

**Cooperstown Graduate Program  
Research and Fieldwork Course (HMUS 520)  
Oral History Project  
Fall 2020**

**Interview with Lili Ott by Hannah Deschenes**

Interviewer: Deschenes, Hannah  
Interviewee: Ott, Lili  
Date: November 10th, 2020  
Location: Zoom platform

Archive/Library Repository: Cooperstown Graduate Association and Archives and Special Collections, Milne Library, SUNY Oneonta

**Description:**

Lili Reinneck Ott was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1947 in Hudson, New York. As a child, Lili loved visiting museums with her family. She explained that an experience she had at the Albany Institute when she was just 12 years old inspired her to enter the museum field as an adult. Lili attended high school at St. Mary's Academy in Hudson. She contracted rheumatic fever her senior year in high school which prevented her from applying to colleges after graduating. After fully recovering, she applied to the State University of New York at Albany where she studied for the duration of her undergraduate career. Lili was guided by wonderful mentors and professors who helped determine her future career path. During her time at the State University of New York at Albany, Lili decided that she wanted to pursue a career in museum studies.

After an interview at the Cooperstown Graduate Program, Lili was impressed by the wide variety of classes that were offered through the program, and by the professors who were dedicated to passing on their knowledge of the field to students. Once Lili was accepted into the program, she immediately found an apartment in town and linked up with classmates. In Cooperstown, Lili describes spending time outside of class with professors and other students at dinner parties, enjoying the lake in town, and having parties at her apartment. In class, Lili loved having hands-on experiences where she was able to see her work being produced and

showcased in exhibits. She was even given the chance to design and help build an exhibit on Redford glass which was displayed at the Fenimore Art Museum.

After graduating from CGP, Lili went on to have a very successful career and has filled numerous positions at different institutions. She explained that her experience at the Cooperstown Graduate Program was invaluable in moving her career forward. She learned numerous life skills that have helped her as a museum professional. She also made lifelong friends and priceless network connections within her field.

## **Key Terms**

Hudson, New York

Cooperstown, New York

*Harlem on My Mind*

*Driving While Black*

Minor Wine Thomas Jr.

Dick Slavin

Per Guldbeck

Cooperstown Graduate School

Fenimore Art Museum

The Farmers' Museum

Shaker's Museum

Old Sturbridge Village

Politics

State University of New York at Albany

Olana State Historic Site

Community

Professionalization

New York State Historical Association (NYSHA)

**Cooperstown Graduate Program  
Oral History Project 2020**

LO = Lili Ott

HD = Hannah Deschenes

[START OF TRACK 1, 0:00]

HD:

Hi, this is Hannah Deschenes interviewing Lili [Reinneck Ott] remotely on Zoom. It's Tuesday, November 10th at 5:40 [PM]. This interview is being conducted for the Cooperstown Graduate Program Oral Histories Project. Hi Lily, how are you doing?

LO:

Hi, good. Thanks, Hannah.

HD:

So, for my first question, I want to ask you about where you were born and if you could tell me a little bit about your childhood?

LO:

Sure, I was born in Hudson, New York, which is only about two hours away from Cooperstown and for the first 13 years of my life out in the country. We had a little farm, so I learned a lot about farming, but we always went to museums. A lot of weekends when we had visitors from out of town it was off to the museum. So, they were a real part of my childhood. And then when I was about 13, we moved into the town of Hudson. And that was great because it had train connections to New York and to Albany. So, I traveled a lot more not only with my family but with my friends. So, I had a lot of museum experiences then. My dad was a retired foreign service officer, so he was very interested in a wide

variety of things and my mother was very involved in historic preservation. So, both of those were part of my childhood.

[TRACK 1, 1:15]

HD:

Awesome. So, you mentioned that you've liked museums from when you were a child. Do you have any specific museums that were your favorite that you remember going to a lot?

LO:

Oh, well I loved going to New York and going to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art]. That was great, but I think the real reason I went into museum work was when I went to the Albany Institute when I was about 12 and the guy who was the director there, Norman Rice, was such a nice person and he came over and asked me my opinion on stuff and when you're a 12-year-old kid, nobody asks for your opinion on stuff. I just thought it was such a cool place and such a cool person. So, I always sort of kept that connection to the Albany Institute. I still really love the Albany Institute.

HD:

Have you been back recently?

LO:

I've been on Zoom. They've been doing some fabulous lecture series on Zoom. So even though I live in Mid-Coast Maine I do attend stuff, and I was there before COVID. I went there last fall to see an exhibit. A fabulous Hamilton exhibit.

HD:

So, has the museum changed a lot from when you went as a child until now?

LO:

Yes, yes it has. Although last time we were there we saw Norman Rice. He's 96 or something and he was still in there doing some volunteering. So, some things don't change. But yeah, the museum itself has grown and expanded, a great core collection though.

HD:

Wonderful, that's awesome. So, Lili, can you talk a little bit about your undergraduate career, where you ended up going to school, and how that experience was for you?

LO:

Sure. Well, it was actually kind of a fluke. When I was a senior in high school, I got rheumatic fever and it was okay, but they said, "oh well you'll just have to skip your freshman year in college." So, I didn't do anything about applying for colleges. Then by the time Spring rolled around it dawned on me that I'd have to spend another year with those juniors, which I didn't want to do. So, I went in as a special student to Albany State with the idea, now the University of Albany, with the concept that I would transfer to another school after that year, but I got up there and I really liked it. I had fabulous professors. I had a fabulous English professor. I went in as a chemistry major and by the end of that year, I was an English major, American lit, and American histories. I mean just some really amazing teachers. So, I stayed there all four years of my undergraduate work; ended up with kind of a double major in American Literature and American History.

HD:

Do you think that those professors that you had at that school influenced your decision to go into the museum field?

LO:

Oh, probably a little bit. Yes, somewhat, but what really influenced me was I worked some summers and actually even during the school year at Olana [State Historic Site] because Olana had just become a state historic site and my family was really involved with the initial part of it going in with the state. And so, then I worked there through the transition when it was run by the parks. And then later different parts of New York State took it over, so I was there for all of that. It was fascinating. And the guy that was a Cooperstown graduate, Dick Slavin, was the first director at Olana and he encouraged me to go to Cooperstown.

HD:

Okay. So, while you were at Olana what kind of museum tasks did you find that you gravitated towards?

LO:

Well, we did a lot of guiding, especially at the beginning. We had some good texts but not a lot so we ended up having to do a lot of research. Even though we were kids, we did a lot of research on the collection and even more on [Frederick] Church's life and on the community around it. And then, at that point there were still a number of people who had worked for Sally Church, the daughter-in-law. So, we interviewed them and did a lot of that. And then once Dick came and we really started working on the collections, then we did a lot more collections work under Dick's oversight. So, a little bit of everything.

HD:

Great!

LO:

No development then, though.

HD:

So, you mentioned earlier that when you had gone to undergrad originally, you were thinking about doing chemistry?

LO:

Yeah. I was going to cure cancer and save the world.

HD:

So, does that mean that deciding to go into the museum field wasn't always something that you wanted to do, and that just kind of evolved as you were going through?

LO:

No, well I was going to teach.

HD:

Oh, okay.

LO:

I would teach, but that's kind of an involved story. I was in school in the '60s and I started a teaching program where I was going to be in a teaching situation for my student teaching that I didn't want to do, and I got a lot more political over those years. So, I decided that I didn't want to teach and then I did decide, because there were a lot of really interesting things going on in the museum field in the late '60s like *Harlem on my Mind*, was this wonderful exhibit that had opened as an outreach and I wanted to do more things like that. So, I thought

well, this is a really good reason to put together some of the things that I'm interested in in terms of popular culture and the state of the world at that time, which is not too dissimilar from the way it is now, and kind of put those together. So, it seemed like a good idea. And it was.

HD:

You mentioned *Harlem on my Mind*. Can you explain that exhibit a little bit? I don't think I've heard of it.

LO:

Yeah, actually I should probably send you some sort of link to it. It was an exhibit. It was one of the first outreach programs that was done in Harlem to bring a museum experience, because the whole museum field has changed so much in 50 years and there wasn't too much research done on audience. There was more the idea of we'll put together beautiful things and welcome whoever comes in our door. And so, there was the idea that well, wait a minute, maybe we really need to investigate who's coming in and why they're coming in, and why the people that aren't coming in aren't coming in and let's see what we can do about that. So, this was one of the first outreach ideas to take a museum into Harlem to be able to not only show beautiful things but also to broaden the audience in general.

HD:

So, you were really interested in diversifying the field of audiences and turning the collection of things, as you said, into more like ideologies is that what you mean by that?

LO:

Yeah, yeah, a little bit more. Yeah.

HD:

Great.

LO:

Actually, when I was at Cooperstown that was even more of a thing too. I was the class of 1970 and that's when Kent State happened and there were a lot of interesting political discussions that we had among ourselves as graduate students then.

HD:

Yeah, you did actually talk about politics earlier. So, you think politics was a driving influence in your decision to go down this path?

LO:

Maybe not driving but it was certainly part of it. And then, once I interviewed, I wasn't sure until I came out and interviewed at Cooperstown. But then I think for a lot of us coming out and interviewing that it became really clear that this was a great idea.

HD:

Yeah. So, I am curious actually about your interview process. I'm sure it was very different back then and different from my experience. Of course, since my interview was online, and it was not in person. So, I'd love to hear about your interview and your process of traveling to Cooperstown, and how that went.

LO:

Yeah, well, I had a boyfriend named Bobby at the time and we drove from Albany,

and we came in and everybody was so nice. Like I remember we stopped to get lunch somewhere in town, and the people in town were so nice. The people giving us the lunch were so nice. And then at that point, everything happened in the library, the offices were in the library. But somebody was really nice to Bobby and said, "oh well, you're going to have to wait here. We'll get you a snack or we'll get you a cup of tea or whatever." And then I just remember going in and Doctor [Louis C.] Jones was the person that I remember most interviewing with. And of course, he was a real force of nature, just an amazing human-being on every level. But he had had some involvement with the University of Albany and knew some of my professors and one of the professors who had written a recommendation for me with somebody who had been, I guess he had been a mentor too, so we talked a lot about him. We talked about things going on at Olana because of course, that was sort of the beginning. The program had only been going on for four or five years, so the idea of having a graduate send a potential student was kind of just beginning to happen all the way around. So, we talked about that. His warmth and the force of his personality, and he was just so smart and so kind and just kind of opened up. Well, I could study with this guy for the rest of my life. He's brilliant. And then I had bought his books. He had written a whole series of books. So, he particularly impressed me, but everyone else was very nice too and very warm and I was really impressed with the variety of the classes that would be offered. Of course, this was before the internet, so you only really saw what was happening when you looked at the little piece of paper that said, "Here are the courses that you would be expected to take." I went around town that same day and I met a person who was a current student, and she was getting ready. She

knew she was going to be leaving because she said, “Well, take a look at my apartment,” and it was on Glen Avenue and I walked in and I just loved the apartment so that didn't hurt either to have a really great place and the rent was like \$40 a month or something, which back then was like real rent.

HD:

So, can you remember a specific moment when you knew that you were going to commit to going to the Cooperstown Graduate Program, or was it more of a gradual decision?

LO:

Well, I got a letter saying I had a fellowship.

HD:

And that was the moment for you?

LO:

Yeah, I mean, I was pretty sure I would anyway, but that was like icing on the cake.

HD:

Right. Were you intimidated about traveling to go to grad school, or were you excited?

[TRACK 1, 11:30]

LO:

No, I wasn't. I was excited.

HD:

So, you mentioned that you lived in an apartment on Glen Avenue. That's actually right next to The Barn. That's the road that I go by to go to school. I'll look for your apartment next time I drive by.

LO:

Yeah, it was a big old white house. There were several apartments in it and then I had a friend who lived at The Cricket and then there was a guy who left the apartment and she moved to the 2nd floor. Mine was on the third floor, it was just a great place. We had a lot of fun, a lot of parties.

HD:

A lot of parties! I really feel like I know exactly what building you're talking about and I do believe that CGP students still live there.

LO:

Oh, good. It's a great place.

HD:

So, you mentioned that you and your friends had some parties while you were at school. I wanted to ask you when you were living in Cooperstown, what kind of things did you and your friends do for fun?

LO:

Well, we did a lot of stuff with the professors. We did a huge amount of stuff. There was not a lot of like "this is a student event; this is a faculty event" it was all together. And Minor Wine [Thomas] and Annabel Thomas were kind of like extra parents for everybody in my class and so at least two or three times a week. I think about it now, as an adult, I don't know how they stood having us there all the time. But we would go home after class and get something to eat and then we

go over to Minor Wine's and just do everything. Like one time a crow had been hit by a car in front of the house and so he said, "I'll show you how to stuff a crow." So, we were like "that's too gross" and he said "no-no-no." So, he showed us, and we all did it. He had Styrofoam that you put in the body and he just happened to have crow eyes, like who has crow eyes in their house? But Minor had all these amazing things. For a while, he had a pet ferret, and the ferret would just climb up everybody's legs. I mean, it was just wonderful. They were just amazing people and funny and so we did a lot of stuff. Minor Wine also had an icehouse out on the lake so we would go ice fishing a lot. We would go ice fishing in the winter. So, we did that, and I don't know. We swam like you. You know, because it was really easy to swim then because the pool was right downtown in that building where the museum is, where the Baseball Museum is now. A nice pool. It wasn't as nice as the pool you have now. That pool is fabulous. But they were open a lot and we would eat a lot at the hospital because the hospital had a lot of food and it was cheap, and it was good. We didn't have eating clubs. I know my husband's class had eating clubs. But we were pretty healthy eaters. So then once my friend Janet moved into the second floor, she and I would just eat a lot of healthy salads and stuff together and then go out and do stuff. We would go to Utica to go to the movies because that movie theater was open in the summertime so we could go to the movies, some in the fall. But then I think it closed around Columbus Day. So, then we'd go to Utica. And well, my boyfriend would come over and then we would just do a lot of hiking too. He was in Binghamton at the University, so sometimes I'd go there.

[TRACK 1, 14:50]

HD:

Yeah, there's a lot of really great places around here to go hiking. I've tried out a couple of them, but now that it's getting a little bit colder, we're going to have to find some other things to do. But there is a lot to do here, isn't there?

LO

There is and once it warms up again, there's so much on the [Otsego] Lake. You know we used to rent canoes a lot and go out on the lake and just really good things.

HD:

Incredible. So, the community. The Cooperstown community around you guys. How were they when you were in school?

LO:

Well, they were great. The people that owned the house that I was renting, he was a jeweler. Across from the Cooper Inn, there was a jewelry store on the corner back then. And so, he was very nice, and he always had good suggestions for places. And we would go to the *Tunnickliff*, it was not just The Pit then but the *Tunnickliff* upstairs had a really nice kind of a dining room. Like the kind of place that if your aunt came, you'd go have tea there. It was just really nice. And the people that ran that were very involved and there was also, oh my gosh, I'm forgetting the name of the place [Hickory Grove]. Out on Route 80, they would do a Thursday night dinner for students for some really reasonable price. I can't believe I can't think of the guy's name. But anyway, Madeline [Barton] was the wife, and they were really wonderful members of the community because they really supported the graduate students and I think we were probably good

because we would all go out on Thursday night so they would have, you know it would be like meatloaf or something, but they'd be able to serve 20 people for dinner. And so that was a good thing. During the slow time in the mud season and in the late fall, when there weren't any tourists, it was good for them too. And there were other community people. We all got checking accounts at the local bank and you know the *Pick and Pay* grocery store and everything. We all supported that.

HD:

So, did it feel like a community around Cooperstown? Like all of those folks were very like a tight-knit community?

[TRACK 1, 16:50]

LO:

Yeah, before it was all baseball, there was a hardware store and the bookstore. Everybody was always at the bookstore. You get your *Times* every Sunday at the bookstore, *Augur's*, and it was a great bookstore. You could order stuff and the people were really nice and very nice to the graduate students. So, the fact that it was more like a full-scale community with drugstore, bookstore, grocery store all within a two-block radius, restaurants. Now when we come to visit, it's harder because it's all baseball, so it's kind of lost that sense of small-town America.

HD:

Yeah, so what was your favorite store downtown when you were at school?

LO:

Gee, I don't know. I guess I really don't have a favorite because it was just stuff, you know. Drugstore stuff you needed or groceries or whatever.

HD:

Yeah, it's transformed a lot. Now it's a lot of tourist stores.

LO:

Yeah, it's too bad.

HD:

A very cute community though.

LO:

Well, and you really didn't need a car for much. Once you were downtown you could get everything you needed, easily.

HD:

So, did you guys spend a lot of time down by the lake near downtown?

LO:

In the good weather. Yeah, sometimes renting canoes and stuff.

HD:

Wonderful. So, can you talk a little bit about, so the CGP building has gone through a lot of reconstruction, what did the building look like when you were in school?

LO:

Well, of course, the new building wasn't there. We were in the white building, which I don't know what you guys call, that looks like a house. Our classes were either there or in the library. The kitchen was great, just go put your lunch in the fridge, and it was very comfortable. That was really it. We did do a lot with Fenimore House. I mean, all of us had to do an exhibit and we were in teams of two or three, and we did exhibits either in Fenimore House or in The Farmers'

Museum. So, there was a lot of back and forth between the graduate school and the museums and a lot of overlap. The curators would be very instrumental in how we would put stuff in and really great at guiding us through collections storage and what to exhibit and how to exhibit it. Per Guldbeck was a professor that was just amazing. For his class, it was very hands-on, and I remember learning how to do gold leaf and learning how to take a hunk of Styrofoam and turning it into a pie. So, we just did so much stuff and then he would make sure that we got to see what we did in an exhibit. So, it was really the full adventure from conception, to seeing it, to having an opening. It was cool.

HD:

What was your favorite part of that process?

LO:

I think I really loved the hands-on with Per, because both he and Minor Wine talked a lot about how things were made so that, for instance, when you studied iron, you didn't just look at a beautiful example of a wrought iron or cast-iron kitchen tool, he would talk about the actual process and in some cases, well not with iron, but with other metals, would demonstrate the difference between forging something and making it in other ways and molds. I remember that with glass, in particular, between blown glass or molded glass; you know there's nothing like doing it or watching it done to have a better understanding of the actual finished product. So that was very useful. I really loved those classes. Then we had the Frank and Freddy show. We had a professor named Frank Spinney. And Fred Rath, who was then, I guess his title was Vice President. Vice-chair of CGP. And they both had had vast experience in the museum world. Fred Rath

had been a founder of the National Trust, and Frank Spinney had worked at Sturbridge and at a whole number of other historic sites and museums. So, they had wonderful first-hand stories of their adventures. Frank and his wife would have dinner parties, they would have dinner parties for like three or four of us at a time and there was some speculation that he was actually checking out everybody's table manners. And then there was something, I remember somebody saying to me: "Well, you had chicken curry, but we had roast beef and Yorkshire, so we were the better group," which really annoyed the Spinneys when that went around. But, it was very warm and very interesting, and those classes were really memorable. I didn't actually realize how memorable they were until 20 years later. I would find myself going "Oh, that's what he meant! I remember that because of what Frank Spinney used to do in his class." He would give theoreticals like "OK, you're the director of a small historical society and your number one donor's wife wants to wear the ball gown to the fundraising party. How are you going to handle that?" Everybody would really talk about it. Of course, there was no right or wrong, but he really made that come through. Because I went right from college to graduate school. And it was really interesting too, and I'm sure you're finding the same thing when you have people that have had work experiences in between, they bring a different perspective, and you'll see that more and more. So, that was a really cool thing about his class.

[TRACK 1, 22:27]

HD:

Yeah, so you said that you might have had a chance to design an exhibit at the Fenimore.

LO:

Yeah. I did it on glass, some kind of green glass from New Jersey. It was interesting. I didn't even like it so it was really a good learning experience to have to do an exhibit with something that you didn't even particularly find attractive. So, Redford Glass was the name of it, which, if you're a fan of Redford Glass I don't mean to insult it, it's beautiful glass.

HD:

I'm actually learning about glass right now in my collections class. So, we just started talking about classifications of glass and ceramics and porcelain.

LO:

Nice. You'll keep using that a lot, I'm sure.

HD:

So, what's different now, a huge difference in the program is that we're not able to take field trips which in years past they've gone on many field trips, so I was wondering if when you were in grad school at Cooperstown if you guys did do field trips outside of Cooperstown itself?

LO:

Yes. We did one big field trip. I think now we've hosted field trips subsequently that were smaller, but we did one big long [one], I think it was two weeks. I think it was Frank Spinney who took us on that, and because he had so many contacts in New England, we did a New England sweep, and except for the fact that we had mac and cheese and ham for about 9 meals in a row, it was absolutely

fabulous. Matter of fact, I just wrote a letter today to a friend of mine and I said “I met you on my class trip 50 years ago this year,” because we're still friends from that trip. So, it was really amazing because the thing is that even if you'd been a visitor to the sites, which many of us had been, it wasn't the same as finding a Cooperstown alum, a fellow alum at this point, who was working there, who would tell you, “OK, well, this is how it really is. The good and the bad.” So, it was a totally invaluable trip. And I think about it now, some of the sites that we saw, we saw them when they were private homes, and now they're museums and so it's really great after the fact to go and see some of these places and see what's happened to them over the years. So yeah, the trip was really great. The trip was really eye-opening, and I think the best thing it did for a lot of people, even people who thought they knew what they wanted to do, when they talked to the alums who had the jobs that maybe they thought they wanted, it was like “oh, maybe this isn't exactly what I want.” So, it was a very useful trip. I mean, you learned a lot of stuff, but you also had a little vision of your future and a lot of us felt that way, so I hope that there's a way they'll still be able to do that virtually because it's really talking to the people that is the part that matters.

HD:

Yeah, so we're actually this week, I'm taking business administration or museum administration, and we're supposed to be going to Old Sturbridge Village.

Unfortunately, we can't travel there. But we are going to do a virtual tour of it and we're going to get to meet the CEO and ask questions. So, it's not the same as traveling, but it's going to be very exciting to meet everybody and hang out with them like that.

LO:

Well, and James [Connally] is coming out. John, my husband is on the board of Sturbridge now, and he's on the elections committee and so do a lot there and we're going out there on Friday and James said, James is also an alum, [END OF TRACK 1] and he said, "I'm going to Cooperstown on Friday," so that must be what he's going for. So, he's coming out to see you guys. That's great. James is wonderful now. What a success story. He's a piece of work. He's great.

HD:

I've heard so many good things about James, so very excited to meet him and ask him a very big list of questions so I hope they're ready for that.

LO:

Oh nice, yeah.

HD:

So, your husband is also an alum of CGP, is that correct?

LO:

Right, yeah, somebody's interviewing him soon too.

HD:

I think that's going to be Thaddeus actually. So how did you, what year was he?

LO:

He was '67.

HD:

How did you meet him?

LO:

Well, because I heard a lot of stories about him. There were people that were working at Fenimore House and actually, I guess in the graduate program too would tell me, “Oh yeah, well there was this guy a couple of classes ago, this cool guy,” and I’m like, “Yeah, uh-huh,” but then anyway he came back in June. I was just finishing my first year and he came back because he had been in the army because that was back when there was a draft, so he has stories to tell about being in Cooperstown and getting drafted when he was in Cooperstown. But anyway, that’s another story that he’ll tell Thaddeus. But then we met that summer and he was working. He was actually going to re-enlist, but Fred Rath had said “come back and work for the ‘summer sems’” [Seminars in American Culture]. There used to be these really fabulous seminars at Cooperstown for teachers throughout New York State in particular, that Doctor Jones ran. They were a wonderful resource because not only did they get a lot of teachers to understand the strengths of Cooperstown and what used to be NYSHA [the New York State Historical Association, now the Fenimore Art Museum] but they also were a way for so many graduate students to get to meet other people. I remember Alice Winchester who was the editor of *Antiques Magazine* and quite a force, she came and gave one of the [seminars] and we all got to meet her and sort of hang out, again because we were always at the professors’ houses. It was a smaller world of the people who ran museums at that point too and not as many, so that was a strength. But anyway, we were there that summer and then we thought “oh,” and then he got a job as director at Hancock Shaker Village. And then I was working; I got a job in Albany as a curator at the New York State Museum, which was just going under a big expansion. So, we were only like 30 miles away. So, then we

just continued to date and then we got engaged the next year and got married the year after that. But there are quite a few couples from Cooperstown.

[TRACK 1, 28:44]

HD:

Really? I did not know that.

LO:

Yeah, a lot of them. One time they did a fundraiser, "If you had met your spouse at Cooperstown, give extra money." It was a good idea.

HD:

That's so funny. So, you talked a lot about networking with alumni. Can you talk a little bit about how that's helped you through your career? I've heard a lot about that.

LO:

Oh totally, totally. And it works your whole life, because then it's really great to mentor people who are alums. There's a philosophy and a standard that's just really wonderful. In New York State there were a number of alums, but I became a site manager after a couple of years at the New York State Museum. At that time everything was run by men and there weren't that many professional women in museums. And so, New York State was really a leader in saying, "Wait a minute, we need to get some women in here," and because Cooperstown provided trained, smart women, we were a natural fit, so they came to, I guess Fred Rath at that point had changed from being at NYSHA to being at New York State. They started they called it then the New York State Historic Trust. It now has a much longer name, but he of course knew all the people that were good that he thought could

help out. So, he hired me, and he hired some people from John's class, particularly Cheryl and Jim Gold. Of course, Dick Slavin was already in the program and was already at Olana, so he hired a number of other people, and so that was really when the women started. I remember my first site manager meeting. I was there, it was in this big parks building and there were all these guys talking about golf course maintenance because they all came out of a parks system. The idea of making a statement for the importance of preservation and the importance of the museums within the parks, because they were all managed by parks people. It was quite an eye-opening experience. I was 26 or 25, and it's like, "What is this world?" So, it was good. It was interesting. But anyway, at that time, there were not just in New York State, but in a lot of other states, Pennsylvania started hiring women in administrative roles, and the Park Service, in general, started hiring women in administrative roles. It was a really exciting time to be a young museum professional, and you would see that when you'd go to AAM [American Alliance of Museums, formerly the American Association of Museums] or AASLH [American Association for State and Local History] conferences, you would really see the sort of changeover. It was both women and it was also the idea that people who were professionally trained, who weren't just art historians who had a sort of, by the way, interest in museums, but were actually trained in museum work. It was a great time.

HD:

So, when women entered the museum field, how did you see the curriculum change, did it diversify?

LO:

Of course it's hard to say with New York State because it was the professionalization of starting to do accessioning and starting to do special events that weren't just recreational, that had a cultural component or historic component. So, I think at that time in New York State and in Pennsylvania, it was more just the museum profession coming in, more than a woman versus a man. But it was just the idea that it had another series of levels.

HD:

So, I want to go back to Cooperstown for one second and ask you about some of your favorite classes from when you were a student.

LO:

Gee, well I loved Per Guldbeck's classes of any, because they were so hands-on and because he was just an inspired teacher. He could do anything. He used to lead a class before my years where he would make kids go up and spend 48 hours on the mountain behind The Farmers' Museum and figure out how to eat berries and live and start fires. They stopped him from doing that, thank God before I got there, because that would have been too much for me. He would talk about how you tanned leather with urine and how settlers would use their own urine to tan leather. You can understand leather a million different ways. But again, it's kind of like talking about the way stuff is made. It just gives you such a different approach to how stuff was done. Plus, his classes were just so engaging, and you learned so many practical things about if you had a piece of furniture and you had evidence of some bug damage, what could you do? Short of the big expense of

sending it to the conservation lab, were there ways to mitigate that were still safe? Things like that were just sort of life skills. Things that you learned all the time and used all the time, I still use. But I also loved Bruce Buckley's classes in oral history. You know, I was telling you. One of the things that I'm doing now is Maine's bicentennial. It's 200 years since it separated from Massachusetts, and so we're doing this series of oral histories in the little town that we live in, with some of the people that are six generations coastal Maine. They're all lobstermen. They're really fascinating, but I use the skills that I learned from Bruce Buckley to do what I'm doing. So, you are going to learn a ton of life skills this year, Hannah.

HD

I'm really excited. I feel like I've already learned so many things.

LO:

Yeah, sounds like it.

HD:

So, did you get a chance to do your own oral history project like I'm doing when you were in school?

[TRACK 1, 34:56]

LO:

Yeah, yeah, I did. I did it on baseball stitching and I don't like baseball, so I was good because I didn't know anything. So, I learned a lot about some woman, I can't remember the town she was in, north of Fly Creek somewhere, but she would hand stitch baseballs. So, I went to her house and it was pretty interesting. You don't have to love baseball to appreciate that kind of craftsmanship. Yeah, so I did.

HD:

Awesome. So, what skills do you think, you did mention that we learn a lot of skills that would carry on, but which skills do you think have stuck with you the most throughout your career?

LO:

Oh well, there was this other woman, Ginny [Virginia] Partridge, who wasn't necessarily a faculty member, but she was a staff member at The Farmers' Museum, and she knew more about textiles. And so, for a while, I was a textile curator, and it was really because of Ginny Partridge. She was so smart about things. She was very low key, but she would just show you what she was doing. She did a lot of natural dying, so I did a project at Cooperstown on natural dying and I still do that. I was dying Easter eggs for a kid this past year and I was using onion skins and it's right from her. So, things like that, little practical things. We used to go over to The Farmers' Museum a lot. The women that would bake the gingerbread. In Lippitt Farmhouse, on a cold afternoon they would be baking gingerbread and we'd always go over and my friend Janet and I would always chat with them and scarf a few pieces of gingerbread and I still have that recipe. So, there's a lot of recipes that I still use from Cooperstown. I still use Alice Spinney's chicken curry recipe from her dinner parties. You will too.

HD:

So, what did The Farmers' Museum look like when you were in school? I actually visited there just a couple of weeks ago. I'm curious to hear how it's changed.

LO:

It's quite different than it is now. It was very lively. There were a number of

craftspeople. The print shop was always working. There was a great guy that did the lawyer. He was the lawyer in the lawyer shop and really explained how the law worked in the era. There was a guy who ran the farm there who was very knowledgeable. So, there was always something going on with farming and I think that's where I really got a real interest in agriculture. From being around them, around the people that were doing it. The craftspeople who were doing it who were mostly local people who had done the craft. It wasn't that they had to learn it at the museum, they had learned it in their life, and they were just showing it as an older person at the museum. So, there was always food being made at Lippitt. There was always stuff going on in Bump Tavern. It was very alive. And all farming. You know there wasn't the, what do you call that thing? I can't remember the name of it, the carousel, the carousel wasn't there. It was really focused on farming and agriculture. Per Guldbeck had just done the Farmer's Year exhibit, and there was a woman that was in our class who was really good, and she did, the Shaker farmer's wife. I mean not Shaker. I'm sorry the Farmer's Year—because we did an exhibit later on the Shaker farm. She did it on women's roles on the farm, which was really a great exhibit. And that stayed in for a number of years, even though it was a student exhibit. It was so well done.

HD:

That sounds really cool, actually. I'd love to see that.

LO:

Yeah, it was the whole upstairs of the barn. Which now is just storage, but it used to be active exhibit space. A wonderful laboratory for students.

HD:

Did they have live animals there?

LO:

Yes, yes, they did.

HD:

I'm glad to see that that tradition carried on because I love the live animals. So, how have you stayed in touch with the alums from your year and from other years?

LO:

Well, I stay in touch specifically with two of my closest friends. We stay in touch all the time. Matter of fact, Peggy [Parsons] has been up in Cooperstown all this week. She's running a film program [Glimmerglass Film Days]. We've been looking at films here in Maine. There've been some amazing films; we had not seen Gretchen's film *Driving While Black*, and I was so glad to see that that was a part of the film festival because we got to see it as the most powerful, astounding film. So, anyway, back to the people. So, Peggy and I stay in touch a lot, and then our third member of our little group, Janice Seeker, who's in Wilmington, NC. She's got some health issues now, but we stay in touch a lot. And then we would come back. Of course we would come to reunions back when people could travel and get together. We would get together with them. And so, it's great to have the newsletter, to have various other ways of keeping in touch is great.

HD:

So, I would like to ask you a couple of closing questions. The first one would be what advice would you give to a student who is a prospective student of CGP;

someone who is looking to go CGP and what skills should they present to the program?

LO:

You mean what skills should they already have?

HD:

What skills do you think CGP would be looking for in a prospective student?

LO:

Of course, it's so different now. I know with our year they were looking for very well-rounded students. But I know after me then for a while they were looking for much higher GPAs and stuff. The trouble is I'm so removed from that process that I don't really know but I know what they could get from it. They can get a really well-rounded ability to approach the museum field in a different, in a more holistic way than some of the other programs offer. Because you do learn so much and you open up to this network of 55 years of museum professionals all across the world who are there to help and are there to network with. But in terms of what you present, I don't know. And you know I worked in a Science Museum for a while and I was so glad to see when CGP was starting the science track because I think that is so necessary and so good to have.

HD:

Yeah, it's a really outstanding part of the program.

LO:

Yeah, what are you going to specialize in do you think?

HD:

I am a curator at heart. I love objects. I'm obsessed with histories of objects and putting them together and seeing how they would look in a collection and an exhibit. That's what I really want to do.

LO:

That's great. Oh, that's great Hannah.

HD:

I'm very excited about it. So last question I have for you. As an EMP, which is a term we like to use, an emerging museum professional, like myself. Do you have any suggestions or advice for us who are still in school and who are approaching being out of school and into the job field?

LO:

Well, I'll tell you when I was hiring a lot of people, I worked at Johns Hopkins for a number of years and we hired at that point. I think the more well-rounded you can be. Of course now there's so much more focus on fundraising, and good writing skills, and the ability to present well both for yourself and for your collection and for your education programs and for everything else. I think that the well-roundedness, which is such a strength of Cooperstown, is a huge plus, and the more you can learn that maybe is a little outside of what you think you might want, the more you can take a variety of courses, the more that will help you in your job search and you may surprise yourself and find something that you decide you love later on. Because the other thing that I was really taken with is that a career is a long time. You know, I worked for 45 years in museums and I did such a variety of things and what I started out doing was very different from what I ended up doing. It's still all the same umbrella of museum work, but the

skill set changes. I look at the difference in accessioning an object when I learned it 50 years ago and how it's done today, it might as well be on a different planet. So, having the flexibility to stay open to what else is coming down the pike is really important, but I know you're going to do great.

HD:

Thank you so much and thank you so much for talking with me today. It's been incredible. I really, really appreciate it. And the Cooperstown Oral History Project appreciates it too.

LO:

Right. Thanks.

HD:

Alright, I'm going to stop the recording. It is 6:25.