

Circa Magazine Interview Transcript

Longtime North Carolina Museum of History employee R. Jackson Marshall III, deputy director, retired December 31, 2018. Before he left, he agreed to speak about his tenure. In this October 18, 2018, interview, find out his thoughts on a number of professional and personal topics. This transcript contains material that did not appear in the published issue of *Circa* magazine, spring 2019.

A Conversation with R. Jackson Marshall III

by Obelia J. Exum, Senior Graphic Designer, and Doris McLean Bates, Editor in Chief

Doris McLean Bates: Okay, good morning. It is October 18th, 2018. Obelia Exum, Doris McLean Bates, and Jackson Marshall, who is being interviewed today for the [upcoming] issue of *Circa* magazine. Good morning, everybody. [Jackson: Good morning, Doris.] [Obelia: Good morning!] Okay. I will turn it over to Obelia to begin the interview.

A Museum Career

Obelia J. Exum: Okay. Describe yourself now versus when you first arrived at the museum. To just sort of give a sub of what am I really talking about here, how do you view your purpose now? How has working at the museum changed your life over the past years? Positive way, of course, but anyway . . .

Jackson Marshall: When I first arrived at the museum, I did not plan on staying very long. I had gotten a master's degree at Wake Forest University in history, and that was an academic history program. It was not public history. I had done [an] internship at a museum . . . when I was in high school, but I was not focused on [becoming] a museum professional. My goal at that time, my career goal at that time, was to get a PhD in history and teach history, but I was out of money. Like most graduate students who had gotten at least a master's, I was slam broke, and I decided, "Okay, I've got to stop, and I've got to work." And I was tired of working construction and, and doing yards and grounds work, and, and even worked in a graveyard. I did a factory. I was doing all sorts of work on my way through college and graduate school. And I really wanted to do something in the field. I had gotten a teaching degree, but at the time there were no teaching positions around.

This is 1987, the early '80s and the mid-'80s, we were going through an economic slump, and I knew PhDs who, who were flipping burgers. They had no jobs. So that gave me some hesitation, but I decided I really wanted to stay in the history field. But I was working a contract job at Historic Bethabara Park, north of Winston-Salem, which is the first Moravian settlement site. And one of the advisors on the board . . . came and met me at Historic Bethabara, and we got to know each other and talked a little bit. And he came a couple of times because we were on a new building program at the site. So we were looking at blueprints and plans for the new building at, at Historic Bethabara.

So, he got to know me, and he had a position that opened up [at this museum], and he contacted me and asked me to apply for it. So, I did. I did not get that position. It was the head of research. . . . [Another staff member] got the position, as she should have, but then her position was vacant, so he contacted me again and said please apply for the research historian position. So, I did, and I was given that position. So, I up-rooted myself from Winston-Salem and moved to Raleigh. He also told me, later, that part of his motivation in getting me to come here was that he was at that time establishing regional museums.

He'd put one at Elizabeth City and one at Old Fort, one in Fayetteville, and the fourth regional museum that he had in his planning was for Winston-Salem, for the Piedmont. And he wanted me to come here and train me and then send me home to be the director of the regional museum in Winston-Salem. It never happened. . . . My goal, at the time, was to simply have a job with benefits and to work here maybe five years, and then I was going to leave and go on back to graduate school and get a PhD and go into teaching. That was my career plan. So, over 31 years later, I'm still here. So, I started off as a research historian, moved up to head of research, then chief curator, and then head of Curation and Collections Management.

Then assistant administrator. That was the title at the time. I went throughout the organization. Head of Design. I moved around throughout the organization. Doris, we both know that, you've been here most of that time. And then when Ken [Howard] got here, he wanted me to come back into management as the deputy director. . . . When you say the first question you have here, describe yourself now versus then, at that time I did not plan on staying here. This was going to be a stepping-stone towards teaching in a college program. That was my goal, to do research and writing and teaching. That was my primary focus. I think, now looking back 31 years, this . . . probably has been a good place for me because I got to do, still do, some of that.

I still could do some research and writing and teaching, which is what I wanted to do, only it was not in an academic world. It was in a public history world; it was here at the museum. I had a construction background, which helped me with the Design staff. [I was also trained] as an editor, so I can appreciate what Doris is doing. I'm not as good an editor, obviously, as she is, but I *understand* what she's doing, because of my time as an editor. Because of my time in construction, I *understand* the design, what the design process is all about. I certainly understand teaching, and while I enjoy research and writing, I do appreciate the material culture, the artifacts, objects. I appreciate the quilts or the helmet and the stories that go behind the artifacts that people have kept and have treasured and have then donated to the museum.

Obelia: I'm just curious too. Would you say that the material culture would not have been really as much of a part of that had you not been here at the museum?

Jackson: I had an appreciation for, for material culture, for objects. But I think being here, yes, being here helped reinforce that. Because, like most families, my family had little things from grandparents and great-grandparents and little treasures, mementos from our family past that I treasured because the older folks in my family and my grandparents and others would show me these things, and they would tell me, this belonged to so-and-so, and they'd tell some story about it. So, I appreciated objects and the meaning of objects before I got here. And some of those things have been passed on to me, and I will pass them on to my sons. So, I understood that we were merely the caretakers of those family heirlooms. Just in our time, and that our responsibility was to care for them, to remember the meaning of those things, and to then pass them on. So that's what I will be doing and have been doing. So, that is part of what the museum is all about, as well.

Obelia: Yes, it is. That's why I wrote down research, writing, and teaching, and just being here at the museum brings material culture, even though you had an understanding of it, being here helps you to, can I say get a better analysis of it? A full view.

Jackson: Because it's not just my family's things; it's everybody's treasures that have been passed on and that the museum has secured, and our purpose is to, the mission is to preserve and perpetuate the history of our state. So that's what the museum is all about. And I think in that sense, again, looking back at a career here, this was probably a good place for me. I don't know that when I was younger that I would have been as, as content purely in academia. I think this gave me a lot of different things to do. Every day, as you all know, is different. You think you're going to do one thing; you end up doing something else. You have a lot of

different people you work with on staff, multiple different talents and creativity. And I got to mix it up with everybody here and work with a whole lot of people here and produce some wonderful things. Just to be a part of that.

Obelia: It just really, that sounds very rich as you talk about it because it's like, it's a, it's a full gamut of here's what I was thinking when, uh, before I came in. And then now because of the material culture in addition to research, writing, teaching, all of that has helped.

Jackson: And what's kind of funny in a way is that my goal 31 years ago was to be in academia; when I leave here, I will be going into academia, as a college professor. But because I've been here for 31 years and have worked with young and old and all of the things that we do here at the museum, I will be a better professor in a college program teaching students because I have a better world experience having been here that I can take to the classroom, that I would not have had if I'd started that, that career track when I thought I was going to.

Tales from Old-Timers

Obelia: It's so interesting; my students would ask me, sometimes, did I have experience being a graphic designer? And they felt like in the classroom, a lot of times, the teachers never got out in the field. So that, of course, is one of the first things . . . one of the first things they asked. Yes, and I said, I'm glad you asked. Let me tell you where I work and what I do. And it helps the students, as well, to know you've been out in the field. And that sort of leads into the second question, which is how influential, or helps to lead into it, how influential has your grandfather been during your career?

Jackson: I know a lot of you here now are familiar with my grandfather's story; he was a World War I veteran, because we're in the middle of the World War I centennial. He was very, very influential on me, but it's not just him. His whole generation was very influential. I grew up around a lot of old-timers. The last of the Victorians, at church and family reunions, on the farm. Just visiting people during the summer. I would spend my summers with my grandfather and on the farm. And he would take me around and visit different people, or people would come and visit him. And I was, from a very young age, I was very comfortable being around old folks. I loved being around old folks at reunions. Most of my age were out playing ball or something; I'd be sitting at the feet, literally, listening to the old folks telling their stories.

So, it was him telling stories about family history, his history, the community church, church history, community history, or people like him that would tell me stories. My other grandfather, who you all are not familiar with, was the caretaker at the family home church and cemetery. And I would spend summers working with him in the cemetery, and as we would work, he would introduce me to people who were out there, and he would tell me about their lives. He would say, well, this is Miss Sally So-and-So. He would tell me their story. Or this is Mr. Barker. And he would tell me his story. So, I even today, I can go home to that cemetery, and I look at not just grave markers. I look at personalities because I remember a little bit about each of the people, not everybody, but many of the people in that cemetery I know a little bit about them.

So, my appreciation for history did not come from the classroom, from teachers, I'm sad to say. It came from people, just regular folks, telling me their stories of the past, and even if it wasn't their past, they'd tell me stories going all the way back to the French and Indian War, or tell me stories about the Revolutionary War, about the Great Depression. . . . My appreciation for history came from the storytelling of people who were sharing the past with me. And I've tried to remember that, again, working here at the museum, it's not just textbook history, which is dry and dusty and often boring. It's about personalities; it's about the people who lived, who did, who did really stupid things, who did wonderful things, who made mistakes, who were beautiful.

All the personalities that are part of the fabric of all of us. Each and every one of us and collectively are that way. We're just a fabric. History is a fabric. It's like a quilt. And there's good and bad and right and wrong, and, and there's mistakes and victories. It's just rich, and I was getting a lot of that; a lot of the stories they were telling me were just silly stories from their childhood, and some of them were sad or sorrowful stories.

But it was just life. It was understanding, not just history, but just understanding life from that generation.

Obelia: And I think you've covered a lot of some of the questions that we're going to go through, which is really, really cool. I added up here research, writing, teaching, material culture, storytelling. I had to say that part. And I know once we go down this list . . . [Jackson: We can come back to that, if you'd like.] We will, we will come back. We'll come back to that. Go ahead, Doris.

Museum Humor

Doris: Jackson, what memory do you have of a funny moment that occurred at this museum? Something that springs to mind.

Jackson: There are some, there are actually some funny moments. I'm trying to think of which one to talk about. I remember when we opened this, this new, what was the new Museum of History in 1994. We had a lot of characters on staff, and there was a lot of pressure, a lot of long hours. . . . And, I think, a number of us, you know, because of the overwork, we were getting kind of punchy, and we were doing some silly things. Clip art at that time was all over the place. [A former employee] was the master of clip art, and he started the, I don't know if he started it, but he was a major instigator of the part that would show up all over the place. And I got into it, and a few others got into it. . . . But you have to do stuff like that to lighten things up, especially during stressful deadlines and exhibit openings and that kind of thing. Those are the things that come to mind.

Obelia: You're answering a lot of, many of the questions. Let's see if you have answered this one. Tell us a story or share an experience that has impacted you while you were here, because I think you have told us, and what were the results, has impacted you in some way. [Jackson: An experience that impacted me?] In some significant way.

Jackson: I'm not sure which story to tell or which story to give as an example.

Obelia: An experience that has impacted you while you were here. I think I would like to say, what was I thinking at that time. Impacted you in some significant way that may have changed your view about things. Yes. That may have changed your view about things because I don't think I'm asking that question down here, but there are a lot of loose-ended questions I kind of threw out there. This may be one of them. I just want to check. Yes. That would have impacted you in some significant way.

Jackson: I think just my over-, rather than just a specific example, I will just say my overall experience here, given the number of years I've been here, I've spent half of my life here. I mean, literally, half of my life has been here at the museum. So, obviously, I've gone through a lot in my life, you know, good and bad, happy, sorrowful, in the time I've been here. I think being here at the museum and working with the different people who have come and gone, and some of us still here, this museum staff in a way has been a family, . . . [and] we have all had to learn to live and work together. And I will say that at times I have not done that very well. And at times I feel like I have done that very well. So, the experience, it's been a life experience here and learning what is important in life and what is not important in life. . . .

[As a museum family] we can get it together as individuals and collectively . . . supporting one another [and] produce some wonderful things here that have had a very positive impact on not just each other, but on the public, on helping these school kids that are coming through here. We've created some wonderful things, whether it's an exhibition or publication or . . . educational programming or more just being here to greet people and to just be in the galleries or at the festivals. All of the things that we've done here and have put ourselves into, individually and collectively, I think, have been very positive over the years. But the overall experience is just learning what really is important in life and what is not. And letting go of what's just really not that important and helping to remind each other that this is really not important. We may disagree with this. We agree or disagree, but is it really worth a lot of angst or do we just need to move on?

Doris: Yes. That just comes with maturity, right?

Jackson: Yes. I think that's just life experience. I mean, that's just life. But I think being here we've shared that journey together.

An Appreciation of Writing Style

Doris: Yes. I agree. Okay. Who is a great historical mentor for you, and why? Someone from history.

Jackson: There are many historical figures that I could name for different reasons. I would like to kind of switch this around a little bit and not talk about historical figures, but historical writers. I've talked about my, the grandfathers and the older folks that helped me appreciate history, and it kind of led me into this field.

There was another thing. I was a very, my parents would say, not a very good student when I was, especially in junior high school, what was called junior high school at the time, um, in a lot of trouble, and I discovered a few writers at the time that I think helped me on my history path but also just helped me kind of get it together. And a lot of them were Civil War history writers. There was Burke Davis, Manly Wade Wellman, who was a North Carolinian. Burke Davis had North Carolina connections too. Glenn Tucker. I'm trying to think of . . . Clifford Dowdey. Just to name four writers that I discovered in junior high school and high school. And I enjoyed reading their books. Manly Wade Wellman, and actually Richard Walsler was another North Carolina historian who wrote a lot about folktales and things. Manly Wade Wellman wrote a lot of just North Carolina history. The common thing about all of those men was that they were not trained as historians. They were trained as journalists. And they knew how to write a story. They knew how to weave a story. Whether it was a folktale or a Civil War story or pirates or just county history. And I actually got to meet Manly Wade Wellman right before he passed away. I very much admired those men. But it was their writing. They knew how to write history.

They wrote history in a different way than the academic PhD historians would write history, because they were very visual writers, and they would get into the personalities and the motivations and the triumphs and failures. They would get into the actual people [Obelia: It's like they went into all the people. People writers.] But it's more of those writers, of those figures that made a difference. And it has, is part of, what shaped me. I appreciate local history, not just the US history or state history. I appreciate family history, and I like reading biographies. And these individuals wrote some biographies. Because I like to know the story of the individuals that are in our history, in the history of North Carolina or US history, and even when I look at other history, western history, world history or World War II history, whatever it is, I like to look at the biographies, and I like to understand them. Who were the people that were shaping this, and who were the people impacted by it? [Doris: Yes. Did they play a part whenever you were writing your book on World War I?] My writing style, I've been told, and I understand that I'm not really an academic writer, mimics their writing style. I've tried, because that's what I like to read, because that's what connected with me. When I write, I try to write the same way as they did and try to connect with regular folks and telling the story. So, yes, [his book] *The Memories of World War I* follows that same format. I do talk about the context; I set the stage in each of my chapters, but then I'll let the veterans tell the story. So, all I'm doing is setting the stage and letting them act out the story and then I set the stage again and let them act out the next story.

Artifacts and Stories

Obelia: That leads right into telling the story. The sixth question: What one artifact story surprised you the most, and how? I'm going to skip down to perhaps him telling an effective story in your opinion. Is there a powerful artifact that we use or perhaps there isn't only one. Tell us what you think.

Jackson: There are many artifacts, and, really, my goal or desire would be that just about everything we have in the museum collection, we can appreciate it for what it is; not just as an object—certainly like a beautiful piece of pottery or quilt—but it's who made it. What is the story of everything we have here? Again, back to what we've been talking about here together, what's the humanity behind this object? What does the object tell us? Not just about how it was made, but is there something about the object that is telling us something that may not be so obvious? But can we discover it's whispering to us?

There are some objects we have in the collection that Fred Olds collected that we have no information on. It's just an object. We discovered that with even the World War I exhibit, there are their helmets that have bullet holes in them or something or damage, or they're just objects that you have in the collection. He may have known everything about the story, but it died with him because he didn't write it down. But

even then, even so, if you put that object on the table in front of you and just sit quietly with it, it is speaking to you. It's just speaking in a whisper, and you may not even quite hear what it's telling you, but it is telling you something. It has a story; there is a history, and there's, there is a very personal history; there is someone or a group of people or there's an individual that is connected with that object, and we may not know who that was. We may not know what that story is, but that object is still trying to tell us. So, you have to let the object speak to you as much as it can without making up something. You don't want to concoct some nonsense, but the object is whispering to you, and you have to listen and see if you can understand at least some fragment of its story, and then try to tell that. And also just admit that we don't know. We don't know the story behind this object. And maybe present that to the public as a mystery. What do you think it's telling us? But there are a lot of objects, too, that we do know more about. We knew about the person who wore it or a person who made it. But, even then, you still need to go through the same exercise of, of what more can we figure out from the object?

Obelia: And, Jackson, we're gathering information about, as we set that object in front of us, we're gathering information about who's, what the story is, and then we take that information and . . . with us and just sort of, oh, okay, let me go find some names or some people that may, we believe, may be associated [Jackson: Connected with it. Yes.] And sometimes we may not find everyone that's connected with it, but if someone comes to that exhibit, they may say, they may see the object and say, Oh, this is what I know about this object.

Jackson: Right. But there is something, there's a story behind everything. The curators now are trying to capture all of that as they collect things and get that in the historical database. So we have it. But everything has not been . . . you look at Ernie Barnes's paintings, and you can appreciate any one of his pieces of art. Like, wow, look at this. Look at the energy. Look at that. You can look, you can appreciate it for what it is. You can appreciate it more if you know his story. But everything is that way. You can appreciate any object for what it is, but you can appreciate it more if you know the story behind the object. And that's what we really should be working on. The object is not a mere illustration. It is important, but the story behind the object is more important to me.

Overcoming

Obelia: Oh, I'm next. Okay. Sorry, I had to write that down. It's just some good quotes . . . [Jackson: Why? You're recording it.] Yes. I know. I like going back over my notes. And what I'm doing is I like to write things—I know it's all recorded—but I like to go back over that and just from my writing and see what it is. So, I have the next question. I was wondering, there have been some challenging, difficult times while you've been here at the museum. Is there a challenge that you would like to share with us, one that comes with gratifying victory or reward, if you choose to share that, and you don't have to, but let's just put that out there, and you may have, actually, I kind of feel like you've shared some things.

Jackson: I've shared some things with the two of you . . . before . . . not so much with others. There been many challenging times here. Some of it . . . all of us have gone through some challenging times, some very difficult times together. Any time there are major staff changes or director changes or organizational changes, it can always throw you off balance; either as individuals or as an organization, you have to find your equilibrium again, and try to move forward. You know, opening the building here in '94 was, was [Obelia: I was thinking about then as a challenge. That was a challenge.] There were long hours. . . . It was really rough. . . . There has to be some balance between what you're trying to accomplish institutionally and who is trying to accomplish it and being careful about the people. The staff. You've got to give them some grace and give them some time to be with themselves and with family; you can't just run them into the ground. That was a difficult time.

You know, certainly when, when [Jackson's late wife, Patricia Phillips Marshall] died, that was the roughest time I had here. Just in life! And coming back here was very difficult for me. But with the support of family and friends and people here, I turned it around. I'm very happy in a new marriage [with wife, Donna], in a new life. A new purpose. I think that was a bell ringer; a career is not everything. The museum's not everything. Your job is not everything. It's just a part of who you are, and it should not define you. It's just a part of who you are and what you're doing. And I've tried, in the eight years since she passed away, to rebuild my life, and I feel like I have as much as I can, and with a new wife, new family, and a new purpose in my life.

I'm over at Southeastern [Baptist Theological Seminary teaching history to students]. I think that, that you just move on. You just have to keep living life and learn to get through the sorrow. So that was certainly the most challenging thing. One of the most rewarding things here has been obviously the World War I centennial. And working with all of you on this exhibit that's been tremendously successful. And has been very positively received. People have told me who have known me for years and years that I should be able to leave here knowing that I fulfilled my commitment to those veterans, that they would not be forgotten. That was something that they were very concerned about, and many of them told me that they thought that their service and sacrifice had been and would just be forever forgotten. And I told them way back then that I would do what I could do—I didn't know what that meant at the time—to help people remember them.

That was a promise that I made to them without fully understanding the significance of the promise. But I feel like I have done as much as I could do for them, with the help of many people here on staff and many other people, to make the centennial not just a commemoration of the war, but make it an honorific remembrance of the men and women who served in that war. So that's been very rewarding to me to be able to feel like I've accomplished that and that I can rest now with that commitment. I'm at peace with it now.

Obelia: So, yes, there's a lot that came out of that, and that's a, that is a storytelling exhibit. That's an exhibit about the people, and I believe that's why I could capture it when we were working on *Circa* together, because I just believed when I looked at it is it tells the stories of these people, you know, coming together in America and then also what it was like in Europe.

Jackson: And that's one reason I wanted to start with children in that first section. To stop people cold; what are they doing here? This is supposed to be on a war. And it's to also remind us that everybody's impacted. Even the little ones are going to be impacted by every conflict we go through.

Obelia: Tell this story. And that is not just the adults. Yes. In a lot of ways too. I just see you sitting with your grandfather listening to the story.

Jackson: My brother teaches fifth grade in Stokes County, so I love that age group. Fourth and fifth graders. So, when I thought about those characters, the age of those characters, I told Sally and Jerry [that] I want them to be about that age; Sally and Jerry were wonderful with Rick and even lowering the monitor that the visuals and the monitor so the fifth, fourth and fifth graders can walk up to those monitors and be eye to eye with those characters. And it works; the kids just lock up and will stand there. The student groups. [Obelia: Yes. And they see themselves.] They see themselves in that. [Obelia: That is what makes that significant though, because I know the latter part of it, just the adult, adults are already always telling adult stories.] Right. [Obelia: But they are not necessarily telling, letting a kid see themselves in that story.] [Doris: Do they like the diorama that you and your sons made?] They do. There are several places that the guards would tell you are good places but also can be logistical plugs for when they're trying to get a lot of school groups through there. The first one, they say, they lock up with those first monitors, and the teachers or the chaperones or the guards have to say you need to keep moving because people are stacking up behind you. So, they freeze up there, they freeze up at the drill sergeant, they like him. And then at the diorama. And then they buzz all around. A lot of adults, especially too, the artillery section, just the guns going and the boom, boom, boom. The rumbling and the visuals that Jerry [created] for the historical photography I think is almost mesmerizing to a lot of people. Everybody is shocked by the machine gun. There are different parts of that exhibit that attract different age groups. But I think with the younger age group, it's that first section. It's the drill sergeant; it's the diorama. And then they just are wound up, excited about the rest of the exhibit. The kids like the video boxes too that Jerry and Sally put together with all the soldiers and nurses telling stories. [Obelia: Oh, I know they do. I mean, I like just seeing the way that they are dressed, the people who are telling those stories. That has to capture the eyes of a child.] And again, all of those are people you can look at telling you what happened. My goal was that if no one read anything, [if] they didn't read one label in that gallery, they would still get it; they would still understand, getting an impression of World War I. And I think that's working. It seems to be working.

Obelia: Well, it's definitely a different way of telling a story than what I've seen around, you know, and I'm pretty sure academe wouldn't tell a story that way. I think you sort of answered some of this question, question eight, the centennial, but how do you believe you've influenced the field of history, and you're telling the story about the . . .

Jackson: With everything we do; the way we write things. The graphics work, the video work, the design work. I don't know that I've been so important to have influenced the field of history, but I've tried to do my part with everybody here to present history in a way that is engaging and interesting. All of us have a part in presenting history. In a way that people can lean into it and appreciate it and get some impression about what happened, whether it's a good story or a sad story or, or alarming story, that we're leaving them with the right impressions about what we collectively have all gone through together over the many years.

A Future Vision

Doris: Okay, Jackson, what do you desire for the future of this museum?

Jackson: To do more of what we're doing even better. I think it's continuing to connect with people, get people here, to get them to engage in what we're doing here and to learn something from it. Not from necessarily a cognitive sense, but to appreciate what we have collectively together as North Carolinians, as Americans. What we have gone through together, and we can talk about diversity, the values of diversity, but to me what's equally or even more important is the unity. We all come from different backgrounds, different perspectives, different outlooks, different everything, but when it comes down to it, to survive as a people, we have to come together somehow. And we have. Sometimes we do it well; sometimes we have not. And that's the way it's going to be. That's the way it is now. That's the way it's going to be in the future. We've got to find some unity with all the diversity, in diverse ideas and opinions and thoughts, feelings. I think the museum can have a role in helping to shape that, to reflect back on what we've done right and what we've done wrong in the past, but to also challenge people to think about what we're, what are we doing now based on what we can learn from the past and what should we, how should we look at the future, and how should we prepare ourselves for the future?

I feel that way even with the World War I exhibit. But the way that exhibit ends is I wanted people to stop, if they will stop, with the adult characters, with the photography. That big mural of crosses, that was a tremendous tragedy; the exhibit is not just a record of that tragedy, a story of that tragedy. What have we learned from this tragedy? What didn't we learn from that tragedy? What should we have learned from that tragedy? And it's not just the negative things. You can go through *The Story of North Carolina*. You find things. Wow, this is wonderful what they did back then. Well, what can you learn from that? How is it that it came together? How is it that we got through that together? What success can we build on together? I think the museum should have a role in exploring the past, to challenge us now and to think about the future in preparing us to come together and work together to make our lives as good as we can make it.

Doris: Should the museum take on controversial subjects or avoid those?

Jackson: I don't think we should avoid it altogether. We cannot avoid what's already happened. I think we need to talk about it straight up. I don't want to use the word neutral, but with an objective voice, a fair-minded voice, and when something was rotten about a decision or an individual or something, we just need to say it. It was rotten, and it's not to be overly subjective, but to just be honest, and I think when it comes to the challenges of today, I think if that's what people are anxious about and concerned about, we could have a role in discussing that and not just talk about the immediate crisis, but to offer that we've gone through this before, maybe in a different way, or maybe we've gone through this exact same thing before, and it's just we've regurgitated the thing up again. We've already dealt with this, and we did it badly in the past. So, let's look not just at what's going on now, but let's look at where this is coming from and where we made a mistake in the past, and we need to correct it. Or whether we're looking back, we've gone through something similar to this, and we worked it out, so how, what can we learn from that to apply to this? But, again, to be honest about it, not to take sides necessarily about anything

that's current, but just be honest about this is what we're dealing with and this is what we can look back [on]; we can gain some insights on how not to do something to get us through this or how to do something to get us through this, together.

Doris: Yes, because the public sort of looks at us as a leader.

Jackson: We should be. You're right. We should be. They're looking for a place to come to get some sanity, and I think that we can be calm and say, yes, this is a, this is a crisis we're going through. But we've been, we've gone through this before. Together, we have suffered through and have triumphed through things in the past, and we can do it again. There's nothing that's happening now that we haven't already experienced. Our forefathers and foremothers have already experienced the same . . . they survived it and went maybe through worst things, and they got through it somehow; so how did they get through it, and what can we learn from that, and how can we. . . I've talked about the objects whispering to us; the people before us are also speaking to us. They're trying to speak to us. We need to listen to them.

Obelia: Yes, yes. Those voices. Yes, yes. They are speaking. Yes.

Footprint

Doris: Okay. My last question. If you were to disappear tomorrow, tell us what you think your legacy is that you have left this world.

Obelia: And he is going to disappear in January.

Jackson: Left this whole world? It would be nice if I could be remembered for like at least another 20 years.

Obelia: But you know this is a microwave world now? Now, we do have an appreciation of you. Okay.

Doris: What do you want people to remember you for?

Obelia: What's his legacy? What's your legacy?

Jackson: You're assuming I'll have a legacy.

Obelia: You have one; you already have one.

Doris: You already have one.

Obelia: But, you know, the question really is what do you want people to remember you for it because you might have this legacy, but there are many people who, who have done a lot of great things, but what they believe they want to be remembered for is another story.

Doris: Yes. Because you already talked about that you think you've done all you could for the World War I veterans, with the book and also with the exhibit. So that's part of a legacy.

Jackson: When I think about legacy, I don't think career, a career statement. Just like I said earlier, I think, and I know that for some of our people here on staff and others in general, career is everything. And I've been there, done that. And it's a mistake. I've been left in the empty home with lots of beautiful things and a career, and it did *nothing*. It means nothing. To me, anyone's legacy or my legacy, you know—I would prefer to be remembered as a loving husband, father, friend, teacher. Now if you talk about history, the history part of my life, which has been a greater part of my life, it would be someone who appreciated our state history and tried to perpetuate it and share it so that the people of our past would be remembered, not just those veterans, and not just the facts and figures and dates and all that bunch of stuff. That's not important to me. It's that the humanity can be appreciated. I don't like progressive history. The whole idea that we're getting better and better and that you have this attitude about the people before us were stupid or slower; I hate that! They made a lot of mistakes. We're making a lot of mistakes. They were doing the best they could with what they had to work with. And sometimes they did wonderful things, and sometimes they did not, but I don't want to be judgmental about them. I just want to, and it doesn't mean when I say appreciate them, I don't mean celebrate them. I think we need to, we need to say, wow, they really messed up but appreciate what they were going through. And so that's the teaching part, is to just simply share the stories of our past so that we can hopefully learn from it.

Doris: Well, thank you, Jackson. We're going to miss you.

Obelia: I have a question for you. It's not . . .

Doris: Go right ahead, ma'am.

Jackson: You can't ask that. It's not on the sheet. We're at the bottom of the page.

Doris: She's got you trapped.

Obelia: No, I do this, I have this question. I was reading that, you know, I really enjoyed reading this [*Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine] article [that Jackson wrote]. I really did.

Doris: It was a good article.

Obelia: It is a, it's a great article. It's one of the best; I just like the way it's written. I just pick out certain parts about your grandfather, but it helps me. I'll tell you why. It's a kind of a weird thing, but it helps me think about my family, and it helps me think about my mom. It helps me think about how would I tell a story like that, like a story of my dad. It doesn't have to be . . .

Jackson: If you were to write a story about any one of your family members. My grandmother's life or my grandfather's life. Or my . . .

Obelia: I spent a lot of times, as you were telling this story, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, which her name's Obelia. I'm still trying to live up to her name. I haven't done it yet. I'm still working on it. I typically tell people that I haven't lived up to her name yet.

Jackson: Well, I understand that.

Obelia: But, anyway, usually people will ask me that question. But just a funny thing; I was noticing where you were saying that your granddaddy had a tattoo? Three tattoos. [Jackson: Yes.] And I got tickled, Jackson. I said, it must have been interesting for you.

Jackson: That was just part of trying to figure him out. Because he didn't talk about that either. He had them on both arms, and they were *awful!* They must've been done by some amateur on a rocking, rolling ship when they were probably drinking or something . . . I don't know how . . . they were terrible.

Obelia: An American flag, an ugly skull, and [the letters] USA on his arm.

Jackson: It was, it was a terrible skull. It was meant to be a skull and crossbones.

Obelia: It just tickled me. I said, because you're writing, to me, sort of through the eyes of a child, like God, that was...

Jackson (chuckling): What is that?!

Obelia: And it reminded me of so many things like grandma might go to the trunk. It's like, what in the world is that, Grandma?

Jackson: Why do you have that?

Obelia: Oh, okay, now I want you to have it. Okay.

Jackson: Great! Thank you!

Obelia: You know, and as life goes on, you, you understand it or you get it better, but it still was haunt-, it's kind of haunting like. That is scary. But I also wondered that I, I get kinda tickled because I see you with your sleeves rolled up, standing in the office. I said, I wonder if it's just some of this, and then you got a tattoo. I just wonder if some of this, Jackson . . .

Jackson: It may be. He got away with it. Maybe I can get away with it.

Obelia: I said, he rolls his sleeves; he stands there, you know, because this is how I see Jackson. You know, just as a staff. Even as I have seen you in suits and some of the pictures that we've had, I think about you more as that guy with his sleeves rolled up, standing there, not the suit type, but you will do the suit when you need to do the suit.

Jackson: I'm not the three-piece suit type. I don't like that.

Obelia: You'll do what you need to do. And I guess it's part of this, too, reminds me as you were telling the story, about being a construction worker. I was like, Oh, yes, you got all in the dirt.

Jackson: Oh, yes. Factory work.

Obelia: I worked at the pickle plant. [Jackson: Oh, really?]

Obelia: Yes. And every time the bell would ring, and the scarf [that women wore]. I would remember a lot of women came. I would just stare at them every day because it just was the most incredible, amazing thing I had ever seen. My mom said, you don't belong there.

Jackson: Where were you? Mount Olive or Cates?

Obelia: Mount Olive. [Jackson: Wow.] Mount Olive. I worked there for a while, and they would say, you're out of place, but I just, it was, it was just an interesting place.

Jackson: But you learn things by having jobs like that.

Obelia: I know, I know. Anyway, though. And there was a woman at my church who worked there, and actually we were like, you mean she ended up working this amount of years, and she retired from there? It was like people were working there, *retiring* from there.

Jackson: Their whole life.

Obelia: But getting back, the thing about the tattoo, I just wondered if you were this person that you are. If, I said, he and his grandfather are alike in so many ways.

Jackson: I guess that's good.

Obelia: What does your tattoo mean to you?

Jackson: Mine is a Celtic cross, and I didn't get it until 2012.

Obelia: Well, see, that's what I was noticing. You never had one before.

Doris: It's nicely done.

Obelia: Now, it's recent. It's really done very well.

Jackson: I designed the cross.

Doris: You did?

Obelia: Did you do it?!

Jackson: Yes, I have in a file four different designs, and [his sons] Dalton and Stuart helped me with it, and we decided to do this one. It's a Celtic cross. Some people would call it an Irish cross. It has the Trinity knots, for the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Obelia: Okay, so that's what that is.

Jackson: And the knotting is a Celtic thing. The VERITAS VINCIT is Latin. That's my family's Scottish motto. And I thought about putting that on this arm, and see we put it on together, because in Latin it translates "Truth conquers," which is my faith-based statement.

Obelia: Well, there you go. Truth conquers.

Jackson: I've told people, I tell my students, I did this for me, for a number of reasons. What I didn't realize was that other people were going to see it and react to it. And I have people at stores, grocery stores, convenience stores, paint stores who will see it. They'll like the cross, but they don't know what the Latin means. So, they ask me, what does that mean? And that's the opening for me to make a faith-based reply. That's the opening. And that was God's plan. My plan was just for me; His plan was, this is going to be an icebreaker so that you can offer a faith-based statement.

Doris: I know all ages come up to you about that tattoo.

Obelia: Well, you know how some tattoos are almost there, and some tattoos are sort of there. Then it's like, what in the world is that? His is for sure. This is *not* a mistake. This is *definitely* a statement. **END OF INTERVIEW**