parks, but what they were dreaming about--aided and abetted by Aubrey Neasham and George Collins--they were dreaming about a big park. [A Park Service report, prepared by Collins, proposed a Point Reyes National Seashore in 1959.--Ed.]

Lage: And I think the Park Service even looked at it in the thirties.

Stewart: Well, these two men came from the Park Service. The Park Service had not done anything about it at that time, other than what these two men were doing. I think, both of them were no longer working for the Park Service at that time.

Clem Miller's Campaign to Establish the Seashore, 1958-1962

Stewart: They talked about it and discussed it long enough and finally got the Sierra Club and other people interested in it. The thing just grew. And finally, Clem Miller--.

Lage: So now we’re clear up to the fifties.

Stewart: Now we’re up to the fifties.

Lage: So it took awhile.

Stewart: I mean, time had gone by.

In the meantime, they had gotten these small parks. Took a long time, you know, they didn’t come all at once. The league had built up some membership. It was the right county. Most peculiar county. I don’t know what you would call them. Some people would say they were conservative, but, of course, they weren’t; they were very radical. But they were people who liked the kind of county that they had and didn’t want to see it change, and they recognized that there was great beauty in this county, and they wanted to preserve it.

There was a thing going on at that time, over in the East Bay around Walnut Creek and down the peninsula, where they were developing a lot of farm land, beautiful country, into home sites.

So, they, eventually, had a quite reservoir of popular support in a part of the county, not among the ranchers, for a park. Clem Miller--. Really, I’m sure that it was because Roger Kent told him, "Why don’t you campaign for Congress in this district on the basis that you favor the establishment of a
park?" The Park Service was, of course, very interested by this time. A lot of time had gone by, ten or twelve years, fifteen years, then twenty years since it was talked of. And Clem Miller did.

Lage: How do you know of this suggestion from Roger Kent?

Stewart: I knew Roger from high school.

Lage: Did you know Clem Miller very well?

Stewart: Yes. I knew Clem Miller. I know his widow very well. Everybody knew him. Marin County was a little bit of a county before the war. I don't know whether we had 30,000 or 35,000 people in the county. World War II brought a lot of people in to work in the shipyards at Marin City. And, of course, at the end of the war, it brought in all of those people who had gone through here and wanted to move here. So, we grew rapidly in a short time.

Lage: But even out here in West Marin you had ties to San Rafael and Mill Valley people?

Stewart: Well, you see, it was such a small county. San Rafael was the county seat, right in the town at that time. The courthouse was right where the big office building is now, the Bank of America. Any rancher or any man that lived around the county any length of time, born and raised here, if you walked down Fourth Street in San Rafael, lot of people would know you. You didn't have a mobile population. You had a very, very static population. You had those business people that worked in San Francisco. They didn't know us personally, but they knew who all of the ranchers were; you never had that many ranchers. You never had two or three thousand ranchers. I don't know whether we've ever had over five or six hundred total in the county. It was small.

Clem Miller had a pretty popular project on hand. Ranchers didn't catch on in time to oppose it much. They weren't interested. They were going along. They were doing well. They had done well during the war, and they didn't think anything would come of it. Of course, Clem got elected [1958].

By this time, people were interested in parks. There was that surge of feeling about the environment that had grown from the thirties on. They held hearings. They got involved with legislation and they held hearings. Things really moved along. They put up the legislation which set up the boundaries of the Point Reyes National Seashore.
The Status of Ranchers and Ranchlands within the Seashore

Stewart: And because the people that promoted it came from here, at that time they didn’t start out by saying, "We will move all of the ranchers off." When they started talking about it, there were areas that were not suitable, that had not been ranced, they were just used for dry cattle, they weren’t good ranches. A number of them along the coast here.

But nobody paid much attention to the fact that you were talking about something that ordinarily wasn’t talked of. You were talking about making a park out of land that was in commercial production. And when they began to think about it, they talked about, well, they would have a park there. They didn’t want to disrupt the county. There was a lot of talk that went on back and forth about whether or not, and how, you would continue ranching.

Lage: Did you get involved in this sort of, we could call it negotiation, maybe? Or is that too strong a word?

Stewart: Well, it wasn’t negotiation. It was just everybody running around kind of wildly.

But in back of the running around, by this time, you had the Marin Conservation League, which was pretty well organized now (a long time has gone by), had an old membership with good directors, and you had the Sierra Club deeply involved in it, and a strong organization, a vigorous president and executive officer. So you had some people who would plan as they talked.

Now, they didn’t plan too well. They wanted the park. Everybody they talked to was in favor of the park. They didn’t talk to the ranchers because they didn’t have much contact with them; these city people didn’t. The Marin County people just left the ranchers alone. They had always stood in well with them. The ranchers, belatedly, found out that they were being taken on. They opposed it. They immediately organized to oppose, but this is a little bit like the elephant and the mouse, you know. They did spend money. They sent a lawyer to Washington to oppose the taking over of the ranches.

At the time that that first happened, that they opposed it, the park had been outlined. The area had been designated for a national recreation area, but the legislation wasn’t closed. It wasn’t complete, and it didn’t carry the right of condemnation on the land that was being operated on. It was separated. The
ranchers on the point here, the legislation provided they were to be in the park and that the park would acquire them. But it didn't say the park had the right to condemn, but the other land it did. Yes, the rest of the land.

Lage: As I understand it, the ranchers in the pastoral zone that kept their ranches in agricultural use couldn't be condemned.

Stewart: They couldn't be condemned.

Lage: Now, was that something that the ranchers through their organization got put in to the legislation?

Stewart: No, no. Because nobody had thought anything through, because no one had really gotten everybody together and sat down and said, "Well, now, how can you make a park out of it if you buy just pieces of it and leave other pieces out?" Nobody had ever gone into it far enough. The way these things work [is that] there was great, great interest in getting a park; so, we pass a law outlining the park.

Authorization of Point Reyes National Seashore and Subsequent Increase in Land Values

Stewart: We had accomplished a lot. We hadn't the slightest idea how we were going to do the rest of it. And they didn't. They began to run into problems. They appropriated some money [$14 million], and that was part of this not thinking things through, because they never appropriated enough to do any good at any one time, for a long time. They bought the Bear Valley ranch, five thousand acres, where the headquarters is now.

And then they bought the south end ranch that was owned by a church group, Mankind United. The church wanted to sell, and the Park Service bought that. Then out on Point Reyes there was a man by the name of [Edward] Heims who wanted to sell, and he persuaded the Park to buy it. He saw there was an opportunity to get his money out of the land.

Lage: Was he an old-timer too?

Stewart: No. He was a man who had come here just prior to World War II. Interesting man in his own right. There's a rather interesting story about it, but it had nothing to do with the park, other than the fact that he was one of the early ones that sold. And
he sold out on the point, in the area they didn't have the right to condemn.

In 1961, they had held hearings. The House held hearings back there. The Senate came out and held hearings out here. If I remember right, they were held in Marin Community College. [Senator] Alan Bible came out. At this point, some men who were very serious about the park got really deeply involved in it. In particular, the Senate Subcommittee [on Parks and Recreation, a subcommittee] of the Interior [and Insular Affairs] Committee.

Lage: That was Alan Bible's committee?

Stewart: That was Alan Bible.

Lage: Now, you had a friendship with Alan Bible. Where does that date from?

Stewart: We met Bible when they were talking about this, because of something that had happened long before. I had met him during World War II. My wife was a young woman who had gone to college down at Dominican, a music student. She was teaching music. She thought that it would be suitable to marry a rancher along the line, and did. So, I got involved with it, because she was involved with these people around there. I was active in the Marin Conservation League we were trying to start.

Lage: So you were actually a member and active in the Marin Conservation League. Now, how did that sit with the ranchers? Did you have a good relationship with the ranchers out here?

Stewart: There's a movie, I think it was an English movie, called The Gods Must Be Crazy, and there's a guy in there [who said] whenever he had trouble, "I-yi-yi, I don't want to talk about it." [laughter] That was my relationship with the ranchers.

Lage: It set you apart, I would guess from what you say?

Stewart: Yes, it set us apart. Because of a personal background about land, and the care of land and so on, we were interested in the land, and liked it and felt that if it was in a park it wouldn't be subdivided.

Lage: Now, was your ranch a part of the proposed park area?

Stewart: Yes, yes. The interesting thing about it, of course to me, is that I found that—it isn't a personal feeling, you understand; I'm a rancher like all of the rest of them—but you are a traitor if you join the enemy that wants to take over their ranches.
Now, there were several things that happened at the time that made this pertinent. There were some very wise, farseeing speculators came along and said, "Oh, Oh! This is going to happen."

Lage: This was after the park was authorized?

Stewart: And they bought some pieces of land on the point, some land that eventually ended up in court. They saw that there were opportunities to subdivide out here. You see, subdividers had never come here. As I said, the land was held; nobody wanted to sell it, and there hadn't been any great pressure here. The war came along and Marin County was growing rapidly. They were all around Tiburon. That area that had been big dairies, was all being built up. Mill Valley, in back of Mill Valley over by the coast where you go over the Corte Madera Hill, Tunnel Ranch, all of those places were being subdivided. And speculators realized this was going to grow the way it had down in Santa Clara County.

As an aside, when I went to college, the fruit basket of California was the Santa Clara Valley. Right on the university grounds, there was a close to a hundred-acre field of strawberries, and there was a dairy on the campus. There were fourteen canneries between San Francisco and San Jose when I was in college. And packaging and processing operations were located in San Jose. That was the proper place for them. Well, now it's houses. And, of course, they all moved away. All of the orchards were plowed up.

It's a long time since the Southern Pacific ran tourist trains into the Santa Clara Valley from the East during blossom time. Just like people, now, go east to see the fall colors, well, they had special tour trains to the Santa Clara Valley.

Lage: To see the blossoms?

Stewart: In blossom time. It was just a fruit bowl.

Lage: Did seeing what happened down there affect your view of what should be done here?

Stewart: The depression stopped everything. Things began to pick up; the war came along. Population came in, and suddenly there were people that saw there were possibilities of making investments out here that would enable them to make a lot of money, that, eventually, it would be subdivided. They bought the ranches around San Rafael.

Lage: Did this happen as early as the fifties then?
Stewart: Yes. It began happening as the war ended, in '45. By '50, it was buzzing along.

Lage: And what about out here? When did the speculators come?

Stewart: Out here the land hadn't been for sale. A couple of places were bought. A promoter, Douglas Hertz, who at one time owned the New York Giants football team, had a place over on the Wildcat. Bought it from Willie Tevis. He was developing one of these exclusive hunting clubs where you come out and shoot pheasants that are released and shoot ducks on the coast. Oiled the road from Highway 1, eight miles over to the ocean. Now it's wilderness.

Well, Alan Bible held the hearings down in Kentfield. And he realized what you had here, as well as anybody. Old Wayne Aspinall was a good friend of his from Colorado [chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs], and a fellow by the name of [Roy] Taylor was chairman of the House Interior Subcommittee on Parks. And they had all been holding hearings on it. They had gotten along.

The park was delineated, the lines were drawn. And it wasn't clear about what they could or couldn't do. The Park Service considered that they could not condemn the operating dairies on the point, the pastoral area they called it, but they could the rest.

They had gotten several piecemeal appropriations, $7 million, $5 million, $3 million, $2 million, until they had gotten finally up to maybe $26 or $27 million. [The original $14 million appropriation was supplemented in 1966 with a $5 million appropriation. --ed.] And they didn't have any of the point bought. Didn't have all of this area bought. There was a question: "Would they raise the money and buy the seashore? Or, would they dilly-dally around and lose it?"

Lage: And let the prices go up.

Stewart: And let the prices go up. There was even a proposal made at one time, by the Park Service, that they would buy the land and then lease it over long periods of time for partial development. This came out of the Park Service itself, in an effort to try to save the park. They didn't think that they could get the money.

Lage: Did the ranchers react to that proposal?
Stewart: Well, the ranchers, all of this time, were paying a very competent lawyer to go to Washington every time there was a hearing of any kind about the park, and oppose them taking it over.

Lage: So they had an association, a formal association?

Stewart: They didn’t have a formal association. They were never formally organized, but Bryan McCarthy was their attorney. And he was doing a very good job of representing them. The park had to deal with him in hearings, and the committees. The senate and the house committee would meet, you know, and talk, and they—.

Remember the procedure that they had to go through: You’ve got the park delineated. You’ve got some pieces of land bought, not together, just separate pieces of land. And you want to get some more money. So first, you go to the Interior Committee and they recommend that you get some more money. Then you go to the appropriations committee in each house to get the money appropriated and hope that the budget bureau won’t knock it down and that it will go through in an appropriations bill. It was working, slowly, that way, but in the meantime, the speculators were around. They were here. They pointed out to us that we could divide this ranch into three pieces. We could get a lot of money for it.

Lage: They came to you?

Stewart: Yes, they came to us. They came to everybody. If you’re a real estate man, and you know what’s going on, and you’ve got a park here, and if there is anyway you can get a piece of land within the park, either you’ll get well paid for it, but more than that, you could subdivide it, because there was a demand for housing out in the country. And this is beautiful country.

Lage: Were these local real estate people?

Stewart: Yes. Most local people, that is local Bay Area people. They had been doing a lot of developing. Now, remember Marin County had started out back in the thirties with thirty thousand or something, maybe 35,000 people. Then there was a tremendous influx of people beginning in the late thirties, with the shipbuilding industries and all.