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SUSAN BUGGEY INTERVIEW

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Susan Buggey

Hello, my name is Susan Buggy. I worked for Parks Canada for twenty-seven years and then I was ten years as an adjunct professor at the University of Montreal in landscape architecture. But now I am mostly retired, I just do really interesting projects and things I think are important. I'm based in Ottawa Ontario in Canada.

How did you become interested in landscape preservation?

As a young historian, I was working for Parks Canada and you get assigned whatever they need assigned. I was assigned to work on a heritage property that had a century-and-a-half old urban garden, so I started with the building, which is where it always starts, but Parks Canada has a multi-disciplinary approach and so when we were looking at the garden I worked with John J. Stewart who was then the only heritage landscape architect in Canada. He was young, he was vigorous, he was energetic, he was enthusiastic, and he was building knowledge. He was reaching out internationally, he was reaching out into the United States and we worked together on that project and then on a couple of others. I learned a great deal from John about landscapes and gardens and we made presentations, we succeeded in getting two landscape sites designated as National Historic Sites. We didn't initiate them, they were initiated externally, but we did the response that lead to the designation. Landscape preservation, this is in the mid-1970s, landscape was a tabula rasa. There's nothing so attractive as a tabula rasa with great opportunity. I never looked back.

How do you define a cultural landscape?

Cultural landscape has a great many perceptions. It's from mental landscapes, which don't have place, to all outdoors which has all of place. It's sometimes referred to as an approach rather than a place. But

sometimes it's a small garden, which is really just whatever's outside the footprint of the building. It's really a site rather than a cultural landscape. I think there's a difference in perception between designated places that are cultural landscapes that tend to be relatively small because they come out of the cultural heritage movement and a cultural landscape as conceived by academics that are usually large landscapes. I tend to lean to cultural landscapes are large landscapes. They are large enough that they can behave like at least a small ecosystem – so many factors playing together. It's a sense of a place that is looked at holistically, in terms of ecological processes, in terms of cultural processes. Cultural landscapes are also dynamic. It's important to think of the constant movement, continuous change that takes place in cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes we have today, is not the cultural landscape of the past, it's not the cultural landscape of the future. It is very much in the moment, expressive of this time, and I think the heritage movement is moving towards this recognition, not only for cultural landscapes where the organic nature of the landscape drives that forward, but also across the spread of cultural heritage recognizing that we speak for our time and not for all time. We can't prejudge the values of the future. We can't perfectly understand, comprehend the values of the past and their selection of properties. We need to respect the values of the past and their judgments and allow the future to make its decisions as well.

What types of projects are you working on now?

I retired from Parks Canada a little over ten years ago, and mostly since then I've worked on are what are known as Aboriginal cultural landscapes. The two real challenges are how do you define and articulate the outstanding universal value of this particular landscape, and how do you compare, how do you present a comparison, because this is part of the requirements that show what is distinctive about this boreal, subarctic boreal landscape associated with Aboriginal peoples from the multiple others across the whole boreal area. So this is the real challenge in this, and it's very, it's very interesting, it's very challenging, it's very important to get that articulation and get it persuasively presented.

The second thing I want to tell you about is working with the development of guidelines for what are traditional practices, and I'm part of a working group for developing new guidelines for this as part of the landscape guidelines in the '*Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places*' in

Canada that is like your ‘*Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*’ in the United States. It’s been a difficult challenge to address, because many of the policies that exist in Canada are really focused on material remains. The guidelines really deal with material evidences rather than the intangible. The traditional practices are largely intangible. The second edition of the *Guidelines* has just been released, and what they’ve incorporated is evidences of traditional practices and evidences of land use. These are important steps forward in recognizing that these are fundamental to a cultural landscape in many parts of the country and particularly in the north where Aboriginal peoples under land claims are the occupants historically and currently of vast quantities of that land.

What do you think the future is for landscape preservation?

Right now there is emerging a UNSECO recommendation on historic urban landscapes. This came out of the intrusion, essentially the intrusion in view sheds of contemporary architecture, and a sense that the spatial relations have not been maintained. The balance of historic landscape to the space around it and to the place around it has been intruded by new architecture. I think what is really exciting about this recommendation is the focus on the integration of conservation practice with socioeconomic processes in urban places. For a very long time now World Heritage [UNESCO] has looked at historic town centers as ensembles of buildings and the rest was rather incidental. And this is not in fact the character of these places, nor is it about how these places work. I think the movement of this recommendation is that you need to take a landscape approach, you need to look at this holistically, you need to maintain it holistically, and it needs to be rooted in people live here, they shape this place by their experience of living here. It is rooted in the past, it carries forward. There is a strong sense of identity that people have. These are landscapes that give people their sense of place.

How did you become involved in the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation?

We were at an APT [Association for Preservation Technology] conference and there were all these architects talking about landscapes and we said we should be doing our own thing with landscape, we

should bring people interested in landscapes who are bringing landscape perspectives to the built environment, and we managed to get a grant for the next year. We organized a small meeting in New Harmony, Indiana where Tom Kane had done a lot of work. It was an invited meeting, we created a proceeding, and we never looked back.

What does the Alliance mean to you?

It's a network of people, it's like a family, and you get to know people over a long period of time. But it's also bringing together people who are passionate about landscape preservation. And you know people all over the continent as a result of your connections through the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation. Something comes up, you can contact them. And it's a way of keeping in touch with what's emerging, hearing about different projects, hearing about new approaches, hearing about experimental work as it's starting to go on.

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