friends and neighbors, relatives, have been employed by the park.

[01:17:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And maybe they've seen -- Park Service in general, you know, people move around -- tend to move around a lot. But maybe here there were people who came and were employed and settled here, and maybe that helped people in the community see, oh they're not so bad?

DEB BOETTCHER: I think so, too. And also, a boost to the economy is the Park Service people could pay some of the rents here in town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

DEB BOETTCHER: And I think that -- that was helpful.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

DEB BOETTCHER: Because it gave people renters year-round. They weren't just seasonal renters. [01:18:31]But one thing that has changed, though, is a lot of the companies now have bought some of these private homes, and they are only occupied seasonally. But the Park Service is here year-round and renting from people year-round, and I think that has helped the economy a lot.

[01:18:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, just from talking to you and seeing you here in your office, I can tell you've enjoyed this work with the museum collections.

DEB BOETTCHER: It's been wonderful. I have learned so much, but it -- it's -- the Park Service has been a wonderful place to work because I feel like I'm always learning something, and it's never the same, day after day after day. And I've worked in canneries, lots of canneries around Alaska, and it's the same work, day in and day out. [01:19:28]But I come to work here, and I think I'm going to do this today, and then I end up doing something totally different. It just depends if I get a research request in the morning, then it's gonna -- that's gonna change my day a little bit, my plans. But very seldom does the day turn out the way I think it is going to, or the way I plan it to be. It just -- it just doesn't happen that way.

[01:19:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Is there -- looking back through all the years and the different things you've done, are there certain things or certain times that have been particularly challenging or harder?

DEB BOETTCHER: Here in the park?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. This job.

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, I think one of the most challenging parts of this job was when the archives changed from record groups, which I was very comfortable with, to this new archival system. And that took me a good couple years before I started feeling comfortable with it. And now, I'm -- I -- to me it's a challenge to figure out where the -- see those two boxes right there?

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: Those are 19 -- 2018 archives, just generated from our park alone, right there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Trying to figure out where every single piece of paper goes.

[01:20:49]KAREN BREWSTER: And you don't just put that whole box as it -- itself. You have to --

DEB BOETTCHER: No. I have to decide, this goes under historic preservation. This goes under natural resources. And where in natural resources? Oh, it goes under the toads. It goes under the amphibians reports. And where does this piece of paper go? Oh, this goes under special events. Which special events? Does it go under our park events? Does it go under our 25th anniversary events, centennial events?

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I'm -- I'm --

[01:21:17]DEB BOETTCHER: So every single piece of paper that's been generated in the park, and these are -- most of them I've gotten from emails. We also collect newspaper clippings. You have to figure out where they go.

[01:21:29]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it's nice that the park is creating an archive of its own material that it produces, like the reports and all that. I don't know that that happens every place.

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, we call it administrative archives, and we have 'em for every year.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's great.

DEB BOETTCHER: So from 2010, we have administrative archives, and it's material that's been generated in the park, like all the reports that archeology puts out or maybe natural resources. They put out a lot of -- a lot of reports. Maintenance, we'll get their reports on buildings they've restored, for example, or treatments they've made, and so they all get filed in their respective places.

[01:22:05]KAREN BREWSTER: And then as employees leave or retire, do their own personal file cabinets of stuff, like former superintendents and things?

DEB BOETTCHER: Correct. Unfortunately, those are stacking up because we can't -- and also these are kind of stacking up, too, because we can't really -- we can't really incorporate them until the other archives have been reorganized.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:22:29]DEB BOETTCHER: But as I'm reorganizing some, I am incorporating them because they're used. And I'll give you an example, natural resources. Every year I'm asked to see the bird surveys from the year before and the amphibian surveys. So those have

already been reorganized. As I'm acquiring new materials every -- every summer, I'm incorporating those because they're used so much. And archeology's the same way. They'll use those reports. They'll ask to see the Chilkoot Trail report from three years ago, and if it's archived, then I can quickly go get it and you know, scan it for them. Or they can come over here and look at the report and find the data. And they use those a lot, so those I try to keep up with. And some of the, um, memos that we get are really important to our administration, so I'll try to incorporate those into the admin archives because they -- they're important. They're going to be used.

[01:23:35]KAREN BREWSTER: So you currently have a museum curator?

DEB BOETTCHER: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

DEB BOETTCHER: We have had three museum curators. Our last one left in July this summer, 2017 -- 2018. She went back to Hawaii Volcanoes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And who was that?

DEB BOETTCHER: That was Krsti Ausfresser.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: A-U-S-F-R-E-S-S-E-R. Kristi spelled K-R-S-T-I.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And she was here about two and a half years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So after Samantha Richert retired?

DEB BOETTCHER: Samantha Richert went to Washington State.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, it was Deb who retired. Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Debbie Sanders retired.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: Then Samantha Richert. And after that, Krsti Ausfresser.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

DEB BOETTCHER: And we don't have one right now. [01:24:28]And I was planning on retiring in May, but if we don't have a curator by then, I will stay if the park allows me to, until we do get a curator.

KAREN BREWSTER: You need somebody here.

DEB BOETTCHER: We need somebody here, and also I would like to be able to help the new curator get kind of established.

[01:24:50]KAREN BREWSTER: You haven't wanted to be the curator?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. The technician, I think, has the more interesting job. The problem with not having a curator is I get asked to do like, reports, and I'm not familiar with how to do the reports, so I have to be walked through how to do the reports, 'cause they are required every year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

DEB BOETTCHER: But fortunately the new area -- regional curator is very helpful.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's good.

DEB BOETTCHER: And she will help me. And also other people who have done reports, you know, they come to my aid. [01:25:29]But I find that the hands-on working with artifacts and the archives is really enjoyable. So -- And our curators also have gone to museum training, so they know how to store things properly. They know the laws, and I -- I'm really glad just being a technician.

[01:25:51]KAREN BREWSTER: So to finish up, anything else you want to say to conclude this?

DEB BOETTCHER: Well, I appreciate Park Service taking me on because it's -- it was not something that I had ever thought about doing, but I have learned so much. And if anybody's interested in being a technician or conservation, a conservator, I had never even worked with conservators until this job, but there's so much to learn, and you're continually learning, and it's never boring. I just found it -- find it a wonderful, wonderful job. If you -- yeah. If you like being -- if you like being challenged.

KAREN BREWSTER: And --

DEB BOETTCHER: And I find that there's so much to learn, and you never stop learning in this job. It's never boring.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, thank you so much for your time this afternoon. So unless there's anything else?

DEB BOETTCHER: No. Thank you, Karen.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, thanks.