

Entry Date 5-18-93
Data Base HDOCNDX
Index # INS.0206162

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

DATE OF DOCUMENT [Date of Interview] = 06 - 03 - 68
OFFICE OF PRIME RESPONSIBILITY = JSC
NUMBER ON DOCUMENT = 00
TYPE OF DOCUMENT [Code for Interview] = 1
PROGRAM [3-letter Program Archive code] = INS
AUTHOR [Interviewee's Last Name] = WINN
LOCATION OF DOCUMENT [Numeric Shelf Address] = 091-04

SUBJECT OF DOCUMENT: [use relevant bold-face introductory terms]

Oral history interview with Grace K. Winn
[full name of interviewee]
about Move & relocation
[main focus of interview]

Title: 1962 - Relocation Branch, Personnel
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]
1968 - Recruiting & Admin, Personnel
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 12; # tapes 1]

Abridgement

Master 1

CONTENTS:

Biographical - [date/place of birth; family background] _____

Education - _____

Career Path - _____

Topics - ¹⁹⁶¹ Initial association w/ NASA; ^{November 1965} began relocation work; ^{airport} welcome ~~to~~ NASA people; liaison w/ realtors; info on schools; medical emergency story; family anxiety about relocation possibility; office staff; ^{informational +} promotional brochures; Coord. w/ Letter Business Bureau; Driver training manuals; credit approvals; Chambers of Commerce; helping Astronauts select homes; Arrangements rental car ^{companies} ~~arrangements~~

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : BP2/Grace K. Winn

DATE: May 22, 1968

FROM : AC/Special Assistant to the Director

SUBJECT: Preparation of a History of Manned Spacecraft Center

At the request of Dr. Eugene M. Emme, the NASA Historian, we have agreed to assume responsibility for the preparation of an MSC history. This effort is expected to complement programmatic histories (Projects Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo) which are either in preparation or complete. The MSC history will place primary emphasis on the Center as an institution--its general management philosophy, the evolution of its major organizational elements, growth and modifications of its staff, management of its financial resources and contracts, acquisition of its facilities, and its impact on the economy, culture and society of the community in which it exists.

Dr. Robert B. Merrifield, a professionally trained historian, has been asked to prepare this record of our progress from Langley origins to the present. Since he has been with the Center for over five years, Dr. Merrifield is familiar with many key decisions, events, and trends in the Center's past. However, he will need help from all of us who have been major participants in the life of the Center, particularly in interpreting why and how various forces have influenced the development of the Center as an institution. Your aid and cooperation in this undertaking are vitally important to its successful completion and will be appreciated.

Paul E. Purser
Paul E. Purser



INTERVIEW WITH GRACE WINN

June 3, 1968

SEPTEMBER

(Probably E. Franklin Phillips, then later less to Dr. Glennan, now at EDC)
162
In 1961, I was living in Washington recovering from a whip lash accident. I happened to drop by to say hello to Congressman Teague, and as I arrived he was sitting in his office with his coat off in front of his television listening very intently. When he saw me he motioned for me to come in, sit down, and listen to the program he was watching. I sat down not having the slightest idea of what I was listening to, and in a few moments he excitedly explained that NASA was going to Houston. I didn't know what NASA was, because I had been in this accident and had been going to the doctor every day. Congressman Teague said that I should go introduce these people to Houston--that I knew the city, having been a part of it for a long time. He immediately picked up the telephone and called to NASA Headquarters' offices and asked for a Mr. Phillips. He told Mr. Phillips about me, who I was, the Civic life that I had led in Houston, and that he thought I would be a very useful person for NASA to send down there. Mr. Phillips was interested and requested that I come by the next morning.

Personnel Officer of the STG located Hampton, Virginia
162
I went to see Mr. Phillips, and he seemed to be impressed with my background. He picked up the phone and called Stu Clarke[^] at Langley Research Center. He told Mr. Clarke about me and Mr. Clarke suggested that I come down the next morning. Mr. Phillips had his secretary make reservations for me on a 7:00 a.m. flight to Langley the next morning. He gave me instructions about how to get there, and asked me to report back to him *as soon as I returned.* ~~when I got back from talking to Mr. Clarke.~~

I went to Langley the following morning and Mr. Clarke had someone

162
 Lt. Col. J.A. "Shorty" Powers ^{Public Affairs Officer} in to his office. Shorty Powers said he would like to have me in his Public Relations Office. Mr. Clarke said he would want me for the relocation effort, but after that was completed, perhaps in about three months, then I could go into the Public Affairs Office. I signed some papers, flew back to Washington, and talked again to Mr. Phillips. A couple of months would elapse before I would need to return to Houston, and I began making the arrangements. I came back to Houston and reported for work on November 13. It was on a Monday morning, and as I recall, I was the 13th person to report for work in Houston.

134
 That morning I reported to work for NASA was one of ~~those~~ pouring down rains. We had our office^s at that time in the Gulfgate Shopping Center. I was told by Margaret Cox that there was a lot of correspondence waiting for me as no one had done ^{one of the first employed in Houston} ~~anything~~ ^{much} about the relocation. I went downstairs to look at some material that had been published for use in the relocation, came back upstairs, and by the time I got back, I was instructed to pack up everything as we were moving to the Rich Buiding. So before I had had an opportunity to sit at my desk we moved into the Rich Building.

162
 Mr. Clarke had given me a free hand in planning my support for the relocation. There had never been a Center like this, and it would be up to me to make many decisions, which, of course, were subject to approval from MSC's management team. I felt the weight of this responsibility, and consequently gave careful thought as to what I should do. I decided the best way to approach my job was to consider how I would like to be treated if I were coming into Houston where I did not know anyone but

167
was going to make that my future home. ~~So~~ with that thought in mind, I began to work out a systematic approach to relocation services. The first people were flying into Houston that afternoon, so I decided to meet the plane, to see what these people were like, what the plane was like that brought them, and welcome everyone to Houston.

154
155
At that time, instead of coming into the Executive Airport as it was to do on later flights, the plane was to come into International Airport. It was on a Saturday afternoon and I missed one of the biggest football games ever played in Houston to meet that plane. Shorty Powers and his secretary were there and two or three other NASA people. We waited and waited, until finally about 9:00 o'clock we learned that the plane would not come into Houston ~~due~~ to the horrible weather in the area. The plane had to go back to Arkansas, and it was Sunday afternoon before the first group of NASA people finally got in. ~~So~~ that was my first experience in meeting one of our NASA planes. I had them taken to the Skylane Motel. Everyone was tired, worn out, disgusted and discouraged, so the first thing I did was take them up to the Club and give them all a treat to build up their spirits and make them feel they were welcome even though the weather was so bad. 160
My next major step was to contact the different realtors, as these people were looking for a home or apartment. I knew that realtors would have to cooperate fully and be willing to show someone else's property, because it would be impossible for our people to be in Houston only a few days and yet see a large number of areas, especially since the communities in the area near the permanent site were often many miles apart. Many people were here for only 48 hours--some even less than that. I pointed out that the realtors would be requested to show

their competitor's homes in addition to their own. If they were not willing to do so, of course we would not blame them, but it seemed like the only reasonable approach to the problem. They were absolutely wonderful about it. People from Fairmont Park showed Timber Cove homes and Timber Cove people showed Fairmont Park homes, and all of them worked together to welcome the newcomers and show them what real estate they were interested in seeing.

160
The schools were one of the most important things that our personnel were interested in. Our highly educated people naturally were interested in getting their children into fine schools, and in all honesty, I must say ^{in my opinion} our schools are as fine as can be found in any large city, because there is so much money in back of the schools here. This was particularly true along the ship channel. Taxes are very heavy there and school districts have the money to spend. They have made every effort to ensure that their schools are fine, so that was not a problem at all.

163
There were many interesting things involved in meeting the planes. There were times when they were quite late, and other times we didn't have any word from them and would become worried. Finally we would get a message that the plane was due in 15 to 20 minutes. One night I remember well. The plane was overhead, and in another minute would have been down on the ground, but the fog closed in so quickly that they were obliged to turn around and go back to Beaumont. We had to send a bus to bring them back to Houston.

163
During these winter months of 1961-62, weather was poor and one night I hesitated about going to meet the plane. It was the only occasion I ever hesitated, but the weather was so bad that I almost stayed

161 home. But I did go and got there just shortly before the plane came in. As the door came down Mrs. Ould was standing at the top of the ramp and her first words were "you are Grace Winn--they told me you would be here waiting with open arms," and I said silently to myself, "thank you dear God that I am here!" Both Mr. & Mrs. Ould were on the plane and I took them to the motel. They invited me into their ~~apartment~~ ^{room} to visit with them for a few minutes, and that was the first and only time that I visited with any of our personnel upon their arrival. It so happened that during the night Mr. Ould had an attack of appendicitis and at 6:30 the next morning his wife had called to tell me that they had taken him to the hospital and she had to be there by 8:30 for the operation. During the night we had a sleet storm and a lot of ice was on the ground and I knew that I could not drive out and get her to the hospital in time. So I called the Manager of the Skylane and asked him if he could possibly get her to the hospital, and if he could I would meet her there. He took one of his cooks out of the kitchen for a driver to get her to the hospital. Mr. Ould had his operation and recovered successfully.

161 Then we had many families that talked to me about their problems of whether they should or should not come. Sometimes the husband was anxious to come but the wife didn't want to leave her home. It was understandable in some instances because many of these people were coming from ~~Langley~~ ^{Hampton} ~~and Newport News, Va.~~ where they had lived most of their lives. It was a small area and everybody knew everybody else and many of the ~~girl's~~ ^{wives} parents lived there. The ~~girls~~ had the privilege of running over and leaving their children with mother while they played bridge or shopped, and they knew that when they came to Houston they wouldn't be able to do this. However, once families

made the move, very few moved back to ^{Virginia}~~Tangle~~ley.

162 I tried to keep sick cards in my desk at all times because we did have quite a few that after they came here had to be in the hospital for one reason or another. I know how lonely it is to be sick in a strange area, so I always sent cards any time I knew that one of our people was sick. When one of them passed away I immediately went to their families, and in some instances took food or sent flowers. I always tried to let them know that they were being thought of. At one time, one of our secretaries was in the hospital after being very badly burned. Her parents came and were here for several days because it was quite some time before they knew whether she would live. I visited the hospital almost every day and looked after her family, talking with them, trying to cheer them, and taking them to lunch. These were some of the little things that I did in trying to make our people feel that they were truly wanted and that they could find warmth just the same as they could in the area they were leaving.

162 I had two wonderful girls who helped me in the office. Mrs. Joan Pesek and Linda Sauter. These two girls were just excellent. They were very gracious and very patient with everyone--and at times it did take some patience. I tried to get to know our people personally, but by the latter part of the year there were so many arriving that I couldn't get to know them all. But I did try to let them know everything I could about this area.

162 We had one room that was completely filled with shelves. On these shelves were an excellent group of brochures that had been sent to us by apartment owners and realtors giving essential information. (With the

help of Mr. Clarke and Mr. Martin at the Chamber of Commerce I compiled a book listing the needs and desires of our people.)

162
Then I remembered that these people were moving into newly developed areas, where there was bound to be snakes and bugs and things like that, so my next move was to find books on snakes. I kept books in our file of all kinds of snakes and insects, and what one should do if bitten or stung by them.

162
I also realized that in building their own homes these people would need to be protected. People would try to take advantage of them by building shoddy homes or selling them cars at an exorbitant price or taking advantage of them if they were redecorating a home. Through the assistance of the Better Business Bureau, I got together a great deal of material on insurance and on protecting oneself from shysters in the home improvement field.

162
Since most of these people came from out-of-state, they would have to take the Texas Drivers License test, so I arranged for the Highway Patrol to give us hundreds of manuals on Texas driving laws to enable our people to prepare for the tests that one has to pass to get a drivers license. We got enough copies so that each person had one of these books to study before he went down to take his test. I think that the Department of Public Safety was particularly nice to our people and generous in trying to work them in as quickly as they could to take these tests for drivers' licence.

162
When the time came that our people began to be interested in recreational opportunities, I realized that a lot of these people were wanting to buy boats and go fishing. I knew they would want to know what kind of

fish were available in the area, and what kind of shoreline we had, so I got together all kinds of maps and literature. These also were given out to our people. Where I did not get enough copies to give out to each person coming to the Relocation Center, I set up a relocation library, that our people could use. We tried to think of everything possible. I even got books and charts on the weather so that people could know when to expect our hurricanes, what months to expect foggy weather and what months to expect the heat. Having belonged to the Retail Credit Association at one time, I got the Association to agree to help our personnel establish their credit locally as quickly as possible. That meant a lot because people in making the move frequently needed quick credit. By this means we were able to get phones installed, the utilities connected, and loans on homes worked out very quickly. The banks of the area sent representatives to meet with our people and offered their services and any information requested regarding loan rates and the best way to go about getting a home loan. The Chambers of Commerce in each area were just wonderful. They sent material, and maps in particular. We had stacks of maps from Houston, Baytown, Pasadena, LaPorte, and the Bay area. These maps were used over and over again by our people who were trying to locate homes in places that they wanted to live. — *Particularly the new hires in the Apollo and Gemini Program Offices*

162
After the second group of astronauts were announced at a press conference in Houston, Ed White, Jim McDivitt and Frank Borman chose to stay over and try to find a home before they went home. I picked them up the next morning at 8:00 o'clock and took them out first to Meyerland, as that area seemed to have more nice rental homes to choose from at that time. The first house that we went into Frank Borman went thru it like a streak

of lightning. He said "I'll take it. The owner happened to be there so he wrote out a check. I asked him if he wanted to look at other homes but he said he only wanted something to "cover our heads," because he was planning on building his own home right away. So Frank caught a plane and was gone. Ed White and Jim McDivitt looked and looked. Jim was very quiet. We looked at one extremely attractive home, Ed was sure his wife would be happy with. I suggested that we ask a neighbor if we could use her phone. As we called the owner, the lady was listening to the conversation and I introduced her to Jim McDivitt and Ed White. A lawyer was in charge of renting the property for a couple getting a divorce, and he offered to meet with McDivitt and White that afternoon at 6:00 p.m. He told me what the rent was and when I told Ed he said it was too high, but agreed to meet the lawyer at 6:00 o'clock. The lady, whose phone we were using had heard me say that we would be back at 6:00 p.m. The rest of the afternoon we looked at other houses. Jim has nothing much to say. Ed found another house just across from a school and he decided to take it if he couldn't make a deal with this lawyer at 6:00 o'clock. Evidently the woman whose phone we used in calling the lawyer, knowing that they were astronauts and having heard that we would be back at 6, had told everybody in the neighborhood because the street was lined with little boys on bicycles. We went into the house and I introduced Ed to the lawyer and then feeling that the negotiations were a personal matter, excused myself and went outside to wait for them. When I walked outside these little boys came dashing up, surrounded me, and asked if those were the astronauts. I said yes, they were two of them, and with that these little boys began running up and down the streets yelling "astronauts are in the house"

"astronauts are in the house." By the time Ed and Jim came out, all the boys were back waiting with me and asked for autographs, Jim and Ed obliged with some papers they had. When they finished and got into the car they expressed surprise that anyone would want their autographs, because they hadn't done anything. I told them that this was just their first experience of this type and in another few months, they would know what it means to be asked for autographs. Ed also indicated that the lawyer wanted too much rent, and felt he just couldn't afford to pay that much. He said he was going to drop a check in the mail for this other house across from the school and leave on the 10 o'clock plane that night. After dinner, Jim and I put him on the plane and came back to Houston. I commented to Jim that he had not said one word during all of this looking but that in the morning we would find him the best house in town. He just smiled. I promised to pick him up at 8 o'clock the next morning. I had hardly walked into my house when the phone rang and it was this lawyer who was renting the house for the couple getting a divorce. He said his clients had decided that they would like to have one of the astronauts rent their house and were willing to meet their offer. I told him that Capt. White had already dropped a check in the mail for the other house and was on his way home, but I felt certain that Mr. McDivitt would like to have it. The next morning when I picked up Jim and asked him how he would like to have that house that Ed was looking at yesterday he said he couldn't afford it either. When I told him they had reduced the rent, he was thrilled to death and immediately rented it. Being quiet and polite certainly paid off--he really got the nicest house of all.

I remember another ^{incident with} ~~time~~ D. Slayton's son, Kent, who at that time was

162
about five years old. His mother was looking for a house, and I agreed to take care of Kent. I took him around and introduced him to different people and he politely shook hands with each. Finally he commented that his hand was so tired--did he have to shake hands anymore? I took him out to the Shamrock to visit Eric Hilton's little boy thinking that he might be a good playmate. As we walked through the lobby there, a very nice looking grey haired man passed us and Kent said "Hello Daddy." I told Slayton later that he had better stay home more so Kent would know who his daddy is.

134
One afternoon Marty Byrnes called a meeting of all the owners of rent-a-car companies in the Houston area and told them that we would like to rent cars but explained that it would be done on a minimum basis, because our people were coming down without reimbursement and could not afford to spend a lot of money for a rental car. Satisfactory arrangements were worked out with several companies. It was understood that when our people rented a car, they would be responsible for taking it back to the rent-a-car company full of gas just as they had gotten it and that the rent-a-car company would have no responsibility in getting them to the airport and of course neither would I. They were supposed to be at the motel when the bus left for the airport and they should have turned their car in by this time. In most instances there was no problem although I'm sure our people were very crowded in having to meet the deadlines of this arrangement. I remember one afternoon, one of our top executives (although I didn't then know who he was) came dashing up in one of our red rental cars and told me that this car belonged to so and so and asked me to take it back. The plane was ready to go, in fact the

flight had been held up while waiting on this gentleman. I told him he was supposed to have taken that car back to the rental car company full of gas, and that it wasn't my responsibility to get it back. He looked amazed and shocked and turned to someone else and said get this car back and handed them a \$20.00 bill. I reminded him of what it would be like if everybody catching the plane back every afternoon brought a rental car for me to deliver, and asked him in the future if he would please respect the arrangements we had agreed to. It could have been a very embarrassing moment for me later on when I found out who this particular gentleman was. But at the time, I was treating him as I would anyone else in urging him to respect the policy.