INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Oliver Allen

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Oliver Allen conducted by Interviewer Peter Reda on March 30, 2010. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive's Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

In 1982, Oliver Allen and his wife moved into a loft in Tribeca. A retired writer for Life magazine and Time-Life Books, Allen quickly became a preservation activist, taking on a role as photographer for the Landmarks Commission's survey of historic properties in the neighborhood. In the 1990s he co-founded the Friends of Duane Park and began writing articles on Tribeca history, which were collected into a book in 1999. In this 2010 oral history interview conducted by Pratt Institute graduate student Peter Reda, Allen discusses his involvement in the process of designating Tribeca's historic districts and his observations on neighborhood history, the value of historic landmarks, and the impact that landmark designation has had on Tribeca

Oliver Allen meticulously documented New York City and Tribeca history through careers as a writer and editor for LIFE magazine, as editor at Time-Life books, and as an independent author. His column for the Tribeca Tribune, "Old Tribeca," was a neighborhood fixture, and his books from New York, New York to The Texture of Tribeca garnerned widespread critical acclaim. Allen was a co-founder of the group Friends of Duane Park, and was an instrumental force in the battle to designate four historic districts in Tribeca. The Texture of Tribeca was used in the early 1990s by the Landmarks Preservation Commission as evidence for justifiable designation.
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Interviewee: Oliver Allen | Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Peter Reda | Date: March 30, 2010

Q: So, I guess I'll just run through these questions.

Allen: Yeah.

Q: All right. It's the first time for me. Are you originally from New York City?

Allen: Well, it depends on what you mean by originally. I grew up around New York in a suburb of New York, but since then, with one exception of a year or so, I lived either in the city or in a suburb of the city. When our kids grew up and moved out of the house, we had a big house, and said, "Let's get out of here and go back to the city." And people where we were living in Pelham said, "Why do you want to go to the city, it's dirty, it's crime-ridden, it's congested, it's noisy." and we said, "That's where it's at. We want to be there." So, shortly after that, you know, a couple years after we moved in, this effort started and so right away I was right in the middle of, you know, what makes the city work, which is fascinating. Along about that time, I wrote a history of the city, which was published, and didn't sell worth a damn, but I did a lot of reading on the history of the city so I pretty much know what the major causes are or how the city developed.

Q: So, is that—you went from Pelham to Tribeca?

Allen: Yeah.

Q: Is that when you moved to Tribeca?

Allen: Yeah.

Q: Okay. What was that book you published?

Allen: The book was published in—I guess it was published around 1990. I ought to know. I should have brought my resume with me but I don't remember. It was published by Atheneum [Books] and got a couple of good reviews. Everybody said, "This is terrific." And then it disappeared. Fell through the cracks. That was the end of it.

Q: Maybe not. It's still on the shelves I'm sure.

Allen: Yeah.

Q: Was the book about Tribeca or what was it about?

Allen: No, it wasn't about Tribeca it was about the whole city.

Q: Okay.

Allen: The city as my theme was that there are two forces at work and they both relate to the harbor. One is New York as a financial capital and that all came about because of the harbor. The second one is the city as a welcoming place and that's also because of the harbor, where the people came in. So, that was the theme of the book.

Q: Okay. All right.

Allen: Then I wrote a bunch of other stuff. I've written a whole lot of stuff, which is not important for this conversation. But, about in the fall of '94 there was a couple, a man named Carl Glassman and his wife April Koral, who were starting a neighborhood newspaper that was going to be called the *Tribeca Trib* and they wondered if I would write for them, and I said, "Yeah, sounds like fun." They said, "What do you want to write about?" They knew that I was a writer and when you're an editor, you're always looking for writers. And so I said, I'd like to write about the history of this area. And they said, "That's terrific." So, I've been doing that ever since and we've already published one collection of articles that I've written about Tribeca and I'm now writing—I'm about two thirds of the way through writing another book, which is in effect an illustrated history of Tribeca. It's a rich history. It's fascinating. So, it's really a lot of fun.

Q: So, when did you start researching Tribeca, when you first moved in then?

Allen: Well, of course when I was involved in the historic district project, which would have been—that started in '84, I had just been—in the course of working on this book and doing other things I learned a lot. One of the things was I was in charge of photography for the Landmarks Commission's survey. They needed somebody to take pictures and I took a lot of the pictures. Some people helped me but most of the photos I took pretty much because they needed a record of what they were about to designate.

Q: Right.

Allen: So, I took a lot of pictures of sidewalks among other things like facades. You had to document the sidewalk in front because they talk about street furniture. Do you know what street furniture is? That's like hydrants, and curbs, and types of pavement, and stuff and that's street furniture.

Q: So, what was Tribeca like when you moved there?

Allen: Well, actually, that was the interesting thing, of course it's changed extraordinarily since we moved in. There were a lot of people already there living. People say, "You must be a pioneer." I said, "No, we're not pioneers. We're part of what you might call gentrification because the real pioneers were the artists who moved in." Most of the artists who moved into Tribeca moved in in the '70s or some earlier, some in the '60s. And there's one guy I know who moved in in something like 1959 and he's about the longest living artist there. Tribeca wasn't

anything then. Tribeca was a commercial district from which the major commercial organizations were moving out.

There were two basic industries in Tribeca. In the eastern part of the area east of—more or less east of West Broadway, but certainly east of Church Street, there was the textile business and it was the chief textile merchandizing headquarters. They did some work on the textiles, there was some printing of textiles and preparation for selling, but basically they got the stuff from—the stuff would be shipped from New England from where the mills were back in those days, this would be in the Nineteenth Century. The stuff would be shipped to Tribeca and then big commercial organizations like J.P. Stephen's [Restaurant and Tavern] and Deering-Milliken and Company—all these are big names if you know anything about textiles—but they all later on moved in the nineteen—well, I don't know when, '30s, '40s and '50s—they all moved out because they had cheaper labor in the south. So, that's why you get all these outfits now in Alabama and Mississippi and so forth.

So, there were all these empty buildings in the eastern part of Tribeca and then in the western part it was the food industry. The western part of Tribeca was called Washington Market District and that's a very tricky concept because there were two Washington Markets, there's one building and there's one area.

Q: There's one in Gansevoort isn't there?

Allen: What?

Q: Is that a Meatpacking District? Wasn't there one—?

Allen: Well, the Meatpacking you mean in the West Village, Chelsea in that area Meatpacking? I'm not quite sure when people talk about meatpacking what they actually mean. I know there have been meatpacking or meat wholesaling operations like on West Fourteenth Street until just recently and some of them are still there.

Q: Gansevoort?

Allen: They've been crowded out by fashion houses.

Q: I saw that, yeah.

Allen: But the western part of Tribeca was known as the Washington Market Wholesale District. The reason for that was that there was a huge building down on Washington Street about where building number two of the World Trade Center was located. In fact, the market was finally demolished in the 1950s because they were planning something like the World Trade Center down there. But the Washington Market had been—originally when Manhattan was growing, when it became a city, they couldn't produce their own food. When it was like a little Dutch settlement then they could produce their own food, you know, there were a lot of fields around, but then they all got populated and pretty soon the food had to come from New Jersey or Long Island and other places too.

So, New York developed a whole bunch of kind of neighborhood markets, which were really set up more or less the way the green markets are now. There were places where farmers and so forth and bakers and would bring stuff in and sell it to the local residents. But then the city kept on growing and these places began consolidating until finally there was one great market, a huge shed down there on Washington Street at about Fulton Street. But that was originally both wholesale and retail and then it turned out that the wholesale people needed more space and they moved out and they moved up Washington Street into the area that is now Tribeca.

So, you had retail—if you wanted to go and buy a lamb chop you go down to the original building or if you wanted to have oysters or something it was a wonderful place to go and they had several hundred stalls, it was huge. But if you were a hotel or a restaurant or a grocery store in the city, you would come down and pick up your three dozen lamb chops from the Washington Market carrier, which was in the western part of Tribeca, which is where I live now. And so, you had these two thriving wholesaling operations basically textiles in the east part and foods in the western part and the food wholesaling was also then divided up between different categories of food.

Greenwich Street runs right through the middle of Tribeca, what the [New York City] Landmarks [Preservation] Commission designated as Tribeca West [Historic District]. Greenwich Street runs right through the middle, and then west of Greenwich Street was all fruits and vegetables, and east of Greenwich Street were all the other things. Around where I live, which is Duane Park, it was the whole butter, eggs and cheese area. So, Duane Park, an

incredibly lovely little park that I help take care of today, was surrounded by outfits, for instance, the places that handled butter were known as butter printers and that's because the butter was wrapped in paper that had to be printed, so they were known as butter printers. Then, you had the egg candlers and they're the people, you know, who look at the eggs against a candle flame and say, "Is it okay?" That's egg candling. All that went on around the district. Our building, which is 42 Hudson Street, which is directly across the street from the park, was a cheese warehouse. When we moved in the thing was converted to apartments and lofts. We don't say apartments here in Tribeca we say lofts because originally they were open commercial spaces. The whole inside was open whereas apartments are built with rooms already built, you know.

Q: Yes.

Allen: But anyway, when we moved in we didn't know—we had a problem with the furnace and we asked the guy who had been in charge of converting it into apartments what was the heating history of the building. He said, "It wasn't heated it was refrigerated."

Q: Good in the summer, hey.

Allen: Yeah. So, where were we?

Q: So, you said about 1930 the textile and the food started moving out of the area.

Allen: Basically, what happened was that the economic forces became kind of overwhelming, preventing it from working efficiently. I remember in 1955 or six, I went down with a lady friend at that time to visit. I said, "I understand it's wonderful down there. You go down there in the middle of the night to look at the Washington Market wholesaling." And we went down there it was incredible. It was a mad house. People are shouting and yelling at trucks backing up and people yelling and a great traffic jam and everything, right along Washington Street and it was amazing.

But, about that time, well, I think the first problem was the—well, basically, the change came about because of the decline of the railroads. The railroads couldn't afford any more to bring the food from the Jersey Shore across on flat boats, the boxcars would float them over, and then the food would be unloaded from the boxcars and either sold to wholesalers on the docks or brought into these warehouses, and the railroads found that they couldn't do that, they weren't making much money. Meanwhile, of course, trucking was taking over from the railroads and the trucks couldn't maneuver our little streets, so they had to park along West Street and the stuff had to be hauled, you know, brought by hand cart and stuff into the Washington Market and further along on Harrison Street so that the stuff could be sold. And the trucks not only could they not maneuver easily in the streets, they had to come through the Holland Tunnel, for God's sake, or the Lincoln Tunnel. Oh, my God, it was terrible. It was not very efficient.

So, the whole thing was kind of choking itself to death and finally the city said, we've got to have a new wholesale market. And sometime in the late 1950s was about the time that the Washington Market proper, that big building, closed down, which I think was in '56. About that time the city

said, we've got to have a different system here, and so they said, there's going to be a new wholesaling center in the Bronx, which there is now, Hunt's Point and that's where all these operations take place now. That's even where the Fulton Fish Market moved to also. So, that food wholesaling is now all in the Bronx.

But, of course, these food concerns moved out of these beautiful buildings, amazing buildings, they were just terrific, and they were vacant. And of course, nobody knew about Tribeca, it was too far away. People said, "Where the hell is Tribeca?" "I don't know." People, when we first moved in they said, "Where is it?" I said, "Oh, it's way down." They said, "Is it as far down as SoHo?" I said, "SoHo is uptown." Nobody knew about it so these buildings were empty and so who moves in? Well, artists need space, they need cheap rents and landlords were desperate for making some money even though it was illegal at the time for anybody to be living in most of those buildings because the area was zoned for commercial, not for residential. So, there were a lot of funny stories about when the fire department inspector or some other inspector would come by and what the artists would do to conceal what they were doing. There were a lot of funny stories about that, but they were the first people to move in.

And then, of course, well, about the time we moved in it began to kind of be discovered as a wonderful place to live because it's incredibly convenient and the buildings are great. And then, I think, I'm absolutely, firmly convinced that Tribeca would not be so successful if it hadn't had been for the historic designation because that meant that there were never going to be high buildings that would cast shadows along there. The light and air is wonderful because all the things were five or six stories, with a few exceptions, but they're okay, you know. But, basically,

it was never going to become the Upper West Side or the Upper East Side because you couldn't do it.

Q: Is that when you became—like your involvement with historic preservation when you moved in there?

Allen: Well, I became involved before I knew about all that, before I really appreciated it. I think the first time that I heard about this whole thing was in '84 when somebody came to our building, and I can't remember her name. It wasn't Carol De Saram it was the person that she was involved with. Let me see if I can find her name. You may know—you probably know her name. She and Carol were running the Tribeca Community Association. Let's see here, the acknowledgments. Carol Nelson, yeah. And she was passing out leaflets and said, "Come to a meeting to help preserve our neighborhood." Yeah, I don't know what started them working on it, she and Carol and then Hal Bromm. Hal says that he was concerned about it and he had a—there was a meeting at his apartment or something with all kinds of preservation people and they decided yeah, we've got to do something about this.

Q: So, what were the goals at the meeting?

Allen: Yeah, I can't remember whether I went to a meeting before we met with the Landlords Commission. Hey, I'd like to be on a landlord's group, not the commissioners, but with the staff. And is Tony Robins on your—Anthony [W.] Robins, is he on your list to be designated or to be interviewed do you know?

Q: Oh, I don't know she does the—

Allen: Well, he's now a tour guide for the Municipal Art Society and he's wonderful. I've been on a lot of his tours. He's very, very smart. I remember when we first went there, you know, we came to see him and said, "How can we help?" And he said, "Okay, here's what we need to have done. We need help in researching the buildings and we also need help in photographing." So, we came out with those two marching orders and then we had a subsequent meeting in Hal's house, Hal Bromm's apartment. Hal said, "Is there anybody who would like to take over the photography element?" And I said, "Well, I'll do it." The reason I said that was that I know a lot about pictures because I worked on *Life* magazine way back when it was successful and I've taken pictures all my life, so I understand photography. I've worked with great photographers so I know how they work and what the problems were. So, I was able to do that, so I took over that.

You learn a lot about a building by photographing it because when you photograph it you've got to look at it. Most people don't notice the tops of the buildings because they never look up there, but when you take a picture you say, "Jeez, look at that isn't that amazing." Since then, I've learned a great deal about the architecture of Tribeca partly just because I'm interested in it and my wife and I are both kind of amateur architectural enthusiasts. We're not trained that way although she took some architectural courses before we had kids, so she knows a great deal about it and I have learned a great deal since then. So, I now give architectural walking tours of Tribeca to point out the different architectural styles because Tribeca it's really a museum of Nineteenth Century commercial architecture. Wonderful, wonderful to see.

I mean, everybody knows about SoHo being the cast iron historic district and that's the place with cast iron. But we had—the marble buildings in Tribeca are just beautiful and incredible, Italianate and French Empire styles and Romanesque Revival, unbelievable buildings. Just great stuff.

Q: Do you think the architecture in Tribeca reflects—

Allen: What?

Q: Do you think the architecture in Tribeca reflects the city larger or do you think it's pretty secluded?

Allen: The thing was that after about 1900 there were very few buildings built, the place was all pretty much built up and there wasn't any reason to rebuild it because the growth of the city was off someplace else. This was a kind of forgotten area, although to the people who worked down there it wasn't forgotten at all. It was very, very busy, thriving with the textiles and food business, but there wasn’t any building going on. So, basically, you have the architectural styles, which start with the Federal style, which you know all about that, the Georgian building, we have some buildings left like that, but then you have Italianate and then you have French Empire and then you have Neo-Grec. Do you know about Neo-Grec?

Q: I do.

Allen: Well, do you know about—most people have never heard of it and I have to point out Neo-Grec to people. And then, you had Romanesque Revival and then you had Classical Revival and they were good architects who did it. I mean, you know, the—

Q: Were there any famous firms like McKim, Mead & White?

Allen: Well, there's a building at 105 Hudson Street, which was designed by Carrére and Hastings, which did the New York Public Library.

Q: Okay.

Allen: That's no—they're very good people. Then, there was an architect named John B. Snook, S-N-O-O-K, and he was involved with the architecture, with the design of the first Italianate building. A very important building historically, architecturally historically, which is the—we call it the Stewart Store. It's also called the Sun Building. It's on the northeast of Broadway and Chambers and it's a beautiful Italianate building and that was really the first Italianate building. It was built because Mr. Stewart, A. T. [Alexander Turney] Stewart, who was a phenomenally successful merchant, he said, "I want a building that's going to look terrific." And it was. The textile firms in New York had been downtown along Pearl Street—that was the textile center up until the great fire of 1835. The 1835 fire was very important and influential because it caused so much disruption and it helped to bring on what was an important economic thing, which was the panic of 1837.

So, a lot of things happened that were bad in that time. But the textile people had lost a lot of their buildings and they thought they should move someplace and they finally decided—well, they didn't know whether Tribeca was—well, it wasn't called Tribeca then it was up a few blocks—they didn't know whether it was okay. But when Stewart built his store they said, "Oh, if Stewart built his store there it must be all right." So, then they started building and so you have all these incredible Italianate buildings in the textile area. Almost none in the western part of Tribeca because the eastern part was built up—developed commercially thiry or forty years earlier, or twenty or thirty years probably, before the western part was. So, where I lived on Hudson Street, west of West Broadway is all Romanesque or Neo-Grec or Classical Revival or what we call Utilitarian. There are some wonderful buildings that they say are not any particular style; they're just good buildings, we have a lot of them. So, that was all later.

So, you get no Italianate where we are. If you stand on West Broadway at Duane Street and you look east, the first thing you see is this marvelous marble fronted building, Italianate building, 142 to 146 Duane Street. It's absolutely beautiful and it's got all telltale characteristics of Italianate. The windows are all laid this way and with an arch, you know, that whole way just like in Rome, and a huge cornice at the top and cast iron columns at the first floor but then marble above that, unbelievable. And all kinds of plasters and string courses, you know, things of each, I mean, it's just—there it's a museum piece. That's east and you look west and there's nothing but brick. East is all marble with some brick, but that's built later, but basically its marble and limestone. You look west and it's all brick and it's Romanesque. So, anyway these are all fascinating. I can't remember how we got on this subject, but.

Q: Well, I did have a question about—

Allen: Yes.

Q: —171 Duane Street.

Allen: Oh, yes, that's the building, which is on the corner of Staple Street.

Q: Ephraim Treadwell's?

Allen: I don't know the word, Ephraim Treadwell's home. But, as I understand it, I think that's the building that's on the corner of Staple Street and that was originally a Federal style building. It was built—it was three stories high and then in the 1850s they took off the whole façade and put on a cast iron façade.

Q: That's what I wanted to ask you about. Looking back now do you think it's—

Allen: Well, it's a lovely building but you wouldn't know that it had been a Federal style building until you look at the side because the side is open because it's on Staple Street. So, it faces Duane Street, but Staples Street comes up. And you look up and those are all Federal style windows but the windows in the front are all arched and it's painted in light blue. It's beautiful.

Q: So, do you think that took away from the original building or do you think it added some history to it?

Allen: I don't have a feeling—it's not a desecration, if that's what you mean, I mean, it happened. It's a fascinating building. It's fun to talk about. If it wasn't like that, it wouldn't be fun to talk about and then I wouldn't be able to say anything. But, Duane Park is a wonderful area because it's filled with interesting buildings there. It's got a magnificent Romanesque Revival building on the corner of Hudson and Duane that now has a very, very expensive David Bouley restaurant on the first floor. But, the building itself, you know, he can't change the outside so the building is actually beautiful.

Then, we have a couple of equally interesting Romanesque Revival buildings, 165 Duane Street, which occupies the whole block between Hudson Street and Staples Street. It's a big building and it was built by the Spice King or Coconut King. Leopold Schepp, he dealt in spices and coconuts and they were all processed in this building where there are a lot of people now, they live there. It's a wonderful building to live in. But, the window treatment is fascinating. The architect was Stephen Decatur Hatch and Stephen Decatur Hatch was very, very good. He's a damn good architect. He could do anything. You could say, "Can I have a Romanesque Revival?" He'd say, "Certainly, you'll have it tomorrow," that kind of thing.

Oh, I mentioned Snook. Snook was one of the architects of the Stewart Store. Not at the very beginning, there was an architect named [Joseph] Trench who I think was in charge of it, and then the place was enlarged and he was maybe the chief architect at that time, this would have

been 1848 or '49. The building first was built in 1846. But, Snook had a long career—this was very early in his career, but he practiced for like fifty years and toward the end, he was doing Romanesque Revival buildings. There are buildings right on Duane Park, right across from 171, that are Neo-Grec that he designed. And when people say, "Whoever heard of John B. Snook?" And I said, "Well, Commodore [Cornelius] Vanderbilt heard about him because he had him design Grand Central Station for him," the first Grand Central Station. You know, there were three Grand Central Stations, there was the original one and then they enlarged it and changed it somewhat and then that was all torn down and the current building was designed by Warren and Wetmore.

But, Snook was darn good and then Stephen Decatur Hatch was known all over the city. This is true, you find these buildings designed by first-class architects because these merchants were ambitious and buildings sell. Buildings are good for your reputation, they call out success and smart business practices, you know, if you've got a good building. I mean, the RCA Building, think what good publicity the Radio Corporation of America had for the RCA Building, which is now I'm sorry to say the GE [General Electric] Building or something. I forget what it is now. Anyway, okay, where were we, architects, yeah.

Q: Well, that first meeting after Carol Nelson was handing out the pamphlets down there.

Allen: What?

Q: That was handing out the pamphlets down there.

Allen: Yeah, right. I don't remember what the pamphlets said. I don't have any memory. And I really don't remember—I don't think I went to a meeting before everybody who was interested were asked to come to a meeting with Landmarks, which we did, and that's where Tony Robins spoke and a couple of other people spoke. He said, "This is what we need." First, Landmarks has to know what they're doing, they really do, and they have wonderful people.

Q: So, they were working with you guys?

Allen: Well, they said, "This is what we need." So, our whole effort was to help them to designate the whole area and you would have heard from Hal Bromm the whole story about how he was convinced, thought then and still thinks that it should be one historic district with no empty spaces in the middle. I wasn't sure. I think that—I know that the head of the Landmarks Commission and the chief commissioner at that time was a man named David [F.M.] Todd, who I happened to know well because a very close friend of mine was a friend of his. And we got to know David Todd and his wife very well over the succeeding years, and he was the head of the Commission, and he felt there was a political problem in designating too much. He was acutely concerned with Landmarks not overstepping itself.

Q: And what year was this again you were saying?

Allen: This would have been in the late '80s.

Q: Okay.

Allen: Yeah, I can't remember when his years were but he was the commissioner when Tribeca West was designated, which was the first. He said, "There are too many areas in this general neighborhood that are not worth preserving." For example, the principle gap is around Finn Square, which is where Varick Street and West Broadway come together, where the Franklin Street Subway Station is. There were a couple of wonderful buildings there, but the rest is just nothing. And he said, "If you try to include that people are going to say this isn't worth preserving." So, he said, "We have to start with something solid." And the rest of Tribeca West, what they did designate, you couldn't argue with it, it's just perfect.

For example, though, he didn't go below Reade Street for the Tribeca West Historic District. A lot of people thought that the district should go all the way down to Chambers Street and the Landmarks' people said, "No, those buildings aren't good enough." So, he was the one who said that it should be just—we should have maybe four districts, which is what we ended up with. Then, he retired and then I guess Laurie Beckelman was the chairman or chairwoman or chairperson of the Landmarks Commission ran the other three, the Tribeca South [Historic District], Tribeca East [Historic District] and Tribeca North [Historic District]. Of those, the North District is not as valuable or is not as kind of amazing and impressive as the others are. It's just got a lot of big buildings there and a few of them are wonderful, but there are a lot of buildings that aren't that interesting up there in Tribeca North, it's just kind of in the rest of the area. But, Tribeca East is the one that has the great textile buildings, the great Italianate and marble fronted and cast iron buildings.

There were no cast iron buildings with complete cast iron fronts in Tribeca West, but in Tribeca East and Tribeca South there are several that are just kind of, you know, out of the books, I mean, you just couldn't get any better ones. And there's one cast iron building, which is not in any of the districts, and that's designed by [James] Bogardus and that's at 75 Murray Street, and that's not in any of the districts, but that's an individual landmark. But then, in the district, there's another building at, what is it, on White Street. Is it White Street? No, no, excuse me, Leonard Street that's designed by Bogardus.

And then, we have probably the most remarkable building of all is in the Tribeca South district and that's the Cary Building at the northwest corner of Church [Street] and Chambers. It's just amazing. I mean, its got shutters that are concealed that pull down over the windows, and some of them still work, and it's got this marvelous cartouche at the top and all this stuff done in cast iron, you know, with flourishes and everything, swirls that says Cary Building. Wonderful.

But there are no complete cast iron buildings in the western part. They were still doing first floor facades in cast iron when they built buildings in the western part, which are otherwise Romanesque or something else. Our building has cast iron on the first and second floors, but most buildings would have it just on the first floor with columns, cast iron columns, Corinthian, but otherwise above that it would be brick or mostly brick.

Q: Okay. So, it sounds like the Landmarks Commission was pretty friendly.

Allen: Well, they wanted to designate it. They felt—this you'd have to ask them, I mean, I don't know, I mean, it was my impression that they wanted very much to designate, but they were very careful. Oh, to go back to what David Todd said because we saw him at a party at some point during this whole process and he told me how—he knew that I was involved in all this and he told me how concerned he was because this was before the Supreme Court decision that saved Grand Central Station.

Q: Okay.

Allen: Remember, who was it? The great powerhouse architect who did the Whitney, he designed a high rise to go over Grand Central Station.

Q: Oh, yeah.

Allen: That's when Jackie [Jacqueline Kennedy] Onassis got involved and everybody, big names. It went all the way to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court said that New York did have the power to designate, to forbid something like that. After that, everybody at Landmarks breathed a great sigh of relief because you never know. You know, you can designate something and somebody can come along and say, no, that was a big mistake let's appeal it or, I mean, repeal it. Yeah.

Q: So, they were a little more aggressive or confident—

Allen: Yeah.

Q: —when it got to Tribeca.

Allen: Of course, I mean, Hal Bromm continues to work to get more areas designated and he still thinks that it was a grave mistake to leave these gaps between the districts, particularly all around Finn Square. Finn Square isn't worth preserving. It's a fascinating story, which I won't go into because it's not relevant why it's called Finn Square, but anyway, there are a lot of good stories around Tribeca.

Q: I wanted to ask you about the Tribeca Organization.

Allen: You mean Carol DeSaram?

Q: The one established after September Eleventh [attacks]?

Allen: Oh, the Tribeca Organization.

Q: Yeah.

Allen: Oh, yeah.

Q: Are you involved with it?

Allen: Well, I did some work for them. They had funding problems; they didn't really last very long. This is the one—yeah, their business was to try to firm up Tribeca as a commercial destination and commercial area and I've forgotten now the names of the—there were two guys who were running it. One of them is a sculptor or something whose name I can't remember. He's European. I mean, he speaks with an accent, he's not European. He speaks with an accent. I can't remember his name. A hell of a nice guy. Then there was another guy who was much more sort of the business thing. They tried to put out—they had a website at one point and I wrote a bunch of things for their website, which was architectural history I think, but they ran out of money—they no longer exist if that's the organization you're talking about.

Q: I suppose it would have been. Yeah. So, that branding approach, it didn't work out for them?

Allen: Well, they ran out of money. I mean, after a while they couldn't raise any more money. Maybe the problem seemed to get solved.

Q: Okay.

Allen: I think there still is a problem in that the commercial aspect of Tribeca is not anywhere near as successful as the residential aspect. Everybody wants to live there, but how many people want to open a store there? For example, our building is a six-story building, it's the one that was a cheese warehouse, and the first floor is a store. My wife and I are co-owners of the store, not because we want to, but because when it became available for sale the guy who converted the

building said he didn't want to own it any more. So he said, "I can sell it to anybody, but does anybody in the building want to own it?" And another person in the building, she and my wife and I decided that we really should buy it if we could because then we could protect the building, because we were afraid that there would be some kind of an operation there that we wouldn't like, like having a restaurant. We didn't want a restaurant there. There were two delicatessens that were there and they would do cooking and we didn't like that a bit, but we wanted to control who was in the building, so we felt the best thing is to own it.

Then, later on, the other person pulled out, she moved out of town, and we bought her share so now we're the landlords. I hate being a landlord; it's terrible. You know, there you are you're *[unclear]* you know, it's terrible. But, it's actually—there have been times when we were looking for a tenant and it was hard to find a tenant. I don't know that it would be any more because things are different now from the way they were ten years ago. We finally found—there was a woman that I heard about who ran a children's shoe store on the Upper West Side and might be looking to have a branch in Tribeca. I called her up and she came down and looked at it and she thought it was terrific and she's there now. The store on the Upper West Side has folded, so this is her only store now, but she's doing very well. There are an awful lot of children in Tribeca, you've never seen so many, I mean, the birthrate is just incredible. You see any kind of a community gathering and everybody there is this high or less. It's amazing, all these little people.

I remember when there was one time when some outfit was thinking of moving there—I think it was a place that was going to sell coffee. We said coffee is okay. But the man—one of the partners came and sat on our loading dock, we have a loading dock, loading platform, and he sat

there all day long and counted the people who came by and he said at the end day he said there's not enough people passing by. So, he said, “No. No, thanks." There was a long time before the children's shoe store really was completely secure. It is now. Well, she's very smart. She now sells not only children's shoes but children's clothing and hats and toys and stuff too, so it's very good. With this phenomenal birthrate, she's doing fine.

But, it's not being developed the way you might think, the whole area. For instance, suddenly we discovered about five or six years ago that Duane Park area is now an antique center, furniture center. I mean, there are about five furniture stores and they like to be together. I always thought that you're better off with your competitor not across the street, but in that business, you get people referred. And you say, "I'm looking for a desk, a Nineteenth Century piece or something or other maple table." And you haven't got one and you say, you might try so and so, because then the so and so will send somebody to you. So, we now have these things work. Well, who would have predicted that antique stores or modern furnitures stores, whatever it is, would do well here. It's very strange.

Q: So, does that make it kind of a destination area for people?

[INTERRUPTION]

Allen: Is this going to be transcribed by somebody?

Q: Yes.

Allen: Because I hope they can do it. I'm very dubious about transcriptions because there was a time when, I think it was *American Heritage Magazine* was doing interviews with influential and important people, so I undertook to do one of these things and I happened to know the man, because I had known him in years past, and this was a doctor who was, at this particular point, was the head of the Johnson and Johnson [Family of Companies] Foundation. They give a lot of money for medical research and stuff, and he's a very interesting guy, and he had a lot of interesting things to say about medicine and healthcare and so forth. They said, "Oh, we're going to do—" They gave me a thing like this and I handed it into them and I got the transcript and it was unusable because the person typing the thing, putting it on paper or whatever, didn't understand a lot of the concepts so there was a lot of stuff that was garbled. So, I said, "I'd be much better off—" In fact, I hardly used it at all because I had taken notes, so it was much easier for me to follow my own notes and remember what the guy had said then to read what this person thought had been said. So, anyway, best of luck.

Q: Well, you can leave them a message right here if you want to.

Allen: What?

Q: You can leave them a message right here if you want to, "Do the transcription properly."

Allen: Okay.

Q: I'm sure they'll do—

Allen: Where were we, I forget?

Q: I just had a couple more questions for you, I guess. So, how do you think—if you could go back, is there anything that you think you'd change about the historic designation process?

Allen: About what?

Q: The historic designation of Tribeca?

Allen: I don't know. I'm not sure. Do you mean—was it—

Q: Did the approach—?

Allen: Did I think it went well, is that what you mean?

Q: Yes.

Allen: Yeah, well, I think it was fine. I think they did very, very well. The designation guides that they put out, have you ever seen one of them?

Q: Yes.

Allen: It's incredible. It's a bible. They have everything. I have all of them because I helped them on all of the areas. I took photographs—well, actually, the photographing was done in two sections, two waves. First of all, they needed a photographic record of every building in Tribeca and you say that's not very much. Well, it turns out there are ninety-eight blocks. Big deal, you know. No, I took a lot of pictures. I was always snapping pictures and I had some help on that. And then, when they were ready to designate, they had to have a record of the building as it looked when it was designated so that they can always say, "Oh, I see you've changed the window here and you can't do that." And all that stuff. So, I did all that.

But, because I have done all that work for them, I got a free copy of all the designation guides, and people when I write about these buildings, and people say, how do you know all about that? And my answer, I just happen to have a secret source. It's incredible. I look stuff up all the time. I mean, I'm going to go home and look up Ephraim *[phonetic]* what's his name from 171 because I didn't know about him, but they'll have him. He'll be in there.

Q: That's actually where I got it.

Allen: Oh, okay.

Q: That was kind of my idea, if they've got the designation on places now and the height requirements and everything, if that had been in place when they put that department store on it

obviously that Federal building would have been altered, but then the story wouldn't have changed with the building.

Allen: I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you're saying. What are you talking about the Stewart Store?

Q: Yeah.

Allen: Yeah.

Q: I guess the idea was if the landmarks had been in place like they are today, then no one would have ever altered that Federal building, and then wouldn't have had that added layer of history, but it wouldn't have been altered. Do you see what I'm saying?

Allen: No, I don't remember. What are you saying about the Federal building? Oh, you mean whatever had been there.

Q: Right.

Allen: Oh, yeah, it's like Mrs. Astor and her house.

Q: Exactly.

Allen: Yeah, same thing, right. Sure.

Q: So, that's what I was kind of asking.

Allen: Well, this is what my quarrel really with the super preservationists, Hal Bromm is a prime example, but there's another fellow who works with him whose name I can't remember. They were so gung-ho and it's old it's got to be saved. I said, "No, old may be bad. There's a lot of junk around." I think they were right for instance to stop—to put the dividing line in Tribeca West at Reade Street and even part of Reade Street is not designated; the line goes up around the middle of the block. As a matter of fact, there was an architect named John [L.] Petrarca who unfortunately died about ten years ago at the age of fifty-something. A wonderful guy. He had cancer and died. But, he constructed his own townhouse on Reed Street, and it's a cast iron front modern building, and it's absolutely lovely. He couldn't have built that because he had to tear down the existing building, but that was not protected so he could do that and he did his own building and three others I think, they were all over the road there not too far from Greenwich Street on Reed. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure it's cast iron, it may be aluminium or something, but the entire façade was made in one piece and brought in on a couple of trucks and put up like that and bolted.

Q: Like a barn raising.

Allen: Yeah, right. Everybody was there watching when it was installed it was great. But, that couldn't have been built.

Q: So, do you think that's an appropriate development?

Allen: Yeah, sure, sure. Well, he designed a lot of buildings now that are there in that general area that are modern. There's one on Greenwich Street between Duane and Jay Street that he did, completely modern but it works fine.

Q: So, what do you think is appropriate for development in the area?

Allen: Well, sure, who's to say what's appropriate. Most things, if they're well designed they're appropriate, that's what I think. The thing is you can't—you start imitating then it's tricky. If you're slavishly imitating something then you haven't done anything; you just rebuilt the same old building. But, the good architects will take a general idea of how you work with space and use that general idea. If that particular idea was what guided the Romanesque Revival architects, they'd use that same idea—use arches maybe—then you've got something good. But, I'm not an architect so I don't really know, but I'm fascinated by contemporary stuff that shows kind of awareness of what the tradition was and how you can take the tradition and then change it a little bit and you get great stuff.

Q: So, what do you—?

Allen: Are you studying to be an architect or what?

Q: I don't know anymore.

Allen: What are you doing, I mean, which way are you heading in your studies?

Q: I'm finishing up a Masters in Science and Historic Preservation at Pratt now.

Allen: Oh, I see, so it's preservation.

Q: Yeah.

Allen: Oh, I see, but not as an architect or an engineer.

Q: No.

Allen: No. Okay.

Q: But maybe I should do—

Allen: Sure.

Q: Or I was an archeologist for a while.

Allen: You what?

Q: I was an archeologist for a while.

Allen: Oh, really! Oh, boy.

Q: So, maybe back to that.

Allen: On digs?

Q: Yeah.

Allen: Oh, wow. Yeah, I've known people on digs. That requires patience that I would not have all those little paintbrushes and all that stuff.

Q: And then the oil company with the backhoe waiting to—

Allen: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Q: Well, it's relaxing.

Allen: Right.

Q: So, what do you think—how do you think Tribeca is doing now?

Allen: Well, Tribeca has now become so fancy that it's kind of hard to—when we moved in we thought we were moving to the frontier, and in a way it was a frontier then, but boy it ain't a frontier now. The frontier now I would say is the west twenties around the High Line; that's the frontier right now. That's changing remarkably. Tribeca has already changed now. It's not going to change much more. It's already gone through its changing. These things they go in waves depending on economic forces, and development, and depending on where you can build because the city is going to keep expanding. But Tribeca, I don't know what would happen now in Tribeca, except that it would become even fancier then it is because it's so convenient, geographically convenient, and the buildings are so great people want to live there. They don't necessarily want to work there unless they work at home, of course, then that's fine. There are a lot of people who are working at home, you know, computer businesses and stuff. But, I don't know how it would develop any further because I don't know which way it would go. I mean, it can't get much more expensive, it's already—I mean, the money these people spend is amazing.

Every year I help to take—I'm part of a group called The Friends of Duane Park and Duane Park—you know Duane Park—and we take care of it and we raise money to pay for new plants and horticultural advice and other stuff. We have a loft tour every fall. We've had it now—we skipped a couple of years, we skipped 2001, for obvious reasons, and we skipped a year ago because we were kind of exhausted. But, most years we put it on and what we do is we persuade ten or twelve loft owners to allow people to come and visit their lofts on a designated day, it's almost always a Sunday in October, and it makes big money, a big bunch of money, so that does very well. But, one of the things that I do is my wife and I visit each loft in order to describe it

for the ticket that people get. What we have is, we have a poster that we take, and I've taken the picture for the poster most of the years, and the poster is about this big, it's a big thing, and on the back of it is a map showing where all the lofts are and a description of each one. My wife and I write the descriptions and I take the photographs, and I photograph all of them. So, we get to visit them all and we come and say, "Oh, wow. Jesus Christ it's amazing." I mean you say, "Where do these people get the money," it's amazing.

A couple of ones—last year there was a loft and finally the wife couldn't do it at the last minute because she had a family problem and had to go and visit her family in Canada because somebody was ill or something, but now I think it's going to be on the loft tour this year. It's a formerly commercial, totally commercial building, on Hudson across from the exit roads from the Holland Tunnel. You know where it comes and makes a circle. They are on the tenth floor or something, and it's all factory stash and it's all white and pristine inside, and the furniture is all fantastic, and it's all bright red and bright blue. You're looking and you say, "Wow, Christ."

There's some area where they have a bookcase or something that comes up in the middle of this space to separate one part from another, and the side of the bookcase it goes up like this, and then it goes like this, and then it goes up like, and then it might curve like this. That's the side, that's the profile of this thing. So, they have a—or maybe it's the wall of the loft that has that thing, but they have a sliding door inside this thing and it's all very heavy and it moves perfectly and it comes—and here's the—the thing is supposed to fit into it like this, and the door is made like this so it comes and fits exactly, and looks as if there's no sliding door there at all. And you

say, "Wow, that's really building." Well, I mean, there goes $10,000 right there, easily. Who's got $10,000? Well, I don't know and there are lots like that.

Q: So, that sounds quite a bit different from the artists moving in there.

Allen: That's right. Well, we always try to have an artist loft on the tour and I'm trying to get one for this year. We feel it's important to have something that says—well, this was originally an artist colony and we had a wonderful one last year. Some of the people—several people who are friends of ours who took the tour just kind of are ho-hum about these fancy places but they said, "That artist's loft, what a wonderful place." This particular one, it's in the same building as the Odeon Restaurant and he moved in, in 1971 or something like that, and he's never touched the walls. He's never cleaned them, painted them, anything. They are exactly the way when he moved in. And it has this wonderful kind of decayed look but it's really quite nice, you know.

He was sitting there and he had some friends in to kind of accompany him while people were visiting him that afternoon and a friend of ours went in and said, "Gee, it was Paris in the 1950s." But, it's true, it's harder to find those people because most of the artists who are there either they've got money that will support them or they are very successful. I mean, Brice Marden has a studio on White Street that was on the tour four or five years ago, it was beautiful. I think it's Brice Marden, a sculptor—I can't remember, but a huge, huge studio.

We had another artist loft this past fall, besides the one I was talking about. There was one that's owned by a couple and she is a sculptor and he is a painter and they have two studios, one

downstairs on the main floor and then they also have an upstairs floor. It's quite a large establishment. Wow, you don't find those things on the Upper East Side. It's nothing like that up there.

Q: No. So, the economics there seem to—

Allen: Well, how many artists can afford to buy a building for two million dollars? Well, not the building, the space for two million dollars, that's what you pay. The second floor of our building was originally zoned for commercial and then the zoning was changed so it's now residential and the person who owned it when we all moved in, in 1982, she probably paid $150,000 or her husband then would have. It would have been the cheapest space in the building. She sold it about seven or eight years ago for $1.1 million, something like that.

A guy bought it and we weren't quite sure what the heck he was like, what sort of a person he was, but he said he was looking forward to living there and it turned out he was just going to turn it over. He spent probably two hundred thousand dollars or three hundred thousand dollars making it over. Putting in new flooring, new everything, new facilities, everything was new. And in the process he alienated just about everybody else in the building because he was not trustworthy. He sold it for $1.9 million. Think of that markup. Then he went to California and was never heard from again. The people who bought it for $1.9 million, the husband works for McKinsey [& Company], so he's doing okay, and I think his family had a bunch of money.

But then, they had to move out about a year ago, that couple had to move out, they moved to Texas for one reason or another and I said, "Now, it's going to be interesting to see whether this space will get anywhere near $1.9 million." Well, it did and this guy bought it and he has a bunch of money. He works for some financial firm and he's got the money and he doesn't seem to be more then twenty-seven years old. He's very lucky and he's very smart too. But the amount of money around this is just amazing.

Of course, this is the interesting thing, of course about Manhattan real estate, the Manhattan real estate was affected much less then any other area in the housing bubble and that whole thing in the recession, because space is in such demand in Manhattan. Not so much in the other boroughs, I guess, but Manhattan the rents and sales figures apparently have been pretty steady.

Q: I guess, yeah. I live in Brooklyn.

Allen: No, but the money is amazing.

Q: Well, that's kind of all the questions I had.

Allen: Oh, well, that's interesting.

Q: If there's anything you wanted to add?

Allen: Well, I could keep on talking about Tribeca forever you just had to start me, you know.

Q: Well, there you go; it sounds like just an average working class family where the kid wouldn't be able to move in there.

Allen: No, you wouldn't. An average family wouldn't be able to, no.

Q: So, where do you see the neighborhood going now?

Allen: Well, it just becomes richer and richer.

Q: Yeah.

Allen: Yeah. It will become just like the Upper East Side, you know, like where we are here. Except that this is not the same because it never had any kind of protection until quite recently, so that it's got all these big buildings now. You feel much more that you're in kind of a beehive of high rises and you look out your window and there's another window right there. Whereas you look out the window in Tribeca and you're going to be able to see four or five blocks maybe.

Q: So, do you think that's one of Tribeca's greatest assets?

Allen: I think because of landmarks it will get even more choice all the time.

Q: All right. So, it sounds like landmarks really protected it.

Allen: Oh, I think so, yeah. When people say, "How come Tribeca is so solid and so attractive?" I mean, somebody said that the zip code 10013 is the fourth wealthiest zip code in the United States, something like that. And that's because it's all residential, you see, I mean, there's more money in one-zero-zero—New York 22, 10022, the lower part of the East Sixties and Seventies that's got more money per square foot, but there's also a lot of industry, office buildings, so a lot of people don't live there. So, per square foot, you see, it wouldn't be—the net worth of the occupants wouldn't be so high because they're not living there. That's my understanding of it, but in Tribeca everybody is living there. But anyway, why did I get into that? I forget what my train of thought was.

Q: So, what's this here? This is your book?

Allen: Oh, yes, this is the book that we did. Hal Bromm probably showed it to you. What happened was that Hal decided that in order to get popular support for landmarking, which the Landmarks Commission was acutely aware of, they didn't want people to be defying them and saying, "No, you can't designate this area." He said we need to have a book or something. So, we started with planning a pamphlet, sort of glorified pamphlet, maybe sixteen pages or something like that, and then it seemed as if we kept getting—the project kept on growing and we thought there was more and more to say. So, then Hal said—I think the idea came from him—he said, we should have an art auction, because he's an art dealer, and he knows a lot of artists, and he's a great—he's very efficient, he's a real driver, you know. And he said, okay, let's have an art auction. So, we did and the art auction raised something like fifty thousand dollars. We had

figured on hoping to raise twenty thousand dollars or twenty-five thousand dollars and suddenly we had all this money and so we said, okay. Now, let's do the book we should do. So, we hired Andrew Dolkart to write the text.

And then the book was—Andrew Dolkart wrote the text and I edited it, I was the editor of the book in effect, and the layouts were all made by Hal and Carol De Saram and me and the designer of the book, Connie Baldwin, who is now living in California, she was a very good designer. So, we made all these things and then I took a lot of these pictures. You've seen this book?

Q: I haven't.

Allen: You haven't. Oh.

Q: No.

Allen: Well, see here are the Romanesque Revival buildings.

Q: All right.

Allen: Here, this is the building—the 171 Duane is over here. This is 165 Duane. It's a fantastic building. Every other floor gets—the window design changes. It's just wonderful. You could just

sit there and look at that building and it gets better the more you look at it and it's by Stephen Decatur Hatch.

Q: And this is all original up here, this mansard roof and the stool top?

Allen: Yeah. Well, there used to be a bigger tower on the corner.

Q: Okay.

Allen: This is the best. This is my favorite Romanesque Revival building. This is the way it was when it was first built. This is Varick Street and this is Franklin Street and Franklin Street is filled—that block is filled with great Romanesque buildings. Where is the Carrere and Hastings building?

Q: Do you have any secrets to taking photos?

Allen: It's here somewhere. What?

Q: Do you have any secrets to taking photos?

Allen: What was that?

Q: Do you have any secrets to taking photos, tricks of the trade?

Allen: Oh, here's the Carrere and Hastings building. It was originally—this was enlarged and now it's like this. This is the Nobu Restaurant, a very fancy Japanese restaurant that's on the first floor.

Q: Oh, okay.

Allen: But this is a lovely building. That's a good Classic Revival. That's Carrere and Hastings. So, we made all the layouts. The one thing that I did get when I took all these pictures—oh, I guess it wasn't for the book, I guess it was when I was doing the documenting for the Landmarks—I had the use of what I call parallax correction lens. Do you know about that?

Q: Mm-mm.

Allen: You see how this picture—when you take a picture like this from the street looking up the lines converge. This is not parallel with this that's got to kind of come together because of the way optics works.

Q: Like in *[unclear]?*

Allen: But you have probably seen, if you've seen a photographer working with a very fancy, one of those cameras—a photographer that has a hood and he can raise the front of the camera up

like that. So, if you're taking a picture and you can turn a screw and raise—if it's a bellows camera—you can raise the front like this and then these things become parallel.

Q: Oh.

Allen: And there's a lens that they make for Nikon, that Nikon makes, which is a parallax correction lens, which I used for most of the documenting that I did for Landmarks. It happens there is a guy who lives in our building, he and his brother run a photographic rental outfit. So, if you want a fancy camera or a fancy lens just for the weekend, you can get it from them, and that's his business. And he gave us a special rate, so I kept borrowing that lens and taking it. It's wonderful, you look through the view finder—this is a single lens reflex camera, so you look through and see the actual picture, and you turn the screw and you can see the lines going this way, and it's sharp all the way from top to bottom, so it was great.

We had an arrangement—there was so much photography and the processing was all done by an outfit on East Forty-Third Street that somebody knew somebody. They said, "Oh, sure, we'll just take care of all your processing." I would hand in like three or four rolls of film after a weekend of photographing, I would hand it in to this guy or somebody in his business and they would send it back. I think what we got—we didn't get contact prints back we got four by six prints of everything, or five by seven that's what they gave me. So there's a bunch of dupes that I still have and they were very sharp.

Q: Do they have—that was for the—?

Allen: And those pictures are now, the ones that I took and turned over to Landmarks and they are in the official file.

Q: Okay.

Allen: That's what you look at when you say, "Gees, here's 36 White Street and somebody's done something to it." Then, they go back and look at my picture to see what it was like in 1991, or whenever Tribeca East was designated, and then they can enforce the rule.

Q: And they have all the negatives?

Allen: Yeah, I think they have the negatives too. I'm sure I gave—yeah, I'm sure I got the negatives back and handed it—I handed the whole thing into them, yeah.

Q: So, this book, this is to generate interest in the area or to document?

Allen: Well, the Andrew Dolkart text is wonderful. In fact, I use it as a source because this book that I'm doing now is an illustrated history of Tribeca. I have a whole chapter on the architecture, which just repeats what I talk about in my tour, but I use him as a source because he really knows what he's doing. I don't know what I'm doing. I just write what somebody else says. I think I took this. It says back here in the picture credits. Where are we here? Oh, yeah, picture credits. You see, I keep appearing here.

Q: Oh, yeah.

Allen: Well, I'm here, and here, and here, I'm all over the place, yeah. Somebody called me, a neighbor who I know very well, a woman who lives across the street from us in that wonderful building 165 Duane. She called up and she said, "I wonder—we've had this idea it would be nice to, in our hall between the different apartments on this floor, wouldn't it be nice to run some enlargements of historical pictures of Tribeca." She said, "Do you know anything about where I would get them." I said, "I could tell you everything. I know where they all came from." I'd have to look it up, but they come from the Historical Society, and the Museum of [the City of] New York, and the files of the Municipal Archives, and they come from public library collections. It's just amazing.

The public library collections are amazing. There's a wonderful thing you can look up under NYPL [New York Public Library] digital gallery. Do you know about that? Isn't it amazing! And I was looking through and I was looking up something and I came upon a picture that I think I had seen before and I said, "This is extraordinary. I've never used it in my articles so I'm going to write about it for next month." It's a picture that shows St. John's Square, which is, you know, where the traffic turnaround is. That was originally St. John's Square before Commodore Vanderbilt built the train shed there. And this is picture—it's a drawing that would have been made sometime in the 180s and it shows it in the wintertime with snow on the ground and kids playing in the park. It's a lovely picture. Well, there it is. I guess I might have seen it before, but I

forgot about it. So, I'll go back and send a little message to my editor saying, "It's another month that I can do something for you."

Q: So, you write an article for—?

Allen: Well, I do, yeah. I can't remember what I've told or I haven't told you. In '94 this couple, they were just thinking of starting a neighborhood newspaper, and it would be a monthly, it's called the *Tribeca Trib*, and they started it then. Before they started, they came to see me and they knew that I had been involved with the historic designation effort and they also knew that I was a published writer, so I was presumably more or less reliable and understands deadlines and stuff. And they said, "Would you like to write for us?" I said, "Yes, it sounds like it would be a lot of fun." And they said, "What would you like to write about?" I said, "I'd love to write about the history of Tribeca because I know that it's very interesting." So, they said, "Fine."

There have been times when several months would pass where I wouldn't have anything, but mostly every month or every other month or something, I would have a new article. The kind of thing I would write about—this is an interesting thing the way these things happen—I met an artist at—do you remember this guy I was talking about who moved into Tribeca in 1959 and who is probably the oldest living—he's been there longer than anybody. He had a party a couple of months ago in his loft. He's on the fifth floor, there's no elevator so it's a long ways up. But anyway, we got up there and I was busily pouring wine into myself to make up for having done all that climbing, and there was this guy there who was an artist named Harry Bogdos. We got talking about old buildings and stuff and he said he thought he had a picture of the Horn and

Hardart Restaurant that was once on the southeast corner of Chambers and West Broadway. And I said, "Christ, I heard there was a Horn and Hardart there and I'd love to see a picture of it." So, he said, "I have a bunch of pictures that I took way back, around 1970." And I said, "Wow, that's fantastic."

So, I went to his loft, and we sat down, and he had made a computer disk with about twenty-five, thirty pictures on them and most of them weren't any good at all, they were just snapshots, but they were interesting. The Horn and Hardart picture didn't work out because it was a shot of the store's window in which he and his wife were reflected. So, it was really a portrait of them reflected and nothing on it said Horn and Hardart, so what good was that I couldn't use it at all. But one of the other pictures—this was in 1970 and this was that whole area west of Greenwich Street, which is now the Independence Plaza and College of Insurance and now Barnes and Noble is there, everything, it was all open and empty except for a few buildings. One of them he took a picture of and I came across it and I said, "Jesus, this is the Lang Stores [Bogardus Building]." Do you know about the Laing, which had the cast iron front designed by [James] Bogardus and the building had to be torn down so the Landmarks saved the cast iron pieces and kept them in a vacant lot under lock and key with barbed wired and stuff around, and the stuff was stolen and sold for scrap. You ever heard of that?

Q: I did.

Allen: You must have heard of that; it was a great tragedy. Well, so here it was and I said, "Hey, I can write an article about that," so I did. That's the way these things come about.

Q: All right.

Allen: Yeah. And I don't do any articles unless there's a picture. The editor said, "No, if you have an interesting story and there's not a picture I'm not going to run it."

Q: That's your decision or the editor's?

Allen: What?

Q: That's your decision or the editor's?

Allen: The editor's; that's his policy. He says, "No, you've got to have a picture." Sometimes we can dream up a picture somehow. But anyway, this woman who came and said, "I would like to get some enlargements." And I said, "This is a bigger subject then you know." So she and a friend of hers are going to come and visit me sometime, maybe next week, and I'm going to show her this book and I'm going to show her the other book that we've done that is called *Tales of Old Tribeca: [An Illustrated History of New York's Triangle Below Canal]*, which is articles from the newspaper, and then I have a lot of other stuff too. I have a lot of wonderful pictures. All they're probably going to want is eight or ten pictures, but I've got something like four hundred pictures that I can show them.

Q: So, what happens with that magazine, is that magazine local for the neighborhood the Tribeca?

Allen: The paper?

Q: Yeah.

Allen: It's a monthly newspaper. Well, it's for Tribeca, but Carl Glassman, the editor, tends to think of Tribeca in a rather enlarged sense. He'll do stories about things that were not really in Tribeca, but close by. He considers the whole downtown area, not Wall Street as such, but Wall Street as a community where people are living down there. There are issues down there and things happening to those people, and what's happening at the World Trade Center, and stuff, and all that. He would consider that part of his—that's part of the subject area. It's very hard to write a neighborhood newspaper because you have to know what's going to be of interest to the people that they haven't read in the daily or seen on television. It's got to be something different. He's a really good journalist. He has it figured out. Well, there are so many interesting people in Tribeca, so many interesting things going on.

There's an outfit that I learned about, about three or four months ago, through a person I met at a party, and it's called Ship Lore and Model Society *[phonetic]*. It's people who are nutty about ships and every kind of ocean going or sea going or lake steamers, all that stuff, these people just love that stuff. I went to one of their meetings and said I would like to become a member and I thought it was fascinating. I said to the woman who is kind of the secretary I said, "Gee I wonder

if you might—it might be very interesting if the *Tribeca Trib* could do an article about you." She said, "I don't think so. I don't think we'd want that." She said, "We're doing okay." And I said, "How long have you been going?" She said, "Eighty-one years." So, they don't need us.

But, where we meet there's an outfit—what's the street above White Street, it begins with a B? Anyway, it's up there not too far from the Tribeca Trib office, and we meet in this outfit called Art In General, and the head of Art In General—I don't know what they do—he lives in the building on the fifth floor, and he has the most remarkable model train set you have ever seen. It takes up half the loft. The rails are this far apart, and the cars are this long, and he must have a couple of hundred cars, and he has several trains going at once, and they're all going around and changing tracks, unbelievable. Well, I told Carl the editor I said, "You want to ask what's his name about doing an article." And he said, "Oh, yeah, I think I've heard about that set." I said, "It's the most remarkable train set in the world and its right half a block from you." Well, all these things go on. How does anybody know what's going on behind closed doors, you know, all sorts of remarkable things.

Q: So, that's kind of—

Allen: So.

Q: All right. I'm out of questions.

Allen: Anyway, this thing I forget how many copies we printed, but we may have gone back to get it reprinted once, but it's hard to find now, it's just about sold out.

Q: Okay.

Allen: And it did help us a lot.

Q: It generated a lot of interest?

Allen: Oh, yeah. Sure.

Q: Okay.

Allen: It's funny, it turned out that the—I don't know if anybody else has mentioned this, but the big opposition to landmarking when we were involved in this thing was the real estate interests.

Q: Yeah.

Allen: They thought we were going to kill real estate, you know, nothing would ever happen with real estate in Tribeca if it was designated. Because all those guys, the real estate people, they all were waiting until they could tear down their old buildings and build high rises, you see.

Q: Right.

Allen: They didn't realize that their property is probably much more valuable now than it would have been if they had just torn down the buildings and put up high rises.

Q: Absolutely.

Allen: Really. You can't get property much more valuable then what's there right now because the demand is so high. They wouldn't know that. They were fighting us to the bitter end.

Q: What kind of things did they do?

Allen: Well, they were all owners of buildings, which were all falling apart and had some commercial enterprise going in, but then the commercial enterprise might have moved out and then they had a lot of vacant space and they had no concept of the whole idea of this thing being so attractive, the buildings being so solid and so attractive, and not being allowed to change, which is the critical matter, that they would make their fortune. They had no idea. They couldn't understand that.

Q: So, did they go to the Landmarks Preservation Commission and—?

Allen: Oh, yeah, they testified against it, sure, at public hearings, yeah. And the Landmarks people said, "Thank you very much. Yeah, it's very interesting to hear your side of the story." But they wanted it designated of course.

Q: Right.

Allen: Is there something I'm supposed to sign here?

Q: Oh, yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]