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Oral history interview with Wm. A. Parker  
[full name of interviewee]

about Relocation in Houston; local reception;  
[main focus of interview]  
initial procurement work and facility leasing.

Title: 1962 - Procurement Operations, Procurement  
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]  
and Contracts Div, Admin  
1968 - Mgr, Center Support Planning & Control, Admin

Interview conducted by Robert B. Merrifield - Staff  
[interviewer's name/position]

Historian at MSC  
[location of interview]

Transcript and tape(s). [for inventory only: # pages 14; # tapes 1]

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**Career Path** - Goddard Space Flight Center - PERT;  
1961 - STG

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**Topics** - Hectic early days of STG staffing; Apollo RFP  
preparation; 3 concurrent programs; relocation  
logistics; Houston people wanted contracts;  
warm reception by local officials & merchants; special  
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setting up quarters for singles at Laney.

## INTERVIEW WITH W. A. PARKER

Parker: Well, let's see, so you can identify the tape, this is Bill Parker. I was employed at Goddard Space Flight Center and there I was head of the PERT organization which was forming at that time. In the spring of 1961, I began to hear rumbles about the Space Task Group down at Langley being relocated somewhere. I understood that this would be somewhere in the South, and being from the South, I decided it would be to my advantage to return closer to my home. I went to NASA Headquarters to talk to Wes Hjernevik, who I heard by the grapevine was going to be the head of STG Administration. At that time, these discussions and comments were either rumors or based on rumors, ~~and by golly, they~~ ~~proved to be pretty good~~. When I went in to see Mr. Hjernevik, I told him I was at Goddard, wanted to head south and heard about the possibility of STG moving ~~to Houston~~. He about fell out of his chair, of course, because none of these decisions had been made, Site surveys hadn't been accomplished or anything else. He looked at my background and told me that it would fit in a procurement organization but at the Space Task Group Glenn Bailey was then the head of the procurement organization and that the new head, Mr. Lang, hadn't come onboard officially. Mr. Lang was head of the B-70 procurement at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Hjernevik said if I could contact Mr. Lang, and if Mr. Lang, when he forms his organization might wish to have me, well it was all right with him.

Mr. Lang at the time was traveling between Dayton and Langley on the weekends. He would go to Langley on the weekends, as he still had very

pressing responsibilities in the B-70 program that required his presence in Dayton during the week. I intercepted Mr. Lang one day at the airport in Washington. He didn't know me and I had him paged off the airplane. I took the bags out of his hand and told him that he was going to be there an hour and 40 minutes and that while he was sitting there I wanted to talk to him. He was aghast that this creep who came in there would be so bold, but when the hour and 40 minutes ended, Mr. Lang had made a commitment that I could come into his organization.

I had the papers processed to be picked up by the Space Task Group on July 10, 1961, and I reported in ahead of Mr. Lang, who didn't officially come, I think, until August or September. The STG organization at that time was so flexible and we were doing so many things by leaps and bounds that Mr. Bailey, who was then the head of procurement didn't even know I was coming. My papers got mixed up and instead of reporting in as a GS-14, they had me entering as a GS-4. I reported, without orders, as in those days everyone's orders always followed. I just showed up, and Mr. Bailey didn't know who I was, or what I was supposed to be doing.

I assigned me a desk over in the corner, sort of the attitude, okay, GS-4, that's where you sit. Mr. Lang, of course, knew I was coming and so did Mr. Hjernevik, but the communications in those days were pretty frantic. Mr. Lang told Personnel that I would start hiring people and building our organization from its current levels. (I think I was the 17th employee in Procurement including all those who were there at Langley at that time). I immediately began my recruiting efforts, and Mr. Bailey, all of a sudden became concerned because these

~~50's were being sent down to Personnel and he wanted to know what in the world was going on.~~ There was a few anxious moments early there in the Procurement organization, <sup>but</sup> Shortly thereafter ~~though~~ we got the administrative batting order all lined up. ~~Just as a sidelight, it is worth nothing, that it has only been recently that I've been accepted in the organization by Mr. Bailey -- it has been a slow tedious process.~~

We were getting out the Apollo request for proposal. We were also working on the Gemini program and we were still in the early days of Project Mercury, so the procurement organization was faced with a problem of three major technical programs and a move somewhere. My immediate task with the Space Task Group was to convert a wind tunnel into office space and to write the logistics plan for the move to Houston. There were several of us working on this logistics plan -- Roy Aldrich, Marty Burns, myself, Phil Whitbeck and I'm sure there were others, but I can't recall their names.

*for the two most preferred sites.*  
As I recall, we were to write two relocation plans, One, to move STG to Houston, and another to move it to Benecia, California. We tackled the Houston plan first. I was busy putting together utility rates and school system data and all sorts of other information and as I recall it, we had finished the logistics plan for Houston either the day before or the very day that the announcement was made that Houston had been selected as the relocation site. Within a matter of hours of the announcement from Mr. Webb that Houston was the Site, we had packages in everyone's hands. Those people who would have sinister thoughts

*Signature*

anyway, immediately assumed that this thing was stacked for Houston to start with.

The minute the announcement was made, it seemed like everyone in Houston wanted a contract or a job. The Houston people immediately started bombarding the Space Task Group with inquiries. It was decided that we would send a small cadre of people from Langley to Houston to talk with the Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Administration, and also, to send some Personnel people to start setting up the procedures for hiring some of the local people. I have always been proud to have been one of the first MSC people to be down here on temporary duty. I think there were six of us. There was Stu Clark, the head of Personnel, and myself. I brought Bob Peck who was a small purchase procedures man, and Jeff Davis who was the facilities procurement man because we knew we were going to have to talk about interim facilities with the GSA. We had John Vincent <sup>and Luther Turner</sup> from Personnel and I'm sure I've overlooked someone, but that is the group that sticks in my mind as coming down here initially on TDY.

I never will forget those first few days. We arrived here on a Monday and we started off meeting with Mr. Hurley, Executive Secretary, of the Houston Chamber of Commerce - - Mr. Hurley and others. We were really heroes at the time, although we were strictly lower to middle management in the Space Task Group organization, or at least I was. The keys to the City were just all but given to us. They told us that they realized that we had a lot of appointments and a lot of things to do. ██████████

couldn't find a parking place not to worry about it, just park it in the middle of the street.

The city was ours. We had police escort from meeting to meeting because everyone was interested in talking with us. The Mayor of Pasadena, the <sup>Commanding</sup> General at Ellington, the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, GSA, the Small Business Administration, and the Better Business Bureau; I guess all of us were thrown all at once into public speaking roles.

We had a constant audience. We were getting telephone calls at the motel -- the people found out where we were. I never will forget one morning <sup>2</sup> Stetson hats showed up at the Motel from Joske's <sup>(one for Dorothy Byrnes the other for me).</sup> I still have a letter in my scrapbook from the President of Joske's welcoming us to Texas. One of the first things we did, we spoke down here at the Humble Club one night to the Bay Area Development Realtors, who were particularly interested in us. As a result of this meeting, we developed a unique system of advising the Bay Area Development Company (a real estate association) as to when the airplanes were arriving with <sup>our</sup> ~~out~~ people and how many people there would be. They made arrangements to meet the airplanes and take our people on tours of the area showing them housing. The local banks were outstanding. ~~I recall the First Pasadena State Bank in particular.~~ We worked a special arrangement, ~~with them (I think they were the more aggressive of all the banks in the area).~~ If our people, when they reported in, were short of cash because they hadn't gotten their moving expenses check yet, we could send them to the bank almost at any hour and float a loan. If the bank was closed, the side door was open to them. It took about 5 minutes -- call down

there and there would be cash waiting for these people. There were no questions, no credit checks, or anything else. The Chamber of Commerce came up with tickets to everything -- we were guests at football games, theater parties, almost anything you could think of.

We were on the go from morning to night -- until 10:30 and 11:00 p.m. every night. We were on stage, we were the NASA people, and it was a glorious experience while it lasted. But all good things have to come to an end.

As I mentioned earlier, we arrived on a Monday and on Wednesday night a group of us were sitting around relaxing. It was about 10 p.m. I guess, when we received a call from, I believe Hjernevik, at Langley. He asked how soon we could have interim offices set up in Houston -- preferably Friday. We hadn't done anything toward locating office space or making any such arrangements because that wasn't our initial purpose down here. It just so happened that the manager of the Gulfgate Shopping Center happened to be in our company at the time the call came. He had two dress shops that were vacant at the time in Gulfgate Shopping Center there on the Gulf Freeway. He asked us if we would like to look the place over. So all six of us walked over to the Gulfgate Shopping Center -- we were staying at the Carrousel Motel -- and looked at these two empty stores. He asked, which one do you want? We said, we will take both of them. That essentially is how we got out initial office space here in Houston.

To indicate the mood of Houston people at the time, it should be mentioned that an office equipment company (Finger Furniture) installed office



equipment free of charge. The telephone company (Southwestern Bell Telephone) installed telephones and didn't require a purchase order -- they just asked what we wanted and gave it to us. One of the leasing car firms gave us temporary use of 6 automobiles during the opening of this official office. If my memory serves me right, Continental Airlines provided some hostesses to act as receptionists. Joske's put in drapes. We weren't at all sure that between Wednesday and Friday we could get GSA Furniture delivered from Dallas, but we did get a whole shipment of GSA furniture. We got expedited action, and were faced with two locations fully furnished <sup>from Fingers</sup> and a big truck full of GSA furniture arrived -- which Finger Furniture stored for us in their warehouse.

*Sensitive*

Of course, as I said, all good things come to an end. We obviously had to start paying for some of our services that we had been getting free. We had been "wheeling and dealing" pretty much, which is hardly the usual practice for a government agency coming into an area. Our management back at Langley got concerned about the fact that we might be over-committing the government by the "deals" we were making, that we might be compromising ourselves, etc. I was called back to Langley to review some of the "deals" that we had made. For example, MSC management insisted that we needed to execute some sort of document with all these people saying that we were willing to take these things on a gift basis, but that the government was not liable for them, nor would it assume any future responsibility or obligation. In other words we were moving so fast that all

of a sudden the more thoughtful members of our management staff realized that we could get ourselves into some kind of awkward position here in Houston. This concern was, of course, absolutely correct. We therefore executed the necessary legal documentation covering all of these agreements and there have been no repercussions whatsoever from those early days. In retrospect, it seems certain that some of them could have turned sour if we hadn't been real careful.

I guess we had been in Houston three or four weeks on TDY when the initial cadre was put on permanent change of station from Langley to Houston. Again an initial group of about 6 people were moved on a PCS. I was in the first group and I never will forget that I drove almost straight through from Langley to make sure that I was the first officially assigned person to arrive PCS at the Manned Spacecraft Center. Of course, Marty Byrnes always gets the credit for having led the group into Houston, but the fact is, I was the first one TDY and the first one PCS and I've got that in my scrapbook sort of as a memento. When I hit Baytown I called into the office and said I am on the outskirts and I want to make sure to be shown as being available for official duty, as I am going to arrive that afternoon.

Many of our families had still been left at various places around the country. I had been at Goddard by myself because I hadn't been able to locate housing for my family there, and since I was only temporarily at Langley my family remained in Mobile, Alabama. After a few months of that, my wife was about ready to go on rebellion against President Kennedy.

She felt like this was almost as bad as the Korean Conflict. She said, "why don't you just go back to the Air Force if you want to stay gone all the time." But, I wasn't in Houston PCS one week before my wife was in, had a house picked out and moving vans were here. We located in Timbercove. Harold Christman who was our small business ~~purchasing~~ <sup>liaison</sup> ~~agent,~~ <sup>officer,</sup> also came in with the initial group. (We didn't know what small business firms or what business capabilities were here and we had to start from scratch to develop a bidder's list to be used in sending out bids, requests for proposals, and so forth. We had started developing our bidder's list right there in the temporary quarters of the Gulfgate Shopping Center. As people would come in, we would give them an application to get on our bidder's list.) Chris and I bought the first two houses in Timbercove. There were only two available and we flipped a coin to see which house each would get. I got one and he got the other. Our families were soon here and we were celebrities here in the Clear Lake area. We moved in on a Halloween; there was some sort of a Halloween party up at the grammar school and we took the children down there. The Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Andy Pupa asked me if we were being harrassed by the local people too much and I didn't know what he was talking about. His wife spoke up and said, "Gee, don't you feel funny without drapes up with all these people driving by gawking at you?" Sure enough people began coming up and asking for our autograph. It was a real embarrassing situation because, golly, we weren't astronauts or anything like that, yet we were being given this kind of treatment by the local people down here. As far as the site was concerned, there was

nothing. At Webster there was a little general store there at the crossroads and that is about all. There was only an old two-lane, farm to market road 528; no Clear Lake City and no Nassau Bay. Swan Lagoon had been started earlier, but had been hit pretty hard by Hurricane Carla. We saw evidence of Carla when we arrived. A boat had washed out of Clear Lake over into the Lagoon by the Harris County Boys Home, and was still sitting there on its side. Kemah still had a lot of debris scattered all around. The home that I bought had its back windows knocked out and the den floor had been flooded. We had to get that all fixed up before we moved in. I guess from the standpoint of history, you could go two ways -- the history of the Clear Lake area and the history of MSC. While the two probably parallel each other in a time span, I am as much intrigued about the development of this Clear Lake area as I am the development of MSC.

One of the first things I did was to meet with the local Chamber of Commerce. I still have the clippings of that meeting. We met in the Seabrook Elementary School and I made a talk about how they were going to have to face a lot of changes down here, that they may not like them, but they better face the fact that their whole way of life was going to change. Boy, has that ever come true! I was asked to serve on the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce, which I did for 3 years. We merged with League City Chamber and formed a responsible group that has promoted this area and attempted to avoid a boom environment. In other words, we attempted to keep the "rinky dink" kinds of business out -- the trailer parks, etc. that you find around so many boom areas and make

them undesirable from a long range investment standpoint. I think that in this respect the group has been a very successful. The architecture, the overall planning, all have been progressing very well. One problem in the Clear Lake area that has not been solved is that of many separate, small municipalities. I think in time that that also will disappear, but it will take time.

*MS's*

~~Our~~ immediate job was to go into Ellington and set up some sort of supply system and get working space for our people. Early procurement <sup>management</sup> realized that it was going to have to change its organization. At Langley we were known as the Procurement and Supply Division. Dave Lang and I talked this over and recognizing that at Langley Research Center <sup>we depended heavily on another group</sup> for supply activity, and when we came to Houston, we were going to need a pretty big logistics base to support ourselves. We felt that with the tremendous procurement tasks ahead of us, that is of awarding Apollo and Gemini contracts and administrating all the procurement activities that would be associated with them, we felt from an organizational standpoint that supply should be a separate function and not under our jurisdiction. Our recommendation was accepted and supply became a function unto itself. We actually were afraid of the tremendous workload ahead of us concerned that we couldn't handle both ends of this business and do it well. We were having a tremendous buildup, and our immediate job was to fill our warehouses with the necessary operational supplies and to lease buildings, which of course, was a tremendous task. In the leasing activities of various locations throughout Houston we worked through the GSA. GSA was here in Houston and could effectively lease these buildings for us

and we sort of used them as an extension of our own organization. As far as the construction of the Site was concerned we decided that the Corps of Engineers were experts in construction and we used them. We felt that there was no point in expanding our capabilities to get into these areas when we had such a tremendous workload ahead in just logistically supporting the Center and carrying on the major spacecraft and hardware procurement.

One of the problems that we encountered when we came to Houston was acquainting the local businessmen with how to do business with the Government. It is not uncommon for companies to offer favors and special privileges to their preferred customers. We had to really work at indoctrinating our people and the local businessmen about the code of conduct and ethics of government procurement. Local businessmen didn't understand for example, why they couldn't take a buyer to a ball game, why they couldn't give them a Christmas present, or why they couldn't take them on extensive hunting trips. We were constantly required to warn our people about conflict of interests.

*when we met a group from Langley on the occasion of the official office opening*  
~~One day when the troops were coming in from Washington and we met them at~~

<sup>and</sup>  
the airport, an automobile agency allowed us free use of 6 cars: one a white Cadallic. We didn't park these cars in the parking lot; we pulled them right up to the main entrance of the upper level of the airport terminal. They were lined up and the police had the area marked off for us. Walt Williams and the crew that was with him looked at these cars and Walt pulled me off to the side and said, By Golly, we can't afford this kind of publicity! Of course it wasn't costing us anything, but we should have been sensitive to adverse publicity. I guess we had got carried away, and when they offered us a white Cadallic, we said why not?

Or again, there was a reception at the Pasadena Club. There Congressmen Casey and the Mayor of Pasadena presented five or six of us with Stetson hats at a cocktail party that had been given <sup>for</sup> to our group. In all I had five Stetson hats given to me and I still have about three of them. I gave ~~several~~ <sup>some</sup> of them to less fortunate members that were not in the lime-light, but were drooling for a Stetson. Congressmen Casey met with us on two or three occasions to get acquainted with MSC people. This relationship has continued since that time, and Casey has been very close to the Procurement Office. He has always been interested in the local procurement actions, has been very cooperative, and has never interfered.

Merrifield: There was a shortage of housing in 1961 at Langley, and you and Stu Clark, I believe, took the initiative and found quarters for some of the single types--

Parker: It started out really, when I reported into Langley. Hjernevik had rented a 2-story house for his family; but his family hadn't arrived yet, so he took in some of the transients that were showing up with a suitcase but without their families, and looking for a place to stay. I moved into the Hjernevik mansion with other single fellows like Ed Campagna, Floyd Brandon, Stu Clark, and one or two others. It was a terrible experience in living--very few of us knew how to cook and fewer knew how to wash dishes. Mrs. Hjernevik finally arrived and booted us out. Stu and I recognized that we were going to have to have a place for all of us so we went down and leased three houses on Lighthouse Road on Chesapeake Bay. Two or three of us had automobiles. We put 5 or 6 people in one house, charged about \$35 a month, including maid service and linens and utilities, which was a pretty good

deal for the fellows. Stu and I formed this little partnership and it wasn't very long before we realized that we were making money hand over fist. In order to not make money on our employees and our friends, we decided that we would hold buffets on the weekends with the excess money. We had quite a fraternity there on Lighthouse Road with our three houses of bachelors. At one time we had about 25 people in those three houses. We even had TDY facilities; for example after I came to Houston, whenever I would fly back to Langley, I would just automatically roll into Lighthouse Road and hope that there was an empty bed -- somebody off on travel.

We had some disgruntled tenants that moved out and formed their own syndicate over on Adriatic Drive. What happened, I guess, was in one of the houses the hot water heater kept breaking down. One thing led to around and they decided that they would form their own housing enterprise. Months after I came into Houston, my wife was still sorting out underware and socks that belonged to other people. As a matter of fact I inherited sheets that are not mine, and I never have been able to find their owner. It balanced out, I guess, as I lost some of ours in the process.