

**Cooperstown Graduate Program
Research and Fieldwork Course (HMUS 520)
Oral History Project
Fall 2008**

Interview with Howard Talbot by Matthew Cox

Interviewer: Cox, Matthew

Interviewee: Talbot, Howard

Date: November 8th, 2008

Location of interview: Cooperstown, New York

Archive or Library Repository: New York State Historical Association Library, Cooperstown, NY

Description:

Born in 1925, in New Berlin, New York, Howard Talbot has had the privilege and responsibility of working for one of the most important sports related destinations in the country. Mr. Talbot served as an accountant, assistant treasurer, treasurer, and eventually director of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, beginning in 1951. His many years at the National Baseball Hall of Fame have left him with invaluable stories and experiences not only for the baseball fan, but also for the museum professional.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame was started in 1939 in Cooperstown, New York, and a young Howard Talbot happened to be in the crowd. Mr. Talbot served the director of the Hall of Fame from 1968 to 1993 and worked very hard to make the NBHOF a world-class museum. Some of his goals were to improve the museum's education program, become an accredited institution, and better the security of the collection. He also had the opportunity to interact with many legends of baseball, such as Ted Williams, Warren Spahn, and Tom Seaver, and his stories serve as reminder that these sports heroes had a human side. These stories are some of the most interesting material in the interview.

While Mr. Talbot's memories about the NBHOF and the game of baseball are especially interesting, these subjects by no mean define him. Mr. Talbot's recollections extend from his childhood growing up in Edmeston, New York, to his service in the Pacific Theater during World War II, and coming back to find work and start a family in the post-war years.

The answers provided in this interview show some level of familiarity with journalists and writers, which seemed to prevent Mr. Talbot from telling longer stories. This does not mean that the interview lacks detail or description, just that the interviewee regulated the length of his answers. Mr. Talbot's interview sheds light on a variety of topics and his comfort while being recorded makes him an enjoyable and useful interview subject. Shorter pauses and terms such as "um" and "uh" have been left out of the transcript, as well as the word "and" when it is used to finish a sentence. These changes have been done to increase the readability of the transcript and not take any focus away from Mr. Talbot's message.

Key Terms

National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

Major League Baseball

American Association of Museums

Accreditation

Pacific Theater

Educational Programming

Camp Chenango

Active/Inactive List

Ted Williams

Warren Spahn

Tom Seaver

Joe DiMaggio's Jersey and Cap

**Cooperstown Graduate Program
Oral History Project Fall 2008**

HT: Howard Talbot

MC: Matthew Cox

[START OF TRACK 1, 0:00]

MC:

Today is November 8th [2008], 10 A.M.; this is Matthew Cox's interview of Howard Talbot. We are in Cooperstown, New York, in Mr. Talbot's kitchen, and this is done for the Cooperstown Graduate Program. So, if you would just indulge me, could I have your full name please?

HT:

My full name is Howard C. Talbot Jr.

MC:

Were you named after your father?

HT:

I was. Mmhmm.

MC:

Alright. Where were you born? Or where and when were you born?

HT:

Well, I was born on October 6, 1925. In the Parda Hospital in New Berlin, New York. I think that I was the first one from the town of Edmeston, village of Edmeston, to be born in a hospital. Everyone else of my generation that I can remember was born at home. But I think I was the only one born in this little hospital in New Berlin.

MC:

That's certainly a nice little claim to fame. [Laughs]

HT:

[Laughs] That's right.

MC:

Where is Edmeston in relation to Cooperstown?

HT:

Well, Edmeston is a small town that is located about 15 to 18 miles west of Cooperstown.

It's a small town of only, probably, well when I was living there I'm gonna say eight to nine hundred people.

MC:

We already mentioned your father, but who was the rest of your family?

HT:

Well, I have my wife, Alice, of whom I've been married to for sixty years. We have three children. We have two daughters and a son and our one daughter, Julie, was a vocal music teacher in Laurence Central School for thirty-two or three years. She is now retired and she and her husband live in Morris. Then we have another daughter, Judy, who lives in Liverpool, north of Syracuse, and she is the supervisor of parks for Oneida Shores Park on Oneida Lake. Then we have a son, who is living in St. Petersburg, Florida and he's been down there now for five or six years I guess.

MC:

And do you have any brothers or sisters?

HT:

No. I had a sister, but she died at about eighteen months old of [pause to think], I believe it was spinal meningitis. In those days they didn't have the drugs or the way to treat things of that nature that they have today. So, she died at about eighteen months.

MC:

How long did you stay in Edmeston?

HT:

Well, I stayed in Edmeston until I was probably about a sophomore in High School. Well, in fact I lived there, but I went to school there till I was a sophomore. Then my mother and father sent me to the Manlius Military Academy in Manlius [New York] and I was out there for two years [coughs], but still living in Edmeston. Then I was in service for two and a half years during World War II and when I came back I still lived in Edmeston for a time, till I met my wife and we were married, and then we moved to Cooperstown.

MC:

When did you go into the service? What year was that?

HT:

Oh goodness, I'm not certain. Probably about 19 [pause] 40, 41. I'm not, I'm really not certain about that date.

MC:

Where did you serve?

HT:

Pardon me?

MC:

Where did you serve?

HT:

Well, I served in the two outfits. I served in the, started out in the tank destroyers and then I went from there to the armored field artillery. I was sent from, quite an experience I had actually, when I was still in the tank destroyers we were going over to the South Pacific and they sent me on an advance unit with the train of all of our equipment, the tanks, the destroyers and so on, from Fort Hood, Texas, to Seattle, Washington. I had to ride on a flat car going over the Rocky Mountains and that was quite an experience. I went from there, from Seattle, over to Hawaii and we were going with the idea of joining the Tenth Army [START TRACK 2, 0:05] and being in on the invasion of Okinawa. But our ship had problems going to Hawaii so we were late getting there and they didn't wait for us, they went on. So, we got there and took our jungle training and then they didn't know what to do with us, but we spent most of our time either in Pearl Harbor loading and unloading ships for about six months and then I was sent on LST from there to the Philippines, to Leyte, with the idea of being in on the invasion of Japan. But we never invaded Japan, so I really was very fortunate, never saw any action.

MC:

What was that like? Being on the edge of going into battle? Were you tense? Were you relieved? What were your feelings?

HT:

Well, we never got close enough that I really had that, any kind of a feeling. I just had in the back of my mind that eventually I probably would be in some kind of a battle, but it

was never brought close enough to us so that we could feel or say now like "Well next week we're gonna be in on the invasion of Japan or we're gonna be doing this". So I never really got to that point of coming close enough to going into battle to have any feeling of that nature to be truthful.

MC:

So you said after the War you came home, got married. Where did you meet your wife?

HT:

Well, her family moved into Edmeston right after World War II. They had been living down in, around the metropolitan area of New York [City]. My wife was still working in New York [City], but she came home to visit her parents and they had an opening at New York Central for her type of work and they offered her more money than she was getting in New York [City], so she stayed up here and went to work. We both went to the same church, the First Baptist Church of, or Second Baptist Church of Edmeston. So I met her actually through church. That's how I met her.

MC:

And what brought you to Cooperstown after you were married?

HT:

Well, I had been working over here for about, a year and half to two years before we were married, at the Leatherstocking Corporation after I had graduated from the School of Commerce in Utica. So my job was here and I had been driving back and forth, still living in Edmeston, but then after we were married, of course my job was here, so we looked for a place and we couldn't find anyplace immediately, but we did find a place up on Pioneer [Street] that we could rent. We did that from October until May. Then we

found an apartment we moved into and we bought another house on Walnut Street, lived there for awhile, but our family started coming along and the house wasn't big enough, so then we moved up here where we were at, 95 Pioneer [Street].

MC:

What was the Leatherstocking Corporation?

HT:

I worked for the Leatherstocking Corporation as an accountant and that was the headquarters of all their accounting for all the things in Cooperstown, with the exception of the Iroquois Farm. Some of my accounts that I had to work with was the gymnasium account and also the Baseball Hall of Fame account, and the Cooper Inn and the Otesaga Hotel. In fact, one of the first jobs I had, first year I worked here, twice a year was to inventory everything in the Otesaga Hotel. Because in those days in the winter time, it was a girl's school, the Knox School for Girls, and in the, they closed the school out in June and brought different furniture and so forth in, and it was a hotel during the summer. Then in September again they would take the hotel out and in would come the girls. So I had to inventory all of the beds, night stands, chairs, tables, and everything of that nature.

MC:

It sounds like a very long project.

HT:

It was. It took about [chuckle], I guess about four or five days to do it all.

MC:

And then, so, with all of these different experiences, what brought you to the National Baseball Hall of Fame?

HT:

Well, as I say, I had the Hall of Fame account, accounting back in those days at Leatherstocking [Corporation] because everything was done there. Then they decided that they would take the accounts and move them to the respective places. In other words, not only the Hall of Fame, but they did the same thing with NYSHA. [START TRACK 3, 0:10] All the accounting for New York State Historical was down there and they moved all of that and the Farmer's Museum up to NYSHA. So, they asked me if I would like to go with the account to the Hall of Fame and add other responsibilities to my job and I said yes because I love baseball, so that's how I got to go over to the Hall of Fame.

MC:

You said you loved baseball, what teams did you root for, what teams do you still root for?

HT:

Well, my two teams that I've always kind of held dear to my heart so to speak was the Boston Red Sox in the American League and the Philadelphia Phillies in the National League. But, I didn't really show that very much while I was at the Hall of Fame because we worked with all clubs and we couldn't really show partiality to one over another. So I kind of had to hold that in [chuckle] and not publicize that much while I was there working.

MC:

How did you feel about, how did you feel when the Phillies won the World Series, a couple weeks ago wasn't it?

HT:

Oh, this year.

MC:

Yeah, this year.

HT:

Well, I think they were basically a better team than the Rays were. Although, I've seen the Rays play a couple times this year because our son living in Florida, I've been down to visit him and we went to a game in spring training. Then we went to a game also last September, so I've seen them play and they were a good team, there's no doubt about it, but they didn't have quite the experience and quite the method to go about winning the World Series that the Phillies did and I was very pleased that they won.

MC:

So, you started off as an accountant, moved from Leatherstocking to the Hall of Fame, and you said you added some responsibilities to that job. What were, what did you do at the Hall of Fame?

HT:

Well, to begin with not a lot more. They had a small gift shop and I worked in the gift shop selling a few souvenirs. I also was working somewhat with the exhibits even, to put the exhibits on display because we didn't have but only, I think there were five of us there working at the Hall of Fame. Bob Quinn was the director, who was sitting at a desk out in the main part of the museum just answering questions of the public. He had a secretary and then we had one girl who worked on admissions and in the gift shop and a custodian and myself. And that was it. So we kind of were a jack-of-all-trades, master of

none, you might say. If somebody were sick I would take over and maybe sell the tickets and souvenirs and just pick things up as they, as we could see what needed to be done. And that went on for several years and then we built a new addition to the Hall of Fame and of course that meant adding more help and we then had to hire someone to do more work with exhibits and so it just kind of mushroomed from there on.

MC:

When was the new addition built?

HT:

1951 was the first addition.

MC:

Did you have to do a lot of extra research or really do anything else to become more of an expert on baseball?

HT:

Well, I didn't have to. I did it on my own. We had a fellow there by the name of Ernest Lanigan, who was the historian. He had more baseball history in his head than are in any books there have ever been written about it. But we never could get him to sit down, as we are, and record all the things that he knew. He was more interested I think really in the minor leagues. He would pick minor league players up and follow them through their career until they became a major league player. Then he would drop them and go back and pick up more minor leaguers again. That was just a little quirk that he had. But he was an invaluable source to us for many, many years and his cousin I think, J.G. Taylor Spink, is the one who published the "Sporting News".

MC:

In 1939, I've read in a New York Times article that you were at the first Hall of Fame Induction. Would you tell me a little bit about that?

HT:

The first?

MC:

The first Hall of Fame ceremony in 1939?

HT:

Oh, in '39 [START TRACK 4, 0:15], yes. Well first of all, they had games being played on Doubleday Field almost every day, at least two or three times a week from early May right straight through into September to help celebrate baseball's hundredth anniversary. One of the games that was played in the month of May was between Manlius Military Academy and Albany Academy. At that time I was going to Manlius and playing in the band, so I came with the team and the band and they had a parade down Main Street, so I was playing in the band for that back in May in '39. When the June 12th ceremony was held, my father brought me over to it so I could see it. So I was lucky to be here on that particular day when they had the induction and opening of the Hall of Fame.

MC:

Were you able to see any of the players from where you were or do you remember...

HT:

Oh yeah, of course there was quite a crowd and I was not as tall and as big as I am now, so there were some things I did not see, but I did see Ty Cobb coming in. He was late getting there and he worked his way right straight through the crowd up to platform,

climbed up over the platform railing to get on the platform for the ceremony. So I do remember that. But I saw Babe Ruth and the others that were there for it, yes.

MC:

Being there for that ceremony, did that make you any more excited to be working for the Hall of Fame all those years later?

HT:

I don't think so, no. I mean it was, in fact when I first did their account, or when I moved over there in '51 permanently, I didn't even recall the fact that I had been here in '39. It didn't register as a great thing of importance to me at that point.

MC:

Interesting. Why do you think that was?

HT:

I don't know. It meant a lot to me in '39, but course quite a few years had gone by before I came over there and worked permanently. So it just didn't have that much of an impression on me to make me jump up with joy that I had been there in '39 and then going there to work permanently in '51. But through the years yes, I have thought it was quite unusual that that would be the case as far as that's concerned.

MC:

So, you started off kind of accounting, like you said, and doing a lot of other responsibilities, but what was your next step?

HT:

I think the next step was that Paul Crew, who was the president of the Hall of Fame, made me Assistant Treasurer. So I did a little bit more of the accounting that I had not been doing before. That went on for a number of years and finally I was made Treasurer for the Hall of Fame. So then I was in complete charge of all the accounting for the museum and would have to make up all the reports and everything to the board of directors and so on. Then for the last twenty-five years I was made director and course that meant I was in charge of the entire operation. Something that I enjoyed immensely and it gave me a chance to get to really know more about some of the Hall of Famers themselves, personally. We had a policy that I instigated a few years after I'd been in that if a Hall of Famer died it behooved us to go to their service, if services were held, to at least let the family know that, how much their coming to Cooperstown every year for the induction ceremony meant to us, by coming to the service for the Hall of Famer.

MC:

Did you ever get any feedback from the families?

HT:

Oh yes, yes. It was very well received. I don't know whether it's still done today or not, but it, we always had a wonderful note or something from the family thanking us for that.

MC:

What made you decide to start that policy?

HT:

Well, I just felt it was a way that we could get closer to the Hall of Famer's family themselves. Because when the Hall of Famer himself died, that in a sense might terminate our association with that family. [START TRACK 5, 0:20] We wanted to continue relationships with them. We were looking to for additional material to put on display and that maybe would help us a little bit by furthering our relationship with the rest of the family. I just felt it was a nice thing to do to.

MC:

I think you said, but what year did you become the director again?

HT:

Well let's see, I retired in '93 and 25 years from that would be...is that '68? I'm not very good at math without a paper and pencil.

MC:

I believe so, yeah. So you retired in '93?

HT:

Right around '93.

MC:

And you were there...

HT:

25 years prior to that, whatever that would be.

MC:

I'm a history major, so I'm not very good with numbers either. Do you remember the process of how you were chosen to become the director? I mean, were there other candidates was it...

HT:

No, there was really no big deal. We had several directors, Bob Quinn was our first director and he came from the Boston Braves. Basically he was there maybe only two or three years because he was along in years and his main responsibilities, as I said before, was to sit at a desk out in the museum proper and answer questions that fans coming in would ask him. And then we had another one by the name of Sid Keener, who came from St. Louis. He worked for the St. Louis Post Dispatch and then he was there, I've forgotten just how many years now, maybe about 10, 15 years before he died. When he died they named Ken Smith, who was a baseball reporter with the New York Daily Mirror. The Mirror had just folded before we needed him and so he was given the job as director. It was a job that I think they kind of looked for someone like that to take it over, who had been familiar with baseball and yet did not at that point have a job. They were really not paying a whole lot for salary for the director. The commissioner's office and the two leagues did help somewhat. To start with we got five thousand dollars each, from the National, American Leagues and the Commissioner's office. That was designed to pay the salary and expenses of the director. So there was fifteen thousand dollars we had to spend on a director, which wasn't much. Then when Ken Smith actually retired, they talked about a director, and I had been there long enough, so I certainly had had enough

experience, so they just simply asked me to become director. There was no search made, so that's just how it happened.

MC:

How do you feel that kind of moved into that position, when now it's probably such a competitive search?

HT:

Well, I was very pleased to be named director and because I had been there long enough so that I could see avenues that we could improve ourselves. One of the avenues that I thought quite strongly about was the fact that I would like to see us become accredited with the American Association of Museums. So we started working on that and we did have an inspection and found that there were several avenues where we were lacking and that we were to shore up those avenues and have another inspection to see if we could pass and be accredited. That was never accomplished before I retired, so I never did get museum accredited before I retired, but that was one of the things I wanted to do.

MC:

When had you heard of museum accreditation?

HT:

Well, we belonged to the American Association of Museums and had for a number of years and we are classified as an educational institution and qualify under the 501C3 rule, tax wise. I was just interested in it enough to pursue information about the American Association of Museums and [START TRACK 6, 0:25] this was a part of their programs that they offered and this is how I became apprised of it.

MC:

What about it, when you were reading about accreditation, what made you, what did you see, that made you want to achieve that?

HT:

Well, there was only one other hall of fame, which was the Hall of Fame of Great Americans in New York, prior to the Baseball Hall of Fame. I felt that we were really something special. We just weren't another hometown museum so to speak. I wanted to do everything to bring us up to the top quality museum that we should be. Most all of the museums that are first class museums are accredited by the American Association of Museums, so I thought this would be one way to raise our level a little bit by becoming accredited.

MC:

When you were going through that inspection and things, at that time what were the strengths of the Hall of Fame?

HT:

What were the?

MC:

The strengths of the Hall of Fame?

HT:

Well, the strength lied pretty much with the way in which we exhibited everything. The operation, the day-to-day operation we had, and the amount of staff we had for various responsibilities. One of the things that they did not like, or felt we should improve upon, was our educational part of it. Which we really at that point in time were not doing much with education other than having school groups come into the museum and take a tour

through, and we would guide them through the museum, not just turn them loose. That was the only educational portion that we were doing. But since then that has drastically improved and has gone to the point now that, well I can't extemporize on it because I'm not there anymore and have been out for quite a few years, but it's by computers, they can do so many wonderful things [that] classes will see in Atlanta, Georgia right from Cooperstown.

MC:

The distance learning.

HT:

So this is something they are doing right now.

MC:

[During] your time as director, you guys did a lot of great exhibits, what was one of your favorite objects or exhibits from your time at the Hall of Fame?

HT:

Well, [chuckles] that's a hard question.

MC:

Well, was there something that you'd see that would make you go, "wow, that is amazing" or something like that?

HT:

I think one of the ones that I can remember the most was the Ted Williams statue that we have. That was carved by an artist and he did several paintings of Ted before he did the actual sculpture himself, but it was a very realistic thing. Even the socks looked like wool socks and the wrinkles in his hands looked very realistic and it was all one piece of wood

except for the bat. He had a bat in his hand over his shoulder and the bat was separate piece of wood. Everything else was all one piece. It was dedicated and Mrs. Yawkey was here and Ted was here for it. It was done on Hall of Fame weekend and that was the only time I ever saw Ted Williams break down and shed a tear.

MC:

Do you remember what year that was?

HT:

I don't to be honest, no.

MC:

Had you met Ted Williams previously?

HT:

Yes.

MC:

Do you have any particular, any vivid memories of Ted Williams, aside from the statue?

HT:

Well, Ted was of course an ardent fisherman, I know practically every year for Hall of Fame weekend he would come flying in from somewhere up in Alaska or some distant place where he had gone fishing. He did love to fish a great deal. One thing that always struck me with Ted, and this may be a little bit on the other side of baseball, but he never wore a necktie. He would go out to a big [START TRACK 7, 0:30] dinner, everybody was in tuxedos, he would never wear a necktie. That was just Ted, that was his life style. I have wonderful memories about many of the Hall of Famers actually because they are, well as being director I got more close to them, corresponded with them more, talked

with them on the phone, saw more of them, and so on. Some of the things for example, that I can remember, with Warren Spahn. First of all, when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame, his brother, who worked for the railroad, lived in Rochester and came for the [induction] ceremony. He was of course sitting with the family up front and the ceremony then was held in Cooper Park, in front of the library building. When it came time for Warren's speech and to be inducted it affected his brother so that he had a heart attack. We had a doctor there, Dr. Pollock actually in those days, to keep track of the crowds and so on, and he was there and attended to him and course got an ambulance and took him right up to the hospital, which is up the street. So that was the first thing about Warren. Then I can remember one year, coming back to the ceremony with his son Greg and his wife, and Warren had a girlfriend with him, and he called ahead of time and said, "you know what I'd, I want to come in two or three days early. I'd like to go sailing on the lake." He said, "Can you arrange it?" I said certainly, so I arranged for a sailboat for them. They came and I took them up to Thayer's to get the sailboats and Willie asked, "do you know how to sail?" and they said "oh yes, we know how." So, pardon me, Warren got in his sailboat with this girlfriend and there was just a little breeze, nothing to strong, and they were all set, pushed away from the dock, so they pushed away from the dock, and they had gone maybe twenty-five, thirty feet into the water and all of the sudden over they went! A gust came up [laughs] and he tipped over and they both got soaking wet. They were going to a party that night, so I had to take his girlfriend down to a hairdresser to get her hair fixed and ready to go that night. I never let him forget it [laughs]. His son and his wife went off in beautiful shape and Warren stayed and did some sailing himself finally.

MC:

Do you have other particular players or stories that...

HT:

I felt I was fairly close to Tom Seaver. In fact, Tom were both on a foundation board for the Little League Museum for a number of years. So I got to know Tom that way, probably just as much as I did through the Hall of Fame. But there was one year, I've forgotten just what year, that he and Nancy were stayed over on Tuesday from Hall of Fame weekend and weren't going back till Wednesday. We, my wife and my one daughter Judy and her roommate went over to the Otesaga for dinner and afterward we walked out on the porch and here sat Tom and Nancy having their dinner. So we stop and talked with them a few moments and something was said about going home and playing bridge, because our daughter Judy and her friend played bridge, and he said, "Oh bridge, I haven't played since I played for Chicago." I said, come up and play, so he did. Nancy stayed down to pack and get ready because they were leaving the next morning, but Tom came up and played bridge with us for a couple of hours [chuckles]. So their human beings, their right down to earth. I know lots of kids worship Hall of Famers and ballplayers, which is fine, but when you get to know them they are just like anybody else. So those are some of the experiences I've had.

MC:

Do you remember any particular baseball event, some particular thing that happened within the game, affecting you more because you were working for the Hall of Fame and you did know a lot of the players as people?

HT:

[START TRACK 8, 0:35] I don't think so. I really, I'm not a hero worshiper first of all. Never have been and anybody, I don't care who they are [or] whatever they do in baseball, they're still a human being and I don't get too excited over things that occur like that. So, I can't really think of anything now that stands out head and shoulders above other incidents. I just can't think of any.

MC:

Yeah, because a lot of baseball fans have that, they know where they were [moment]. That's very interesting. So...knowing these people, or knowing the Hall of Famers as people and not doing the hero worship, did you feel maybe a special connection to baseball or did you feel differently about it than the average fan?

HT:

Well I don't know. I always felt that I was very fortunate to be in the position I was in. That I had been asked to do this, I didn't apply for the job, that always gave me a little satisfaction knowing that. I guess my feeling was that I was very fortunate, very lucky, to be where I am, doing what I'm doing. That was the way I looked at it I think.

MC:

What was the relationship, I know you talked about salary but other than that, what was the relationship between Major League Baseball and the Hall of Fame? How did you interact?

HT:

Well, years ago it was wonderful. We had a very good relationship with the league offices and the commissioner's office. I think the closest we were with them, was when Bowie Kuhn was commissioner and Joe Cronin was president of the American and Chub Feeney was president of the National League. I think during those years we were the closest to them. Not only just in talk, but they were also, the commissioner and the two presidents, were on our board of directors. We've always had Major League Baseball represented on our board and now they even have members of the Hall of Fame on the board. But you see, things have changed so there is no longer really the feelings that there used to be between the leagues. There is no American League president, no National League president, they call it the American League and the National League, but it's all run through the Commissioner's Office. It's not the same as it used to be, although I'm not involved so I can't elaborate on that much. If we needed something done, or if we had some idea, we would pass it by the Commissioner and the League Presidents and most, generally they would go along with us.

MC:

What type of ideas?

HT:

Well, ideas doing policy, more or less I will say with the method of electing new members. Whether it be by the baseball writers of the Committee on Veterans. I think that was the area that was most prevalent with them as far as that goes.

MC:

Did you have a vote in?

HT:

No I did not. No, of course the baseball writers vote on the active, what we call active players, and the Hall of Fame Committee on Veterans was a select group that was picked. There were certain writers, there were certain baseball, the Commissioner was on it, league presidents, Hall of Famers themselves, so it was a select committee. But no, I did not have any vote.

MC:

How does a player go from being elected on the normal Hall of Fame ballot to the veterans, could you explain the Veteran's Committee and that sort of thing?

HT:

The baseball writers would vote on what we call, I shouldn't say active but the modern day players because they had to be retired for five years before they became eligible. They would be voting upon those players that had completed at least ten years of major league service, but then retired for five years. [START TRACK 9, 0:40] The Veteran's Committee was able to vote on players that maybe had been missed way back in the early 20's or early 1900's and they could also vote on some who had been missed by the writers, that they didn't feel warranted election, so the Veteran's Committee could reconsider them. They also were able to vote on baseball executives and managers and umpires, which the writers could not do. That's the main difference.

MC:

Do you think that, being that you were at the first Induction Ceremony and you've probably seen countless ceremonies over your time [at the Hall of Fame], do you still attend the Induction Ceremonies?

HT:

Oh yes.

MC:

Do you think that they have grown in popularity and if they haven't when was their heyday?

HT:

No, it used to be, originally the ceremonies were held right on Main Street at the front entrance of the Hall of Fame. Then it got to be so many people coming that there wasn't room enough so they could see because they were up the street, they had to close off the street. So we moved it out in back of what was the Leatherstocking office one year and then we built the library building and we had it in front of the library. The year that Brooks Robinson was elected we had a big crowd from Baltimore and that was really the start of thinking we've got to have more room. So, it was decided we would move down to the Clark's Sports Center where we had this huge field that could hold probably a hundred thousand people if need be. So, that was the start of the big crowds and I think the biggest crowd we had was when Cal Ripken went in that was the straw that broke the camels back so to speak. There will be years when, I think a normal year right now the way things are going should average fifteen to twenty thousand and I doubt the day will come in my lifetime when we'll ever have seventy-five or eighty thousand again. I don't see anyone in the future of that stature that would draw that many people.

MC:

It's those Baltimore fans [chuckles]

HT:

That's right.

MC:

Do you remember any particularly, any speeches or incidents from those ceremonies that really stuck with you? Anybody being particularly eloquent or not?

HT:

No, to be honest with you I don't. [pause] I think, years ago I will say, some of the people, like Harry Heilmann for example, who, I'm sorry not Harry Heilmann because he was dead when he was elected, his wife go up and spoke for him and accepted the plaque on his behalf and she did a marvelous job for a widow accepting for her husband. Most of the ones back in those days that accepted their plaque were at the microphone about two minutes and that was it. There are some that had a speech written on paper, that would get up and get the paper in front of them and it affected them so they couldn't even read the paper. They said, "I'm sorry, I thank you" and then sat down. That has happened. Today it's, people are more prepared and they have a prepared speech. I will admit some of them talk to long. We like to give them I think about fifteen minutes, but some stretch it into twenty or twenty-five. When you got four, five going in that makes quite a long ceremony.

MC:

Did anyone in particular go twenty or twenty-five minutes?

HT:

Oh, there's been quite a few. Quite a few.

MC:

Why do you think they went from being microphone shy to...

HT:

Well, I think this day in age people are more adept at appearing at places and making public speeches or organizations [START TRACK 10, 0:45] or schools and so on or television, so that they're more better prepared to give a speech and some of them write their own and some of them have it written by someone else for them, but it's their one claim to fame and they all seem to say that this is the pinnacle of their career. They've enjoyed playing, they've had a wonderful career on the field, but this is the ultimate. They've attained this goal and just want to take advantage of it I think.

MC:

How did that make you feel about your job as director knowing that these men valued their Hall of Fame spot so much?

HT:

Well it made me feel very good to be truthful. They had some wonderful experiences on the field and off during their career. But this was the thing they considered the top. There was nothing beyond this that they could ever expect. So it made me feel very good knowing that they had that feeling toward us.

MC:

Was there ever any pressure though, knowing that becoming a Hall of Famer would change their life so much? Was there any pressure or any, although I know you didn't have a vote, was there every any worrying about a guy being on the ballot and not making it or anything like that?

HT:

Not that part or it, no. It didn't used to be years ago when I first went or worked there that becoming elected meant all that much. They weren't asked to appear here and appear there, now their asked to do many things. So I think most of them realize there is a responsibility that goes with it. That they are representing the Hall of Fame at whatever function they may be attending. That they do have this responsibility to keep their standards high.

MC:

Was there every any controversy at the Hall of Fame, such as the, well kind of a modern example is the Barry Bonds home run ball, I know that caused a lot of commotion. Was there ever anything like that in your time?

HT:

Not while I was there, no. We never had anything that [pause] caused that much disturbance you might say. The drug situation is something now that is very prevalent and that is gonna come into play very soon with people who are going to become eligible. We had discussed this at quite length and we just didn't come up with what we thought was the right answer. So what we did, we made a ruling that no one would be eligible for membership if they were not on Baseball's active list and some of these people who have been on drugs or had other problems are not on the active list and are not able to attend ballgames or be on the field or participate in a baseball function. So if Baseball puts them on an active list then they become eligible to be voted on, but if they are on the inactive list they are not eligible to be voted on.

MC:

And the active list is what exactly? That says...

HT:

Well anybody who might be banned from baseball, like Pete Rose for example. He's on the inactive list. He can buy a ticket and go to a ballgame, but he can't go on the field and he cannot participate in baseball functions, this type of thing. That's the example right there.

MC:

Out of curiosity, how do you feel about the Pete Rose situation? I know recently, well he always seems to be trying to get back on that active list, how do you feel about him?

HT:

Well, my personal feeling is that he does not belong on the active list. He did something which was wrong in the game of baseball and he denied it up and down to start with, and finally he's admitted it. We do have, or I say do, we did have at least anyway, a sizeable exhibit telling of Pete Rose's accomplishments on the field, but [START TRACK 11, 0:50] that does not mean he is a member of the Hall of Fame, because we look at it, really it's two separate things. There is the baseball museum, which tells the history of our national game, and there is the Hall of Fame where we honor the all time greats of the game. So there is two different things there and we did show in the museum portion what he accomplished on the field, but he's not a member. See, kids look up to these people their heroes and if they said, "Well if Pete Rose can do this and gamble all this money and so on, so can I." And I don't want that to happen.

MC:

How do you feel about, do you think it is the role of museum to explain some of those not so great moments, such as the betting and steroids and things like that?

HT:

Should we have exhibits on them?

MC:

Yeah, do you think it's part of the...

HT:

Oh yes. That's a part of the game, that's a part of baseball and we're telling the history of baseball. We're not trying to cover it up, but by the same token we're not advocating that we're promoting it either, but it is a portion of the game we've got to show it the best we can.

MC:

How do you feel about the, coming up like you said, some of these players are gonna have allegations against them, not a lot of prove, but the rumor of steroids hanging over them. How should the museum deal with that or what do you think will happen to them when they get to committees for voting in?

HT:

That's as I said before. If they're on Baseball's active list they are eligible to be voted on. If the Baseball has taken them off the list they can't be voted on. Be the same thing with drugs or gambling or whatever the problem might be.

MC:

Going back to, I mentioned the Barry Bonds homerun ball because that's the controversy that I've really grown up with. How would have dealt with that situation? There was a lot of heat for the Hall of Fame taking it with the asterisk stamped on there. What would you have done?

HT:

I don't think the asterisk should be on it. I'm glad we got the ball, let's put it this way, but I don't think an asterisk was deserved really. He hit them regardless, so it should be without asterisk. That's my feeling.

MC:

So during your twenty-five years as president and trying to get accredited and all these other things, what do you think was one of the areas that the Hall of Fame made the largest improvement? What do you think that you enacted that was just really great thing?

HT:

Well, I think from the year one up to the present time, I think the biggest advancement the Hall of Fame made, or best decisions that were made, were working with the educational program. I'm not in favor of sending a lot of material around the country. Some of this is irreplaceable. I know they've had this exhibit that was well received throughout the whole country, but I'm not an advocate of doing that. There are other ways I think we can apprise the public of the history of baseball through television, computers, and things that I'm not familiar with. That [in effect] is why I retired, we were going very heavily into computers and they sent me to Atlanta, Georgia, to learn about CD-ROM and went down there for two days and I came home and I didn't know what

was said. That was the beginning of my thinking to retire, because I hate computers, so that's just me.

MC:

You said you didn't have very much education [programs] when you started as president, was there a particular program that you remember that you created or that was created by your staff that you were proud of?

HT:

Well, I think the educational program was started by Bill Guilfoil, who was our PR director for many years. He was the main reason that we got it started with the educational programs. We would bring school groups into the museum and take them around and then give them a quiz afterwards on what they saw or we might have a treasure hunt and have them take a piece of paper and find [START TRACK 12, 0:55] this ball or that bat or whatever was described on the treasure hunt.

MC:

What...do you think...my interest is that you started off as an accountant and these things. When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up and did you have any idea that this might be where you'd be all these years later?

HT:

I had no idea I'd wind up in Cooperstown or at the Hall of Fame. My father was in the feed business selling feed to farmers and I had always wanted to go into business with him. But unfortunately I had an asthmatic condition in my youth that did not allow me to be around feed dust or I would be in misery. So I had to give that up. And even after I graduated from the School of Commerce in Utica, I really didn't have much of an idea,

the first thing I thought of was going down to Endicott and apply for a job with IBM as a salesman or working with them. I did that, but it was right after the war and they were having difficulty getting materials to manufacture more typewriters and whatever at that point. They said, "go home, get a job and if there's an opening we'll call you." Well, I went home, but I never got the call [chuckles], but they had seen, in the Leatherstocking Corporation, here in the paper where I had graduated and they were in need of an accountant, so they called me over for an interview and that was how I got started there. But I had no idea I'd ever wind up at the Hall of Fame, even when I went to work for Leatherstocking, no idea that I'd be over there.

MC:

It's certainly an interesting turn. You mentioned that, this is kind of a little side of thing from our baseball talk, but it really does interest me, you mentioned you had asthma growing up and that the feed really upset it. Where there any treatments at this time to help you deal with that?

HT:

Well, I think it was for my sixteenth birthday that my mother and father took me to New York [City] at a doctor's suggestion to see a specialist to test for asthmatic condition and what caused it. I know they stuck needles in both arms every day for three or four days and I'd have to go back and they'd see if there was reaction and so on. They did find a few things, feed dust was one of them, ragweed was another, some weeds and so on. And by the way, as a sidebar to that one, when we were down in New York [City] for my birthday, my dad was able to get tickets to take me to Ebbet's Field. That was my first Major League Baseball game. It was my sixteenth birthday.

MC:

That's a great sixteenth birthday gift.

HT:

So I came back and they did give me a serum to take shot I think once a week, which I did for a period of time. And then this doctor that we had over in Edmeston said that, "you know there's a camp over on Otsego Lake in Cooperstown and it might be well for him to go over there for a summer and see if he's free from this asthma." So my mother and father sent me over here, Camp Chenango, and sure enough I was free from it as could be. Never had a bit of problem and as a result I kept coming back as a camper until I got old enough to be a junior counselor and then as a counselor, so I kept coming back over here till I went to the service in World War II.

MC:

And where, kind of in relation to where we are now, was Camp Chenango?

HT:

It was on the east side of the lake, going up beyond Kingfisher Tower, and there used to be a Boy and Girl Scout Camp just beyond that, and it was about a quarter of a mile beyond there. It was between the road and the lake. When I started over there it was just a dirt road and now of course it's paved and used quite heavily.

MC:

What made this asthma camp special? Was it the location? Did you do particular activities?

HT:

Well, I liked it to begin with. The whole program. They had good meals, good staff, good counselors, good program, they had horseback riding, a lot of water sports, I loved to swim, and I just loved it over there. [START TRACK 13, 1:00] That's one of the reasons I kept coming back. And of course I was free of asthma, but when I went into service in World War II, from that point on I never had another attack of asthma.

MC:

Interesting. Do you think your time as a camp counselor played an influence in how you ran the Hall of Fame as it's director?

HT:

Could very well be. I never looked at it in that light, but by fact that I was in charge of kids in a tent, five kids in a tent, might have had a bearing on it. Yes, could very well be.

MC:

I was just kind of curious with you talking about the education being so important, and I was a camp counselor myself and I know that's a very educational role.

HT:

I love camping to begin with, so I think that's the main reason, but that could very well be the case.

MC:

You bring up this sixteenth birthday, you were at Ebbet's Field, which is amazing, do you have any particularly vivid memories?

HT:

I don't to be honest with you.

MC:

Do you remember who played or anything?

HT:

No, I don't. I don't even know who they played that day [chuckles].

MC:

Lost in time I guess.

HT:

Right.

MC:

Is there any particular story that we're missing from this, from your time at the Hall of Fame...

HT:

To do with the Hall of Fame?

MC:

Well, yeah, I mean just as your time as an, just in your entire time there.

HT:

Well, there have been a lot of incidents that have happened. I think probably one of the most vivid is the fact that security is something we learned by experience. For example, we had Joe DiMaggio's locker and the locker was sitting right out and in it was hanging his uniform and his cap was up on the shelf. We came to work one morning and went around looking and here was the cap, missing. It just had laid on the shelf and someone

had come along and found it and picked it up and put it in their pocket and walked out with it. So we said we've got to change that. So we wired the cap to the shelf, another cap, and the next thing that was gone because they had clipped the wire and walked off with it. So what we did the next thing was to put a door on the front of the cabinet or the locker, so that they could see through, but they couldn't reach in. That worked pretty good for awhile and then one day we were cleaning the locker and so on and we happened to notice that the sleeve of the uniform had a hole, bout this big around, and somebody had gotten a hold of it and pulled it through the little hole in the locker and had a knife or shears and cut it off to take that piece of cloth home. So then we had to put plastic on the inside of the locker. So all these things we learned the hard way so to speak.

MC:

Did you ever find, any luck tracking down the caps or anything?

HT:

No. And another experience we had during the winter, I was over, in fact most of us were over in the library for a meeting, and the only one left other there [the Hall of Fame] was the girl at the ticket counter. The phone rang in the library and it was the woman on the ticket counter saying, "Howard come over here, we've got a deer in here! Come over quick!" Well, what had happened, a deer had come up Main Street and had turned into the entrance of the Hall of Fame and had jumped up over the railing and it couldn't stop in time on the, with the porch till it hit this window, it was a small window pane and a metal window and it broke the glass and it's nose went right through the window into ticket counter. Scared the daylights out of the girl who was on duty there and then it

jumped over a railing on the other side of the porch, in between this building next to us and it was caught because there was fence on both ends. Couldn't get out. So we finally called for the SPCA to come tranquilize it so we could get it out, but in the mean time before they came, the deer had managed to get underneath the barricade in the back and went on up through Cooper Park and out toward the hospital. [START TRACK 14, 1:05] So that was another experience we had.

MC:

[Chuckles] That's crazy, my goodness. You know, now that there is Dream's Park and the distance learning, information travels so much faster, when you were president, I'm sorry, director, was the Hall of Fame still, or was it then, as large of an attraction as it is now?

HT:

Well, I think yes it was. In fact, we had more people visit the Hall of Fame visit when I was there than we are today. For our fiftieth anniversary, that would have been '89, we had over 500,000 people through and it was astronomical because the majority of them came during the summer months and we've not had that since. So I think it was as popular by more people visiting, of course now we have the price of gas has gone up, travel restrictions and things that probably prohibit some people from coming. And this is one reason why the thing they are doing to promote it by other means, by T.V. and so on, is great to keep us in front of the public.

MC:

One thing I've always been curious about, not being from here myself, I've heard of Cooperstown though my entire life and what is it like growing up in this are knowing about the village of Cooperstown, but also knowing that you could go almost anywhere in the world and say "Cooperstown" and people know. What is that like growing up around here and living around here?

IIT:

Well, it's great. We've lived here as I say for sixty years and it's not just fact that the Baseball Hall of Fame is here, but it's what Cooperstown has to offer. You've got a wonderful hospital here, we've got the Otesaga hotel, and you've got the golf course, you've got the lake, you have the Clark Sports Center, you've got the Glimmerglass Opera, and you got a summer theater, and what more could you ask for? People, when I retired, people said, "alright where you going? Are you going to Florida or you going to Arizona or where you going to move to?" I said I'm not moving anywhere. I'm staying right here. The only thing that some people feel we lack is shopping. They don't have a place to buy clothes or things of this nature or they have to go to Utica, or Albany, Syracuse, Oneonta, somewhere. But that doesn't bother me because I'm not a shopper. But there is so much going for Cooperstown, a town of twenty-two, twenty-three hundred people that it's just an ideal spot. Plus the fact that you do have the museums, that is a big drawing card and a lot of it is really due in many ways to what the Clark family has done in Cooperstown. The things that they've seen happen here and have provided for and keeping the lake as it is, for example, on the east side, there's no camps much allowed up through there except a few that they own and I believe that when the Clarks are all gone

this will continue through foundations to. If it weren't for the Clarks probably the Hall of Fame wouldn't be here, NYSHA wouldn't be here, Farmer's Museum, hospital, all these things are as a result of what the Clark's have done. They've furnished the village with its first fire truck and they put in the first water system.

MC:

Do you remember the dates for either of those?

HT:

I don't, no. So it's a very unusual situation. Fortunately, Jane Clark, who is the only surviving member now, taking a great deal of interest in Cooperstown and she has continued a lot of the things her family has started and we are very fortunate to have her feel the way she does.

MC:

Well, I just want to say thank you very much for your time. Is there anything that we're forgetting? Anything you want to add to the record?

HT:

No, not that I know of. I think we've covered the water front so to speak.

MC:

All right.

I, Howard C. Talbot, Jr. have read and agree to the terms of the procedure explained above.

I, Howard C. Talbot, Jr., do hereby give to Matthew Cox for scholarly and educational uses the following recorded interview(s) recorded with me beginning on 11/9/08 as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the New York State Historical Association the legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use I may want to make of the information in the recordings myself.

This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

Howard C. Talbot, Jr.
Signature

Howard C. Talbot, Jr.
Print name

95 Pioneer St
Address

Copertown, NY 13306

547-8334
Phone number of interviewee

10/25/08
Date

Matthew Cox
Interviewer

10/25/08
Date

For any other questions or concerns you may contact:
Kim Muller
State University of New York-College at Oneonta
Grants Development Office
27 Bacon Hall
108 Ravine Parkway
Oneonta, NY 13820

I, Howard C. Talbot, Jr. have read and agree to the terms of the procedure explained above.

I, Howard C. Talbot, Jr., do hereby give to Matthew Cox for scholarly and educational uses the following recorded interview(s) recorded with me beginning on 11/8/08 as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the New York State Historical Association the legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use I may want to make of the information in the recordings myself.

This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

Howard C. Talbot, Jr.
Signature

Howard C. Talbot, Jr.
Print name

95 Pioneer St
Address

Copertown, NY 13306

547-8334
Phone number of interviewee

11/25/08
Date

Matthew Cox
Interviewer

11/25/08
Date

For any other questions or concerns you may contact:
Kim Muller
State University of New York-College at Oneonta
Grants Development Office
27 Bacon Hall
108 Ravine Parkway
Oneonta, NY 13820

