

ASEH Founders – Oral Histories

Interview with J. Donald Hughes by Melissa Wiedenfeld

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

March 3, 2007

This is Melissa Wiedenfeld and I am interviewing Donald Hughes at the ASEH meeting in Baton Rouge in 2007. One of the things I was going to tell you is that just a few years ago you did a paper, at one of these ASEH conferences, and I was so struck by you're ... the paper you presented because it was the perfect presentation. I have never seen one that ... really pulled in the audience so well. We couldn't wait to hear the next word. And it ended exactly on time. And so I realized that you were the best example I've ever seen in ... well, I've only been coming to these conferences for 16 years. I wanted to tell you that because ... of course, there is a difference between writing a paper for publication and a presentation.

Donald Hughes – Yes.

MW -- ... People often excel at one or the other, but they don't always do both. And, anyway, I was so incredibly impressed. I wanted to tell you that to start with.

DH -- I really appreciate that. Sometimes I wonder, ... I don't remember which paper you are referring to, but I usually find that I end up writing two papers – one for publication and one for delivery.

MW -- But it was wonderful. And you write beautifully -- your books, your reviews. The review you did for me, not one comma, not one thing, had to be changed. So, anyway, I want you to know what a big fan I am.

DH – Well, I was editor of the journal so I had practice correcting those things.

MW -- Well, you know the purpose of the interview of course is to talk about the founding of ASEH and so I think we should start with question one -- what attracted you to environmental history?

DH -- Well it was, undoubtedly, a lifetime interest in nature; the out of doors; national parks, from vacations there; from being a boy scout. My undergraduate major at UCLA was botanical genetics. So, I didn't start out in history. I developed an interest in that later on, particularly classical history - Greeks and the Romans and so on. And at some point ... I thought, well, here I find myself potentially with degrees in two very different areas – in biological science and history. And how can I find an area where they converge? And that was probably how I ended up writing things that were later called environmental history.

MW -- So you have a degree in genetics in ...

DH – Yes.

MW -- And then came the history?

DH -- Yes. And I don't know how much of my checkered career I should reveal, but I also have a degree in theology. Surprise.

MW -- And so environmental history ...it made me think of John Muir.

DH -- Uh huh.

MW -- Interest in nature and theology.

DH -- Oh, yes.

MW -- You know environmental history is really a ...

DH -- Yes. In terms of influence on me, John Muir certainly is way up there in terms of his writing, because when I was in my teens I went with a boy scout troop to Yosemite National Park. And knowing I was going there I read everything I could get my hands on that John Muir had written. And talking about writing, well, it's florid Victorian prose I suppose, but ... I also was very familiar with the King James version of the Bible because of my upbringing. And so those two resonated. And yeah, Muir was definitely one of the early influences on me.

MW -- Which scholars did you find the most influential?

DH -- I would say, and it's interesting they aren't all historians, Carl Ortwin Sauer was one. Clarence Glacken, of course, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*. Because it enriched another area of interest for me, two areas of interest. That is, a lot of *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* has to do with the ancient world and the classical writers, and what their ideas were about the relationship of humans to nature. And ... I would say that, when I became familiar with Al Crosby's work, that was really a revelation for me. I ... was deeply impressed by Al Crosby, and his *Colombian Exchange*, and his other work as well. An article that Will Jacobs wrote, and it was published, not in the *American Historical Review*, but in the newsletter of the AHA, and it was called "Frontiersmen, Fur Traders, and other Varmints." And what he was saying is these brave openers of the West that we tend to admire, or at that point there was a lot of writing that portrayed them as an important force in the expansion of American and so on, and he was saying 'but they were ruining the environment at the time.' They were trapping beavers, and changing the erosion, and geology, and so on, of the river systems. And that article, I think it was published in 1970, opened a whole area of thought for me. And I began to write some things of my own. I remember, I think the first thing I did was one on the ancient Greeks and their environment, which was published in the journal of the National Parks Association. And that brought me to the attention of John Rodman who was at Claremont, at that time. And then he and I had a little set to. He was arguing a different take on the ancient Greeks from mine. ... I had been pretty critical of how the Greeks treated the environment and, I still am, and he was saying

'well, there was a positive tradition there, with Pythagoreans and so on.' So, we became good friends. And there was no ASEH at the time. And the natural home for some of us, at that time, was the Forest History Society. And so I joined the Forest History Society and went to some of their meetings. Met Pete Stine. Ok. Well, where are we going from here?

MW -- Well, you taught some of the first classes in environmental history in the US?

DH -- Yes.

MW -- What led you to initiate that ... to teach those classes?

DH -- Well, it was ... a colleague of mine, who was an ecologist, suggested to me that the two of us get together and teach a class. I think we called it "Ecology of Planet Earth," which sounds a bit more scientific than it really was. But we combined science and history there. And we had some interesting speakers who came in. One of them was Paul Sears who wrote *Deserts on the March*. And his daughter, Sears' daughter, was then teaching philosophy at the University of Denver, and so, through her we were able to get him to come and talk to us. I understand that Rod Nash taught an environmental history course at about the same time -- and that he called it Environmental History, which, as far as I know, is the first time that the term came into use. But, I ... could be wrong. We didn't know what to call ourselves when we started out. What should the Society be called? Well, I may be getting ahead of things here.

MW -- That's all right, keep going.

DH -- John Opie suggested we call it the 'Society for the Study of the American Land.' And I immediately objected. I said, 'some of us do some things that are outside the American history,' myself included, doing the ancient world, ancient Mediterranean world. And I suggested that maybe we call it 'Eco-History.' That did not get adopted. And, it may have been Rod Nash that came up with the term 'Environmental History.'

[lots of background sounds of clashing plates and voices]

MW -- It will add color to our tape.

DH -- Yes, I guess so.

MW -- Well, how did you find student response to these classes? These classes would have been in the early '70s, the first environmental history classes.

DH -- Well, of course, Earth Day was in 1970. The first Earth Day. And there was tremendous interest. I mean, we ... had 80 students in that class the first time we offered it. And ... "Ecology" was a new term for a lot of people at that time. It then became a household word. Of course, I got a lot of criticism for doing the ecology of

the Greeks and Romans. People said 'well, you know, ecology, that's a modern fad. And you're trying to read something back into the past that isn't really there.' I got that a number of times. And I said 'now, you know, wait a minute. Let's look at Aristotle and see what he said about the natural world.' And then people began to come around and realize that environmental history didn't start with *Silent Spring*. It was something that is a useful concept for all times and places in history. And now, you know, we're giving up our emphasis on the land. There is the environmental history of the oceans as well. And we really need to expand, both chronologically and geographically, in terms of our work . . .

MW -- ... 80 students seems like a lot for a class.

DH -- Uh huh.

MW -- So you found the student response to be very enthusiastic?

DH -- Yes, it was. Students then were ... It was a new cause and it had a lot of attraction and interest for students at that time. Well, of course that shows our tie in with the environmental movement. And we can't deny that at the birth of this subject, this academic subject, there was considerable impetus provided by the environmental movement. And, you know, a lot of us were activists at the time, too. Soon as I heard about the Sierra Club, I joined it. And sort of had an almost lifetime membership in it. And the National Parks Association. Since I worked in some of the national parks as a summer employee for many years, in the ... forests in Oregon first, and then in Yosemite, and then the Grand Canyon.

MW -- Did you ... take your family with you when you were a summer employee? Or was this before you were ...

DH -- Well, most of it was before I had a family. But when I got married, yes, we both went to the parks in the summer.

MW -- I'm going to draw you back to that academic question, just for a moment. How did ... your department or the university respond to teaching environmental history?...

DH -- Oh, at that time the decisions like that were made by the Chair of the Department and the Dean, and the administration generally. And I found pretty good support at the University of Denver. It was like 'oh, this is an innovative idea' and, you know, 'go ahead and try it out.' That sort of thing. If I were to start again today I would encounter faculty committees that would not be as receptive, I'm sure, because I have, in recent years, proposed certain things and had them turned down by my colleagues. Democratic faculty governance is not always the most encouraging in terms of one's own individual creativity, let's say.

MW -- You ... mentioned activism, and, of course, many in environmental history had a relationship with environmental activism. So, was advocacy versus objectivity an issue?

DH -- Yes, it was very much an issue at that time. And I think it was at our first conference that John Opie gave a talk that was entitled, or it had the term, the 'specter of advocacy.' That ... and there was the criticism coming from professional historians of the traditional type, at that time. They would say, 'well, if you're an advocate, that means you can't be objective in looking at the historical evidence, and so, your work is suspect from its inception.' That would be the kind of reaction that we got. And I'm sure that many environmental historians became extremely careful to make their work historically, professionally, acceptable, at that time. And we still do, of course. In fact, ... the pendulum may have swung too far in the other direction now. I'm not sure. But a lot of us were motivated by our concern for the environment. And that was something that directed us into environmental history. Now, there are environmental historians now who are not environmentalists. There are some who are very critical of environmentalism. Anna Bramwell would be an example of that.

MW -- Does that surprise you?

DH -- No. No. Just as ecologists, you know, aren't necessarily taking a line that will preserve the things that they are studying. ... I remember a friend of mine, an ecologist, whose job was to locate all of the nests of endangered raptors, working for a mining company, on the line their railroad, and then to move the nests out of the way of the railroad, you see. So his knowledge of the behavior of the birds enabled him to just be sure that there wasn't a conflict, or a court case, or whatever there might have been. . . . Ecology isn't necessarily an environmentally benign enterprise. It depends on how it's done. It tells us about the world. It doesn't necessarily tell us what we should do in regard to the world. That's informed by morality and ethics.

MW -- If you were beginning a career as an environmental historian, what kinds of topics, or approaches, would you find most appealing now?

DH -- That's a question. . . .For myself, you mean?

MW -- Yeah.

DH -- Yes. The area that I'm looking at now is looking at islands and seeing if they can be regarded as a kind of microcosm, where the actions of certain environmental changes and forces can be observed more easily because of the small size and so on. So, that attracted me to the Pacific Island studies, which I am working on. Other areas would be global warming and its effects, because this is the pressing issue at the present. And the whole impact of the political/economic sphere, the global market economy. We used to look at the world as composed of nation states, and you could talk about the environmental history of a particular ... well, say Greece, or Italy, or whatever it might be. But, now, nation states have increased in number and declined in power, and the forces that are involved in impacting, for example, Pacific Islands, are those of the global market economy

and the entities that make that up, whether it's business or international organization of some kind.

MW -- So ... your approaches are quite different than they would have been, even maybe ten years ago?

DH -- Yes, definitely.

MW -- Well, ... I want to move back to the founding of ASEH.

DH -- Yes.

MW -- Can you describe the founding?

DH -- Yes ... To start out with, I want to say our charter may say 1977, but it actually started in 1976. And, as I recall, the first event was a meeting of several people, I think there were probably about 15 people in the room, at a conference that was being held in Denver. It was just a meeting that was announced, and the idea of, 'well, shouldn't we look at environment as an important subject in the historical studies.' And I think, now ... I'm trying to remember who was there at that meeting, and I can only definitely identify John Opie and Don Worster. They were certainly there. I would have sworn Carolyn Merchant was there, but I talked to her yesterday and she said, 'no, I wasn't ... I wasn't at that meeting.' She was at some of the ones that were held right after that. Who else was there at the time ...

Ron Engle, I remember very well. We had a conference at the University of Denver in 1980, which was held, I think before any of the ASEH conferences. And he was one of the people that was at that conference. Like several of us at the time, Engle was interested in the history of religion, and Christianity in particular, and I think did a paper on St. Augustine's attitude toward the natural world and its possible effect on the Christian view of the environment. Who else is on here that might be interesting to talk about? Well, Bill Cronon is on there. Now he was not in the first group that got together, but he came in soon after that. He's a little younger than Opie and I. Joel Tarr; he was very much a part of it from the really early time.

MW -- But was he at that first meeting in '76?

DH -- I couldn't say. It's not impossible, but I don't remember. Human memory, you know, is not dependable. Rod French. That's an interesting factor, there. We had people who were not historians. Who were, let's say philosophers. People involved in literary studies. Of course, geographers, and so on. So, I think one of the reasons why the journal was called 'Environmental Review' at the start rather than 'Environmental History' was that we were not all historians and we didn't want to limit it to historians at the beginning. We've become more and more professionally oriented as the years have gone by. Al Cowdry was important. So, anyway, Roderick French is a philosopher. And he was very, very much involved at

the beginning of our Society. Jeff Stine. ... Very important right from the start. Tom Dunlap; he's been with us the whole way. Let's see ... who else here. Phil Terry. I think he was our first book review editor. Steve Pyne . . . I remember being with him at a couple of conferences very early on. That's when I was still teaching in San Diego. Susan Flader; doing her work on Gifford Pinchot. Jay McDaniel. Another person very much interested in the role of religion in the whole field. Marty Melosi. ... Was he there then? I can't remember. Bob Shultz. A philosopher at DU. He and I organized the conference ... to observe the tenth anniversary of the first Earth Day in 1980. And there were a bunch of other people from this field that were there. John Opie was at that one, too.

MW -- Was it an ASEH conference?

DH -- No. No, it wasn't. It was in Denver. We organized it, but it was the kind of forerunner of the kind of conferences that we have at ASEH. Alfred Crosby. My goodness. Well, this is a longer list than I remember. Mike Cohen. Wow. [Hal?] John Rothman is on there. . . Had quite a mix then. Doug Strong from San Diego State. I remember [him] very well. Oh, Ken Bailes. I'm glad you gave me this [looking at an early membership list]. He was really important. Ken Bailes organized our first conference, which was held in 1981 in Irvine, California. And, tragically, he later died of AIDS. But that was a really important development, and he was the one that made that first conference possible. That was the initial [conference] of ASEH. And after that, and that was '81, we met every other year. So we met in the odd numbered years. But I don't think, the time of that conference, we knew that that would be what the pattern was. It just emerged later on. Garrett Hardin had a membership in the Society. He came to one of the conferences that I helped to organize, I remember. Paul Ehrlich. . . He's at Stanford, of course. And he's always had an interest in environmental history, although he hasn't been directly involved in our Society. Bill Devall – he's a sociologist. But he and George Sessions, in northern California, were active in the origin of the field of environmental ethics. And we were involved with each other. The two societies later became separate organizations, but, at that time, we all felt a common ... endeavor. Morgan Sherwood later became president of ASEH. And was at the University of California at Davis, but he lived in Alaska. Alaska was his first love. Don Worster, of course. John Perkins was there . . .

MW -- And he's an historian?

DH -- I believe so, yes [John Perkins is a historian at Evergreen College in Olympia]. He's a very good friend of John Opie's. And then is John Richards on this list? He should be, because he was an important mover and shaker in the beginning of the Society. And we had a conference in Durham. Again, because John Richards was there. . . This is an interesting list. 1983. I wish I had an earlier list somewhere.

MW -- Perhaps this is the earliest Lisa could get for me.

DH -- Yeah, maybe.

MW -- Well ... the organization began to take shape between 1976 and 1977?

DH -- Yes.

MW -- And then you had the official founding in 1977. And ... it took four years before there was a conference organized.

DH -- Yeah, four or five years before the first conference. Yes. We had the journal beginning in '76, the first number appeared in '76.

MW -- So it was the journal and newsletter maybe ... [newsletter started in 1974]

DH -- Oh, yes.

MW -- ... that tied you together.

DH -- Yes, right, the journal.

MW -- That tied everybody together, because four years is a long time before you stage a conference.

DH -- Yes, but staging a conference is a big step.

MW -- It is. It is.

DH -- Yeah. And there was no email at that time, you will remember.

MW -- No email. I said something to Mark Harvey, who did the reviews for many years, and of course when he started doing the reviews, he had to write all the letters and send them by us mail. And, of course today, I send out a letter and I can hear in an hour if someone is interested in a book or not.

DH -- Yes.

MW -- So, it's far easier with email.

DH -- And another thing that wasn't available to me, at least at the time that I was editor, and that was simply having a computer where you could do an article and make revisions and so forth. I had to take things down to a print shop and have them type up the articles.

MW -- So, getting out those early years of the journal were far more ...

DH -- Yeah, it was a lot of work.

MW -- This isn't one of the questions, but it makes me think too, of course, with computers of course we can go back and edit and re edit and re edit and re edit ...

DH -- Yes.

MW -- And in some ways, I think, the people who started out without the computers are more skilled with the words because they had to be. And we can be sloppier now, because we can go back and fix it and re-fix it.

DH -- Yeah . . . if one were to make corrections and revisions then you had to have a typist type that up.

MW -- Again.

DH -- Again. Do the whole thing. Letter by letter. Through the whole article. Ahh! Goodness. And putting together the pages; had to cut out the part of the text that would be on that page and paste it to the page, for the photograph to be taken of it and so on. What I most regret is not having a composition program at that time, where we do now, but ...

MW -- The first meeting ... was at UC Irvine. Do you remember any of the other earlier meetings that might stand out?

DH -- We had one in Oxford, Ohio, at Miami University there. And that was, I think, because there was another meeting not too far away, just before that, that a lot of us were going to. It was probably the OAH. I think it met in Cincinnati. And then we had a meeting there. Oh, I could provide you with a list of the meetings because I wrote them down and I have them on the computer file, but I'm not sure I can remember them in the right order. [A list of meetings is available on ASEH's website.]

MW -- And that would be nice to have. I'm sure Lisa has that as well.

DH -- Probably.

MW -- But the things that don't get in a list are important to share... What were they like? ... How long were the meetings? ... Were there very many papers?

DH -- It was usually three days or so. And we had no lack of papers. I don't think we ever turned anybody down in the early days, but ...

MW -- And graduate students. Did you bring graduate student to the meetings and ...?

DH -- Yes. Yes, there were graduate students there. Some of them are now stalwarts of the profession. One of the graduate students I remember very well was John McNeill. Oh, and Hal Rothman was a graduate student when I first met him at a meeting of the ASEH.

MW -- So that would have been in the mid '80s?

DH -- Probably. Yeah. Which meeting was it that I had ...

MW -- '85 maybe

DH -- Yeah, I remember the meeting with John McNeill very well because it was on John Richards' front porch in Durham, North Carolina. And we got to talking about Alexander the Great. And we had both been to the archeological museum in Istanbul and seen the very famous head of Alexander - the Pergamum head, and we both thought it was the best representation of Alexander that was. And let's see ... we had a mutual friend {Russell Meiggs}, and he wrote the book on the Mediterranean forests ... Well, sometimes names escape me too.

MW -- What were the most significant challenges in those early years? You had plenty of papers, seems to be enthusiasm ...

DH -- Challenges.... Well, other than simply the logistics of getting a society together and so on, there was the unwillingness of many in the historical profession to accept environmental history as a sub field of history, and proposing meetings and session at the AHA and having them turned down, because they didn't think it was valid. That kind of thing. Would we be accepted as fully qualified members of the history profession in terms of our subject interest, and that kind of acceptance

[Turn over tape]

MW -- And environmental history has come into its own in the last 30 years.

DH -- . . . So, recognition by societies like the AHA. And, I guess, one of the really significant challenges was just keeping alive as an organization, and, as you know, keeping the journal going. It didn't always come out on time. And John Opie can tell you about that better than I, because he had problems with the printer, and ... well, we're not the only journal that had such problems. And I received some and I never know when they are coming. ... Yeah, keeping us together and in touch ... that was a real challenge.

MW -- And so the most significant achievements of those early years? You kept together.

DH -- Yes. We did keep together. One of the significant achievements was the geographic, the global scope, of the subject, because ... Even at the first meeting we had European scholars with us. I think there were a couple of Swedish scholars there. And then it broadened out into ... well, Mario Agnoletti came to us through the Forest History Society, but he's been very active in environmental history since. John Dargavel in Australia. Richard Grove, of course. A wonderful man, and he's

now in very critical condition and it saddens me greatly. But, of course, Grove came to us saying 'you Americans, you think that everything started with George Perkins Marsh, and that environmental history is predominately an American subject. But I can show you that there were Brits back in the colonial and early period of colonial expansion, and French, and other Europeans, who were writing similar ideas, publishing them, and so on. And so you Americans shouldn't think that you're the be all and end all of the origin of everything.' Well, he had a good point. He may have overdone it in a few ways, but he came up with some pretty interesting points so ...

MW -- When I saw this list, one of the things I thought was interesting was there were a fair number of international addresses ...

DH -- Yes.

MW -- ... on it and so it was not ...

DH -- There's New Dehli, India, there. Yeah.

MW -- Canada. Taiwan. Were you able to get very much international presence at the early meetings?

DH -- Well, we had ... Austrian scholars, German scholars. A number of them came to us through the Forest History Society, which already had contacts through IUFRO - the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. And so we've always been close to forest history. And, of course now, we're sort of amalgamated with them. But we were separate organizations at the beginning.

MW -- Well, actually that might be a one thing to ask ... You talked about the founding of ASEH, but many of the people that belong to ASEH were already in Forest History Society ...

DH -- Yes.

MW -- And so, you knew each other through the Forest History Society?

DH -- Yeah, many of us did.

MW -- So not just through, for example, writings or coming ... meeting each other at the AHA or the OAH, you ...

DH -- Yeah, that's true. Now the Forest History Society did not have regular meetings that were expected or predictable. But they would organize one every so often, was more how it happened. But I did meet people in that way. Many of us did.

MW -- I noticed, too, there were several federal government subscribers to the journal anyway.

DH -- Yes. And we had ...

MW -- Fairly early on ...

DH -- ... several people in government agencies. Harold Pinkett was one of those. people in Department of the Interior, Agriculture, National Archives... Yes.

MW -- One thing I was thinking about, the composition of the membership ... You talk about the early years and having a number of ... people of different disciplines involved in environmental history – AHA, ASEH. And so that's been fairly consistent all the way through then, to have maybe biology ... or biologists or geographers or ...

DH -- Yes.

MW -- Philosophers.

DH -- That's true. Now, I have noticed, I think, that that happens less today than it did in the earlier years of the Society. We are more likely to be historians in our discipline. Geographers also. I mean, we haven't lost the geography contingent. That is represented at all our meetings. But, you know, I don't see the philosophers any longer. And I really don't see scientists as such at our meeting much anymore.

MW -- That is interesting. Of course, Ed Russell was also ...

DH -- Yes.

MW -- ... a scientist who came to history.

DH -- Yes.

MW -- And you were a scientist who came to history.

DH -- Yes.

MW -- So, there are those ...

DH -- I am a great admirer of Ed Russell's work in that respect. Yeah.

MW -- In the looking back at the founding of ASEH, is there something in hindsight that you might have done differently?

DH -- Yes. I think if I had known what was going to happen, I would have had a lot more confidence and enthusiasm about it, because we were very much on the edge in our early times. And I should have realized ... we're on a trajectory that's going to

be remarkable and important and so on. Just maybe a psychological thing. As editor of the journal, although I didn't have the technology available to me, if I had really made an effort I might have been able to assemble more of it than I did. In terms of what technology was there at the time. And there were computers and so on in 1983. I didn't know how to run them then ... at the beginning. Also, I probably would have tried to make the journal look more like other professional journals at the time. It has a rather individual, idiosyncratic appearance from that time. And looks – as I look back on it – more like an amateur effort. Well, probably it was. . . . I could have got some help from the people who were doing environmental ethics at the time [Eugene Hargrove]. You know, that's hindsight. Would I have done something different looking back? Yes, I would have tried to produce something that would have helped us with the big problem that we had of recognition in the profession. Now, professionalization is not always a good thing. And there are advantages, there are joys that come from other kinds of efforts and relationships, but ...

MW -- Well, some of those ... early meetings were fairly casual ... Didn't you have venues that were more ... I don't know who to put this. ... You met at universities?

DH -- Yes.

MW -- But, in the off years you used to have some kind of an event, didn't you? A gathering, a more informal gathering?

DH -- No, not that I remember. But, you're right, the meetings did have an informal feel. And we'd do things like ... Well, we'd sort of adjourn and go down the street and all have a beer together. And practically everyone would be there, you know, 'cause there weren't that many of us at the time.

MW -- That's something ... I've only been in the organization for 17 years, so I'm new. And the first meeting I went to, I was a graduate student, and everybody ... a group, I wouldn't say everybody, but a group, a huge number of people, just sort of wandered down the street to a place that served beer.

DH -- Yes.

MW -- And, there was this very friendly ...

DH -- Huh. Uh huh.

MW -- ... atmosphere. Everybody knew everybody.

DH -- Uh huh.

MW -- Except I didn't know everybody.

DH -- Yeah. But, I imagine you felt that the scholars in the Society were very much open to getting to know you fairly well, right from the start, weren't they?

MW -- Yes. ... Probably not the first year I went in Houston. But, for example, I remember walking up to Donald Worster and being incredibly impressed that I could just walk up to Donald Worster and speak to him like a regular person. And he would speak to me.

DH -- It's like Ari Kelman was saying that ... the one he went to was the Las Vegas meeting. And he took the field trip that went down to Hoover Dam. And sat down, alone, in a seat. And Marty Melosi came and plopped down next to him and started a big conversation, which lasted all the way to the dam, and so ...

MW -- When ... [The Las Vegas meeting was in 1995.]

DH -- That's the kind of experience that some graduate students have in our Society.

MW -- There was one meeting that ... or at least two meetings, where I saw Alfred Crosby sitting by himself at a luncheon or something, and I got to sit next to Alfred Crosby. That was ... that was probably even more amazing to me. That I could sit down and eat lunch with Alfred Crosby - and his wife.

DH -- Yes. Yes. They both came to a number of the meetings.

MW -- As we grow are you ... you worried about losing that, within the organization?

DH -- I don't feel that were losing it at all. But, of course, people know me. And I'm busy talking to somebody, or doing something with somebody, for the whole time of the meeting.

MW -- Right. Right.

DH -- And never have any time to sit down and read a book or something like that.

MW -- Do you have ... Are there any issues that ASEH faces today that you think are particularly important?

DH -- We've talked a lot about professionalism, and that is an issue. And, as I said, there are both advantages and disadvantages to that. I don't think we've lost ourselves in professionalism yet, but we are more specifically a history society now, than we used to be. And we lose something by not having the philosophers around to raise theoretical questions. Questions of theory, rather than simply getting the names and dates right. Now, we ... never get to that point either, but ... I'm kidding a little, but ...

MW -- What kind of advice would you offer for the ... for the future for ASEH?
Recommendations for the organizations for the future.

DH -- There are some directions that we can go that perhaps offer openings for us. I mentioned the idea of doing the oceans and seas as a subject area. And that's something that's opening up. Being very aware of our global dimensions. But, of course, I've argued for that throughout my career. But, things are operating on global scale now, are they not? And that's something that we can look at, increasingly. Ed Russell's idea of evolutionary history, I think. There's a subject that needs to receive some more interest and perhaps have some graduate students work on it. I think we need to look at a wider audience for our field. Not just other historians, but ... the educated public. Or the public that would like to be educated. And, here, I think Jared Diamond has done a wonderful thing for us. His books are in all the airports, and people are reading them. And I know that the students really like to read Jared Diamond. They'll go through 600 pages of Diamond in preference to a 200 page tightly written environmental history. And that is a gift for us. It's opened interest among people so that we can talk to them. And, alright, he made some errors. But, nobody writes about the whole world and doesn't make errors. And different interpretations are possible – yes. We need to bring those out and so on. But let's not dismiss an opportunity like that. Let's take advantage of it. TV. I've seen Ari Kelman on TV recently, talking about the New Orleans disaster. And environmental historians are experts whose voice can be heard on TV, and in films, and in cds, and dvds. It's not lowering the quality of our profession to make it available to a general public. And, I would argue that, that's some advice that we ought to take.

MW -- Is there anything ... that you would like to mention, before I turn off the tape or ... I mean, I thought you might want to take a break or ...

DH -- Well, there are a lot of people that I didn't get to mention.

MW -- Well,

DH -- Individuals that stand out.

MW -- Do you have them in your notes? Would you like ...

DH -- Well, I have a few that I jotted ... When you gave me that list there I probably did mention most of them. Linda Lear was one that I did want to be sure to mention. I didn't see her name on there. Maybe she came in a little later than 1983.

MW -- Jackie Corn is on this one.

DH -- Oh, yeah. Jackie Corn. And, of course, she arranged our meeting in Baltimore. And ... she's a really important person.

MW -- Which was '97.

DH -- And I don't think I have mentioned Doug Weiner's name yet. But, certainly he was there from an early time.

MW -- And helped lend an international ...

DH -- I remember him as this young scholar who was doing Russia at that time. and he came to one of our meetings wearing the badge of the Russian Nature Society. And that tremendously sharp intellect that he has ... He's done good work. Well, who else? Richard Judd. Oh, Sam Hayes. Did we mention Sam Hayes?

MW -- No.

DH -- Is he on the list?

MW -- No we actually haven't. So, was he at that first meeting in 1977?

DH -- He could well have been at that first meeting. Yes.

MW -- And Alfred Crosby wasn't at that first meeting?

DH -- I don't remember that he was.

MW -- And Roderick Nash?

DH -- Oh, yeah. Rod Nash was around a lot in the early days. He was certainly at the Irvine meeting. And I'm sure he was involved in the conversations when the Society was being born, but I can't vouch that he was at that meeting that I was talking about.

MW -- One of the things that I noticed when I looked at this list is that there were ... seemed to me, there were a lot more people in Denver involved. Does that have anything to do with you?

DH -- Well, yes. These are people that I knew in Denver and I encouraged them to ...

MW -- Colleagues, graduate students?

DH -- Yes. Right. And see, this was '83, and we had had the Denver conference in 1980s, so I think they came in at that time. I notice a history colleague or two of mine that signed up. I probably twisted their arm.

MW -- The Denver meeting - was it in 1980? That's an even year. Would it have been '81?

DH -- Oh but this was one that Bob Schultz and I just organized. The one I was talking about. Sort of a forerunner to our meetings but not an official ASEH meeting.

MW -- Oh, right. Right. Right.

DH -- And, we did, of course, have the ASEH in Denver in 2002. That was after we began meeting every year. Or maybe it was the case of our first time to do annual meetings. And that one Ari Kelman organized. I was on the committees, but he did all the work.

MW -- That was a nice venue, the Brown ...

DH -- Oh, the Brown Palace was wonderful.

MW -- ... Palace. Yes. Yes.

DH -- I thought so. I picked it out.

MW -- That was perhaps one of the

DH -- Because he just arrived that year and I had done a couple things before that and one was to ... we went together to the Brown Palace and talked to the people. And they were really excited about it because they feel that their hotel has a historic aspect, and they have history tours of the hotel, and they talk about the ghosts that haunt some of the rooms. And they do date back. I think the hotel was built in 1892.

MW -- That a very nice conference. One of the things I thought about, too, in the earlier years, and of course as we grow... It is interesting to me that you didn't end up picking things ... like national park lodges or something [as a location] ...

DH -- Yeah, that's interesting. Probably because they're very expensive. But, yeah. I just, last month, was at a conference in the Grand Canyon. . . .outfitted with all the latest technological equipment. . . Carolyn Merchant has always been at the forefront of our expansion into the world of technology and electronics and so on. Well, you know she has that cd ...

MW -- Yes. Yes. Uh huh. Have you used that cd?

DH -- Yes, I do. Even though it's American history and I generally am branching out into other areas of the world. ... There are things that are really helpful for my students on that.....

[End of tape]