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The Oral History Documentary Series

Donald Stewart

Donald Stewart Interviewed by Sarah Duncan

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DUNCAN: This is Sarah Duncan interviewing Donald Stewart for the Sandy Creek Park Oral History Project of the Russell Library. This is July 20, 2005 and we are at the Sandy Creek Park Visitor Center in Athens Georgia. Okay, why don't we start off by you just telling us a little about yourself?

STEWART: As you know I am Donald Stewart I work for the Soil Conservation Service several locations around the state and for the last 12 years of my career I was in Athens in state office and my title was Assistant State Conservationist for Water resources. This job covered Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act and also the Resource Conservation and Development Program, so I was essentially the program manager for these programs. I didn't actually get involved in the technical aspects of it, but primarily my job was setting priorities on where our appropriations were spent and dealing with the Washington office on securing funds for this project and others. We usually had probably 10 to 12 projects going on at the same time.

DUNCAN: What is your educational background?

STEWART: I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy from the University of Georgia. I graduated in 1958. I spent a lot of time in Connor Hall.

DUNCAN: Are you from Athens originally?

STEWART: No, I am from South Georgia originally. I am from a little town called Enigma.

DUNCAN: Enigma? I'll remember that.

STEWART: As I said I worked in the field locations across-about ten different locations in Georgia and eventually I wound up here in Athens with Assistant State Conversationalist.

DUNCAN: What kind of work did you do in the field locations?

STEWART: Well, we assisted land owners and applied soil and water conservation practice, primarily to farmers, but we would also assist the other land users, home owners, who ever, in developing conservation systems, [and] helping them with wildlife, forestry, water disposal systems and that sort of thing and developing conservation plans for their farm.

DUNCAN: Now you said there were two programs you were mostly involved in. It was the Water Resources Program ...

STEWART: Overall yes. Well, that was terminology the Soil Conservation Service used.

Water resources, at that time, covered watershed protection, the Flood Prevention Act and also the Resource Conservation and Development Program.

DUNCAN: And what was involved in those?

STEWART: Well, they are very similar. Naturally what we actually do is provide technical and financial assistance to local sponsoring organizations such as Clarke County, Oconee River Soil and Water Conservation District. [They] were the sponsors of these projects, and we provided technical and financial assistance. The cost share in the system varied program to program, depending on the purpose of the project itself. For instance, the flood control part of the projects soil conservation services provided 100 percent of the funds for that. But the recreation, and the municipal water, this was a 50-50 cost share. Sometimes a local sponsoring organization, such as counties, who had equipment and work force, would provide their part of the cost through in-kind services, rather than actually having to fork over the cash money so to speak [DUNCAN laughs].

DUNCAN: Why was there that split between flood control, for example, and recreation?

STEWART: Well, this is the way Congress set it up. They figured flood control benefited everybody and there was a one hundred percent cost supplied by the Federal Government. Now I suppose - I don't exactly know what Congress' intent was - but I supposed it figured that if people wanted recreation, municipal water, that sort of thing that they should contribute to the cost of it.

DUNCAN: Did Clarke County provide in-kind services?

STEWART: Yes, yes. Some of it was labor, some of it was design services, [or] maybe they actually got a design and engineer and contract with some people to design some of the recreational activities.

DUNCAN: That was Robert Farmer?

STEWART: Yes, he did that, that's correct. I had forgotten [Both laugh] who did a lot of it, but that is correct.

DUNCAN: Those plans are in that little back office [DUNCAN laughs] so that is where I came up with that.

STEWART: Is that right? I have been retired for fifteen years a lot of these names slip my mind.

DUNCAN: Oh that's fine, that's fine. Hopefully I can look most of them up, so as we go along, we don't have to worry too much about that. How did you first get involved in the Sandy Creek project specifically?

STEWART: Well, when I came to Athens, this project was already ongoing. In fact, the dam I believe was built the year I came to Athens in 1978. And soon as the dam, the flood water retard structure was complete then we got involved in the recreational part of the project.

DUNCAN: So you were primarily involved in the recreation part?

STEWART: Right, right.

DUNCAN: Since the dam had already been done. I've heard that dam is a unique structure. Do you know anything about that? That it was designed differently than most dams are.

STEWART: Well, I can't remember for sure about it. Some of the structures all around the state were probably unique also, but I can't remember the specifics of this one, probably it's an emergency spillway. It might be different from the others.

DUNCAN: Yeah that was what I had heard. What did this park look like when you first saw it?

STEWART: Well, the first time I came out here, the lake was dry. They had a dam here and the rest of it was pasture and woodland, pretty much like it is now. They didn't change it - I mean the areas - too much from what it is ... what it was then. It's pretty much that way now. They utilized that area pretty much as it is.

DUNCAN: When you say as it is, do you mean the park itself or the surrounding landscape?

STEWART: Well, as I recall this area right in here was already in a pasture. It was not wooded like down in the bottom, or over across the dam, [or in the] camping area over there. Sometimes it is a little bit hard to remember what things did look like.

DUNCAN: Yes, yes, I understand that. That is just something it is hard to look that up to figure out what an area was.

STEWART: I think overall land use at that time and the surrounding area was pretty much as it is today. Of course there has been a lot of development as far as housing and this sort of thing but otherwise it's primarily pasture land and woodland.

DUNCAN: Okay. And you said the lake was dry?

STEWART: Well, yes we hadn't started storing water at the time.

DUNCAN: Yes. Was that strange to see just this...

STEWART: Well, yeah. The reason for that, as I recall, was that at the dam itself was built ...[they] waited awhile before starting to store water to allow settling and so forth you know and not start backing water up on fresh soil.

DUNCAN: Do remember about how long it was before that lake started to fill up and really look like a pond?

STEWART: Well, I can't recall exactly. Best I recall it filled fairly rapidly. This creek, Little Sandy Creek, [it's a] pretty fair water shed. It filled up pretty quick.

DUNCAN: Maybe you can describe a little more what your job was with SCS. I know you mentioned a little you dealt with the Federal government some in Washington ... mean part of the Federal government ... but dealt with the government in Washington and worked with appropriations.

STEWART: Well, of course congress appropriates money to the Federal agencies and Soil Conservation Services received a certain appropriation for the different programs. Conservation Operations Program that was the beginning program that started back in the '30's, but so much money would be appropriated, then each state was allocated based on our request. We never really got all we requested because of limited funds, but my job was to set priorities on these various projects and make a budget or request for allocation of funds to the Washington office. Then they allocated certain funds and there again I'd have to, as I said earlier, set priorities, because we hardly ever got money that we needed or wanted. So sometimes that depended on how fast a project went along as to how much money you've got in a particular year. Also part of my job was to oversee a planning team that planned these projects. We had a planning staff leader that actually supervised the various disciplines of the people involved and planted these projects. So I had a job of planning and also money management.

DUNCAN: When you say planning you're not really ... are you talking about designing planning?

STEWART: Well, yes that also. We had a design team that did do structural design work on some of these dams. We usually contracted out the recreation part of the designs, but as far as the structural part of the dam that sort of thing we had a design team in house that did that. But we had a planning team that started out, once we got a request for a project from the local sponsoring organization, we would send a team out to evaluate or scope out a project to see if it was feasible, if it met the criteria for the program. Then once we determined that, we had a team there that actually planned and determined along with the sponsors now what type of structures and things they needed in the project.

DUNCAN: And this place I suppose, Clarke County was the sponsor for as far as recreational were they also the sponsor for the ...

STEWART: Yes, they were the sponsoring organization as well as the Soil and Water Conservation district, that's the Oconee River Soil and Water Conservation District. And also this watershed project covered more than Clarke County, and Madison County, and I can't remember if Oconee is in there or not

DUNCAN: I think they are on that plaque up there.

STEWART: So there's others.

DUNCAN: So Clarke County was involved from the very beginning?

STEWART: Right, but the county itself was the one who provided financial support as project sponsors. Oconee River Soil and Water Conservation District I don't think actually contributed any funds.

DUNCAN: Was it difficult to fund this project?

STEWART: Well, Georgia was one of the leading states in the small watershed programs. And in fact at one time I believe we were second in the nation of projects installed. Then other states began to come in and jump on the band wagon, so to speak, and then the funds were spread out a little more than they were originally. When it started, funding wasn't as much of a problem. I suppose the program is still running I am not sure.

DUNCAN: Yes, you don't have to worry about that.

STEWART: No I don't have to worry about that anymore.

DUNCAN: So I guess in the '60's, was that when Georgia was in the forefront? And when did those other states start to jump in?

STEWART: Yes. Well, in the late '50's and '60's was when it really was going.

DUNCAN: The late '50's and '60's that was when the other states jumped in or when Georgia was ...

STEWART: Well, Georgia started out originally I don't remember when the law was passed it seems like it was the '50's. '54 or somewhere along there that's when public law 566 I think that's when- I think it was '54 and Georgia took advantage of this program early on. In fact this lake is named Cecil Judge Chapman Lake. He was the state conservationist at that time and he foresaw and had the vision to see the need and utilize the program.

DUNCAN: That was something else I was going to ask you about. I assume ... did you know Cecil Judge?

STEWART: Yes, yes.

DUNCAN: I figured you probably did.

STEWART: Yes sir, I knew him or yes, maam pardon me I said yes sir thinking about him.

[Both laugh]

DUNCAN: That's alright I won't take it personally. What do you remember about him?

STEWART: Well, you say what do I remember? I can remember a lot of things. One thing I remember is that he moved me about in the state, other words, work locations. And I remember the first time my wife met him she said, “Oh so you’re the fellow that causes us to move around?” But he was a good fellow he deserved the honor of the lake being named after him and he was well thought of in this state and had good relations with the University.

DUNCAN: You said that he was really the one who had the vision for what this place was going to be. What was that vision?

STEWART: I don’t quite understand.

DUNCAN: I guess what was his original vision? Let me ask this a different way. Did his original vision ... how does that compare to what ended up happening?

STEWART: Well, I was thinking about the overall program statewide not necessarily just Sandy Creek Park, in fact, I think the proper name for this is Little Sandy Creek Watershed. This is one of the many dams that was built, probably eight to ten in that watershed project. I might mention that the small watershed program was limited to watershed under 250,000 acres. The Corps of Engineers is responsible for projects that are larger than 250,000 acres and above. In fact we were called the little dam people and the Corps was called the big dam people.

DUNCAN: Then maybe actually we can talk about what Chapman’s vision was for the entire state program.

STEWART: Well, he just foresaw the opportunity to utilize these programs to aid the state conserve the soil and water resources in the state and he jumped out there and took advantage of it.

DUNCAN: What kind of personality was he?

STEWART: Well ... I don't know. He was a little bit hard to describe. He was sort of a firm person in his convictions. He fought for what he believed in. I remember there was a good bit of controversy about the activities that SCS was involved in, like channelization that got to be a dirty word you know. He believed we were benefit folks and I guess we learned about the benefits of the whole ecosystem so to speak and maybe we softened up to some degree and changed our mind about the channelization. I don't know whether that's answering your question about him, but he was well known across the state and widely recognized as a conservation leader.

DUNCAN: You mentioned channelization and this creek was originally going to be channelized from what I hear.

STEWART: Well, I don't recall now without going back and looking at the plan. Most of our channelization was done in southeast Georgia down in the flat woods where we had floods. I don't think that we had as much objection to the channel work as there was in the other parts of the state. I just sort of brought up a subject we should just forget about.

DUNCAN: Before we completely forget about that issue, what side of that issue did Chapman fall on for the most part?

STEWART: Well, he was for the channel work. He was definitely for it.

DUNCAN: Just something over time that went out of style I suppose?

STEWART: I remember something that got a lot of attention over time was Alcovée River. I don't think that project was stopped from [an] environmental stand point as much as it was used for the people that opposed it, opposed it from the environmental standpoint but used cost as a weapon and said it was not economically feasible.

DUNCAN: You mentioned that there were originally going to be eight or ten dams. Do you why some of those dams were not built?

STEWART: Well, a lot of it was land use changed [and] development, this kind of thing. I know that we've had projects across the state that at the time they were planned were feasible, but then there's expansion, development came in and it was not longer feasible, especially around the Atlanta suburbs.

DUNCAN: What kind of development?

STEWART: Well housing primarily. Just paving over the land it might be industrial development as well as housing.

DUNCAN: Imagine getting land in that area would have been housing for the most part.

STEWART: Yeah.

DUNCAN: What was the original plan for this project? I know that there was - like you mentioned - there was the recreation part of it, there is the flood control part of it and so on. Do you remember kinda what the overall [unintelligible]?

STEWART: Well, the watershed protection was a big part of it that is trying to apply soil and water conservation practices within the watershed, to hold the soil in place rather than running off. Also this particular dam here, I think the best I remember, cost 260 acre feet of municipal water, so actually Clarke County could draw water from this lake in an emergency. It would be legal as far as the intended purposes of the project, but I don't think water has ever been drawn down for water.

DUNCAN: Were those fairly typical goals or do any of them kinda stand out as a little bit different?

STEWART: No I don't recall anything ... most the projects throughout the state was pretty much the same except like I said down in southeast Georgia they didn't have many dams. They're more in the northern part of the state.

DUNCAN: Why is that?

STEWART: Well, the topography it's just ... the land just didn't address itself as far as flood control dams. As I said, there was more channeling and that sort of thing in South Georgia.

DUNCAN: What is it about this topography that does not lend itself...?

STEWART: Well, it's just rolling under laying type of topography. The runoff is different. The runoff is steeper and faster.

DUNCAN: How did the final look of the park compare to what your original expectations were when you first saw it?

STEWART: Well, you mean as far as the recreational opportunity?

DUNCAN: Yes.

STEWART: I guess it's pretty much like the plan originally set out to be. I can't recall of any significant changes from the original plan.

DUNCAN: You talked about watershed protection sounds like that mostly had to do with runoff and flood control and so on. Did natural resources come into that?

STEWART: What do you mean?

DUNCAN: As in wildlife.

STEWART: Oh yeah, wildlife was always a major consideration in conservation practices. We always tried to include opportunities for wildlife development and wildlife habitat in any conservation of our practices.

DUNCAN: Would you say this was a successful park as far as that goes?

STEWART: Oh yes I think so. You can ride around in this park and see all kinds of wildlife. You see deer, and geese are almost a problem here.

DUNCAN: Plenty of those.

STEWART: There are plenty of geese yeah, but I see deer out here just about every time I come out.

DUNCAN: Who was really behind this project in the beginning? I mean obviously Chapman was one, or maybe I shouldn't say in the beginning, but when did you become involved?

STEWART: Well, course Chapman had retired at that time. He had been retired a couple of years I guess when I got involved at this level. He was state Conservationist when I came aboard for the Soil Conservation Service. I would have to say the Oconee River Soil and Water Conservatism District, the Directors were the people that was behind it and I can't recall who the supervisors were back then.

DUNCAN: Okay. Balfour Hunnicut was he one?

STEWART: Balfour Hunnicut was one of them. I remember we had a sole county commissioner and his name was Holland.

DUNCAN: Jim Holland

STEWART: Jim Holland, yes. I couldn't remember his first name. He was real interested in the project.

DUNCAN: That was going to be my next question who in the county was really involved? Do you remember anyone else or second in command?

STEWART: No, as I mentioned to you earlier Nancy Smith, I guess she was more or less head of the recreation program in the county at that time and she was real interested in this project and I used to have an opportunity to work with her on things. I can't remember who the other people were. The project got started before I came on board so to speak.

DUNCAN: How would you say this compared to other projects you worked on? Were there any different challenges?

STEWART: No, best I can recall this project went pretty smooth. I don't recall it having any problems. The biggest thing, like I said, was getting the funds in order to complete the project.

DUNCAN: Were there particular parts of the project or goals of the project that were easier to fund than others?

STEWART: Well, I guess the [with] flood control part, the actual destructors themselves back when we were building those, the money was a little more free.

DUNCAN: What about particular accomplishments of project?

STEWART: Well, I don't know if I understand what you're getting at?

DUNCAN: Well is there any thing that sort of stands out when you remember the park or trail when you visit today?

STEWART: Well, me personally I think when I remember the overall Little Sandy Trail Creek Watershed project, I think of this recreation project out here and this flood protection out here, this was my primary focus. There are other flood control structures throughout the county now, but you have a tendency to forget them. They are out there and they are doing the job, but you have a tendency to forget those and maybe the people around those structures, they don't forget them. But this project here has been to me a great benefit to the county and provided a lot of recreational opportunities for people.

DUNCAN: When you say it's harder to forget, is it because it is a bigger lake or is it because you visit it?

STEWART: I guess it's my personal interest. I like to fish and this is a good fishing lake. I didn't fish in it ten or twelve years after it was built, but after I retired and I had more time, I decided I'd go fishing out here and I have been fishing ever since.

DUNCAN: So you get to visit it?

STEWART: Yeah, I visit it real often.

DUNCAN: Have you seen a change over time as you've visited it?

STEWART: Well, I see the use of it seems to be increased for various activities. That is the biggest change is that more people are using it.

DUNCAN: That's interesting. Do you think it is different types of users?

STEWART: Well, some for instance I see they have dog shows out here occasionally, and soccer matches, and things like that you know that maybe they didn't have when it was first built. There is a lot going on out here. I think a lot of group organizations come out here a lot, for instance I see handicap people and that sort of thing.

DUNCAN: Do you remember who the user population was expected to be when it was first built?

STEWART: Well, I guess it was some expectation for the type of use. I guess it was the type of recreation measures that was built, dictated who would be using it you know, ball fields, fishing, course they got a beach down here. The facilities dictate the people that come out.

DUNCAN: I guess I was thinking more where people come from that kind of thing.

STEWART: A lot of people use this for jogging trails and that sort of thing. You see lots of people out there walking and jogging.

DUNCAN: You mentioned also that people from all the counties around here use it as well.

STEWART: Yes, I see down at the boat ramp down there you'll see as many people's cars or trucks with out of county tags as you do Clarke County. Course we're - you might say - right close to Jackson County and [there are] a lot of Jackson County people coming here.

DUNCAN: I guess- maybe you weren't involved in this- was that part of the original plan as far as you know. Seems to me that the recreational area was 50:50 funded by the county.

STEWART: Seems to me that like- I can't recall-but it seems like they used to charge a different rate for out of county people. I can't remember for sure what the rate was. I was thinking that there might have been a differential in the admission price for Clarke Countyians opposed to other people.

DUNCAN: Let's go back to kinda what we were talking about earlier, about your background. Now before you worked for the Soil and Water Conservation service in Athens you said you had worked doing field work around this area.

STEWART: Yes I started out in the field location. Back then we called them work units. It could be from one to four or five counties in one work unit. So I started out as a trainee then a work unit conservationist then district conservationist. Then from there I went to area conservationist, which included 27 county areas of the state. Then after that I came into the state office and worked as assistant state conservationist.

DUNCAN: So those first jobs, sounds to me like they were sort of on the ground.

STEWART: Yes, on the ground, actually on the ground with farmers and land users and planning and assisting them in applying conservation practices. So I worked in the cold. I worked in the heat.

DUNCAN: Yes, I bet. Was that a big change for you, to go from that kind of thing to more of an office?

STEWART: Yes it was. But with my background working in the field, I had a better respect for the people. As I used to say, the people at the state office didn't contribute anything going into the cash register. The people out in the field was ones that rung up the cash register and they were the ones getting ... people in state office are support staff, supporting people in the field getting the job done. Course things like these watershed projects, I considered that field work too. It might have been headquartered here locally in the state office or something, but they are still considered field people also.

DUNCAN: Out there getting dirty.

STEWART: Yeah.

DUNCAN: How did you apply that background in the field to an office more bureaucratic type of job?

STEWART: Well, one of the things I tried to see the people out in the field got the resources they needed to get the job done whether it was surveying instrument or a vehicle or whatever you know. That was the main thing was having the field background. Other words, I didn't come in as a top manager so to speak.

DUNCAN: What was most of the makeup of the office like? Was it...?

STEWART: You talking about out in the field?

DUNCAN: Well, like did most people serve in Athens office in charge of these kinds of things?

STEWART: We had various disciplines for instance, we had agronomist, we had wildlife specialists, foresters, and of course in the watershed work it was primarily engineers, several engineers, agriculture engineers. We had a wide variety of various disciplines as far as getting the job done and most of the people who come into the management positions in the State office had their background in some discipline, like I said, they didn't just come in as a manager. They worked in the field offices prior their coming in the state office.

DUNCAN: What was it like working with that wide variety of people?

STEWART: It was interesting. [Both laugh] You had to do a good job of coordinating these various disciplines to work together you know to get each ones input into a project.

DUNCAN: When you say that - I mean I don't know you want to talk about arguments exactly - but were there specific points that often come [unintelligible]...?

STEWART: Oh yes, there was always different viewpoints for instance, we used to joke about agronomists want to put grass everywhere and the engineers want to put concrete everywhere, [both laugh] that sort of thing you know. It was just sort of a joke among the different disciplines. Everybody had their own interest and pushed for their point, but somebody had to coordinate these disciplines. That's what the planning staff leader ... that was his job, you know.

DUNCAN: Did that ever play out in specific projects?

STEWART: Pardon me now.

DUNCAN: How did that kinda play out in specific projects?

STEWART: Well, I don't know.

DUNCAN: Didn't know if you remembered any.

STEWART: I don't remember any. We always got it worked out in the end. [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: That's good to hear. What kind of background did Cecil Chapman come from do you remember?

STEWART: I believe his education was agriculture engineering. I believe that was his ...

DUNCAN: Do you remember who else in the office at the federal level was involved with this project?

STEWART: At the Federal level?

DUNCAN: Yeah, other than Chapman.

STEWART: Well are you speaking, when you say federal are you speaking in terms of here in Athens?

DUNCAN: Yes here in Athens sorry.

STEWART: Well I can go back and think about the people who were working at that time.

There was Dan Searcy, he was the Assistant for Water Resources two times ahead of me.

There was one person between Dan and myself. Dan was heavily involved in the watershed

project early on and J.C. Tillman he was the assistant for operations, Red Worly was a state engineer, Robby Robinson was a state engineer later on after Red Worly. I remember Bob Brown he was a construction engineer. This is some of the people back in the early stages I am talking about.

DUNCAN: Okay. So this is sort of back in the '50's or the '60's?

STEWART: Right, right. Well, I am sure there are many others. Sam Hays he was the state administrative officer of course he wasn't involved to much in the ... he was involved in the contracting part of some of this stuff, but he was not an engineer he was an administrative officer.

DUNCAN: Do you remember—you mentioned a couple of them were engineers, do you remember any of the backgrounds of some of the others like Dan Searcy or ...

STEWART: Well Dan, he was not an engineer it seemed to me he was a soil scientist that was his background before he was a program manager for the watershed program. He was a soil scientist as I recall.

DUNCAN: So it sounds like people from a variety of backgrounds were involved in this at that level.

STEWART: Right.

DUNCAN: What do you remember about working with the county government?

STEWART: Well, I didn't get involved directly with them as a lot of other people did, by level I didn't. But as I recall this particular county, Clarke County was a very cooperative one, of the more progressive counties. And I guess maybe being the University's here, the population here ... the tax revenues were better than some of the outlying counties. It probably had more resources to work with, but we always had good cooperation with Clarke County.

DUNCAN: Did you work with people at UGA on the Sandy Creek Projects?

STEWART: Well, me personally I didn't. I know Sandy Creek. There other programs that we worked with people from the University that was not in the watershed program. As I recall we had agronomy professors carrying on experimental work pasture type experiments and things, down at the plant materials center in Americas, that type of thing. I don't think there was much involvement from the watershed project and the University people as there was with other type people.

DUNCAN: One thing - you may not remember about this but in case you do - one thing I heard was Robert Farmer, the designer was chosen kind of over the wishes the Soil Conservation Service and the county went out of the way to select him. Do you remember anything about that?

STEWART: No, not really.

DUNCAN: It might have been before you were here.

STEWART: Yes, well, probably had been selected before I had been involved. That's news to me really. [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: I don't mean to be passing on gossip; it's just something I came across.

STEWART: Sounds like you've been doing a lot of homework.

DUNCAN: Yes, I have been trying too. Did the Soil Conservation Service often work with counties? You know when they were doing these projects? You mentioned that a lot of the work you had done before was with farmers.

STEWART: Yes, well, I don't know I understand exactly where you're getting at. You say with county, you talking about with the unit of government, county unit?

DUNCAN: Yes, with county [unintelligible].

STEWART: We provided technical service to the counties. I know we used to provide some help in selecting land fill slides and things of this nature in the early stages. That was back

before there was many people out here that was, you might say qualified to do this kind of work. Folk used to just dump stuff wherever they could. They would burn it and that sort of thing. Then state laws came into effect about you having to bury it and put liners in and all this stuff, locate them in certain soil types you know and things. SCS provided some assistance in selecting sites early on and that sort of thing.

DUNCAN: So for...

STEWART: We got away from that once engineers and specialists got here you know. The private sector and could supply the need.

DUNCAN: So you all worked with county governments on a number of landfill projects?

STEWART: Well, I wouldn't say a number there were some more out in the real rural counties where they didn't have engineering staff and people like that to help them.

DUNCAN: Do you remember any other projects similar to this one you were involved in?

STEWART: Not that I was involved in. When that county service resource development project had a lot of recreation - I was trying to think of the name - Treble Mill Park, I remember people came over and viewed this park, the sponsoring organization over there came over and look to see what was going on to help in their decision making over there. I was involved in that. I can't recall another one right off hand from this area.

DUNCAN: Do you remember –suppose not- any previous to this park that was built?

STEWART: Well, there was one at Winder, Marbury Creek, believe is the name of it.

[There are] recreational purposes in that one and there is several around, but right off hand I can't recall all of them.

DUNCAN: You said that the folks in Gwinnet County came to view this before building their park. When was their project done? I don't need an exact year I was just trying to get a decade.

STEWART: It's in the early '80s. I can't remember the ... they wanted to come over and see what the people in Clarke County had done.

DUNCAN: So shortly after this was one was completed?

STEWART: Right, in fact this one was still being developed.

DUNCAN: Actually that was the next thing I was going to ask. I suppose when you came on in '79, like you said, the park had kinda cleared out that area for the lake and the park was on its way to getting built. Do you remember kinda how that process went with the phases of construction and getting funding for each phase?

STEWART: Lord, I can't remember right now. Seemed to me that one of the first things was building a boat deck-I mean a boat ramp and dock down there that was one of the earlier things, then the ball fields. Things came later it's hard to remember exactly the sequence and everything.

DUNCAN: Do you remember if any of those pieces were more difficult to fund or more difficult to get the ...?

STEWART: Not really, no. Not really.

DUNCAN: What was the project ... I suppose you worked for the Soil and Water Conservation Service as the Program Manager from starting in '79 until - when did you retire?

STEWART: '90. 1990.

DUNCAN: 1990. Okay. Do any projects just really stand out in your mind during that period?

STEWART: Well, we had projects going on in several locations throughout the state. We did a good bit of work in Cedartown. They had a lot of flooding there and we built structures, flood water retardant structures up there. Over at Bowden we had a project over there that had a lot of municipal water in that project. Oh goodness, let me see. Up in

Habersham County where we built some structures up there. Not thinking about it recently is hard to go back and recall all these things.

DUNCAN: When you say structures?

STEWART: Well, I was thinking of flood water retard structures, like dams, like this dam here that kind of thing.

DUNCAN: Did you see the type of projects change overall over that decade?

STEWART: Well, the overall project itself, maybe not that much changed. Well, yes there was some. Eliminating a lot of channel work, that was going on. We got involved pretty heavily with watershed protection [and] land application as far as trying to control the runoff and that sort of thing. Later on our projects went to those type projects pretty much. I remember one structure that was built 'bout the time I retired I don't remember whether it was Habersham or somewhere up there but the dam was what they called a rolled concrete dam. I don't know how to explain that to you except that instead of just an earth and hill dam it had concrete added to the soil and rolled with rollers, that type of thing you know.

DUNCAN: Like a snowball sort of?

STEWART: Yes, I guess so. I don't know how to explain it to you. That was I guess an engineering changes primarily.

DUNCAN: Yes, Yes, I see. What about political changes? Did you see anything like that?

STEWART: Well, not really. There was always people for the projects, and there was always people against the projects you know. Course we let the local people decide what they wanted within whatever ... limitations we had you know.

DUNCAN: Generally when the SCS would approach a project - and if you know specifically on this project I'd be interested in that - would they generally come up with the idea for the project themselves and then purpose it to the county or the sponsoring organization or would it be the other way around?

STEWART: Well, it could be some of both. That SCS person out there in that field office would describe my job at one time. That person there was a key factor in a lot of situations. They knew about what the opportunities were and they would get out and try to stir up some interest if the people were interested. And that is the person that probably initiated most of these projects, because the people didn't really know what was available early on and later on they hear about it and they initiated a lot of it on there own. But in the beginning it was that unit conservationist out there that initiated this work. They got the little people stirred up you might say.

DUNCAN: That's interesting, so do you remember in the case of this project who that was?

STEWART: Well, I don't know if in this project whether that had happened or not, course I was not part of the early on part.

DUNCAN: You mentioned you come back to visit the park fairly often. What is your favorite part?

STEWART: Well, I like to fish. I come up to fish. Sometimes I just ride around in the park and see what's going on, but fishing is primarily what I like.

DUNCAN: What have you been doing since the 1990's?

STEWART: Well, I did a little bit of ... got involved in financial consultant work, insurance, annuities, that sort of thing, but it got to be a bigger job than I wanted. I didn't want to have a full time job and to be successful you had to be pretty much full time. So I've just been retired.

DUNCAN: That sounds pretty good.

STEWART: I do a lot of gardening and yard work I have a two acre lot and my yard is two acres and that keeps me busy and "Honey-Do's".

DUNCAN: "Honey-Do's"?

STEWART: You haven't heard that expression?

DUNCAN: Uhn-uhn.

STEWART: Your wife says "honey do this honey do that." [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: Oh I thought we were talking about your garden you got into the melon business. [DUNCAN laughs]

STEWART: No that's a southern expression the honey do's.

DUNCAN: I get it. So you got into financial stuff was that an interest that developed while you were working in [unintelligible] or ...?

STEWART: No, not really. I retired fairly young and my son in law is a financial consultant and he talked me into getting involved in it.

DUNCAN: That must have been quite a change.

STEWART: Oh it was.

DUNCAN: That kinda reminded me ... I did want to ask you - back on budgeting issues - did you have more difficulty over the course of the '80s in getting projects funded? Or was it just different funding then?

STEWART: Well, yes it was more difficult to get the necessary funds later on because, as I said, the demand for the programs increased and Congress was not appropriating that much more money. I mean they might from year to year appropriate what the normal ... I'm trying to think of ... anyway the money appropriations pretty much sat still so to speak, otherwords it didn't increase that much. I guess the Congress felt a higher priority for the other programs and things. I have told you all I know is there's more to profit. [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: I'll have to watch out for that [unintelligible].

STEWART: I have tried to be honest about it and be candid with you about everything. If you would have interviewed me ten years ago I could have helped you out more probably. [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: Well, that's all right. You've given me some good background on how the SCS worked because I didn't know much about that. Do you have anything to add? We're about done so...

STEWART: No I don't have anything more to add. I would say that I feel like - now this is my opinion - that the earlier years of the soil conservation, their mission, we had a need for

that more so then and I think that well, I wouldn't say the mission has changed but the programs and things has changed to be where the organization is more a regulatory agency rather than actually one on one on site helping folks like we used to do. And from what I hear from current employees - occasionally I run across one you know - and they tell how things are going. I don't think we're getting out there and providing one on one to the land users like we did in the earlier years. 'Course they have even changed the name of the organization, it is not Soil Conservation Service anymore it's the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

DUNCAN: Did you start to see that while you were still working there?

STEWART: Yes, yes, it started coming on. Part of that is the reason why I retired early. It seemed like we were getting away from our original mission.

DUNCAN: Why do you think that way now?

STEWART: Well, one thing. The organization, years ago it was run by a professional people-people who came up through the ranks. Then through the Reagan administration they started using political appointees to head up the organization, and once it went political everything changed, but when people like Norm Berg and people like that came up through the organization they were the ones that were heading it up and providing a national leadership everything was fine. When we started getting politics involved, pulling somebody here who didn't know anything about SCS, the hog farmer in Missouri or something like

that, and put them head of the organization. I am not putting down hog farmers in Missouri of course. I could see a lot of change starting then. Politics ran the show or directed how we were going rather than what the actual needs were I felt like.

DUNCAN: Do you remember any specific examples or any specific project you saw that happening?

STEWART: No, not a specific project. Programs and that sort of thing changed. I can remember overall I don't know how to put this exactly I mentioned that organizations got to be more regulatory agency. I don't remember what year the farm bill lost but SCS had to get out here and see whether people were in compliance with the programs they were being offered through the USDA. It seemed like that's when it started. Well, I've told you like I said about all I know at the time.

DUNCAN: It's been a pleasure talking to you.

STEWART: Well thank you and I enjoyed ... (tape is cut off).

[End of Interview]

Biographical Information

RBRL OHD 005-01

Donald Stewart

Occupation:

USDA – Soil Conservation Service 1956-1990

Assistant State Conservationist for Water resources and Program Manager for the Watershed

Protection Act, Flood Prevention Act, and the Resource Conservation and Development

Program Soil and Water Conservation Service, 1979 -1990

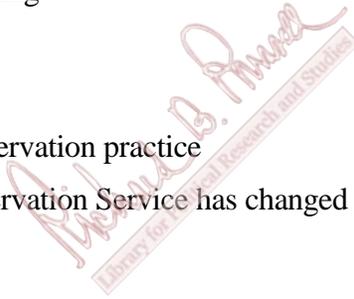


Subject Analysis

RBRL OHD 005-01

Donald Stewart

- Stewart's Education
- Soil Conservation Service
- Sandy Creek Park and Trail
- Sandy Creek before the project had begun
- Georgia's role in watershed programs
- People involved in the project
- Athens – Clarke County
- Funding and budgeting
- Dams
- Flood control
- Soil and water conservation practice
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