

Interviewee: Craft (Barton), Lisa
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Alicia Pearia: This is Alicia Pearia, interviewing Lisa Craft on October 8, 2004, in the R. A. Gray Building for the Tallahassee Preservation Oral History Project. To start with, tell me a little about your personal background. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

Lisa Craft: Okay, I was born in Anniston, Alabama, November 4, 1975, and grew up there in a town called Oxford, which is very close to Anniston. Graduated from high school there and attended college at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Graduated from there in 1997 and then moved to Tallahassee to attend graduate school at Florida State.

Pearia: Okay, and how did you become interested in the museums field or public history?

Craft: Well, I've always loved history. As a small child, I remember being involved in the Social Studies Fair at school, from the fourth grade to sixth grade. And one of my projects one year won either first or second place at the district level, so I was able to go to the state contest in Montgomery, Alabama. And while there my family visited the state archives and the first White House of the Confederacy and some other museums in Montgomery, and that really kind of spurred my interest from that point on in history.

Pearia: And you did the Public History program at Florida State, is that correct?

Craft: Yes, I was a history major at Alabama and knew that I really didn't want to go into the teaching field. So, I thought what else could I do with my history degree, and the museums seemed like a really natural fit. So, I looked for a Master's program in Historical Administration and found one at FSU and decided to pursue that graduate degree. And I just kind of ended up at the Museum of Florida History.

Pearia: What did you do – did you come here straight after graduation or did you work other places first?

Craft: I graduated from FSU in 1999 and – at the end of April, and I did not have a job yet when I graduated. But I had started volunteering at the Knott House Museum, which is one of the sites of the Museum of Florida History, and through that volunteer work when a position came open at the Knott House in July of that year, they did hire me as a part-time OPS worker. And just worked at the Knott House for a couple of years and then got on over here at the Museum of Florida History.

Pearia: I know that you are working on the World War II exhibit now. What other exhibits have you worked on?

Craft: Let's see, my first big exhibit was actually the first World War II exhibit in 2001, and I've also worked on an exhibit called *Visions of Paradise: Florida in the Popular Imagination*. And I have worked on, let's see, *Florida Girls and Boys and their Toys*, which is one of our traveling exhibits that we put on display here and did some upgrading to. And same thing with *Alligators*, no, I'm sorry it's called *Dragons in Paradise: Alligators in Florida*, which is one of our TREX [traveling exhibits program] exhibits that we exhibited here, but with enhancements. So that's about -- that's about it.

Pearia: When the World War II exhibit was first made was there an intention for it to be made permanent eventually or did it develop?

Craft: Yes, yes. They had grandiose plans and – which most of these have been fulfilled actually, as far as what the museum had to do. The components of the whole memorial project of the DVA, the Department of Veteran's Affairs, and Department of State sort of outlined. One was the temporary exhibit, and then they also wanted that to be a traveling exhibit, which it did, to three large cities in Florida. And they wanted to have a WWII Heritage Trail, which actually most of the work was done by the Bureau of Historical Preservation, and they wanted a set of lesson plans, which we produced. I – not me specifically, but our agency. And finally, a permanent exhibition here in the museum.

Pearia: So, how long have you been working on the permanent one?

Craft: Feels like forever! [laughter] Most of this year. Most of 2004. A lot of the background research was done previously for 2001 exhibit, so it wasn't like we had to start everything over from scratch.

Pearia: What is sort of typically day-to-day that you would be doing working on the exhibit or different things that you would be doing?

Craft: Well, I guess it just depends on what stage you're at in the exhibit development process. These days we are getting very close to installation, and so we're prepping artifacts, giving them the supports they need to go on exhibit. Making sure all the paperwork is in order, as far as the relocation forms that have to be filled out, 'cause they sort of leave their permanent home in storage and they go out onto exhibits, so the paperwork needs updating. And making sure all the new accessions have worksheets and measurements and markings. Just really getting into a lot of details. I've actually started hanging some posters and some textiles that are in the exhibit. And we were working with a designer and the fabricator on the placement of these artifacts and also the placement of the photographs that will be on the wall as well.

Pearia: Overall, about how many people typically work on an exhibit or this one in particular?

I know it's usually a team effort.

Craft: We do have a team. It's a team concept. Two educators, two curators, one designer, and then, you know, a team of fabricators, really. Three to four fabricators working on it. Our registrar, who is involved in dressing the mannequins right now for their uniforms. Oh, and we have other designers brought in to design different elements of the exhibit, like interactives. They are on staff. And we'll have people volunteer to proofread the text and that kind of thing. So, it grows into quite a big team.

Pearia: How much, I guess, input do you have in doing the actual designs of the exhibits, other than the people who are more designated the designers?

Craft: Well, we offer input to the designers. When we see something they produce, like a floor plan or something like that. If we see, for instance, we know that this poster should really go over here by this artifact, you know, we point that out and try to make sure that the flow of the exhibit is correct and just the content is grouped in a way that is historically accurate and makes sense and that kind of thing. And you know, we do offer suggestions, probably more than they want to hear about how the design should be. [laughter]

Pearia: What are some of the challenges changing it over from the temporary exhibit to the permanent exhibit?

Craft: I'd say the biggest challenge was deciding – 'cause the first exhibit was a huge exhibit, with over three hundred artifacts, and a huge amount of square footage and the permanent exhibit's square footage is much less. And it was just a challenge just to incorporate the same meaningful story and still have to make hard decisions about cutting artifacts out of the show and text and that kind of thing and just living within that confine of the new exhibit space.

Pearia: What are some of the things you decided to cut out?

Craft: Well, we had to cut the jeep. Obviously – you walked through it this morning – and there was just no way we could have put a jeep in there and still included the same kind of artifacts that we have in there now. That was the space issue for the jeep and just the thing that it's hard to get a permanent donation of a jeep. Other things we had to cut . . . we had a few models that we had to cut. We didn't cut the content out completely because the subject matter is still covered in the text panel or photo or something, but I'm thinking about, specifically, we had a model of a German U-boat. That was cut out. Oh, and a case of airplane models was cut and a – we had a model of the alligator amphibious vehicle that we did not include this time. And also we had a ship model that was in the first exhibit but was not in this one, but we have pictures [laughs].

Pearia: How much do controversies like Enola Gay and stuff like that affect how you would present a WWII exhibit? Does that factor in what you choose . . . I guess, how you chose to do

or what artifacts you use?

Craft: Well, we try to be – we don't want to sugarcoat history or any thing like that, but we try to be sensitive, and I'm trying – we didn't have any really specific controversies over Enola Gay. Something that did crop up actually when the exhibit traveled, it was down in Miami. We got a call from a person who had seen the exhibit down there and wanted to know why there was nothing in it about Japanese internment. You know, that was something that happened mainly on the West Coast, and since we're in Florida, the exhibit was *Florida Remembers World War II*. The Japanese people really were not interned as they were out West. Number one, the population of Japanese was just not that great in Florida, but we wanted to make an effort to satisfy this person. So, we did some more research and found out there was a colony of some Japanese farmers down on the east coast of Florida, and come to find out they did have Coast Guardsmen that were living with them, and I think they had to give up some property. But they were not interned necessarily. But anyway, we got that – we made another panel that talked about that, what happened to the Japanese in Florida. And so that was added to the traveling exhibit.

Pearia: Interesting. Did you get input from veterans or other people in the community before you do exhibits such as this or anything?

Craft: Hmm . . . Probably not as much as we should, to be honest with you. We always have comments afterwards and if we are able to – if something is glaringly wrong, we will make every effort to change it. You know, we're really careful not to – to make sure everything is accurate or as it should be, but sometimes things do crop up. Like, for instance, on our wall of names, which is the panels of the forty-six hundred plus names of servicemen who were killed. A couple of people came in and said, "My uncle was killed in the war. Why isn't his name on there?" You know, we were working from certain sources

Pearia: Right.

Craft: And you know, I guess, also the sources are not perfect. So, what we did, we made a separate panel. We did verify that they were killed and everything like that. It was just that sometimes they could have grown up in Florida and gone to college out of state, and they joined in that state, so they wouldn't have been officially credited to Florida. But when there was an instance where somebody was, you know, darn sure that their uncle did grow up in Miami and was killed then we created the supplemental panel and put their name out there.

Pearia: So, do you – even though it's a permanent exhibit, do you change any of the things that you have out there very often or . . . ?

Craft: We really . . . I would say we lean against doing that. I don't know if we have ever changed anything in any permanent exhibit. I mean to my knowledge.

Pearia: Right.

Craft: And I haven't been there – been here for that long, so it could have been done in the past, but yeah, I don't know about this one. We really had very little to do – to change or whatever in the first one, so I'm hoping this one will . . .

Pearia: Stay the same?

Craft: Yeah [laughter]. There won't be any complaints.

Pearia: Sort of on a side topic, funding is always an issue for museums. How much do you personally have to do with fundraising? Are you involved in that at all?

Craft: Not really. I do sit on a committee on the museum. It's called the Museum Development Group, and it's just a group of staff members that try to find grants that we can apply for. You know, just come up – try to come up some ideas about raising funds from the private world, and from federal, state money.

Pearia: You mentioned volunteers before. How important is the role of volunteers in putting up an exhibit?

Craft: Well, in the behind-the-scenes aspect, they are really important, especially the collections volunteers. As I've said, they do processing of the artifacts. In the past, they have done sewing for mannequins. Sewing the muslin on them. Actually, the last exhibit we had volunteers serve as docents and that was a really nice experience. A lot of them were actually veterans, people who lived through that time, so they were able to relate their own stories sometimes to school groups and things like that that came in, and just made it a little bit more meaningful.

Pearia: What about publicity? Do you . . . it's sort of like the fundraising question – I mean as part of your job, do you have a lot to do with the publicity of it, or . . . ?

Craft: Well, sort of indirectly. We do draft press releases, or we edit press releases. We give the PR person information, so they can write a press release. We do talk to reporters and stuff when they call, and sometimes we do go out and talk to WCTV. I did that for *Visions of Paradise*. And newspaper reporters, we've got some coming for this one, so it's just . . . kind of indirectly.

Pearia: Indirectly. Do you usually get a lot of feedback from the community about your exhibits?

Craft: Umm . . . well, we do try to ask people to do comment cards in the museum, but since I don't deal directly with the public every day, I'm a little bit insulated from, you know, what

they're saying . . .

Pearia: Right.

Craft: You know, someone in education might be better aware of the public's opinions because they deal more face to face with them. But, yeah, we do get, you know, we do get feedback, especially at openings or whatever when we're all there and can mingle with the public.

Pearia: Right. What's usually your favorite aspect of being a curator or that sort of thing?

Craft: Being a curator in general or doing exhibit development stuff?

Pearia: Both. Well, in general and specifically . . . for the World War II.

Craft: Well, let's see, for the exhibit development part, I really like doing installation, that kind of thing because you're starting from just a bunch of empty cases. The space looks kind of just empty. And you're working and you fill up the cases with these cool artifacts. And it's just – you're building something from almost nothing, and being able to know that I contributed to the finished product of an exhibit. And let's see . . . more generally speaking, just talking to the people that want to donate things, learning about artifacts, and just hearing the personal stories of people that donate things. I just like the connection with history, being a kind of facilitator between the people who donated and the public. If that makes sense.

Pearia: No, that makes sense.

Craft: Okay.

Pearia: As far as the artifacts go, I know sometimes you borrow them from other institutions or they're on loan. In general, in the exhibits how many are on loan, or as compared to what the museum actually has?

Craft: For a temporary or permanent exhibition?

Pearia: I guess either. For both.

Craft: For temporary, we tend to . . . sometimes we can be pretty heavy on loans. For instance, the first World War II exhibit half of the artifacts were loans. Now for *Visions of Paradise*, we only had just a handful. We wanted – it just depends on your topic. If your collection's strong in one type or in the types of things you want to display, then you don't have to borrow as much. So, it just depends, and for permanent exhibitions you try to really limit the number of loans because it is permanent.

Pearia: Right, right.

Craft: Although we do have a few loaned items that will be going into World War II. Then I know of some loaned items that we have in the steamboat, and in the lobby, the U.S.S. *Florida* model is a loan. So

Pearia: How much are you involved in, I guess, other things outside of the museum, kind of in the history, preservation sort of field?

Craft: [laughs] Not really! No, not really.

Pearia: So, it's pretty – a twenty-four hour . . . you get really involved . . . it's not a nine-to-five job?

Craft: Well . . . I'm planning a wedding right now. I'm doing that, and that's about it when I go home. So, no, I'm not really involved in other historical things outside of work. Probably sound really bad.

Pearia: No, no. How does your work here compare to when you worked at the Knott House or other places? Is it more what you're more interested in doing here? What I'm trying to say is what are the differences between what you were doing at the Knott House and what you are doing here?

Craft: When I was at the Knott House, I was more on the education side of it. So, I was giving tours a lot, and helping with the planning of the different programs that go on. I was doing a little collections work there. I was half-time education and half collections, so I was trying do – to organize the collections over there a little better and that kind of thing. And over here, I've really, mainly deal with collections and curatorial stuff, which I think I like better.

Pearia: So, I asked you about what your favorite aspects are. What are some of the frustrating or challenging parts of being a curator?

Craft: I guess budget is always something that – and time. It feels like you juggle so much, so many different tasks. You wear a lot of hats and just doing the nit-picky details. I wouldn't say there are really too many negatives. I mean, really, other than those. I enjoy what I do and . . . [laughter].

Pearia: Could you tell me a little bit about some of the other exhibits that you've worked on?

Craft: Okay. I guess the last big one was *Visions of Paradise*, and that was about the different . . . or how people perceive Florida as the Sunshine State. Place for tourists. So we delved into tourism a bit, and, of course, the citrus industry, and the Native Americans, and that kind of thing. So, we delved a lot into symbols and tourism and that kind of thing. What do people think about when they think of Florida? And that was a really fun exhibit. World War II, you know, a pretty serious topic. So, that one was a lot of fun. Just fun for the public and fun to work

on. Although working on World War II has been a lot of fun, too.

Pearia: But just a more serious topic.

Craft: Yeah, a more serious topic.

Pearia: If you had an idea about a future exhibit – or what would be something that you personally you would think would be a good addition, either temporary or permanent?

Craft: I think a cool temporary exhibit – we'd probably never do it – baseball in Florida. Like a sports theme exhibit. I think it would be a big draw. This state's sports crazy.

Pearia: [laughs]

Craft: Lots of sports teams here, so I think that would be fun. I'm a sports fan myself, so there's a little personal interest there. I think it would be a good draw and, you know, really cool artifacts we could obtain on loan. Maybe get some donations.

Pearia: What about a permanent exhibit? Anything to add on?

Craft: Umm . . . permanent? We need to do the sixteenth century Florida exhibit. That's sort of been in the back of people's minds for a long time. It's just actually getting the staff and funding and all that kind of thing to do it because that would fill a hole in the exhibit space in the gallery.

Pearia: What are some of the major obstacles in doing that? Is it mainly funding, or . . .?

Craft: Well, it's just . . . it's complicated.

Pearia: Yeah.

Craft: It's a lot of reasons. Probably more reasons than I really know about –

Pearia: Right.

Craft: Since it's kind of an on going issue for a number of years. But the space issue, administration, what they want to see done, and that kind of thing.

Pearia: Okay, just going back to the World War II exhibit, what are some of – from this point on, you said you're coming up to the installation stage –

Craft: Mmm-hmm.

Pearia: Is that what you're . . . ?

Craft: Yeah.

Pearia: It is opening on November 11, right?

Craft: Yes.

Pearia: So, are you usually working on it up to the day of? Or how does the installation process usually go?

Craft: It usually goes right up until the end, until you're cutting the ribbon or whatever.

Pearia: [laughs]

Craft: So, it ought to be an interesting another month or so. I'm sure we'll all be very busy and we'll be glad when it's over, but hopefully we'll be able to look back in pride and have a lot of pride and fulfillment in putting this exhibit together for the people of Florida and future generations, and for the vets.

Pearia: Okay, well, thank you so much for talking with me.

Craft: You're welcome.

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