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Interview with Ann Laudeman

Todd Juengling

Ann Laudeman

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Researcher: Todd Juengling
Event: interview with Ann Laudeman
Place: the Laudeman home, 507 E. High St., Mt. Vernon

[000-065 lost because I forgot to turn on the microphone. Recording begins 066.]

Ann Laudeman: The kids did some, took some time and learned about the different kinds of plants that are growing in the garden besides the more natural, the plants that are just growing in the woods and that sort of thing, and looking for evidence of squirrels or deer, or even raccoons, of course and chipmunks in the woods. The difficulty was that when you take ten kids at a time the wildlife's gonna get scared of before you get there, you know, they hear them coming. But the best part and what we're expanding on this year with that location of course was time spent in the river, and you know, the kids at first are so overwhelmed just with the experience of getting down in the water and everything that they, it's very hard for them to practice the patience of lifting and looking under a stone, and being at a right angle so the light doesn't shine on the water and, you know, keep you from being able to see it. And allowing them the time to first of all just get used to the experience, and then really to be able to look more closely, both in the water and on the shore, and not just be throwing the stones and everything. So we're really hoping to build on that. Last year we had a day in the water, a day on the land, and this year we want them to have some period of time in the water every day, especially when it's the middle of June and it really feels good, you know. And then we tried to, on the last day we wrap up with this family-type meal so that the parents can see a lot of what the kids do, as well as get more aware of what is at the facility itself, so that the families will come back themselves and enjoy it a little bit too. Well, I don't know what more specifically I can tell you about it, or who's involved. We're trying to include the whole county, we advertise it in all the schools.

Todd Juengling: So, include the whole county how?

AL: In having kids from all the grade schools knowing about it to register as campers, and we try to recruit staff counselors in the sense of high school students that go with each group. And so the presenters may be teachers or somebody who has a particular area of interest, but the high school kids are going around with each of the groups of students to different stations and saying, you know, let's look for this, or you know you need to keep from distracting the other kids. But it's high school kids that are interested in the kids and working with kids as well as having some interest in outdoor activities. And that worked well last year. We had 16 high school kids out there helping. So, every time we get talking about what we want to develop in our program, this year or in the future, we start talking about going to for instance the old, I can't think of what you call it, refill . . . [recording stops 110-315, because I turned the microphone off again since the meter still wasn't noticeably reading. Mrs. Laudeman left to get us something to drink and I figured out what I was doing wrong. Mrs. Laudeman re-enters the room at 332, and talks to the dog, Sisi, for a few seconds. Sisi lay on the couch between us for the duration of the interview, and got rather excited when we started eating chicken wings for lunch.] How's the Rural Life Center going to tie into this, do you know?

TJ: Tie into . . .

AL: The Brown Family Center. Are they gonna be using it for some of the project and stuff?

TJ: I don't know. I don't think they're really tied in their programs or anything like that.

AL: Well they were gonna somehow complement each other but I don't remember what I heard about it. Just mainly because they have some similar goals.

TJ: Yeah, well and I know Howard [Sacks] and Ray [Heithaus] work together on certain things, and in terms of Kenyon the Environmental Center and the Rural Life Center are basically the only links we have with the community, or the main links between Kenyon and the community, and so I think in that way they're related.

AL: Of course from my standpoint you've got music, got religion, you know, there's a lot of links. But that's because I've been. The music department, I've going up there to play in the Knox County Symphony since I was maybe 14. So, I just, that's always to me been a very significant link. But then of course we love some of the guests and performances that you have over there too it's just like who needs Columbus, you know?

TJ: Like, last semester we had the Gabrieli Consort, I don't know if you came up and saw that.

AL: I think I missed that, I think there was some . . . that's wasn't the quartet that played for the opening?

TJ: No, they're the early music I guess orchestra, and they brought a few vocalists, too, and they did like a Christmas concert in the church.

AL: Was it Christmas? Okay, because I think I remember reading about it and I had some kind of conflict. And there was something the week before, they dedicated the back of Rosse Hall, and I missed that too.

TJ: Oh yeah, that was the Orion Quartet came.

AL: Oh, now I caught them, but there was something the week before them too, that I was thinking that was early music, but then there are some particular people at Kenyon that really like the early music performances, so they're always. . . I fact I think there's a series named after . . .

TJ: Taylor.

AL: Yeah, yeah. [talks to the dog] [end of side A]

AL: [We called our] group the Nature's Keepers for the first year. Saying, well we could use this name every year or we could make a new theme every year. And of course part of the temptation is to do something that's historical, you know, that might alert them more to what may have developed in different parts of the county, or you know, take some time to talk about

Johnny Appleseed and what was going on when he was alive. Or even way back in Indian times or something like that. Now that's now gonna be so directly related to the environment, but if we look at other periods in history where we can talk about how people treated the environment, you know, what helped to sustain it and that sort of thing, that might tie it all in. See that's why I thinking, you know, maybe we could use some of the expertise from the Rural Life Center for stuff like that. I can't think of his name, there's a man that volunteered with the Knox Historical Society and he spoke to a group about what the Indians were doing in one location of Knox County at a Cub Scout camp one summer, and I thought that would really be fun to do something like that with the kids. [talks to the dog]

TJ: So what do you see kind of as, I guess some of the goals, like the primary goals of like the summer camp and some of the programs that Inese runs during the year?

AL: Well, I think there's some variety in the sense that some of it serves, is serving a certain age group and other parts of it, some of the scientific elements are more elaborate than others, so. [Mr. Laudeman enters the room and they talk for a minute]

TJ: What board is this?

AL: Oh, he's on the school board for Mt. Vernon schools. It's always a conflict with the raccoon supper, it's always the same night, the first Monday in February. So, like I said, we want the kids to be able to go out and be observant and appreciative of you know what's growing or developing around and the different, what you call the different homes where the animals are living, and also to be able to watch and see what does, you know what is growing or how things are growing, or have that curiosity about it, whether it's something that may develop, be developing in the river, little egg sacks or little larva in the river, or just the plants in the garden. Ideally too, as more of the, some of the school, some of the kids at the high school are doing some testing in the river depending upon what classes they're in, what teachers they have. And so if the kids are introduced early on and they get up in high school and they're doing this stuff, it'll be a much more natural and expected progression, you know, for them to go ahead and do some of that stuff. But again, my, when I was growing up I just loved watching and examining all of this different stuff, but my children have not shared that interest, and that's really been frustrating for me, and so I really want to promote an opportunity for kids to go out and do some of this stuff and recognize that that's just as much of their science education as what they're learning out of these text books about geography and everything. So, I think that again Nature's Keepers, proper care and disposal of what they use. I am not crazy about, I can't believe how much we use up and dispose in this day and age, and every time people want to pull out the paper plates for a meal or something, I just like you know what plates can be washed and re-used. So that's what we promote with this 1st day of having the big dinner and everything and everybody's supposed to bring their own and take it back, and if they use paper they gotta take it back with them. Now we may import some animals this year that, you know, aren't really at the Center, but just for a sort of a little bit of fun, and again just for the educational aspect of it. So, again just having fun outdoors and still being part of the learning process, that's part of the goal, too. We are getting some, making some effort to combine the efforts of some of the achievement goals of boy scouts and girls scouts, and teachers, schools teachers and that sort of thing. So

there might be more interdependency or sharing with the different groups, so when they're all working toward some of the same things they can be doing that together too. So that's been kind of neat, because it's for boys and girls and otherwise they go off to girl scout camp and boy scout camp. So, I'm trying to think what other, if we've named other particular goals or not, but I'd say that's as specific . . . we try to keep it general so that we can embrace any idea that comes along.

TJ: Well what about involving the larger community? Not just school kids, or boy scouts, girl scouts; not just younger kids, but older people?

AL: We haven't been doing that with the camp. The involvement for older people and the environmental center is mainly through the volunteer coordinator who, I don't know if she's strictly responsible for the programs but there's two-hour programs scheduled at different weekends, different times during the week, where it's everything from, like I said earlier, the natural dyeing process she did that. I can't think what some of the other ones they've had. And so the camp isn't really catering to adult involvement other than the parents joining their own kids or being, presenting information for the kids. I don't know that we would expand to try to serve the adults because we're trying to make this a weekday project, and I think if you're trying to serve the adults you want to look, consider the working parent, working adults. Unless we work on doing something with the retired people too. Let them share with the younger kids just for the fun of it. So, that's about as close as we will be getting to expanding with the camp itself. But we are, we're always looking for ways to attract more of the adults. Get, you know, more interaction with the common interests and outdoor activities. Of course, the, was it offered to the students, the canoeing? Have you read about the canoeing that they've had . . . I can't remember if that's offered for the community and students at different times.

TJ: I think it is. Or, I don't know if they put them together or, I can never remember.

AL: Well that's going to, al that's going to increase the visibility of the Center and what the possibilities are.

TJ: So have you worked on other things at the Environmental Center other than the camp? I think Inese said you did stuff with earth day.

AL: Well, I was involved with the initial planning, contacts, you know, who might be interested in participating on that day. The original earth day was when I was in high school, and I was president of the student council for that year, and so it was a really big deal, you know, first time we ever had an earth day. And so we're trying to think of, this is supposed to be a certain a special anniversary I think for earth day.

TJ: The 30th.

AL: Yeah, okay. And we were trying to reflect back on what was happening back then in the schools. But I honestly don't know what they've ended up planning because I was just there for the brainstorming at the beginning. And otherwise I've just been involved on the outside with

working in the garden and stuff like that, trying to maintain community contact is, you know, I just think they have to have that information out there all the time for people to be aware of it. Oh, and agin we're trying to tie in, get more volunteers involved with, you know, keeping the trails cleared off and marked and stuff like that. And we're trying to, there's some projects that might be developed in terms of even eagle scouts making projects out of things that might have to be done around. For instance building steps at a certain point down to the river, where they want to be able to have access down there but that may be a steep bank or something like that. And there's something else they were talking about but I can't think of what it was. Oh and they're building this little man-made stream type place that's going to be made to attract birds, and so that may end up being a project for a couple of scouts. That's the drawback to having all the Kenyon students leave in the summer time.

TJ: then the scouts have to do everything.

AL: Yeah. Go to scout camp or work at the Center. So, I can't think of what other aspect to describe to you about what's going on down there.

TJ: Well, what are some of your kind of, I guess like favorite things about it?

AL: I think mainly the work and the research that's going into planting different parts of it, serving different purposes. Whether it's demonstrating what some of the natural plants would be, or just planting the, it's not, is it a medicinal garden? I can't remember for sure, it's the circular garden. And then the variety of the perennials that they're packing into the main garden I just think it's fabulous to see what is growing well and what they can develop there. But again, too, I'm not so familiar with some of the research that's being done with what's going on in the woods, I know that they are trying to protect some of the growth against the deer and that sort of thing, they've built some areas to keep them out. But otherwise I don't know all that much about that aspect of it. Now they had some goats there a couple summers ago, but it became a problem to make sure that somebody was there and was checking on them every day because they were trying to confine them to certain area and it was penned off, but the risk of them getting loose and not wandering of was a problem. So whether they can get back to that or not I don't know. It's mainly the vegetative type of stuff that they're doing there for me. And again the fact that they can be developing these different places along the river, where kids can see where there's a muddy place or a sandy place, and how much difference that makes in terms of what's growing around it, and what's in the water at that location. I really like canoeing and I like to take my son fishing but we're not very good at it, you know. So we're still working to learn more about that. So I guess that would mainly be what I, what interests me in being involved with it.

TJ: Well, what part, what importance do you think the river has towards the Environmental Center and what importance does the Environmental Center have towards the river?

AL: Uh-huh. I'm hoping that the Environmental Center helps to educate people about caring for it, or draw attention to it, to the benefit that the river provides. For some people rivers can be kind of scary things, you know. And yet when you think about where that river goes, where it comes from, it kind of comes all the way down around Mt. Vernon and, you know, and going

down to Gambier, and now the fact that it's in such good condition. I think that the Environmental Center has helped to, helped people to be more, much more aware of that. So I think they really enhance each other a lot, because having the Center there provides, it's not, there aren't a lot of places where the general public can feel that they can get to the river, and maybe not feel that they can get to the river and not feel that maybe it's either dangerous where they are, or it's supposedly off limits. If you go down there around to some of the public parks, the municipal parks, there is no effort being made to make people feel that they are welcome to go on the river. And so I think the Brown Family Center offers that, where otherwise you'd think, well there's the river but I don't know how I can get to it. Now they did try, and I don't know who's researching the parts of the river around town but, there's a park, I can't think of what it's called, on the west side of Mt. Vernon and they were starting to clean up an area along there so that people would feel that they could go down from the dike down to the river. But I don't know if they ran out of money. It was two summers ago, and then last summer it didn't look like anything was happening. And so I think the Brown Family Center makes you feel that you, it's a little bit more acceptable to go down in the river instead of having to go off the trestle or something like that, you know. So I think that's probably how they enhance each other. Brown Family Center could exist maybe with a creek or something, but to have that body of water as part of it is really great.

TJ: Well, what do you see as kind of what would be the main attractions for people who would come here on a tour, say if they're only gonna maybe an hour or a couple hours?

AL: Mm-hmm. Well, if they stopped at the Brown Family Center of course, depending on the time of year the garden is great. And they're developing some of these, I don't know if you want to call them exhibits, but she, they have a new collection of birds I guess that they're gonna have as an exhibit. And of course that is really neat for a place like that, cause you don't have to go to the museum of natural history to catch something like that. There's a bird display up in Cleveland at the, I can't remember if that's the museum of natural history or what, but not to have to make a haul clear up there just to identify birds, you know, and to really see the bird itself. If people were expecting to they could actually go along the path down along the river. You know, and wouldn't have to be getting muddy or wet, but you know just to have a walk in the woods. So is that what you're talking about, if they stopped there for an hour? Yeah. And that's what, I'm not sure how much evidence there is to know where you can hike if you would just drive in and walk up there. That's what we've been playing around with they have now these bulletin boards and these display cases, and we're trying to find ways to make it more obvious where the trails are and whether people can just pick up one of the little maps and just be able to follow the trail, whether it's very clear or not. So that's what I would recommend to people. In fact, if we had company I'd probably take them over there, people could see. But that would be, I'd probably say between May and what October. Now you know there used to be a ski lift up that hill. Ask Inese to find out more about that. It was a rope tow, you know, and that was 30 years ago, and I don't know what happened to it. I don't know if it was there when Ray was here as a student or not, you know. But you ought to find out about that. That wasn't on the river though, so.

TJ: That's all right.

AL: Okay. [talks to the dog]

TJ: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you can think of that's important to mention?

AL: Yeah, I can't think of anything in particular. I'm trying to think if there's any other, of course you know they're building this building and I don't know how much it's going to enhance the use of the property beyond some of the things the school can be doing with the lab nearby. So I don't really know what to expect. I don't know if they'll ever, for instance, have their own canoes on the property, but then, and where they might be limited in use because of just going back and forth. I don't, what is it, 2 miles, do you know how much property is on the river?

TJ: I'm not sure.

AL: Somehow I'm feeling that, but maybe it was 2 miles that was designated, no that couldn't be right, as a scenic river.

TJ: No, it's like 40-some, to 50. 45-50, something like that.

AL: Okay, because it's marked clear down outside of Warsaw. Do you know where Warsaw is? If you go down out 36 towards Coshocton, Warsaw's out there, and I think there's a sign along the Kokosing there. I'd still like to see something like some simple, some kind of simple permanent shelter, where, you know, if the kids wanted to sleep over or something that you know they could sleep out by the river or something where, you know, you'd really have the benefit of the sound of the river and everything. But of course, you know, the vacillate back and forth whether it's a good idea to promote any, you know, camping there, so whether that's going to develop is hard to say. So that's the only other particular interest that I have in pursuing there. But don't tell Inese. She knows. Are you getting much of a general picture from everybody, or more specific?

TJ: Yeah, actually there's a lot of places where what people say really kind of fits together. A lot of people, well I haven't talked to a lot of people I guess, but it's pretty common for people to say that they like the butterfly garden best. I know Inese likes it just because she does so much with it.

AL: Yeah. Well, you yeah I forgot about that, that we're gonna be taking more time to identify and track what butterflies and how many butterflies are there. I had a simple version of a butterfly collection when I was growing up. But then really those butterflies, certain ones really just disappeared for probably 20 years, and I didn't see them, and they're just coming back. Butterflies that are more unusual than the monarch butterfly and the tiger swallowtail butterflies, things like that. So that's why I'm particularly interested to see what butterflies that particular garden attracts, because you may not see them just in a vegetable garden or something like that because they're looking for certain plants. [looking at the dog] This is a butterfly chaser right here.

TJ: I kinda thought something like that when I was talking to Ray Heithaus about the bluebird trail, and he said that there were like 44 bluebirds fledged, and I said I haven't seen a bluebird in years. I used to see them when I was a kid, all over the place.

AL: Yeah, now when I see them I'm not sure if I really know what I saw or not because it's been so long and you just have to be way out in the middle of nowhere to see one, but they really are promoting them. And I don't, I guess it's across the state, I just know individuals in Knox County that are really promoting it, and so I don't know how widespread it is. But when you drive someplace else and see little signs, then you know that it's not just a local phenomenon. So what's it like, are you anywhere near the river in Cincinnati?

TJ: [I talk about my associations with rivers at home]

AL: Okay, so your experience is more with a river like the Kokosing than it would be with a bigger river.

TJ: Yeah, definitely.

AL: Okay. Well, see there used to be a place, let's see where was it, I don't even know if I could tell you where it was, on the lower side of Gambier called Dorothy's and it was like a little bar, and the students enjoyed it during the school year and the rest of us enjoyed it the rest of the year. And we'd go canoeing down the Kokosing, and stop below Gambier and walk up to Dorothy's for a beer while we waited for someone to come and get us and give us a ride home, you know. Never thought that anything would happen to Dorothy's, just can't even believe anymore that it's not there. And like I said I can't even tell you where it was. I think it was in a house that has been converted back to, you know, a house. I don't think it was torn down. Now there's something that Ray would know. [end of tape]