***Transcription sponsored by Cuyahoga Valley National Park***

**Amy Sumen** [00:00:00] I'm ready to go, just for the record, can you state your name?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:00:06] Yes, Siegfried Buerling, it's do you need it spelt? No, no, no.

**Amy Sumen** [00:00:12] How about your date of birth?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:00:14] January [...], 1932.

**Amy Sumen** [00:00:17] Okay, and where were you born?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:00:19] Essen, Germany.

**Amy Sumen** [00:00:20] Wow. When did you come over this way?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:00:24] I came to Canada first. I lived from 1957 to 1959 in Montreal, and then we came from Canada. I met my wife in Montreal and she is also German and we came over here in 1959 in September, October somewhere on the North America.

**Amy Sumen** [00:00:44] Yeah. Okay, so, so roughly how long are we talking that you've lived in the area?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:00:52] Well ever since then basically I lived the first year or so in Cleveland Heights and then I moved to Chesterland and we built a house there, lived there until 1970 and then moved in here in 1970 and ever since I've been in the area. So I would say longer than most people are old.

**Amy Sumen** [00:01:23] So, what is your role in this project today?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:01:29] Well, I... What do you want to define project?

**Amy Sumen** [00:01:32] I think we're talking about Hale Farm.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:01:35] Hale Farm. Yeah, well, when I started working at the Western Reserve Historical Society, which is the parent organization of the Hale Farm. Everybody thinks the Hale farm is it, but we have a big boss in Cleveland, and I'd just come to Cleveland in 1959 and November, actually it was just about the beginning of November I came to Cleveland, and I was job hunting—I'm a cabinet maker by training—and there was an ad in the paper that says that nonprofit organization looks for temporary carpenter or cabinetmaker. And I when interviewed and I did get hired for six weeks, and six weeks turned into, what, forty years eventually. And I never was let go again now in there.

**Amy Sumen** [00:02:28] Wow. Who was who was putting that ad out?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:02:30] The Western Reserve Historical Society.

**Amy Sumen** [00:02:30] Oh, so you didn't...

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:02:32] Yeah. I didn't know. That was the only employer I ever really had here. It was things I came here.

**Amy Sumen** [00:02:39] So you were the.... Did you initiate the Hale Farm project or how did that...?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:02:45] Well, no. No and yes. First I have to say no. When I started working at the Historical Society, my temporary job ended up at Christmastime and everybody got a Christmas bonus and I got a fruitcake to say goodbye. And but they liked me very much and I liked it there very much. But in the early days, the organization was very conservative, and unless there was money in an endowment fund or guaranteed they did not hire anybody in a full-time position. So I was laid off, when I was laid off for about a week and then I was job hunting and actually I had already already another position accepted somewhere as a cabinetmaker. As a cabinetmaker, you didn't have many problems of getting a job. And they called me and asked me if I wanted to come back. And I said, well, I would come back, but not again for a short period of time because I... [inaudible] So I came back and they said, no, we have your salary reasonably guaranteed and if you behave yourself, you have a regular job. And so I was hired for Cleveland. The historical society at that time was a relatively prominent organization, but I think we had a maximum of eight employees there and I was about the ninth or something like that, [you] know. And the rest of them were almost all retired people, you know, and that have, you know, librarians, teachers, and so [on] that worked out. But the only full-time was really the director. There was a gardener and one other person, and the rest of them there were all just like most small historical societies. And so then... But they had built that big central addition. They owned two mansions, one the library, one the museum, and they combined the two by building an addition in there too. There was some exhibit work to be done, etc., and that's when they had hired me temporary. But no, they had grown and they needed really somebody full time. And so I got started but the hook there was really that they had almost only the salaries for me guaranteed for six months a year. But they had inherited the Hale Farm a short time before with an endowment fund. And so they could pay out of the Hale Farm fund, they could pay my salary for six years, or six months a year. So after starting there again beginning of January, in May I had to march out to the Hale Farm and there was one other guy who was an assistant director at the Historical Society who worked at the same terms that I did there. And boom, we both bundled up in the spring and May 1960 we went out here and started... Look around, well, at that time they had just a custodian living at the Hale Farm and his wife, and they took a few schoolchildren around and the Hale Farm was manicured like like a golf course, really, you know, and the few children that came to visit there, they had to go hand in hand and they didn't dare to run off the path etc. etc. and they really had nothing to do.

**Amy Sumen** [00:06:02] Who was the man that was with you?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:06:03] It was a guy by the name of Bill Penny. He was an assistant director and he was a pretty good guy. He was in his, oh at that time in his thirties. And his wife was also German. And so he kind of like... And he had been after the war in the occupation troops in Germany. So he spoke a little German. And I might say my English at that time was really very much lacking because in Montreal, we, you know, spoke French. And there were a lot of Jewish people there and they all spoke German, you know, and Jewish, just a little bit like German, [inaudible] dialect, really. So it was very hard for me to learn English there. And not till I came here to Cleveland did I really start picking up English. There was no more choice and nobody spoke German. And so, we... And Bill Penny was my supervisor there, and we looked around and really didn't know, we had no real directions for the Hale Farm [on] what to do there.

**Amy Sumen** [00:07:07] What was existing there?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:07:08] Oh, there was just a main house and there was, they had built a parking lot in a totally ridiculous area made almost in front of the Hale house, which interfered with the view of the Hale house. And then there were two barns. Actually, there were three, but the third one didn't amount to anything. There were two barns and that was it. And those things, we couldn't do anything in the house because the caretaker was kind of in charge, but not really. He couldn't tell us what to do but he could tell us what not to do. That type of a thing. And so my supervisor, the guy that was with me then, he lived in Burton where there's a little Century Village and and he had last been in Cooperstown. And he left Cooperstown and he said we should probably take one of the barns and put some tools in it. And so we asked the director in Cleveland at the time, yeah, that's fine. You know, I don't care what you do, just work or do something. So we scraped a barn out. There was a lot of bats, and oh, it was in horrible condition. We literally hosed it out with [inaudible], and we put some exhibits together in there, some old farm implements. And we put in some... a loom. We had no idea how to put a loom together. From a book we put the loom together.

**Amy Sumen** [00:08:36] Oh my gosh.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:08:37] And had a neat little museum put together that season. And towards the end of the season, [inaudible] it was almost August or September and October, the Hale Farm shut down for good for the winter, and we moved back to Cleveland. But now we had a loom set up. So we went out and found a spinner and weaver that could weave there. And I remember the first time we opened, they had never seen that many people at the Hale Farm. We had instantly, I can't remember what it was... I do know the following year, the first year we were open for six months, we had all of a sudden 17,000 people out there and from a place that had just about five [or] six hundred schoolchildren and a couple of garden clubs had come out there before, [you] know? So the trustees liked very much what we had done.

**Amy Sumen** [00:09:31] Can I ask you what year that was?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:09:32] Oh, that would have been 19... We started working out there in 1960, and the first year we did not get that barn done, so it must have been the second year. It would have been 1961. And really there was such a boom in attendance. I think the first year we had in the fall, they had almost 6,000 or 7,000 people. But then the next season, when it really started taking off, we had something like 17,000 people. They liked what we did. And they said, well, what else? Well, we thought we probably could build a blacksmith shop. That would be some nice. Every farm had it but we didn't call it a forge barn. No, no. That didn't really have a blacksmith shop, but they had all a little shop where they did ironwork, shod horses, and whatever goes with it. So we found an old barn somewhere in the neighborhood. It was much too large so we took just one bay of the barn and we put this one together, put a blacksmith in there. No, no idea what we were doing here. All I did... Banged out a few nails and things like that, and it became popular and popular. So that was then about '60, during the summer of 1960, and then the beginning of '61, really, we were fully in swing. And it was pretty nice, you know, and the caretaker there got a little bit upset by that time that we really messed up their nice place on the other side, you know, and left this thing there. And so with that Bill Penny was totally in charge, whatever there was to be in charge of. And Bill... So we both... He lived in Burton and I lived in Chesterland. And so we both traveled together every morning. We came through Peninsula. This is really the interesting part of the story. And at that time, we always came by the Bronson Church, the Little Peninsula church. And the church had caved in. The foundation had caved in, and the turrets, those four little turrets that were on the sides, they were crumbling. The galleries, the roof was leaking. Nobody paid anything, any attention to it, you know? and so we thought, my God, maybe we can help getting this church [inaudible]. The Hale Farm had inherited a reasonable endowment fund—at least at that time it was a lot of money—and it was a million dollars, you know. And we were allowed only to use the income from it, but even the income from it was more than we really used up. But we were doing, putting our own there at a farm, [you] know? and so we went to the trustees and said, can we use a little bit of this money to help to restore this nice church in Peninsula? And they checked into it and like always, the lawyers got into the act and they said, no, the will does not allow us to use this money anywhere else but at the Hale Farm well. So we came up with the idea if we cannot take the money to the church, maybe we can take the church to the money. And again, Burton had started what they called a little bit of a pioneer village there, and Cooperstown was there. And right around the '60s, the end of the first generation of the open-air museums really started, which we had the big ones there. Well, really first ones were like Monticello had been opened and, what was the other one, oh, Washington's Mt. Vernon had opened and Dearborn was in swing and Sturbridge Village was there. And that was just about it in the country. But the fever was there to create this, [you] know, and rightfully or wrongfully it just becomes now a philosophical question, but we thought, well, maybe we can have our own little old village here. And we proposed it to the trustees and they said, Okay, make a plan, make a proposal. We did. We made a layout of village greens in the Western Reserve, we studied them there. And then almost instantly, the first house was offered to us and we weren't anywhere ready but... Oh, I want to go back to the church because... So we went up there and measured the church together to get ready for moving it to the Hale Farm and the people in Peninsula created a big uproar. And you're going to steal our church. You're not going to steal our church. No. Well, we said you never took care of your church, we wouldn't steal anything. You know, if you guys restore and fix it up, well, we don't care but if it sits any longer like that, it's totally gone. Well, when we owned it by then, the Bishop Burroughs from the Episcopal Church hadn't given services in for ten, fifteen years and all kinds of things there. And so the people that formed them was then called the Peninsula Heritage Association, and we supported them and helped them. But then they started a fundraising thing and we also insisted that there was a little bit something of an endowment fund that not just everybody is for it, and then puts the church together and then five years again, the same thing happens now. And so at the time, the counties could give the county historical society, the official county historical society, depending on their size, up to ten thousand dollars a year. And so the Summit County Historical Society was eligible to receive the ten thousand dollars a year. And the purpose was for the maintenance of the Peninsula church. So the Peninsula church was owned by the Summit County Historical Society, and the Peninsula Heritage became the manager for that. And so they got ten thousand dollars for the upkeep or whatever it was each year. And it worked out pretty well, except we didn't have a church. By that time, the plans for the church had gone. And there long stories when I was sitting there in front of the church measuring it I practically got tarred and feathered. They thought I was going to steal the church. We became later good friends with everybody. People like Lily Fleder and Bob Hunger got involved and all the names that are still around. And then so but everything was peaceful at that time, but we didn't have a church. In the meantime, people had heard that we were moving houses and wanted to create a village. So there was a house up on Ira Road, which was the Jagger house and was supposed to be torn down. And we accepted it and moved up to the Hale Farm without having any plans, so I put it in a field. A short time later, a second house became available in Richfield and we moved that one down there, and those were sitting for two years literally, about a year and a half in the middle of the village of the fields there. People said, boy, they're creating a graveyard for old houses down there really, you know. And that time the change, big change, was then that Mr. Penny, who was a fantastic guy, he had one weakness. And he always thought that he is better than our executive director in Cleveland and that he really should be the executive director, [you] know. Now, we all have this kind of a feeling at times about our bosses, but we are smart enough not to let them know that, [you] know. Well, he told that to everybody that wanted to listen to him, and pretty soon it came around to the director. And a couple of months later, Bill Penny was a goner. He got fired. And so the only one left that knew what was going on even remotely was yours truly, who barely spoke a word of English and so I was, all of a sudden I was in charge of the project here. Well, anyhow, we moved the buildings and the foundation, we laid the village out and we had studied, like I said, we had traveled quite [inaudible] on the [inaudible], an extremely interesting history. Anybody that is really interested ought to look into it a little bit. We went to all the townships to look at the layout of the village greens and turned out that they all had been rectangular. But then as the farm was... Well, either rectangular or squares, but the farmers were too lazy to make the sharp turn so they cut the corners off and all of a sudden there were ovals and rounds started in squares, you know, like Tallmadge is round and Burton is round, but Chardon is long. And then there are over 80 existing village greens still in the Reserve and more are being discovered again, [you] know. So we did the same thing, but we had to make it a little bit smaller, although they came in all sizes, in all shapes and forms, as long as they were round. So we opened our first building now and again that was not... The first building we moved was the Jagger house, the second best Saltbox house, but we moved... We opened the Saltbox house first. It was easier to restore, etc., etc. We had by that time learned a little bit about politics. We wanted to show something.

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:14] Just a second, everything is fabulous but every movement is sounding onto the tape.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:21] Oh.

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:21] Okay, it's like a drumbeat.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:24] Oh, when I go like this? [haha]

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:28] And there's something squeaking.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:29] Oh yeah, my sh[oes].

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:30] Your handsome shoes right there.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:30] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think...

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:31] Good looking shoes.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:32] Good, yeah. [laughs] Actually, better I took them off, huh.

**Amy Sumen** [00:19:38] Sharp shoes. Okay. Go ahead.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:19:38] Okay, so anyhow, so that moved along and the project was very successful. And my career and... Always remembering in those days we closed down in the winter months and I still worked six months a year in Cleveland and I worked six months off the farm. We moved subsequently out of buildings and opened them almost [inaudible] quickly within a year or two. Then we came and then we had to start forming a policy. One of the policies that we had learned to right away from the very beginning from Peninsula, that we would never move a building unless the bulldozer was standing in front of the door and it could never be saved anywhere else, could not be saved in town. There was literally... Subsequently the only buildings that we then tried to find tenants for which has been successful. And we still, as of today, we have never moved to a building that would not have, wouldn't be in existence anymore. I know you'll find this frequently that they say, okay, we're gonna move this building. We learned our lesson instantly through Peninsula there. So anyhow, so the village started going and oh, we got well along there then since we hadn't gotten the church in Peninsula, we needed a church, which was of course very, very important. And a church in Streetsboro became available. It was larger than the Peninsula Church, so we had to find a different place in the village for it. But there was not much of a problem with that one. We just put it on one end, but not on the end of the village green, but on the side to it. And the village moved right along, very, very popular. This was the time other areas opened villages and it was like motherhood and apple pie at the time, [you] know, we had big things going on, special events. We started creating the Hale Farm. We started to develop the Hale Farm again, pretty much having the animals that Jonathan Hale had there. We did not ever do back breed or something like that, because it's too expensive and it's not very practical, but we did get the original breeds that he used and then adapted them, but so that they were very much like the animals. For example, Jonathan Hale had Durhams which grow into shorthorns, but they're about [inaudible] shorthorns, not a cattle door short horn. And to get shorthorn with horns like Hale would have had, we had to search almost for a year and we finally found a farmer that was still breeding them near the Ohio River. But even they cut their horns off when the animals were very, very young. So it took us about four or five years of... We bought the cattle at the farm or left them with them with the assurance that they would cut their horns off on that when they were about a year or two old whenever they were heifers. Then we took them over and out of those we grew our own cattle. We had our own oxen bred out of the things. It was... Everything was just beautiful. And everything flew along nicely. By that time the trustees had realized that the endowment fund wasn't like in any way, shape or form big enough to maintain what we were doing, [you] know. But things went really, really very smooth. We had quite a few special events. Many of them we created, like the Harvest Festival, which was something that was one of our first of the things. Then we had Revolutionary encampments. Never argued and everything went really, just absolutely beautiful till about 1970... Up to the Bicentennial, [you] know, everybody had put many, many hopes on the Bicentennial. And we out there, we thought so too. But interesting, our banner year was the year before the Bicentennial and it was so much going on everywhere that people didn't almost didn't come as much anymore to the Hale Farm, [you] know. It was a very interesting period there because the other thing was the shopping malls were built and people could get a lot of the things for free that we showed. For example, the Brigade of the American Revolution who came annually to us, oh, we bought them a keg of beer and gave them a hundred pound of gunpowder, and they had the time of a lifetime there, [you] know? Well, as the preparation for the Bicentennial came about, they went in and all the cities had parades and they started paying those Revolutionary soldiers for coming there. And we, of course, we couldn't afford to pay anybody on property. And pretty soon then, the people go, they go there for free while when they came to us they had to pay. So it was kind of a tough, tough, tough thing there. And museums just sprang up everywhere. Every town had this, town had that there. We had a very good response in the sense that we did several things that nobody else had done up till now. Our calf program, for example, was second to none. We had, due to my personal[ly] being a cabinetmaker, we had a fantastic, excellent woodworker on our team. And the blacksmith that we had at the time is still with us. He was one of the best in the country. We kind of considered this more being an early American industry, not necessarily stuck in spinning, on weaving, on candle making, on which everybody else did. We have had to develop young people that they treated them like apprentices. And the same thing happened on the farm. We made cheese and everything went really, really, really pretty good. And I think that... And in 1972 or '73, somewhere around there, just before the Bicentennial really, I met a guy by the name of Henry Lucas, who was at that time or later on, he was the president of the Cuyahoga County Fair. We obviously had exhibits there, and he said that he thought that he was... I always had a dream idea of getting the railroad going between Cleveland and Akron. And wouldn't it be nice if we could have a train going from Cleveland to the Hale Farm so that the people, [you] know... And I thought it was a greatest idea in the world. Then we went around, studied the railroads, New Hope. In Pennsylvania there is the [inaudible] Paradise. And then thee were two or three of them, very successful steam railroads. And so we started attacking this and we didn't get anywhere, you know. He gave up very shortly afterward and said, listen, this is not gonna fly. We are not gonna get going. We had big problems with being nosy, you know. They didn't want us on their trucks. And we almost gave up, but then through circumstances we were able to pull it together. And I think it was about 1975. I don't really remember exactly when we got the railroad going. We had formed a board and we literally had a steam train going. That was very, very difficult because of the union problems that we have when... I could tell stories about that for hours by themselves, you know, all by itself. But we finally did get the railroad going and it worked rather well. And a totally different concept, first only on weekends and then later on, we didn't just go to the Hale Farm, we went into Akron. Quaker Square had opened yet so Akron became a destination and, but it was absolutely fierce struggle for every dollar. It was very, very expensive to operate on. We never had enough money. On the end of railroad, the B&O again, the Chessie System by then, they pulled the rug out from underneath us and said, we are not going to renew your contract. We're gonna tear the tracks up and no more. Now, in the meantime, the park came into the picture and we had... For example, all the congressional hearings for the establishment of the park. When they had hearings here, they came on... I always entertained the governor [and] congressional delegation at the Hale Farm and made pretty good friends with some of the senators and the things which in the long run... But the principal people in that business were Mr. Seiberling or Mr. Regula, [you] know. John Seiberling, of course, was a neighbor who lived right next door to us at the Hale Farm. And I didn't know him really well at the time, although I think I employed his children in the early days. You know, every school children, or these child in northern Ohio worked at Hale Farm. So, John Seiberling... I asked for a hearing and I flew to Washington and met with him. And I said, listen, we have come so far with this railroad here, and we have to... We don't want to let it go. If they tear the tracks up, it's all over with, [you] know? Well, I had been through my earlier involvement with the park, I had been very much part in the beginning from again through those congressional hearings, but also at that time, the acting superintendent Bill Birdsell was the first superintendent of the park. He was the superintendent of the Serpent Mounds and whatever have you. We became pretty good friends during the early days. And so I went to Washington and I talked to John Seiberling, and Ralph [Regula] wasn't there himself, but his aide was with us on when I walked out. Oh, I had been able to read the very early management contract for the railroad, the management plan for the railroad, for the Park Service. And in there was... The railroad played a very important picture that would be an alternate transportation system to bring people into the new national park and so I said, oh, no, this is not gonna happen. If they tear the tracks out, it's gone forever. Well, to make a long story short, they were able to come up with the money. I believe it was 1.7 million dollars. [The] National Park Service bought the train, the right of way, and they became then our landlord, rather than the Chessie, [you] know. They made a special, not a special, a cooperative agreement. And from that moment on, the picture on the railroad changed tremendously because the landlord was now available. We didn't have any more union to deal with. We didn't have to pay the railroad rental fees. The park didn't charge us anything and... Actually, in the beginning they did. And then John Debo came on the scene and he fell in love with the railroad and he saw the importance to the park. And it became just what we're seeing here today, you know. It was a big, big struggle in there, there was. More than once when I was ready to throw the towel in, when the early... The first president we had, he had loaned, he and a friend had loaned the railroad 20,000 dollars, and he wanted it back and give up the railroad, [you] know, and I said, I'm not gonna let that happen. We worked too hard on getting that going. So I went to a friend that I knew that was a railroad buff, and I said, how would you like to be the president of a railroad? And he said, How much is that gonna set me back? I said, 20,000 dollars.

**Amy Sumen** [00:32:18] [laughs]

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:32:18] I went to another guy and he said, How much? Vice president said 10,000 dollars. What [do] we have to do? I said, nothing. I do all the work. I just run... You get the titles. I do the work now. We owed 30,000 dollars, 20,000 dollars to the first president. And then we had a secretary, a legal secretary there, that we owed 10,000. So we bought those guys out, formed a new board and we were going without those guys. But the railroad was under, this close to being gone three, four or five times. We didn't have enough money to pay the salaries. We had only one employee and couldn't pay the salaries. So I wrote personal checks. And then our new president, who is relatively wealthy and a very nice benefactor of the railroad still, he came through very often. So we struggled on and on and on till we have it. Well, it's going there now.

**Amy Sumen** [00:33:16] And who was that person who wrote those little checks to help it all?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:33:18] That was that was Mr. Augustus, Albert A. Augustus, and he is a very prominent Clevelander that just loved steam engines. He was also the one that last year for the All Aboard Ball spent 17,000 dollars on having dinner on the train. He was the big thing there. So anyhow, so the railroad went on, and the farm did always very well. We moved in more and more buildings. The programs was there. We were very, very popular there for a length of time, and things actually started changing in my life really a little bit. And in a life of the Hale Farm, then about 1980 or shortly afterward, we did get a new director in Cleveland, and he wanted to establish first-person [interpretation]. He came from Plimoth Plantation and there first-person was the big thing, and our museum was never designed to be a first-person facility. We really when we sold the trustees in 1962 on the idea of a village, it was... Oh... Yes, right in the very beginning, it was, that we had some of the finest collection of American decorative arts in our museum in Cleveland, and they never saw the light of day because they were all in storage. And we sold it to them as an extension gallery of the Historical Society. We put many of the fine objects in the houses and it was really, aside from the nice crafts program, we also had some of the finest exhibits on the American furniture and things in there. Now we are getting to the stage where all of us on... The new director, executive, chief executive comes in and he wants to turn this into a first-person and...

**Amy Sumen** [00:35:30] What's his name?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:35:30] Pardon me?

**Amy Sumen** [00:35:30] What was his name?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:35:32] Richard Ehrlick. And he really was a very efficient guy, but he had absolutely no concept what he was doing with this because he did... And so I said to him, I said, this is not gonna fly. This is not gonna be good. But I didn't have any more choice. So I decided... I was by that time 67, anyhow, [you] know, and I said to him that I would put in for my retirement, [you] know. I really had planned on working until 70, actually over 65 when I worked two more years. But they took me off the project and I did other things for the historical society, which wasn't all bad because at that time I got involved in President Garfield's home, [you] know, which I had arranged to become part of the Park Service because we couldn't afford to maintain it. And so we gave it to the Park Service, but we managed it for the Park Service. It was again under a cooperative agreement, so just about a year ago or two years ago, [you] know. So I had enough to do with the other properties. And also my title was not anymore by that time director of Hale Farm or manager of Hale Farm. I was at that time, and this started probably in the '70s and shortly after, that I became director of properties for the Western Reserve Historical Society, which meant that I operated, I was in charge of everything that was not at headquarters at East Boulevard, which was President Garfield's home, we have a museum in Unionville in Ashtabula County, Shandy Hall, an exquisite museum, a little museum but it is just second to none. And then we bought another property in Canfield, so we had a museum there, and the Hale Farm, so I really had four properties that I was responsible for it. And since I didn't go along with the first-person, I had the three properties. And it's something I got to mention again, backtracking, that once the Hale Farm started really hauling, we had a little bit of rivalry with the Summit County community because they felt Clara Belle Ritchie was the donor of the Hale farm. She was a great-granddaughter of Jonathan Hale, had checked things through and didn't think that the Summit County Historical Society was capable of developing a big estate like the Hale Farm. And she had also checked with the Ohio Historical Society, and she didn't like them because they were in the habit of closing properties down. And so she came to rest on the surface to this idea until Cleveland, which is really not a Cleveland organization, the Western Reserve is a regional museum, but as far as the Akron people was concerned, she made a mistake and gave it to Cleveland. And from that time on, there was always a bit of bad feeling that outsiders were running the Hale Farm, [you] know. And I said to then our director, I said, listen, this is not gonna change till we are becoming part of the Summit County community. And I'd just built my house in Chesterland, and I said, and I think I have to move out to the Hale Farm into Summit County, my wife almost divorced me, [you] know. German women, they do not like to, they build a house and they leave it to their great-grandchildren rather than giving it up. Now, we were living there just about eight years and away we go, [you] know? And but anyhow, I moved out here and joined the Rotary Club and I went to the local church, you know, and pretty soon I became very much part. And then the story of Peninsula, which in the end helped us very good. And so I became a resident here and I have been living here since 1970. So again, this is almost 35, 37 years of living out here. I'm really an old timer here in the neighborhood. And so through that involvement and my involvement with the park, at that time I became an ombudsman, really, I mean, not by law, but because by that time people had learned to hate the park when we were golden children by then, the Hale Farm was okay. The park was the villain at the time. If you remember the early days in the park when the land acquisitions took place. And at the time, the Army Corps of Engineers did the land acquisitions and they certainly went sometimes in like gangbusters, [you] know, could have been done slightly different. But you guys, the park did not have their own real estate agents here. And so there was quite some hard feeling with the park, not like it is today, where most people, at least most people love it. [laughs] There's still a few around. But so through my involvement in all of those things, I was very much in it, and I could not see anything in the world that the Hale Farm could do this first-person business. It can't be done right. And particularly not since all our buildings were stuffed with original objects. And now they hired artists [who] were literally performers in there as first-person, and they started using the objects till then our curators in Cleveland finally got wise and they moved the objects out of it and then they were naked, [you] know. And then about four or five years ago, the director Dick Ehrlich got... He resigned. But you know how it is in our world. You don't get fired. You resign. They give him a little bit of a parachute and away he went. And from then on, there were two or three acting directors and directors in there. And there's never been another real director anymore there. I was during the period when he was the chief in Cleveland. And on this, as a first person, I had very little to do with with a historical society or particularly with the Hale Farm, you know, I just didn't. And they didn't want me in there, [you] know, and then after he got fired within a week, they said, Help. And I was hired as a consultant. And I've been back as a consultant, much too much. Now I would like to have fun. I'm old enough that I really don't want to work anymore, [you] know, so I get it. But the whole story is there that we are getting now the Hale Farm almost back to where I was when I went out, not necessarily in programming and things like that, but the facility had suffered tremendously in there, financially and otherwise, the attendance had shrunk and in popularity. I remember when we opened a newspaper there was the Hale Farm, then came Stan Hywet, then came the zoo, the Akron Zoo, and maybe you heard something about the Summit County Historical Society, you know. Well, now it was... There is... The zoo and Stan Hywet, they're running head and head to be the first ones. Then there comes a long time nothing or maybe you read something about the Hale Farm. And this is now gradually coming back into the thing. We have now again, a new director in Cleveland or CEO, and he is a she, and she very much likes Hale Farm. And so I think things are looking much brighter here again. But some of the most interesting period in my life really was the transition. There were two transitions going on. One of them was when when the Park Service came into the field, [you] know. And I think back to all of the Peninsula Heritage Foundation Association. I tell always people the little story that when we think about it, the little Bronson Church was the starting of the movement to support the park, because when they were done with the church, they had nothing to do anymore and they turned themselves into the Cuyahoga Valley Association. And the Cuyahoga Valley Association was in existence at the time when the park was in its infancy or before it even started, and when... They couldn't become a lobbying arm because of the Park Service, nonprofits cannot lobby. So they formed another organization which was called the Park Federation, and I was very much involved with that and Bob Hunker was involved with it and some of the other names a little later. And they got involved with this and... But they were not nonprofit and they were not tax-exempt so they could lobby. They were strictly formed for lobbying for the park. When they collected signatures... And the Park Service didn't want the Cuyahoga Valley to become a park either. But nobody wanted it except the crazy people in the valley ourself. And then they then... Finally they had the bill on the President's desk, there was... I do not know exactly. I think the Secretary of Interior and I think one chief of staff, they were standing there and recommended to President Ford not to sign the bill. No, he said that this was not a good idea and he should veto the bill making this a national park. This is common knowledge. This is... There is no question about it. The congressmen Seiberling and Regula tell the story all the time, and they were there, and they set the thing there. And then he looked at this and he brought out an envelope, an envelope, and pulled out about thirty or forty sheets with names on there of the most prominent, hundreds of names of the most prominent businesses from the steel factories to all the big factories in northeastern Ohio that all had signed up, that they were in favor of making this a park, and he sent them to those two. He said, listen, guys, I'm going to tell you something. If I do not sign this thing, my name is Mud and I will never be reelected as President. Well, he never made it anyhow, you know. But then he went on and signed this, [you] know. And so the Park Federation, the little church in Peninsula spawned the Peninsula Heritage Association, they spawned the Cuyahoga Valley Association, which of course is your forerunner here for the other, not yours, but the forerunner of the Cuyahoga Valley Association, what it is now. And then they became the lobbying arm for the Park Federation and the little church probably started the movement of making it possible that it became a park.

**Amy Sumen** [00:47:16] Wow.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:47:17] So do you have any question? I blabbered along, you know.

**unknown participant** [00:47:20] I do. No, this was great, but I do have one question. I want to know what do you see in the future for Hale Farm?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:47:26] Oh, I think Hale Farm will be probably going to be shining again. We had major changes. I think they have to change in the sense that we have to work closer together. We work reasonably close with the park. We work reasonably close with the railroad. But I think that all the organizations here that are on the fringes of the park like Stanhughs, Cone Point, for example, and Old Trail School and the Summit County Historical Society, Stan Hywet, that there has to be a close-knit group. They have to form a closer association. Not necessarily that this should become one, or under one management, but there has to be a close affiliation that they all work together. There has to be some kind of an organizational setup that... We are becoming more one unit and do publicity and sharing the resources that we have, because there's a lot of overlapping there that is not necessary, you know, publicity wise. We could become one great big unit with the park. It's really, and the park would definitely be part of that group, [you] know. How close this group... Actually everybody agrees with that. The disagreement is really how close should the group be? Should that be literally a formal thing or should it be informal? And I think that it's the only way that, you know, those nonprofit organizations have a very, very hard time at the moment. And the schools up and down, up and down, like the train and the railroad, if it wasn't for the National Park Service the train would not be in existence anymore. There's no way in the world. The infrastructure of the train to maintain is so many... That's why railroads went out of the passenger business. They could not afford it anymore, [you] know? Times change and this may change again. But... So all I can see is that there has to be a close cooperation between... Regionalism but for nonprofits, you know, that we don't fight each other and try to get in first and let them do it first because there's enough for everybody to go around. And the railroad really... And I have been, like I said, I was president, every time a president left I took over again, short notice for a short time, till I found somebody that could support it again. And then with the cooperation of the Park Service, this is... It's park for all practical purposes. It is a beautiful relationship because the Park Service maintains the infrastructure and we are maintaining the services that are being served. If the Park Service would have to run the railroad, it would cost them ten times as much, you know, with the rules, what their pay scales are, what they have to go through Congress, and all that stuff. On the other hand, if we had to pay for the repairs ourself, you know, we could never come up with the money. And this should float over into the other organizations. You know, the problems for Blossom now, they want to get rid of part of the thing, and they are, you know, and they want the park to buy it and the park should buy it, but they don't have the money to do it, you know, but something I'm sure will be worked out. There'll be some kind of a lease agreement and the park is here to stay, and the park is the big umbrella. We want to work with it. And of course, I have had the title of being the father of the superintendents. Every time a new superintendent came on board, you know, I was the first one that welcomed them. I introduced them to the communities. They're always new and they don't know anybody. And there was Siegfried Buerling, and I took 'em around and pretty soon they knew more people than I knew. And of course, John [Debo]... It's a funny story. I let him into his own office in town. I don't know if you guys know that. And I had seen him only in his picture in the paper. And, you know, I knew he was arriving. And I can't remember who the secretary was there at Jaite at that time. But I went up there in the morning and I said, I'm here to meet, to the secretary, I'm here to meet Mr. Debo. And she said, Oh, he's up at the Happy Days Camp there, and he won't be here [but] he'll be coming down pretty soon. Yeah, I said, I know. There was a rattle on the door and she jumped up and took the key, I said, give me that key, you know? And I went in and I locked the door from the outside. And he looks at me and I looked at him and he said, Who might you be? Well, I said, I know who you are. You're the new superintendent. Well, he said, I kind of think I know who you are too. People have told me about you, you know, and we've been friends ever since then. The same thing was with Lou Albert. People said, boy, wait till the next superintendent comes in, you know, he won't have that relationship with him. The fact is for Mr. Bertalan, who is buried in one of my graves up in our cemetery, when he died, his mother, they weren't sure where they're going. I said, come on, he was so much part of this park here. And so I just prepared four grave sites there and a little in the valley, and he is there. And then Lou Albert came in on the picture there. And they're all professionals and personalities have almost, they have a little bit to do it. But, you know, we were instantly.... They come here, they don't know anybody, and there's Siegfried. And I took 'em around, introduced them to some fun people rather than just to the official mayors, which they all get through there, [you] know. And I think it has been just... Has been... I personally say that I had one of the nicest lives that anybody can have. You know, I'm 77, 76 now, pushing 77. And I wouldn't change a day of my life for the last 50 years. And that was not always roses, [you] know. People said, yeah, you're Siegfried, you get away with anything, [you] know? Yeah, I said, if you knew how many times I walked into the director's office and I was sweating under my armpits, you know, and scared. And I wasn't sure I was having a job, but dammit, I was going to do it my way. And if they didn't like it then they have the right to fire me, but I don't want to get along... Well, and I usually won, [you] know. And you have to take your chances a little bit, and you have to go out, and if you believe in something really, then you've got to fight for it and do it. And I think this is one of the things everybody today is too scared to...

**Amy Sumen** [00:54:45] Yeah.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:54:45] To really believe, do what they believe in. And I'm not patronizing.

**unknown participant** [00:54:53] I have a question.

**Amy Sumen** [00:54:53] Yeah.

**unknown participant** [00:54:54] Do you think that this particular site, Hale Farm, did not work as a first-person site because it's not one single entity of historic period? Like Plymouth existed between 1620 and 1628 so you can you can zero in on those years. But Hale Farm often is in general, it's the development of the Western Reserve.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:55:24] Yeah.

**unknown participant** [00:55:25] So is that why it didn't work in the first place?

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:55:28] Yes and no. For one thing, we had. We say today, wrongfully so, we had a distinguished period here that we declared that when we made our first master plan, nothing was later than 1850. So we took the pioneer days, as we called them, which by itself was doable. But where we had the problem is, I do not think that when you said a large site, if it is a single building in a single area where you zero in on a very short period of time, you can do it, [you] know. They had maintained it was 1840 and 1848 and each year became 1848 again, and around and around and around. They made changes in there that, petty changes that should have never been made. But in principle, I think first-person interpretation is role playing. And it is not really a historical interpret[ation], it's an interpretation, but more in an academic and a theatrical sense, as when life is. And how on earth can we, when we are sitting there, and we're having the schoolchildren coming through there and wearing Donald Duck raincoats, [you] know, and they go through there. And then they have to, all of a sudden, have to take and talk to a person that speaks 1840, and they do not fall out of the role. Kids had tears in their eyes at time[s]. And adults, they do not think, why am I being, what's going on? We don't know.

**unknown participant** [00:57:15] They didn't get it.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:57:15] No, no, they didn't get it on. Many adults didn't like it. They never fell out of role. But having said all that, I personally say it can't be done and I use a drastic example for it. And there are many organizations. Conner Prairie is doing actually a better job than Plimoth in that respect. And but even there it isn't working. And what I'm saying is that if you want to really show how somebody lived in, let's say in 1820, 1830, and any one of those periods, the farmers, they got up at six, five in the morning at sunup and they didn't wash, they didn't shave, they didn't do anything, they had probably a lousy breakfast, milked the cows, and then went out in the field and plowed. Sometimes they had a team of oxen. If they were well enough off. Sometimes they plowed with a cow. Sometimes they had a horse. Sometimes they had a horse and a cow. The guy was in a bad mood morning to evening. He beat the animals with a stick if they would't move. They used words that we never wanted our children to hear. And then they went back in the evening and went back into the house and nothing else they were, they went back to bed sometimes. I mean, we have that Little House on the Prairie sydrome that is not... And now this is the most drastic but they used the language that you can't repeat. You do not live in it. There's no way that you can do that unless it is a theatrical show on a stage somewhere where it can be done. Now that is the most drastic example. The next example is we cannot do it because of our labor laws.

**unknown participant** [00:59:10] Hmm.

**Siegfried Buerling** [00:59:10] [You] know. For example, when we do want to literally demonstrate, pottery making the way it was done in the 19th century, I want to move over to glass, for example. No glass factory lasted longer than five years on one site because after five years, they had cut, clear cut everything in an area that was economically feasible to cut the lumber. They used a tremendous amount of firewood to keep the high temperature in the furnace. Same thing with the pottery. Pottery has to be fired roughly 72 hours and sometimes longer continuously. So they have to work day and they have to work nights, always sticking more wood into that till the temperature is there to maintain this. And then they can rest, but they can't get away. They have too watch that the fire is not too low, is not too small. You could not work anybody. You would have to have three shifts of people working. That would be economically impossible to do now. And so all those things they go, first-person interpretation other than as an acting cannot be done.

**unknown participant** [01:00:29] Got it. So it's not first-person today?

**Siegfried Buerling** [01:00:32] No, no. [crosstalk] We are doing it on a limit[ed] scale. They're doing it still in one house. But and it is extremely expensive to be put on because the costumes, they have to be exactly of their, you know, when you see them, the buttons, you know, and there are some people in there that know they are skillful that find instantly out that it's not the button on that shirt that was available. And like... But when somebody said we restored this house to a certain period of time and I can tear that house to shreds with all the things that are wrong... [interviewers laugh]. We have fun at when we go... Everybody in the museum does that, you know, when you go to their place, you tear it to shreds, because we know everything better than the next guy.

**unknown participant** [01:01:21] Uh huh. Sure you do. You see all the reality.

**Siegfried Buerling** [01:01:23] Yeah.

**Amy Sumen** [01:01:25] Well, thank you so much.

**unknown participant** [01:01:26] Yes. Well, I just was mesmerized by all the things that you told us.

**Amy Sumen** [01:01:30] I know, I know.

**Siegfried Buerling** [01:01:31] Yeah, well, I told you just a nice things. [laughs]

**Amy Sumen** [01:01:36] Okay, shall I turn...?

**unknown participant** [01:01:37] Yes.

**Amy Sumen** [01:01:38] Okay.