

## **ASEH Founders – Oral Histories**

Interview with John Perkins by Lisa Mighetto

Olympia, Washington

September 12, 2007

Tape #1

LM: Good afternoon. I suggest that we start at the beginning. Can you tell me about your background, where you grew up, where you were educated?

JP: Sure. Well, I guess I'm a Westerner. Born in Phoenix; grew up in Colorado Springs. Then, went east to college. Graduated from Amherst College in Massachusetts, and then I did a year of graduate work at Stanford and then changed to Harvard. And this was all in biology. So, I started as a biologist, not a historian, which has always made me sort of a maverick within the Environmental History Society. At any rate, I got interested in this field, but not out of the graduate work I did. I finished the work for my PhD in '68 and got the degree in '69.

LM: Harvard?

JP: Harvard. But by the time I finished the work, I knew I that I didn't want to do experimental biology. I'd been doing fungal photo-physiology and genetics, and I was interested in the fruiting bodies of a little mushroom. And I really thought it was terrific material, but this was a time of great social ferment. And I thought, I'm not sure the world needs another experimental biologist. And I thought there were more important problems to work on. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, I knew Everett Mendelson through work with the American Friends Service Committee, which I did for a couple of years after I finished my graduate work. Everett is a historian of science, history of science department at Harvard. And Everett said, "Well you know, you can do history of science, which allows you to ask all sorts of questions about science, where you can bring in the social dimensions." And I thought, that's exactly what I would really like to do. So, with Everett's assistance and sponsorship, I got a post doctoral fellowship to go to the history of science department after I finished work with the American Friends Service Committee. I started a research project that ended up some years later in a book. The research was on DDT and the simple-minded question I had was how come people were so anxious to use DDT, especially after we discovered it caused lots of problems. Why was there such emphasis to use it? I mean it...

LM: And this was post Rachel Carson . . . ?

JP: Oh yeah, it was post Rachel Carson. Rachel Carson's book was very, very influential in my own thinking about pesticides and DDT in particular. So with Everett's help, I worked for a year as a post doctoral fellow, and did a paper on some of the early history of DDT, which I gave to the, what was it called, the Atlantic Conference on History of Biology or something like that. I think the meeting was at Yale. But at any rate, after I gave my paper, this fellow came up to me whose name I knew, but I had never met him.

It was Evelyn Hutchinson, a very well known ecologist who was at Yale. And he said, "Well, I really like your paper." And I thought that if Evelyn Hutchinson likes my paper, I'm very happy. And then he said, "I'm on one of the committees of the National Academy of Sciences, and we're just starting a new study. Is this something that you might like to play a role in?" Well, I was ecstatic. I said, "Well sure. Not a problem at all." And so that led me to go down to Washington, D.C. for three years where I worked on the Study on Problems of Pest Control. At the time, this was the first time the National Research Council had done a study on pesticides that was not done by the agricultural division. The Academy had done a number of studies during the 50's and 60's because the problems that Rachel Carson articulated so well were getting pretty obvious. And they had the Agricultural Board do the studies, and their reports were, I thought, fairly predictable.

LM: I guess they have an interest.

JP: And the scientists who worked on those committees basically said if you use them as directed they won't cause problems. It's the people who don't use them as directed that cause the problems. And the Environmental Studies Board, which was newly organized in the late 60's or early 70's, took it upon themselves to say we think that there's more to say about pesticides than what the Ag Board is saying. And so I was hired to be the staff person, and the Environmental Studies Board allocated a certain amount of its money to support a staff person coming in and getting something going. So we worked for a year on a preliminary planning study for a major study on pesticides. And then a new committee was organized. I was one of the people that helped organize it. Don Kennedy who was at that time a professor of biology at Stanford, agreed to chair the committee, and we were successful in getting money from the Ford Foundation, EPA, the US Department of Agriculture, and the National Science Foundation.

LM: The EPA would have been brand new.

JP: Brand new, yes. Very brand new. They barely knew where their paperclips were. But we started in, must have been '72. Early '72. And we were successful in doing a complete study on pesticides. It ended up about a five-volume report. And without taking too much pride of authorship, I will say I think we did the best report that had ever been done by the National Academy on Pesticides up to that time. There have since been some reports that surpassed ours quite a bit but we pioneered a new way of looking at pesticides within the National Academy structure. The report had only very modest legislative changes that came out of it. But I think it set a pattern for a much broader way of looking at pesticides and it legitimized asking things other than, Is this material going to increase crop yields and increase the profits of farmers. We thought those questions were important, and they were necessary, but they were not sufficient. There were many other questions. And so I think that we succeeded in showing that there was a very broad range of questions that were important to policy on pesticides. Our report came out in the mid 70's, and then in the 80's and 90's, some very good, very important Academy reports finally came out that actually did change legislation. So, it took another two decades.

LM: But you felt it laid the foundation.

JP: I think it did. Or at least I will probably go to my grave convinced that it must have done some good. It was certainly very interesting for me. I always regard it as my second or third graduate education. When the academy study was winding down, I made a decision I didn't want to stay in Washington. I wanted to teach. I wanted to teach undergraduates. I got a job at a brand new division of Miami University in Ohio that was starting an interdisciplinary studies college. And I was in the founding faculty, and so I went out to Oxford, Ohio.

LM: Was this in the mid 70's?

JP: '74. Right. Yeah. And we started the college. And all I will say is that you should probably do this only once in your life because it's too bloody much work. We arrived in July. Students were due in the end of September. And we had to create a curriculum. Fortunately it was only the freshmen class. So, but for the next four years, we added a sophomore curriculum, a junior curriculum, and a senior curriculum, sequentially, one year at a time. And the first class graduated in 1978. Now to come back to something that's relevant to ASEH. It was when I was in Ohio, I contributed a paper to the Duquesne History Forum over in Pittsburgh. John Opie was at Duquesne at the time. I don't know if I met Opie when I was over there giving a short paper. I might have.

LM: How did you find out about the Forum?

JP: I don't know. I saw a notice. And it seemed to be relevant to what I was trying to do and so I gave them my abstract, and they said fine, come give the paper. I don't know if I met John Opie at the conference or he picked up my name. But anyway, somehow we got in touch with each other. And he told me that he was very interested in this environmental history business. And I said, "Oh, well, that's great. What's that?" I was still mostly a biologist. I still thought like a biologist. And I hadn't really written a whole lot of history. I'd written policy stuff for the academy.

LM: And is that what you did for the forum?

JP: I did a history paper. I was finishing the DDT work I had during the Harvard post doc. I knew I wanted to bring that to completion and get it published. In fact, while I was at Miami, I did get that article published in *Technology and Culture*. If you asked me to come up with a title of that paper now, I'd have to think a while. But it was something about connecting the emergence of DDT to technology in wartime, as a World War Two product. I focused the paper on how the Second World War totally shaped the American research and development of DDT. DDT came to life as a very important commercial product and it had uses beyond agriculture. It had a lot of uses in public health, and the paper focused on the wartime connections to new technology.

LM: But John heard that and said that you were interested...

JP: Well, he thought I was doing environmental history, and I agreed that I thought I must be too. but I wasn't trained as a historian. I spent a year as a post doc in a history of science department.

LM: But the term "environmental history" was around?

JP: It was sort of around; mostly what I knew about it came from John Opie. And he was starting this newsletter that he was trying to circulate. And then again, I probably couldn't come up with a year. Maybe John Opie could. He said, "Well I want to get this American Society for Environmental History started. Would you be on the steering committee, the executive committee?" I said, "Sure." It sounded like a good thing to me. I was transitioning from being trained as a biologist to trying to learn to think like a historian. And the modes of thought are very different. I didn't realize how different they were until I finally managed to get a number of things published that were history, and then I realized, "Oh, my gosh, you don't think the same way you do as a biologist. It's totally different." And then it was sort of...

LM: What are the main differences, in your estimation?

JP: Well, I'll talk about a symptom of the differences. When you write a biology paper, you talk about the literature which identifies the problem. Then you explain your materials and methods, then you present your data. Then you discuss your data. And then you draw your conclusions at the very end of the paper. Historians usually have to tell the answer up front. Most histories are written so that by the first couple of pages you sort of know what the answer's going to be. And then the rest of the paper is the elaboration about why they're right. Well this was, as I say, a symptom but it suggested that in history, you sort of have to figure out what your story is, and then you tell your story. But you tell your reader what your story is to start with. In the sciences, it was much more, what's the problem, How are we going to get data? Let's look at the data. And then at the very end, they tell you what the answer is. And you don't know the answer up front. I don't know whether it's in the doing of the research or the writing of the research that the difference are just very profound. I remember one of the first things I tried to write, or one of several things I was writing early when I was trying to write history; I gave to one of my history colleagues here. And he just...

LM: Here at Evergreen?

JP: Here at Evergreen. Yes, and he just, well not so gently, told me I had written it all wrong.

LM: He wanted the thesis up front?

JP: He wanted the thesis up front, and I said: "Well that takes all the surprise out." And he said, "Yes, right. But then people can understand what you're doing because if you don't tell them your thesis up front, they're not going to get it. And they're not going to

wade through all your lengthy explanations. And it's not like writing a science paper." So Ron Woodbury probably did more to educate me on how to write history than almost anybody else because he was so frank. But on the other hand, that's why I gave him the paper because I wanted his feedback on it. It was very, very helpful.

LM: When you're saying that John Opie asked you to be on the executive board, or the steering committee of the new...

JP: Yeah, I can't remember....

LM: Did you call it ASEH back then?

JP: Yeah, I think we did. The journal was called the *Environmental Review* but I think the organization started out with that name. And the first group, I'm not even sure I can come up with all the names of the people in it.

LM: The people who were on the committee with you?

JP: It was John and myself. And there was Rod French from George Washington University and Harold Burstyn from USGS, for U.S Geological Services or maybe he was working for National Science Foundation. I can't remember where Harold worked. Then Kier Sterling I think was on it. And I think I'm forgetting some others...

LM: How did these people come together? Did John find all of them or did you?

JP: John found them all.

LM: Ok. Did he meet them at the forum you mentioned? They weren't there?

JP: No. We finally got a meeting of the executive committee or the steering committee.

LM: You met in person?

JP: Yeah, we met in person because we thought we were a society. We didn't have any members to speak of. Or there were maybe a few members. It was mostly John's newsletter that I saw as a membership base. Anybody that he could think of as interested, he sent them a copy and put them on the list. And so that was the list of people when we decided to organize the society. That's the list of people that as far as I know, we sent it out to. John was sending most of this out. And a number of people said yeah, they were interested; they'd pay some dues. I think we got up to, I don't know, a hundred or two hundred members fairly quickly. And then it sort of stayed at somewhere around 200/300 members for quite a while.

LM: Now you were still at Miami at this time?

JP: I was still at Miami. Yeah, I came out to Evergreen in 1980. So, I was at Miami from '74 to '80.

LM: So you're getting this newsletter? What do you remember about the newsletter? Was it mostly...

JP: John Opie's musings as far as I remember. I'm not even sure I have any copies of that. Maybe he does. I hope he does.

LM: Well, I have a few. I was just trying to jog your memory...So you're getting this newsletter with John Opie's musings . . .

JP: I invited John over to Miami. So, he came over to Oxford and gave a talk to our undergraduates, and that was very interesting. He and I...

LM: About environmental history?

JP: Yeah, he came over and gave an environmental history talk. The students found it fascinating. John and I talked a lot. I probably had him over to Miami maybe twice.

LM: Was environmental history part of your curriculum? You built a program there, right?

JP: It was, but we never called it environmental history. We called it Creativity and Culture II because those are the names we were...

LM: Culture number two?

JP: Well there was Creativity and Culture I, for freshmen. And Creativity and Culture II, was for sophomores. And it was Curt Ellison, who's an American Studies professor at Miami. Curt and I teamed up to teach Creativity and Culture II. We said, okay let's make this an environmental history course. I think we used Joe Petulla's book.

LM: Oh, that was out?

JP: I believe it was. Now, this was a long time ago, and I can make up all sorts of stories about what we did.

LM: We're historians; we can check.

JP: And if you find out that I'm wrong, you'll just tell me I'm wrong. But I think we used Petulla's book, and so we actually tried to create an environmental history course that was influenced a lot by Curt's American studies so he brought in literature as well as history. And it was influenced by my history of science and biology because I brought in the history of science and biology. But we conceived of it as an environmental course although we may have had a subtitle besides creativity and culture too, but I couldn't possibly remember what it was now.

LM: But students responded well to it?

JP: Yeah, we think that they responded very well. Particularly the first time we did it. Actually I'll sort of go off on a little tangent here. In the freshmen curriculum that we invented, we had natural scientists teaching with natural scientists, social scientists teaching with social scientists, and humanities teaching with humanities. So, it was all team taught, but within those big divisions. And I was one of the people in the second year when we were inventing the sophomore curriculum that said; let's shake this up. Curt and I will team up natural sciences/ humanities, and do an environmental history. And that actually started the ball rolling. So then we had social scientists teaching with natural scientists and humanities teaching with natural scientists and social scientists teaching with humanities. So, we had a much more diversified second year curriculum.

LM: And the university supported that?

JP: Yes. We were in a division called the Western College of Miami University which was it's own degree program. So, our faculty had a very high autonomy in setting the undergraduate curriculum. The only constraint we had was it had to be something that satisfied the general education requirement of Miami University. And that wasn't hard, because we made people take natural science, social science, humanities, and arts. For two years. So by the end of the two years, they had gotten what is still my favorite general education program. So Western College actually just this past year was, well I guess you could say, it was demolished. The University absorbed it into the rest of the University, and so it's no longer, I don't know the details, but it's not a separate program. But it lasted thirty years. I can't tell you why the University decided to change it.

LM: Wasn't John Reiger at Miami?

JP: I thought he was at one of the Ohio State campuses.

LM: Yeah, ok. I must be wrong about that.

JP: Yeah, I don't think so.

LM: You mentioned there were maybe around a hundred members of ASEH at this time. Were students members? They are now, but back then, was it mostly professors from other...

JP: Yeah, it was professors and a few administrators.

LM: You mentioned somebody from USGS. So they were government agency historians?

P. Yeah, there's something in the back of my head that says Hal Burstyn was working at USGS. But he was interested in historical things, and somehow he had gotten into Opie's loop. So, he was one of the founding steering committee people. But we were such

mavericks. Rod French was a philosopher. Lovely sense of humor. Rod used to just crack us up at the meetings. He was a philosopher, but he was interested in environmental. And I think he was maybe the provost at GW. He was a high administrator at GW. And Kier Sterling was, somewhere in Ohio or Wisconsin. He was teaching. I can't remember where. We were, I think Kier was historian, and John was, of course, a historian. But then you have mavericks like Rod French and Hal Burstyn, and me who were not professionally trained historians. And in one sense, that was the strength of the founding of ASEH. It got a lot of people in who were not orthodox historians. It was also the weakness because it wasn't until more historians came in that ASEH gained the legitimacy in the historical profession that I think it has today. But it's much less filled with mavericks today. To me, it's a much more orthodox historian's kind of thing. And most people who go there are in history departments. My perception, and maybe I'm wrong is that the founding was in the 70's, but by the 90's, it had been made into a real history professional society. And there's probably better stuff coming out in terms of the publications and the books. The publications and books are amazing in terms of the breadth and the quality of what comes out.

LM: Better stuff in that there are more people and so the...

JP: There are more people, and they're better trained historians. And they're doing a good job writing really interesting history. In the early days, I think what drove us was the idea that there should be something called environmental history, and I would say that the early days of ASEH took that first step which the historical profession itself had not really done.

LM: And why do you think that was? I mean, why them?

JP: Oh, I think there weren't enough historians who were environmentalists. You know history of technology at first was some historians and a bunch of engineers. And it was the engineers who were interested in the old stuff, and they thought somebody ought to be writing the history of this. Then there were a few historians who got interested, but most historians worked with kings or great ideas or great transformations. They didn't deal with widgets and things like that. Until the History of Technology Society finally brought enough people in that then orthodox historians said, "Oh wow! You know this technology stuff's really got something." I think environmental history had a very parallel experience. At first it was a few historians who were interested in the environment. People like me. I wasn't a retired biologist, but I was a biologist who was searching for a way to think about science and the environment in a larger context and history turned out to be a good way for the kinds of interests I have. But there weren't many professional historians who were terribly interested in this. It was like historians at one time weren't interested in widgets and what they could do. Well they weren't interested in DDT and pollution so what grand historical story is there.

LM: Well. of course we know now there were all kinds of grand historical stories, but you're saying that it wasn't a traditional topic.



JP: It was not a traditional topic. We didn't know what those stories were. A lot of people in the history profession were not trained to ask questions like this. They didn't know how to ask the questions, and we didn't either. The thing that I would credit the early ASEH is helping each other learn to ask the right questions. Tom Dunlap was certainly a major contributor you know. He found that the DDT was interesting. I was doing parallel work that involved DDT, but Tom got interested in DDT as a pollutant. I got interested in DDT as a technology. Why were people even using this stuff? We know it's a pollutant. That's a given. It kills things. If it didn't kill things it wouldn't work. It's got to be a pollutant of some sort. But to me, the interesting story was in the technology, and it came out of the fact that I was also involved with the SHOT.

SIDE A OF TAPE STOPS

SIDE B BEGINS

JP: It's very important to understand that these pollutant things had their origins in technology. It's part of my, I guess my intellectual autobiography. I was very taken with Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle*. Where this was in the late '60's, Barry Commoner was a heated intellectual debate where people like Paul Erhlich. And for Paul Erhlich, population was a problem. And Commoner says no, there's lots of problems. It's not population that's the cause. It's technology. And I actually thought, it's not that I don't think population is important, and I think Paul Ehrlich was very important in building an understanding of this many years ago. But on this particular case, I thought Commoner was more right than Ehrlich was and that you couldn't understand environmental problems unless you understood the technology that produced them.

That's what brought me into SHOT originally. And when John Opie and I hooked up, I was looking for how do you think about things that end up as environmental problems. How do you think about them as technologies and write a history about how to understand the environmental problem by understanding the history of the technology behind it. And that's what I was trying to do with my work on DDT and insect control. Tom's book, which came out a little before mine, was very much on the pollution and how the pollutants were handled. It's a really fine book. I've used that in classes before and very much admired that book. But his book didn't answer the question: so why were people using that? And that's what I tried to do. So I came out of the history of technology/ environmental history kind of combination. We were trying to learn how to write environmental history.

LM: You used the term "environmentalist" a little while ago. Do you think some of early members or the founders were environmentalists?

JP: Oh I have my suspicion they all were. That's what got them into it. They were environmentalists, and particularly John.

LM: Was there any tension?

JP: Between environmentalists and environmental historians? There always is.

LM: I was thinking more between some of the established the university and you used the term orthodox historians and the environmental historians. But yeah, the environmentalists and the environmental historians. Those are two separate groups.

JP: They are, and I think that most environmental historians are environmentalists.

LM: Even now, you think?

JP: Even now. That's one of the reasons they get interested in it.

LM: Was there any tension at Miami University?

JP: No . . . .

LM: So, no opposition to thinking that . . .

JP: No. At Miami, we were a separate division called the School of Interdisciplinary Studies/Western College Program. And we were a group of six that grew to twelve faculty. We had a dean and an assistant dean. We had a residential living program. So we had a residential living program with interdisciplinary studies and self designed majors. The tensions we found at Miami were not over whether we should do environmental studies or not. It was can students design their own major? Should faculty have lunch with the students? Shouldn't there be a little distance here? Faculty lived on campus?

LM: Did you live on campus?

JP: We did live on campus for a couple of years. Then, we moved off. That was enough. But there were the questions that we asked. And there was an argument inside the Western College Program. The advertisement that I answered said: "The Western College Program is hiring a new faculty to start a brand new college with a new degree program, and the majors are going to be American Studies and Environmental Studies." And that's why I answered the ad.

LM: Okay.

JP: I got there and discovered I was the only one interested in environmental studies, and nobody else wanted to do it. And the people who were from American Studies didn't want to do that either. So, we then had to reinvent the mission that we were going to accomplish. What kind of students are we going to turn out because we thought that we had to call them something? Yes, they were self- designed, but there had to be thematic descriptors that said what they were. So we extended, and one of the descriptors was Science, Technology, and the Environment. And once that was settled upon, I was fine with that. I thought that was good. To me, it sounded like environmental studies, but

other people liked the other language better, so that was fine. And in the batch of students that we saw through the first graduating class, there were two students who wrote their thesis with me. We required a thesis for undergraduates. We did a joint thesis, and we published the paper in *Environment* magazine, and it was an assessment of no-till agriculture, which used a lot of herbicides to control weeds instead of plowing. This was such a perfect environmental studies thesis. The two students were excellent students. The paper we published in *Environment* has more citations than anything else I've ever written. And I'm just the third author. It was really their work. So we did environmental studies, and it had a historical line to it. Everybody who wrote on environmental studies usually had a pretty good historical section because they saw history as something you had to understand before you could really understand the environmental side of it.

M: Were there tensions within ASEH?

JP: Well sure, but none that were other than invigorating. There was no strict method to environmental history. There were no central questions. It was just people groping around, each using their own idiosyncratic interests. I was interested in pesticides and insect control technology. Tom Dunlap was interested in DDT. John Opie was interested in land use, particularly in the West, and water issues. Red French was interested in philosophical issues, but he didn't have time to publish much. We were interested in trying to write stuff that we thought had historical stories and documentation that was worthy, and said something about a contemporary environmental issue or a past environmental issue that people cared about.

LM: My first meeting was in 1984 at Banff. And I remember attending a session that talked about advocacy. Should historians be advocates? So you're saying early on, that wasn't so much a concern . . .

JP: It wasn't. I think in some ways all of us probably were in one way or another advocates. The only time I personally have ever felt a tension is, and maybe this comes from a background in biology, but I think it's a general thing in scholarly work, is you get an idea. And you go out and try to show you're right but, you should be willing to falsify your hypothesis if the evidence isn't there. And I know because I have many friends who are very strong environmental advocates. They are much less bothered by the notion. They're not scholars. They're political advocates, and they're much less bothered. They want to be right. They want to have the facts right. But if they suddenly discover the facts aren't behind them, they just reformulate their argument and they go on. They don't go and agonize over: "Oh my gosh I'm wrong." Political activism, you get a general sense in the direction you want to go in, and you're not worried about the scholarly details. If you're a scholar, I think you should be.

LM: You kind of have to be don't you?

JP: Well yes, if you're going to be a good scholar. And, you know, it's just something you have to be willing to say, "Oh gosh, I thought this was the case. There's no evidence

for it. I was wrong.” And then that becomes actually what makes life interesting as a scholar. Find out what really did happen. And in the second book I wrote, that was exactly what happened. It was on the invention of high yielding agriculture as an agricultural technology. The Green Revolution that caused all sorts of problems. And I started off with a hypothesis about why the Green Revolution was invented, and I was dead wrong. I found no evidence whatsoever for it. And I found lots of evidence for another reason. So, I had to back up and reformulate what I thought that Green Revolution meant. And if I had not been willing to do that, I don’t think my history would have been very good. There was a lot of activism that sort of comes and goes about anti-green revolution, anti-high yielding agriculture. And many of the reasons about why we have higher yielding agriculture to me just don’t make any sense. I think there are reasons that we have high yielding agriculture. And if you don’t like high yielding agriculture, you should know why you have it, otherwise you’ll never be able to fix it. And that’s my own form of activism

LM: Did you say that you came to Evergreen in 1980?

JP: Came in 1980, yep.

LM: What made you move out here?

JP: Well there were a number of factors. Have you ever been in Oxford, Ohio?

LM: No.

JP: That’s one reason why we moved.

LM: What, the weather?

P. The weather was great. The summers are so hot. Winters can be just jolly cold. And the winters didn’t bother me as much as the summers. The summers, that heat.

LM: Kind of sticky, humid...

JP: Oh God, it’s just oppressing. It’s like most of the East, you know, in the summer. The second thing was, I did want to try my hand at administration. There was an Academic Dean’s job here. And the third was that although we had settled at Western College on a way to do environmental studies, I was still seeking more. What attracted me to Evergreen was not only did they have a Dean’s job, they also had an environmental studies unit. And I thought, it’s out of southern Ohio. There’s a Dean’s job. They’ve got environmental studies. I think I would like to see if I could do that. And so I put my name in. They pulled my name out of the hat, and I’ve been there ever since. When I got here, I discovered that in fact the College was also just starting to do the planning for a graduate program in environmental studies. Well that just solidified the deal. And so when I came as a Dean, part of my work was to do the Dean’s part of the work on getting that new program going. Oscar Soule was a faculty colleague here. He was the Chair of

the faculty committee that designed the program, but I worked on that committee. Then when it got to the point the faculty was done, I did the administrative work of shepherding the graduate program through the college and through the higher education bureaucracy of the state. We started that program in 1984, and I served as Director from '99 to 2005. That program has been one of my favorite parts of teaching after I stopped being a Dean. So, I'm glad I left Miami, and I got to live in the Northwest.

LM: And you like it here?

JP: Yes. I would live in the East very happily again, but not happily in southern Ohio. Washington D.C. and New York quite all right. Southern Ohio makes Olympia look exciting. And Olympia's a pretty quiet town.

LM: Well I imagine that environmental studies would be quite popular here.

JP: It is. It's always been an important part of Evergreen's curriculum. We have never had what I would call an orthodox environmental historian. We have a number of us: myself; included, Tom Rainey was a historian, Soviet studies, Russian studies historian. Martha Henderson is a geographer but she also environmental history. There have been a number of us who bring environmental history into our work, but we have never described a job that said " environmental historian." Maybe that will happen one of these days, I don't know. But in a sense, the people that do environmental history here are like the first days of NSEH. It's mavericks from every field who come in and carve out a piece of work that they like to do.

And I've never taught anything that was called environmental history, but historical debates and currents inform everything I teach. Basically, I like teaching about environmental problems and environmental problem solving. But I think environmental problem solving today, now, current policy issues, has to start with a historical prospective. Otherwise I think that you're just spinning your wheels because I don't think you understand the things that cause environmental problems are not there. It's not for silly, stupid reasons. They're usually technological in origin because that's the way I see it. People adopt technologies for very good reasons. It usually solves some problem they have. And if you say that technology is very damaging, whether it's DDT or nuclear power or whatever, people won't listen to you. If you tell people, you can't do that any more, you run the risk of totally misunderstanding the problem. You have to be able to understand why they got to the place that they got, and then you have to work to figure out what to do that's not so damaging. So to me, as a historical prospective, it's just absolutely essential.

LM: Have you found that the interest in Environmental Studies has increased over the years? You got here in '80, which strikes me as sort of the height of the environmental interest. Is the interest as strong now as it ever was?

JP: The way I would describe it is that the interest goes up and down, and up and down, and up and down. The average is quite steady. It's got years where there's a lot of interest, and it'll drop off for a couple of years. Interest means students.

LM: Right.

JP: And then suddenly, without your knowing why, suddenly students are back in large numbers for a couple of years and then they dwindle down again. And I've seen this cycle go through several iterations. So the way I describe it is Evergreen has a very important environmental studies curriculum. It's been here since the day the college was organized in 1971. It will probably be here forever I guess. I'm not going to be here forever, but it will be here forever. And its fortunes shift from year to year. Sometimes it has over enrollment. Sometimes we're a little shy.

LM: What's an average number of students?

JP: Well, let's see. Probably around 500 undergraduates at any one time. And ...

LM: And the total enrollment is four thousand right? So that's a sizeable number.

JP: Yeah, were one of the larger sections of the college. Graduate students, we've had classes entering with as few as twenty-five and as many as forty-two. Usually we try to be closer to forty because it keeps the Dean's happier. Deans are very conscious of these things.

LM: Of numbers?

JP: Yes. They have to be. but sometimes we don't make it. But the quality of students, from what they contributed, the graduate program is now considered a good firm fixture of the college, too.

LM: You came here in 1980, and the first ASEH conference was in 1981. Did you attend? It was on the West Coast.

JP: Was that the one down at UC Irvine? Yes, Ken Bailes organized it. Yes, I was there. Gave a paper.

LM: ;What was that like?

JP: The conference?

LM: It was the first one.

JP: We were ecstatic that it finally happened because we had been working for five or six years and we didn't feel like there was much interest. There were a couple of panels organized at the AHA and the Organization of American Historians, and two or three

people, Opie I'm pretty sure was always one of those, he'd find a few more historians who were interested. But we didn't think there was strength to call a meeting until Ken Bales. I can't tell you the origins of how Ken came up with that, but he got interested. I think he was in Russian Studies, a Russian historian, a Soviet historian.

LM: Was that a major initiative? When you were on the steering committee, what was the most important thing? Was it to get a journal? Was it to have a meeting? or was it...

JP: Well first thing was to get a journal, because we feared if we weren't publishing something then it didn't exist. And so John put the idea forth and we came to the starting point of *Environmental Review*. And that took up most of the headache time of the executive committee for the first couple of years, because, well, I guess what you'd say it wasn't well capitalized. In fact, the amazing thing is not that sometimes the issues were late. The amazing thing is that John was able to get them out at all with essentially a budget that is about as close to zero as you can get. And so he just did an amazing job of pulling everything you could get, and we got people to volunteer.

He started putting out papers, and then we had something to send around and say, "See! People who look like scholars are writing." And I know Tom Dunlap had an article. In fact, Tom and I each had an article. I think it was issue number five that made sort of an insecticides kind of issue. A pest kind of issue. But getting the journal was clearly the most important thing. And that was really hard. And I honestly can't tell you what it was, what the connection was that suddenly what Ken Bailes wanted to do and what ASEH wanted to do exactly overlapped because I just wasn't involved in those negotiations.

LM: But you ended up at the conference?

JP: Yeah, but I went to the conference.

LM: How many people were there?

JP: It was pretty big. At least a couple hundred. I mean I remembered it was big. There was more people than we had ever seen before. It could be there was just a lot of people at Irvine wandering around and then happened to come in. I don't know. But there was a proceedings volume that came out of there, and I've got a paper in there. And I think that really...to have a major university like the University of California put some sort of imprimatur this must be okay because the University of California does it. And the University of California wouldn't do it if it wasn't okay. It sort of...

LM: Legitimized it?

JP: It legitimized the field, and it's sort of a specious argument because I think we had good scholarship before them. But if a research university isn't agreeing that you've got scholarship, then it's hard to tell you've got scholarship. So that was very important.

LM: And then there was another meeting in Miami. Did you go to that? Your old campus?

JP: Yes. In fact I was the...they didn't call me the program chair. I think I was Vice President for Programming. But I made all the arrangements with my former colleagues at Miami. You probably know the year of that better than I do.

LM: '83?

JP: Was it '83? That sounds about right. But it was, we set the time and place to be just after the OAH in Cincinnati that year. And we thought, oh, well people will be very happy to come from Cincinnati up to Oxford. And we thought Oxford was a cheaper place to do it. And I have had the contacts there. I knew they had good conference facilities, which is all true. Turned out we didn't get anybody to drive up the road from Cincinnati, but enough people came to Oxford that we had what we thought was a successful meeting. And then I guess the next one was at Houston.

LM: There was one in Banff for the North American Environmental Education and that's the one that I went to. And that was in '84.

JP: Right. John Opie and I had something to do with that because we were both participants in the environmental education association.

LM: So were you in Banff? You were? Okay, so was I.

P; Oh, well I guess our paths didn't cross. I was a member of the environmental education group as well as the environmental history group. And I know John Opie and I, we arranged a panel with the environmental education people a year or two earlier than that at Land Between the Lakes in Kentucky.

LM: I didn't know that.

JP: Gosh what a year. I believe that was even before the Irvine conference. I suggested to the program chair of the environmental education group, "Well, I'll put together a panel of history, environmental history because I think this audience would really find that interesting. And the program chair said, "Yeah sure. That sounds good." So I got John Opie and myself and Marty Reuss.

LM: The Corps historian?

JP: I think it was Marty. This is where you can check my memory , , , ,But we went and were very well received. I mean it was like, I think it was Opie that said afterward, well I go to these history meetings and none of these historians want to hear about environmental history, but if you go to the educators meeting, they all wanted to hear environmental history. So we were all quite elated that we found an audience, and I think that's probably what led us to double up with environmental education again. So...



LM: And then you met at Evergreen?

JP: We met at Evergreen in '89.

LM: You must have organized that.

JP: Yeah, I organized it.

LM: What was that like? I wasn't here then.

JP: Well, it was again a joint meeting. There was a regional association, the Northwest Association for Environmental Studies which was about ten colleges and universities around Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

LM: Did that continue?

JP: No, it's sort of gone to sleep again. It actually was invented in the 70's, had a long nap. It came back. I was instrumental in getting it to wake up again. And it had a run of about six or seven years. And we had meetings at all the campuses that were active in it. And then no one wanted to organize a second meeting, so it went back to sleep again.

LM: But in '89 you met with ASEH?

JP: Yes we lined it with ASEH. So we got a bunch of regional environmental studies people plus the environmental history group. The environmental history group was just at the time starting to sort of look more like a history society. There were a lot of graduate students presenting their thesis work. That sort of thing. It's not just maverick professors presenting their work. So, Oscar Soule, he's a colleague here, Oscar and I organized that joint meeting in '89. And then I think the next time after that was down at Marty Melosi's in Houston.

LM: You mentioned that the journal was a major concern in the beginning, and it sounds like the biggest concerns were finances initially.

JP: Oh yeah, we didn't have any. There weren't many members, and one of the things I subsequently learned about publishing is, if you have more than a thousand issues printed, you start getting economies of scale that are really significant. And if you're down to three hundred, you have no economies of scale and so it was always touch and go.

TAPE 2:

JP: Well, I credit John Opie with the persistence, although, I don't want to call them dark years, because we were having too much fun.

LM: Was it fun?

JP: We always enjoyed getting together, and we'd talk about all the problems and we'd try to solve them.

LM: Were they mostly financial or were they intellectual.

JP: Oh, there were no intellectual problems. The only intellectual problem was getting a critical mass of people who were doing something and had something to say. But that usually came fairly easy because there was always a hand full of people who were trying to do this. Tom Dunlap was certainly one of the first. John Opie was doing stuff, I was doing stuff, and there were many others.

LM: So do you remember at the meetings if there were other administrative concerns? Was it just the journal and getting it together that was important? There weren't other initiatives?

JP: No. If there were, they didn't infringe on my consciousness. We needed a mailing list. We needed people to pay dues. John was working with very limited resources to put out a journal. I'm now the editor of a journal, and I have a much better sense of...I don't know how he did it. But he did it. I just credit him forever that he managed to figure out how to get it done. Without anything like a permanent paid staff or an academic publisher. We didn't have one. Kinkos didn't even exist. So, he found a print shop in Pittsburgh where we could print this thing.

LM: Is the reason you didn't have an academic press that the field was too new?

JP: Too new, too small. Academic presses start getting interested in you when you get close to a thousand. Three hundred, six hundred. If that's what they see, there's no economies of scale. You know, the first copy that we put out was really expensive. The second one's only half as much. By the time you get to the thousandth one, they're cheap. You're down basically to the cost of the paper. But that first copy you put out is expensive. We were too close to the first copy, and there weren't enough dues to give us a treasury.

LM: How much were the dues? Do you remember?

JP: Oh gosh, they weren't much. We certainly didn't want to scare anyone away with being too expensive.

LM: Who could join? You mentioned it was mostly faculty, but were there any restrictions, or could anybody join?

JP: I don't think we had many restrictions. You had to have an interest in environmental history. And I think you could be professional or amateur. If you just wanted to buy it and read, I think we would have said fine.

LM: I wonder if you had many library subscribers.

JP: Not many, no. I'm pretty sure not. Libraries subscriptions can, if you get enough of them, make a good difference. But we had no marketing. John was the editor and publisher. He had to arrange all the logistics, and he had to deal with all the manuscripts. They were peer reviewed, so we got reviewer's comments, and that was very important. We wanted it to be a peer reviewed journal. But John was editor and publisher, and that's more than anybody should ever take on. And, as publisher, he didn't have a marketing division. Basically, his publishing was he organized the printer. And he organized somebody to do the type setting and the graphics and the art work. And he got most of this I think done for a very low cost or for free. So no marketing. We had no marketing. We couldn't even produce a brochure.

LM: How did you choose the sites for your conferences? I mean, how did you come to organize the Evergreen conference? Did somebody ask you?

JP: I think I volunteered. It was after...

LM: So by that time, you were meeting fairly regularly? And it was decided it's time to meet.

JP: I think we, if I remember right, I think every other year we'd have our own independent meeting. And then on the off years, there'd be something at one of the historical associations. And I probably went to one AHA meeting in Chicago at one time because of this. I probably drove up from Oxford. But I wasn't a member of AHA or OAH, so I didn't tend to go to their meetings. I probably just felt like, well you know, in two years we needed to have a meeting. And so I said to the executive committee, if you'd like me to, I'll organize the next meeting at Evergreen, and we'll probably try to do it jointly with the regional environmental studies group. And there weren't any other volunteers. So, now I do remember at the Evergreen meeting. I did the announcement: in two years we'll be looking for another place. Is there someone that you would like to organize this. And bless his heart, Marty Melosi said he'd do it. So he organized the next session after that.

LM: Did you go to Houston?

JP: I think I did. There are very few things I would go to Houston for.

LM: And this might be one of them?

JP: This might be one of them. I'm pretty sure I went. I don't think I gave a paper though.

LM: Did your students come to the conference while it was here at Evergreen?

JP: No.

LM: So it wasn't seen as sort of a recruitment tool?

JP: Not for students. No. It was, in fact, I believe we had it in the summer, so not many students at all. And, yeah it was basically to keep alive that there was an organization and that it was starting to produce pretty good scholarship. It had a journal. It was printing interesting things. You know, it finally took hold. Now, I'm not on the executive committee anymore. I'm not really associated with the journal anymore than as a subscriber.

LM: Do you still go to meetings?

JP: I went to the one in Denver. Was that 2002? And there was one in Victoria.

LM: 2004.

JP: So I went to Denver and Victoria. And Victoria was the last one that I went to.

LM: Well, it's in Boise this next year. So it's not that far.

JP: I saw that. That's right. I could certainly go to Boise. The problem I've had in recent years because I've been editing this journal for the Environmental Professional Association. Pretty much my association time is taken up with that.

LM: How long have you been involved with it? Is it the Northwest Environmental Professional?

JP: No it's the National Association of Environmental Professionals. I'll give you a sample copy. That's our latest issue. So it's a national group. And putting out the quarterly doesn't leave much time in my life for ASEH.

LM: And you're Editor-in-Chief?

JP: I'm Editor-in-Chief. I'm going to stop near the end of June 2008. I've done it for thirteen years.

LM: So, who's taking it over?

JP: We'll we're just about to start the search for that.

LM: Ok.

JP: Do you know anybody who would like to do that? Because we've got a request for proposals for hiring the Editor-in-Chief.

LM: We'll I'll ask around. I just got involved in the University of Washington, and I'll ask.

JP: It's been a lot of fun. It's a different association, and it's very practice oriented. So it's a lot of practioners involved with problem solving. From time to time, I've tried to incorporate, again, historical articles in the journal.

LM: It looks like you have a lot of University Affiliates on the Advisory Board.

JP: Yeah, it's a mixture of University and consultants and agency people. And the meetings are very much consultants, agency people, academics.

LM: And it's national, not Northwest?

JP: Right. It's next meeting is going to be in San Diego next April.

LM: So this will be a national search. You aren't looking for local? Okay.

JP: We have nothing against them being from the Northwest. We're going to do the search nationally. Hopefully somebody will step forward. I've certainly enjoyed it. The day I became editor, the Association went into a financial meltdown, so we stopped publishing for three years. But that was actually in some ways sort of nice, because it allowed me to totally reinvent the journal. We renamed it, and revamped the appearance of it, and changed the kinds of materials that we accepted.

LM: And where did you get funding?

JP: Well the Association has a membership fee. We also have institutional subscribers. We're a Cambridge Journal. I did learn something about the journal publishing business through our trials and tribulations keeping this thing coming out. Most journals are now sold in bundles. Institutions don't buy a journal; they buy a bundle. When we went to Cambridge University Press, we went from 50 institutional subscribers to about 1000.

LM: So that's good.

JP: We'd been struggling for years to get it to 60. And in one fell swoop, it went to 1000. So, I now know something about the marketing of journals. That libraries buy a list, and they get a discount for buying the whole list. And a lot of them get the online version only.

LM: I learned about this stuff when I got involved in the online negotiations for ASEH's journal. Duke did it for a while. And now the Forest History Society. . . .

JP: Oh, the Forest History Society. The publishing industry went through tremendous turmoil in the last fifteen years. I don't think that they are out of it yet. The fifty institutionalized subscriptions were from members that were at the institution. Evergreen

was an institutional subscriber, because I went and asked the librarians, and they said sure. It wasn't until we were bundled that we suddenly grew to much wider circulation.

LM: Well, just getting back to ASEH for a minute. You mentioned several times the importance of John Opie's work. Are there other individuals that stand out?

JP: Tom Dunlap was very important, and Rod French was very important in the early days. I haven't seen Rod for probably over twenty-five years. I don't know where he is. Don't know if he's still alive. He's a little bit older than I am. But, I don't know, to me John had the vision. John had the tenacity. And all the rest of us contributed, but I just have a feeling if it wasn't for John, the society wouldn't exist today. Once he got people like Don Worster and Don Hughes involved, then it started to take off a lot. ASEH moves right along. Getting Carolyn Merchant involved was really very important. I think all of the people who became presidents of the association, just an amazingly good group of really great scholars and great people. When people like that agree to serve as president of the association, it didn't matter who the founders were. The association had achieved a legitimacy. People needed it because the scholarship it stimulated was good.

LM: But if it weren't for you, we wouldn't exist.

JP: If it wasn't for John Opie we wouldn't exist. Susan Flader was a very good President because she brought a legitimacy to things. Very important. With that legitimacy it became more like a professional historian's organization. Our graduate students go to work, usually with agencies. We're very practitioner oriented, not academic oriented.

LM: And the ASEH is not practitioner-oriented. That is interesting.

JP: Right. It's an academic organization. That's fine. But our graduate students are agency and practice oriented, so ASEH is not a place for them.

LM: Well, we are trying to broaden the mission.

JP: Putting out this other journal takes a lot of time.

LM: Yeah, I could see how this could be time consuming.

JP: Right. I've got my day job that Evergreen expects me to do. And then I've got my night job. By the time I get done with NAEP, there's just not much left for anything else.

LM: Well, what do you think's the biggest challenge that ASEH will face in the future?

JP: I'm not sure I know anymore because I'm not sitting on the executive committee, I'm not on the advisory board of the journal. It's, I suspect it's the usual. Do we have enough members? Are we getting enough money? Should we be starting an endowment? Should we be fundraising like Carolyn Merchant had started? Major influence on fundraising. Yeah, I don't know. That's a great question. That's the challenge. I don't have a

particular feel for it. But partly that's because I'm not president of the organization. I can tell you much more of the challenges of 1982, because I know those very, very well. But ASEH, I don't know if the membership numbers are an issue or is anybody unhappy with the scholarship? Or are people getting rejected and can't get published because schisms have arisen in the historical profession and some stuff is not considered environmental history. Now I have no idea whether if I wrote something whether I would get published. If I sent it to ASEH environmental history would I get published. I don't know.

LM: And it sounds like that wasn't so much of a concern in the early days because you were just trying to find it, right? Is that the case?

JP: Yeah. And I don't know. If I had been more active in ASEH in the last couple years, I might have a better feel for it. I went to the Denver meeting, and I did a comment on some papers. It must of been up at the Denver meeting, because Ed Russell was one of the papers.

LM: History of science?

JP: It was the history of technology, science, environment kind of thing. If I stop thinking about it I'd come up with the other papers. And then I went to Victoria.

LM: Did you like the meeting?

JP: Oh yeah, it was lovely. It's always fun to see people there that I hadn't seen for a number of years. You know, but my own scholarly work is moving in a new direction. I'm about to retire, and I may come back to environmental history.

LM: Well, I hope it does. Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't talked about?

JP: Well, just one thing: The only thing that would dismay me is that ASEH did have a schism that really led to some people having to drop the organization. And it's not that I object to disagreement. Academic organizations have had schisms and new a organization is formed. And that had everybody happy, and that's fine. But ASEH was started by such mavericks who were just so all inclusive that that was one of the reasons the organization was fun. That's one of the reasons I put time into it. I think it's one of the reasons Opie put time into it. He was having fun, and doing good scholarly work. Contributing to the scholarship was great. So, it would sadden me if suddenly, some schism arose that some people felt they had to leave ASEH . . . .But if they did, maybe that would be a bunch of mavericks, and they would go off and do something and that would be very interesting and that'd be great. So, I'm not going to get too upset.

LM: Well, I hope that we can keep everybody in the fold. I think we had some great presidents that have been good at building consensus.

JP: Yeah. And to me the thing that made the field exciting was that here I was trying to survive after a little stint in Washington on a policy exercise. And I was trying to do what I thought historians did. I went to the archives. I read a bunch of old correspondence. I told a story about what that correspondence meant, and I offered an interpretation that I hope was useful. But there was an acceptance of all sorts of people of very diverse backgrounds, and again this was one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses. The weakness was, we couldn't get any graduate student a job. There were no jobs in environmental history. There wasn't even an environmental history. Now there is an environmental history, so the association has to get its graduate students jobs, either in academia or in some other environmental field. So in those early days we weren't burdened with that, which was sort of a joy, because it meant that we were interested in the intellectual content of what people brought. And it wasn't for several years until graduate students started appearing and then the organization had to change.

LM: It's part of the maturity.

JP: It is part of the maturity, and is ASEH as much fun? Oh probably so, but it's also a more serious organization now.

LM: I think it's still fun.

JP: The graduate students better hope it is.

LM: Well, that's serious in any case.

JP: Because they've got a very serious problem. You know, it's not easy for a new PhD. We want them to find an opportunity somewhere with interesting work. I don't think it has to be in academia. Now you're a great example. You're going into things that are not the academic side, but I wish more academics would do that. It's one of the things I find interesting about environmental professionals is that it's the only meeting that I can go to and not everybody I'm going to talk to is a college professor. I really like that.

LM: Well, ASEH is attracting more and more consultants and agencies and so on. It's still largely faculty . . .

JP: Well that's good. It has always, I think, maintained an attractiveness to engineers. Often retired engineers who want to do something about old engineering stuff in their retirement years.

LM: They're interested in the artifacts. That's what you're saying earlier, right? Material culture.

JP: Yeah, material culture. I think for any historical associations, it's really good to keep the non-professional involved. Because if it gets too much just the clique of the professionals, they'll probably start talking in ways that only they can understand, and then the stuff is not much fun to read because if you aren't in that community, you can't



read it. It's not written in English. So, I'm hoping that the ASEH will keep writing in English. Good simple English without a lot of deep theoretical things that keep a broad range of people from understanding it. I think that's the only sermon I need to give.

LM: Well, thank you very much.

JP: Well, you're very welcome. I hope it's of use.