

Smithsonian Folklife Festival Interview

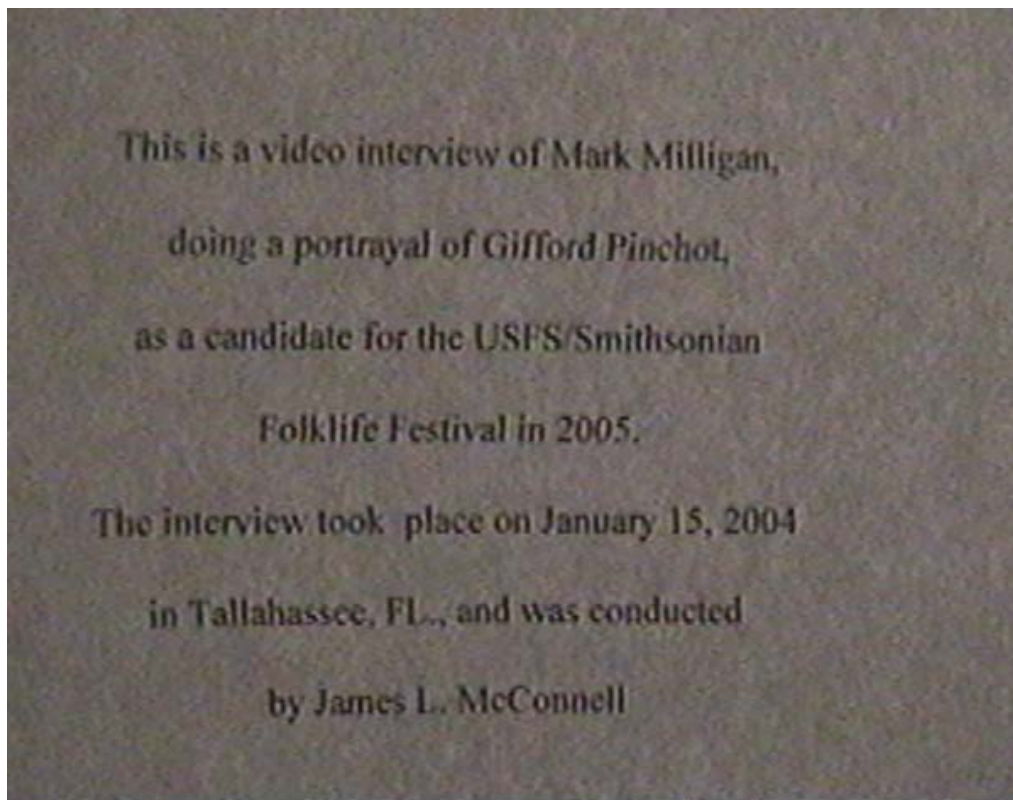
Mark Milligan
Chief Technology Officer
Landmark Systems

Tallahassee, Florida

Interviewer: James L. McConnell
January 2004

Mark Milligan begins his interview “in character”, wearing an oversized old-time mustache and a ranger hat. His presentation is preceded by a title card, which reads:

“This is a video interview of Mark Milligan, doing a portrayal of Gifford Pinchot, as a candidate for the USFS/Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2005. The interview took place on January 15, 2004 in Tallahassee, FL, and was conducted by James L. McConnell”





Mark Milligan [in character as Gifford Pinchot]: “Good morning. I am Gifford Pinchot. I’m going to speak to you this morning about how I became the chief of the Forest Service. When I entered Yale in 1885 my father asked me a question: ‘Young Gifford, how would you like to be a forester?’ When asked, not a single American had made forestry a profession. I had no more conception of what it meant to be a forester than a man in the moon, but at least a forester worked in the woods and with the woods, and I loved the woods and everything about them. My father’s suggestion settled the question in favor of forestry. Neither Yale nor any other university offered a degree or even a course in forestry, so after graduation I decided to study the subject in Nancy, France. After a year of school I returned to the United States to prepare for my lifelong work and interest.

“When I came home not a single acre of government, state, or private land was under systematic forest management anywhere in the most richly timbered of all continents: the United States. When the gay ‘90s began, the common word for our forests was ‘inexhaustible’. To waste timber was a virtue and not a crime. There would always be plenty of timber, people said. The lumbermen regarded forest devastation as normal, and second growth as a delusion of fools. As for sustained yield, no such idea had ever entered their heads. The few friends the forest had were spoken of, when they were spoken of at all, as impractical

theorists, fanatics, or 'denudatics'. More or less, they were touched in the head. What talk there was about forest protection was no more to the average American than the buzzing of a mosquito, and just about as irritating.

“Without natural resources, life itself is impossible. From birth to death, natural resources transform for human use, feed, clothe, shelter, and transport us. Upon them we depend for every material necessity, comfort, convenience and protection in our lives. Without abundant resources prosperity is out of reach.

“My next work was as a resident forester for Vanderbilt’s Biltmore forest estate for three years. Now several years after that I became involved with the National Forest Commission, created by the National Academy of Scientists. I and several other members traveled throughout the West in the summer of 1896 investigating forest areas for possible forest reserves. Two years later I was named Chief of the Division of Forestry. My friend Theodore Roosevelt was elevated to the Presidency by the assassination of President McKinley. The management of the forest reserve was transferred to the department of the interior to agriculture and the newest forest service in 1905, in which I became the chief forester. Thank you.”

[Milligan breaks character]

My name is Mark Milligan. I am chief technology officer for Landmark Systems here in Tallahassee, Florida. We are a technology firm for the forestry and natural resource industries, whether that be private or state. We do a variety of things, from global positioning technologies, handheld data recorders, GIS systems, growth-and-yield, harvest scheduling – just a number of things – position support systems, in the better management of our forests. Pretty much, I think Gifford Pinchot would be proud of today – you know, good systematic management of our nation’s forests.

Anyway, a little bit about how I get into these different characters. I do a lot of different characters. I’ve done this for a number of years. I’ve done different people – presidents, actors, friends – I’ve done these types of performances for retirement parties, Christmas parties, various gatherings. I also did Gifford Pinchot a couple of years ago here in Florida. This was for the One Hundredth Society of American Forester Anniversary. So I guess that’s how it became known that I do a little bit about Gifford Pinchot. I didn’t have a so-called canned presentation or anything. I really just read something about Mr. Pinchot, his history, how he got started. I had printed that out a couple of years ago. I didn’t even look at that until this morning, so I had to do that pretty quickly. Certainly I have come up with all sorts of different routines for various folks that I have imitated over the years.

Are there any other questions that you had this morning? Okay.