

An Oral History

with

Jeanne Kellar



**John C. Stennis Space Center
History Project**

Interviewer: Daphne Alford

2009

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This is an interview by the Stennis Space Center History Office. The purpose of this interview is to document the story of key personnel during the Apollo and the Space Shuttle Main Engine programs at Stennis. The interview is with Jeanne Kellar and is taking place on June 29, 2009. The interviewer is Daphne Alford.

Jeanne Kellar: Jeanne Kellar. I am a subcontractor under Jacobs Technology, with Erica Lane [Enterprises]. My title is documentation coordinator.

Daphne Alford: How long have you been at Stennis?

Jeanne Kellar: Nov. 16th of this year [2009] I'll be here for 44 years.

Daphne Alford: That's a long time. What was your first position here and the company you worked for?

Jeanne Kellar: I was with General Electric [GE], and I was a general clerk in Central Engineering Files [CEF].

Daphne Alford: So you have always worked with engineering?

Jeanne Kellar: I have always been in Central Engineering Files. Only when they were [closing out the Saturn V testing at] the site in 1971, waiting for the space shuttle to start, I was three months out of CEF, they called it Equip Control. I was over at [Building] 8100.

Daphne Alford: You were here at the very beginning—construction—can you talk about those days, please?

Jeanne Kellar: Certainly. They were even building Trent Lott Boulevard when I came down to apply, and for my interview with General Electric. They were down at the Butler Building on Lower Gainesville Road. They had just opened and finished construction on Building 1100 and the clinic had just opened there where I had my physical and I worked in Building 1100. They had just started the Central Engineering Files. They were hiring 12 ladies. We had three men because the construction was right at the start. Nineteen sixty-seven was the year for all construction. We worked every Saturday. I think I had three holidays off and otherwise, we worked six days a week. There were so many people in the halls. You couldn't even go to lunch in the cafeteria because you couldn't get in, the lines were so long. They even had offices out in front of the cafeteria. They had 14 trailers, where the Conference Center is now. They had 14 trailers for people. There were so many trailers all over.

In Central Engineering Files, we had what they called satellite files for the engineering groups on the designing construction. They were at [Building] 3202 out at the test complex, the Butler Building, and we all took turns rotating, going out taking care of the files. We had a copy machine and microfilm of the drawings of the site being constructed, and we would make the copies for the engineers. If they needed something extra, we would go back to the office and get it for them. We were like engineering aides. You had to type 65 words a minute to get the job. *[Laughter]* GE had a lady who was in HR had to wear—even on the construction site—high heels and dresses. You had to dress appropriately. That was their dress code for the ladies who worked for them in the original days. Then in 1969, they allowed us to wear pantsuits. We could stop wearing dresses, but we still had to wear high heels. We had a counter in CEF, where the people would come in for service and ask for drawings. I've been barefoot a many a day, standing up with those high-heel shoes on. For a little country girl to wear high heels all day long. *[Laughter]* I enjoyed every minute of it. I love to see the construction part. That's why I'm still here. I hope A-3's the last one for a while so I can go home. I want to see A-3 built before I go home. I really do.

Daphne Alford: Can you talk about the Apollo Program?

Jeanne Kellar: I got to see the first test-firing on A-2, and any of the other test-firings they had like an oral warning system site-wide. They would count down even on the intercom [to] the test. You can hear everything going on with the test conductors' office when they were testing the engines. You would hear them start with 10, 9, 8, and then everybody would go outside to see the steam and the smoke. On the B-1, when they tested, it was kerosene. It was red flames and black smoke shooting up 40 feet in the air. It was awesome! I saw the first one on it also. It was just awesome.

Daphne Alford: You mentioned earlier that you were without work for about three months?

Jeanne Kellar: No, I was still here. They would move you. The job you were in would no longer be there because GE was laying off people. They had 1,200 people because they constructed and ran the site. North American had testing of the A-1 and A-2 [test stands] and Boeing tested the B [test] stand, but otherwise GE did all the other work. When it was phasing down—we were not testing any longer—they started laying off. If you were in this position and it was no longer needed they would move you to any office because seniority counted with GE. Being 12 of us in the office, and I was second in seniority, all the other ladies would get moved or either they would get laid-off. One lady was supposed to only be there, and they moved me to [Building] 8100. I worked in the equipment laboratory with all the recorders, where they checked them out. I was bored. *[Laughter]* I was totally bored. I was used to being real busy and there wasn't much work going on at that time. Then when they awarded the contract to the maintenance contractor, which was Global Associates, they asked me to come back and run CEF. I've been there ever since. I was only three months out of it anyway because I really enjoyed the work. You know everything that's going to happen. You see the preliminaries. You

see the issuances. You see the construction. You see contractors coming in to do the work and asking for information. When the construction contracts are finished you receive all the As-Built drawings. You make sure that your drawings are updated with the latest changes. All the manufacturers' information that the shops have to use for their maintenance or preventive and corrected maintenance are stored in our office. That database has 94,000 line items right now. In the construction phase again, I don't hesitate to say within the next five years it will be 100-and-something thousand line items. It's so easy when computers come in; they made our lives so easier. You can just give them a search word and it will find it for you. Before, we had to look in books—through pages, after pages of information. I've seen a lot of changes. I've seen from typewriters and pencils with databases for indexes until the computers came in. Now you can't keep up with the technology and computers anymore. They have a new one every month that you'd like to go to but you can't. I know they can't afford to change that often.

Daphne Alford: So you credit the technology to do your job?

Jeanne Kellar: The technology has really helped in CEF. When we first got the computers, I told how we had to search for the information we needed. A shop guy came in this morning; he wanted to find a Trane air conditioner in [Building] 2205 that was put in a couple of years ago. Well, I just went to the computer and put in Trane and the building, and it pulled them up. We could go back to the back and pull the folders. Before, we had them in books by the buildings, and you had to go sheet and sheet by sheet. So, the technology has helped tremendously. I don't think people on the outside world realize the technology that's here. This place has the technology, and it's helped our economy so much to me with the technology that we have perfected and everyone's uses.

But the testing of the Apollo, it was just awesome to me. I mean, my children just got so involved in it that everyone of them has worked out here at one time or another and I have six children. Now, my grandchildren went to work out here. I have just talked up this space program so much and they realize what it can do for all of us.

Daphne Alford: Did you grow up in this area?

Jeanne Kellar: I'm from Picayune. It was 1825 when my family came to this area. My great-great-grandfather was the first Baptist minister in this area. My family has always lived here, and my husband's family, too. So, we are from this area.

Daphne Alford: The Space Shuttle Program – can you talk about that, please?

Jeanne Kellar: We were all at the Butler Building with Global Associates back in the early '70s. We had a lot of engineers that had worked the Apollo Program and NASA was really smart enough to keep their knowledge. They found other jobs for them because they knew the Space Shuttle Program was coming up. We had a lot of those engineers down in the Butler Building, and they did a lot of field verifying information. When the shuttle came in [19]72, we started doing the designs to help the construction.

When the testing started, we lost them all. We had to go out and hire all new engineers. *[Laughter]* But we did have some good management, we really did—Dwight Garrison and Robert Morey. We had NASA people—A.J. Rogers (Jack Rogers)—everyone should thank him for CEF because he put the money there to make sure everything was documented. I can go back right now to 1962 and give you the total amounts of when they built Stennis. We can track everything back, and he made sure everything was there. He was NASA's center-ops director, and he was great. He understood the importance of history and traceability to information you might need. He made sure the money was available to keep all the information indexed and enough people there to do the work.

With the Space Shuttle Program, it got real hectic at times when we were doing the construction. Sverdrup Parcel designed the modifications to the stands. But then our engineering section had to go in and make changes as things would not work out in the construction world. We would go in and make modifications and make sure it would work. We have no more of those engineers here right now. All of them have either retired or passed away. That's sad to see that.

Daphne Alford: Any other names you would like to mention besides A.J. Rogers? Can you think of anyone else that you worked closely with?

Jeanne Kellar: Oh yes, Pat Mooney, Steve Dick, I worked close with them. [Former Stennis Space Center Director] Roy Estess was the test conductor out with the Apollo Program. You can kind of tell people, if you observe, you know whose going to advance, and I knew Roy would go up. He has been fantastic for Stennis Space Center. Boyce Mix made sure everything got documented out at the test complex and with the construction. We've had some great people here. I'd like to see them recognized in the INFINITY [Science Center] when we finish building it. I'm looking forward to that.

Daphne Alford: Would you like to mention the other contractors you worked for during that period?

Jeanne Kellar: I worked for GE from 1965-71. I worked for Global Associates, which was a maintenance contractor. It was still MTF [Mississippi Test Facility] then until 1978. Then, Pan Am [World Services] came in until 1991, and then Johnson Controls [World Services]. I was subbed-out under Johnson Controls to a small business, BAMSI [Brown Associates Management Services]. That was one fine company. The man was from Florida, and I will never forget. When I got my Snoopy award I will never forget Mr. Brown, he owned BAMS. He flew up from Florida that morning, he asked them to wait 'til 11 o'clock. When he got here, his name was Hugh Brown, so he could be here to see me get my award. He owned the company. He took me and the administrative secretary out to lunch after he saw the award and flew back to Florida on a 3 o'clock flight. So that is one fine company that looks out for their employees. He's no longer in business anymore. He said he had enough money to live on for the rest of his life, so he was just going to retire. I hated to see that because he was a great man to work for, a great man.

Daphne Alford: The ‘Snoopy’ is a very prestigious award, have you received other awards?

Jeanne Kellar: Yes, I’ve received the Manned Flight Award in 1994, and then I got the Public Service Award in 1999 or 2000. I got all three awards. I was very appreciative of the awards, but you can look around and see other people you know that deserve it just as much. You really do, but I was very appreciative that someone thought enough to nominate me for it.

Daphne Alford: That was a total of seven contractors.

Jeanne Kellar: Yes. Then I worked for MSS [Mississippi Space Services] from 1999 until 2007, and now I work for Jacobs [FOSC Group], a subcontractor under Jacobs.

Daphne Alford: You have seen the center change names?

Jeanne Kellar: Oh yes, I was here and saw [Senator] John Stennis accept when they named it. To me, it should have been named “John C. Stennis” from the start. I felt like it should because he’s the reason it’s here. I remember his speech down at Gainesville. It was in the paper. I didn’t go because I didn’t live in this area. He told the people that he guaranteed that the center would be for their families and their grandchildren so that they would not have to move out to get a better job someplace else. He kept his word. Then they named it after him. When we were downloading in ’71 because the Apollo was over, he got busy. He got in Data Buoy. He got the Navy to come down here. He even got started working on the Army Ammunition Plant so this place would not close and the people would still have the better paying jobs. This helped the quality of life for so many people in this area; Stennis has for me. I raised six children working out here, and it helped send them to college. If not, I would have had to work in New Orleans or maybe they [children] would not have been able to go to college. John C. Stennis deserved this center being named after him, definitely.

Daphne Alford: You mentioned Roy Estess, are there other center directors you would like to talk about?

Jeanne Kellar: I saw Von Braun at a distance one time. I was very impressed. He was speaking to everyone and shaking hands. It wasn’t like he was very old. Jerry Hlass was a very good center director. I didn’t know the others too well because you were so busy and so many things [going on] that you don’t see these people. Now Gordon Artley, during the Apollo days, I don’t think we would have tested on schedule if it hadn’t being for Gordon Artley. He came from Martin Marietta in Denver, and it was amusing. They called him the hatchet man. He had a meeting with all the engineers that was working the projects at 6 o’clock, and you’d better be at his sunrise service meeting--that’s what we called it--*[Laughter]* Or you didn’t work for him. He’ll move you someplace else. He was brought here to be sure we tested on time and was able to go to the moon when we did. It worked. This man, he did it. He was a go-getter, he really was. I’ve seen some good and bad, but not very many bad. I can’t very well say I’ve seen very many bad

things out here. Anyplace you work you see good or bad, the good outweighs the bad out here.

Daphne Alford: We have talked about the Apollo Program, space shuttle, what's going on now?

Jeanne Kellar: A-3 and some more construction. We have got so much construction going on now. This is the most I've seen since we built Stennis in the mid-60s. We got so many huge jobs going on right now. CEF handles all constructions—drawings, CDs that go out for bids and that type of thing. We got A-3. We got modifications to A-1 and A-2. They're building a new building on Propellant Boulevard for the hydrogen. They're building a new facility of 62 air tanks that's going to support High-Pressure Gas building to support A-3. We got the North and South gates getting ready to put a gate across so you can't get passed the gates. We'll probably put that out for bids next week. We got widening of the road from Saturn Drive all the way to Nicholson. They're going to widen the road to four lanes so that will be an evacuation route.

Daphne Alford: Is that Highway 607?

Jeanne Kellar: Yes. Then there are odds and evens job—little jobs. There's so much going on. We just did all the roofs replacements that were needed after Katrina. We're finalizing all of those now. Being sure the drawings are updated that tell this information. I love the construction phase. I really like the construction phase. To see what things are being built and how they are building them. I've seen so much new technology in the design and construction work in the last 40 years.

Daphne Alford: During your tenure here, what would you say is the most important task you have had to accomplish?

Jeanne Kellar: Bringing CEF into the technology world. We started out with typewriters and pencils and notebooks and now we are computerized.

Daphne Alford: What is your role now in the Constellation Program?

Jeanne Kellar: The history. We're pulling a lot of history to help them know how to modify the stands to be able to do this new program coming up. The history is helping and saving them money so that they don't have to start from scratch to know how to do the design for the construction. We're helping the design a lot with the information we have.

Daphne Alford: What do you foresee for the future of Stennis?

Jeanne Kellar: Only bigger and better. When we get the Army Ammunition Plant, that's going to be very big. It's just going to get bigger and better. Everyone knows that the people out here have a go-to attitude and they're going to get it done.

Daphne Alford: Is there a special event you would like to talk about?

Jeanne Kellar: Well, there're a few special events like when I saw the test-firing on the B stand for the Apollo—the red flames, the black smoke; when I saw the space shuttle, the first one. I try to see one at least twice a year because I still get goose bumps every time I see it. I say I'm part of this history. I am part of this history that will go down in history books.

Daphne Alford: Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask?

Jeanne Kellar: No. Like I said, Stennis has been my life, and I realize that it's going to be for other people to help them with their quality of life. I've already told Myron Webb that I am her first volunteer down at the INFINITY. I want to tell everybody how great Stennis is.

Daphne Alford: You can go on and on and on.

Jeanne Kellar: Yes, I can. Yes, I can.

Daphne Alford: *[Laughter]* You did well. Thanks!

(End of Interview)