LEADING THE MOVEMENT:

INTERVIEWS WITH PRESERVATIONIST LEADERS IN NEW YORK'S CIVIC SECTOR

The Reminiscences of

Margaret Moore

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Margaret Moore conducted by Interviewer Mathew Coody on March 8, 2012. This interview is part of the *Leading the Movement:Interviews with Preservationist Leaders in New York's Civic Sector* oral history project.

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.

Margaret Moore became involved in historical preservation when a building in her neighborhood was in danger of being demolished for new development. Her interest in Ladies' Mile led to nearly a decade long effort to landmark the district. Having strong connections to the fashion industry and media, she was able to bring many high profile celebrities into the effort, as well publications such as The New York Times. She extensively researched the history of the district for the proposal to the Landmark Preservation Commission. She speaks to how she used her book, End of the Road for Ladies' Mile and photograph slides of the area's architecture to enlist interest in the preservation effort.

Margaret Moore's interest in the Ladies' Mile—a historic turn-of-the-century shopping district—prompted her to lobby the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the site. Concerned with the rapid decay of buildings around Midtown Manhattan and the Flatiron District, which encompasses much of the Ladies' Mile's historic buildings, Moore launched a series of advocacy campaigns with the goal of designation. Thanks to her strong ties to the fashion industry and print media in New York, Moore's campaign was successful. Her umbrella organization, Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, encompassed several other preservation groups and created a powerful coalition against real estate interests. Moore became an expert on the architecture of the Ladies' Mile through extensive research and public outreach. She was one of the original board members of the Historic Districts Council.

Transcriptionist: Jackie Thipthorpe | Session: 1

Interviewee: Margaret Moore | Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Mathew Coody | Date: March 8, 2012

Q: We have a lot of stuff in the office—Jack Taylor's archives. He is so organized and he has so much stuff to give. I was wondering what you have in terms of content?

Moore: I kept all of that stuff and I'm trying to put it into a scrapbook. I remember all the letters, because people don't write on their letterhead anymore. There was a reporter from the *Post and Courier*, that's our local newspaper in Charleston, interviewed me when we received an award from the Institute for Classical Architecture & Classical America and he was shocked by all these letters because he realized this is historic.

Q: It's a lost art, letter writing.

Moore: A lost art. People took the time to write letters on gorgeous letterhead and to make carbon copies and send them to the [New York City] Landmarks Preservation Commission and to Jack and to me.

Q: The downside of that though is the boxes, and boxes, and boxes of papers instead of just a computer where you can save all the files.

Moore: I have an awful lot of paper from my computer. I download stuff.

Q: Well it's good to have a back-up of stuff, because you never know.

Moore: I'm dealing with overstuffed files right now.

Q: Right. What have you been doing in New York since you've been in?

Moore: Shopping.

Q: You've been living in Charleston right? How long will you be staying here?

Moore: Just until Sunday. I pop up.

Q: You came on a beautiful—it's supposed to stay nice through Sunday. It's a beautiful time. I'm sure it's even nicer down in Charleston.

Moore: Yes, I was dying to come to New York and this was the perfect excuse.

Q: I went down there—my roommate is from Charleston so I went down last fall, or two falls ago? It was so stunning. Are there nonstop flights between? We had to stop through Atlanta I thought.

Moore: They may try to route you that way , but there is a direct flight from Charleston to New York.

Q: It's so close but so different. The food there is so good.

Moore: It's wonderful. What I'm doing now, I cover the food scene for a local newspaper.

Q: That's not a bad job.

Moore: That's how I've gotten to know Danny [Meyer] so well. I interviewed him a few years ago, we put his photo in local paper. I quite often refer to him because he's a model of how to do it. We've become friends. I walked into Maialino about a year ago, he had just opened it, and he greets me—he was there, greeting me and everybody else. He is so human.

Q: That restaurant is great too.

Moore: Yes, it's wonderful. All of his restaurants—

Q: All of them are so good. And he's so hands on—I read an article about him—he's so hands on with all of them. He goes to every opening, every new restaurant, and pops in all the time to make sure everything is running well. He only hires the nicest employees.

Moore: And they keep track of everybody in their computer and they read it. I go into some of the local restaurants in Charleston and they haven't read their computer. They don't know what my favorite dish is and send it out. Which they do at the Union Square Café—send out little tastes of what they know you loved last time.

Q: I've never been to that one.

Moore: That was our restaurant when we were doing Ladies' Mile, because my husband's studio was just around the corner on Eighteenth Street. We would give slide shows to individuals who were on the Landmarks Commission or members of the press—people we wanted on our side—we would give them a slide show. Then we would go around the corner to Union Square Café because it was new and we got in easily. Nowadays you have to call a month ahead.

Q: That's so funny, well let's get started. To begin with, what was your background before you became interested or involved in historic preservation? Have you always been interested in preservation or did you become involved with preservation before the fight to protect Ladies' Mile [Historic District]?

Moore: I was involved with my neighborhood and what was going on. I became aware that I needed to know the architectural language. [James] Polshek was designing a building for my corner.

Q: Where were you living?

Moore: In the West Village. And he was designing a building for Sixth Avenue and Waverly Place and the neighborhood was up in arms. I then went to Columbia University to the Historic Preservation Department. I didn't get a degree, but I took a number of courses, like the Language of Classical Architecture, so that I would have some kind of background. I was an English major in college so those two courses at Columbia helped. Christabel Gough and I started going to the commission and sitting down there until midnight. It lasted late into the night.

Q: The commission does not go that late anymore.

Moore: Well, we lived across the street from each other so we could take a cab home together.

Q: She's still at the commission, Christabel. She's there for every hearing.

Moore: I know. She's fabulous. She was my inspiration. She was my mentor.

Q: Really?

Moore: Yes. Yes, she was. She understood how to do it. Her mother had been an activist, her father was a real estate developer, so she understood the psyches of both. I look to Christabel for guidance in how to frame testimony with facts not just opinions. Facts are so important.

Q: Very important, yes. What was Christabel doing at that point?

Moore: She hadn't begun *Village Views* yet. She began it soon after. She felt that we should do a book from the Ladies' Mile slideshow. Tony [Anthony C.] Wood had asked us to do a slideshow of architectural photographs of the neighborhood. We were friends and he knew that Truman Moore, my husband, was a photographer and we could do it. So we did it. But it was her idea to turn it into a book. She wanted it to be called *The Lost City*, and I sort of did too, but we didn't. It was like unearthing a lost city, because it had been the center of town, the center of everything in New York. It was just extraordinary because we didn't know that. We just thought they were rather gorgeous warehouse buildings. [We ended up calling the book *End of the Road for Ladies' Mile?]*

Q: There's a quote from you that said that you had first encountered the neighborhood in the late '70s because your husband had a studio there.

Moore: My husband had a studio there and I think he opened that studio in the '70s.

Q: But you both still lived in the Village at that point.

Moore: We lived in the Village, yes.

Q: So when you would go up to your husband's studio you became aware of the architecture?

Moore: We became aware of these gorgeous buildings. I went to a lecture at the Municipal Art Society and somebody there said, "You know, all those gorgeous buildings in Ladies' Mile are going to come down if somebody doesn't do something." Then I had an architect friend, he was a partner at Philip Johnson's firm, and he said, "All the short buildings in Ladies' Mile have been bought up. They're all going to be gone." So he activated us *[laughs]*.

Q: Right. So you were mobilized then?

Moore: Yes, we realized that this neighborhood was so intact. It didn't have any terrible interruptions in the context and that's important. Charleston has parts of the city that are intact, but as you know, there are some horrible mistakes in Charleston.

Q: That's very true. Then I read that Tony Wood, then chairman of the Historic Districts Council, became involved and also got you and your husband mobilized?

Moore: Yes. We became good friends. We were having the commissioners to dinner, many of them. Those that we felt were kindred spirits. One at a time. You never knew Elliot Willensky probably, but he and Tony [Anthony M.] Tung were very close and we became good social friends. Tony Tung has been a mentor too. I listened to the way he framed his arguments. He's very persuasive and relies on facts.

Q: Yes, he's very skilled.

Moore: Yes, he's extraordinary. He came to Charleston and helped save much of Charleston.

Q: He goes to Charleston a lot because he's involved with the *[unclear]*—

Moore: I mean Tony Tung. Tony Tung was our houseguest when there was a hearing at our Board of Architectural Review, we call it the BAR, and they were considering a new judicial center building that was going to overshadow all the three-story buildings on Broad Street. It was going to be huge. Tony got up there and he captivated the audience. The head of the Preservation Society [of Charleston] had come to us the day before. He said, "I'm not going to oppose it. It's a done deal. There's nothing we can do about it." He talked to us for hours one afternoon.

We go to this hearing and there's Tony carrying on about how you could lower this and expand the footprint and it wouldn't tower over Broad Street, etc., etc., and how vital this

heart of Charleston was. The guy from Preservation Society jumps up *[laughs]*, they're opposing the design too, and he got it shot down by twenty feet.

Q: Wow.

Moore: For Charleston, that's a lot.

Q: That's a lot, yes.

Moore: It was a couple of stories.

Q: Right. That's amazing how people can take their experiences in one city and apply it to another, which you've done in Charleston.

Moore: Yes.

Q: We want to focus on Ladies' Mile but you've done a lot of work since you've moved to Charleston as well, right?

Moore: Oh, yes. We were telling war stories about the Committee to Save the City one night to a friend who had grown up in Charleston. He said, "We need a branch here." So we have what we call the Charleston branch *[laughs]*.

Q: Have you undertaken many battles there?

Moore: Yes, but I'm burning out. My husband and I edited an eight-page proper newspaper, the *Charleston City Guardian*, with ads. We didn't sell them. A local paper called the [*Charleston] City Paper* sold the ads and printed us and we were an insert into the *City Paper*, which came out once a week, which was good. We were trying to do some consciousness raising.

Q: Eight pages once a week, is that how much it was?

Moore: No, it wasn't eight pages once a week. We didn't come out as often as the paper did. It was eight pages every few weeks, like six times a year or something like that.

Q: That's still a good number of pages.

Moore: I got people like Robert [A.M.] Stern to write for us.

Q: That's amazing.

Moore: Yes. I went after some of the big names. They, recognizing that Charleston was where they needed to be known, they were willing to write free of charge.

Q: So do you think that the Ladies' Mile campaign was so successful because of the connections that you and your husband had in New York City?

Moore: We didn't have any connections. We had a house at Fire Island and that attracted a lot of people with good letterhead. A friend of mine said, "I'll give a dessert party if you want to give the slideshow out here some weekend." So we did and Tony Wood came out and spoke, and I invited all these influential people to come. Bernice was famous for her desserts so people came to eat her desserts, to hear Tony talk, and to see the slides. And by the end of the weekend, we had thirty important people signed on a petition to save Ladies' Mile and that's when we knew we had to have an organization. That's when my husband said, "Let's call ourselves The Committee to Save the City." Because it was the old city.

Q: So how did that become the Drive to Protect the Ladies' Mile District, because I know that was the name of the umbrella organization?

Moore: And that included us, Christabel's group, and a whole batch of groups. It was a whole batch of us.

Q: Right. I have them listed here: the Union Square Community Coalition, Chelsea Historical Association [phonetic], The Society for the Architecture of the City, which is Christabel's organization, right?

Moore: That's Christabel's, yes.

Q: The Committee to Save the City, the Victorian Society in America, the [New York] Junior League, and the Historic Districts Council.

Moore: I don't know—well, I guess we did have a member from the Junior League, yes.

Q: I read an article about the Junior League. Some women from the Junior League became somewhat involved with it.

Moore: Yes. I used to work at Condé Nast. I got a lot of people at *Vogue* and Condé Nast to sign. We had some connections lined up. And the editor of *The New York Times* was my neighbor.

Q: That's always helpful *[Laughter]*.

Moore: He was the editorial page editor then and he came one night to see the slides. We got him when he got off the boat at Fire Island. We said, "Come have dessert." And we showed him and I think one other couple the slides. He was secretly supportive of us. He got Mary Cantwell to write a good editorial when this horrible person was on vacation who might have made a fuss.

Q: That person might have shut it down?

Moore: Could have interfered, right.

Q: I read that there was one really good editorial around 1986 that really boosted the campaign.

Moore: Yes. That was thanks to this editor. So we knew a couple of people.

Q: Right. And then once it started, did you feel that the ball just kept rolling and you got more people interested? Because eventually people like Woody Allen and Diana Vreeland became involved.

Moore: I know.

Q: Did they have any other interest in preservation elsewhere in the city?

Moore: I think I got to Diana Vreeland because I used to work at *Vogue* and I was able to just go and say—you know, hand it to her.

Q: Right. Because those letters are very effective when you get a pile of them.

Moore: Yes. Somebody got Dick Jenrette. Liz Claiborne was my neighbor on Fire Island.

Q: So it sounds like you did have connections!

Moore: We weren't good friends, but I walked in one day in my bathing suit, because she was just on the next block.

Q: So many people became involved through Fire Island.

Moore: Yes, Fire Island was helpful because there were people like Liz who had good letterhead.

Q: It's a smaller community on Fire Island. You have people who interact more readily. Interesting.

Moore: And Geraldine Ferraro was out there. I didn't get her however, but it was that kind of community, so that did help.

Q: So your husband moved his studio to Ladies' Mile and you both became involved with the campaign. What were the threats to Ladies' Mile that really forced you to take action?

Moore: Well, it was my architect friend, who was also a neighbor, who told me that they were making assemblages in Ladies' Mile and that really made us realize that we needed

to move fast. He warned us as a friend. He was not involved in any of these deals, but he knew about them because he was in the architecture world.

Q: Did it turn out to be true that these real estate companies were trying to pull together parcels for redevelopment?

Moore: Well, we got the district before it happened. We lost one important building, the [New York] Anthenaeum Club building and the owner of that building was a personal friend, and also a neighbor at Fire Island. He was also a personal friend of Carol Greitzer and he threatened to sue us if we kept opposing him. My husband saw them ripping off the tiles on the roof and called Carol and she got a stop work order and then he threatened us with a lawsuit if we didn't back off. We couldn't deal with a lawsuit.

Q: So you guys backed off?

Moore: We backed off. It wasn't worth the entire fight to save a single building. I felt we needed to save the neighborhood and why spend time fighting for one building when the whole neighborhood was in danger.

Q: I read that he agreed to put a mansard roof on top of the building as a last concession to make the new building fit into the neighborhood.

Moore: It's almost insulting.

Q: So you created this slideshow and then did this collaborative book with your husband. Can you discuss that a little bit more and what role you felt that the book played in the success of the campaign?

Moore: Oliver Johnson put it together as a graphic design, but it really was Christabel's idea that it ought to be a book. I did the text and my husband did the photographs. I did a lot of my research at Condé Nast, which was kind of fun because I used to be an editor at *Glamour* and I knew they had this wonderful library of old magazines. So *Vogue* supplied me with all the addresses of these fabulous shops that were in Ladies' Mile. It was fascinating doing the research.

Q: All of those old ads.

Moore: Yes. All the ads. They were little bitty ads but I would see the addresses and found out what was happening in all these stores.

Q: And so many of those old ads had etchings or drawings of the buildings and interiors of the stores.

Moore: Yes. And I discovered that my mother—and I guess it was probably my grandmother—had china that came from one of the larger stores. When I inherited this china, I was thrilled. I knew Higgins & Seiter used to be a major store.

Q: That's amazing. And the book got a couple of awards too?

Moore: Yes. The Victorian Society gave us an award and then there was the Society of American Travel Writers. Then the book was part of the reason why the Committee to Save the City received an award for what we had been doing in Charleston, as well as in New York.

Q: Right. How did you distribute the book? Did you give out for free? I heard you would have book parties.

Moore: Jack Taylor and I went all over town.

Q: Just passing it out.

Moore: Giving slideshows and handing out the book.

Q: The slideshow idea is really great. I don't know if people even think of using a slideshow as an advocacy tool now.

Moore: I still have that slideshow and I realized that at some point it should go to an archive.

Q: It should.

Moore: Know that I have it. I haven't told my daughter about it, but I've kept it intact.

Q: Now they have such amazing ways to transfer slideshows to digital format. So you could keep the same slideshow but have it as a PowerPoint or in a file that had all the images in order so people could view the exact slideshow.

Moore: I've still got it in order in one of those trays. And I saved my text. My husband even gave a version of it in Charleston. He belonged to a group where they had to give talks about something that was outside of their field and he did a thing on Ladies' Mile.

Q: They have a good number of cast-iron buildings in Charleston.

Moore: Yes. We have a lot of neo-Grec, because there was an earthquake in the '80s so a lot of the facades had to be replaced and it was neo-Grec time. It was kind of nice to see all of that having known it from New York.

Q: Well it is, learning architecture in New York and going to Charleston, you see so many similarities, it's pretty amazing.

Moore: Yes, are you an architectural student?

Q: My background, I did architecture, undergrad, at the University of Texas in Austin. I'm actually from Houston originally. Then I went to Columbia, the Historic Preservation Program.

Moore: That's how you know Tony.

Q: That's how I know Tony. I actually work for the New York Preservation Archive Project, which is Tony's organization.

[INTERRUPTION]

Moore: Tony Wood was so instrumental during the '80s when he was with the Kaplan Fund, in getting money for things like this book.

Q: That was a question I was going to ask—the book was funded entirely by the J. M. Kaplan Fund?

Moore: Right. We used the book—we would give it to people and say, "The price of this book is that you write a letter to the Landmarks Commission and send us a copy."

Q: That's a wonderful tool. Then people have those books forever. Because it's a beautiful book. I was looking through it yesterday and the photographs are amazing. Then you also led walking tours, right?

Moore: I didn't but other people did, yes.

Q: And then some exhibitions were put on and things like that.

Moore: Yeah, my husband's work was used in some of these and he made his photographs available to newspapers if they wanted to do a story.

Q: How much time did he spend photographing all of these buildings?

Moore: A lot of time.

Q: Because he was working at the same time, right. He was doing his art.

Moore: Yes, he had a business. We had to put a daughter through school *[laughs]* and I was dragging him off to take these pictures. But some of the most fun we had was when I discovered how many decorative lions there were on the buildings. I was fascinated by this and we wondered if it had come from the Ĕcole des Beaux-Arts in Paris because a lot of the architects of Ladies' Mile had studied in Paris. So we were making a trip to Paris for fun anyway, but we decided we would make it a lion hunt. Truman took his cameras and tripods, you know all that equipment, over and we spent a couple of weeks going around Paris photographing details.

I remember people would gasp and I would say this is a detail from the bottom of the Louvre and this is the top of the Flatiron Building. It was more than lions, it was a lot of architectural details that were very similar. And people just gasped to see the connection between Paris and New York. It made them appreciate what we had.

Q: Exactly. Because it's a grouping of buildings that are incredibly ornate. You don't really see much of that in New York together in one place.

Moore: It's not cool to look up *[laughter]*.

Q: Right. Well, a lot of it is so far up the building that you're not even able to see those details from the street. You have to go up in the buildings and photograph them.

Moore: Yes, Truman got a special lens so he could photograph the top of the Flatiron Building in good detail.

Q: I'm sure a lot of the storefronts were downtrodden at that point.

Moore: They were horrible.

Q: So people weren't really going there and looking up. You were kind of rushing through the neighborhood?

Moore: Yes. And Andrew Dolkart was saying the side streets are just garbage. I'd say, "Andrew!" I recall showing pictures and saying, "This is Andrew's garbage." *[Laughs]*.

Q: Tony was telling me that that was one of your big pushes was to get the side streets included in the historic district. A lot of people were just looking for avenues, but you thought the side streets were a really important part of the neighborhood.

Moore: It was hard to photograph them because you're right, the ground floors in many cases were garbage. But if you looked up at the top, there were these gorgeous buildings and they had to be saved. You just don't not save the side streets.

Q: Right. And the side streets were part of the whole system of how Ladies' Mile worked.

Moore: Yes. It was all an intact neighborhood.

Q: Were they side entrances or different kinds—factories or things like that?

Moore: There were retail stores on the bottom, on the ground floor. Like this china business, the Higgins & Seiter I discovered, started out with a little bitty building on a side street, it kept expanding into other buildings on the same block, and then it went through the block. So there were little bitty businesses that became big and moved to the avenues.

Q: I found that interesting as I read the designation report, how the neighborhood evolved. For example, the Lord & Taylor expanded their building over the years and other businesses did the same as they became large department stores. The neighborhood was not conceived and built as a series of amazingly ornate buildings, it was a process. The side streets are really important because it captures some of that.

Moore: Oh, yeah, it all hung together. You had a lot of manufacturing upstairs and retail on the ground floors and they all related.

Q: Were there parts of the neighborhood that you really wanted included in the district but that got cut out of the final boundaries?

Moore: Our proposed district went all the way down to Eighth Street and that should have been included. You can look at the book and see where we started.

Q: If you go visit the district now, can you tell exactly the buildings that were not included and how they've changed?

Moore: I haven't wandered around that part on this trip. But I was thrilled to see them gilding the cupolas of the Hugh O'Neill building. That building was very downtrodden but it got restored and they put back the cupolas.

Q: When you go now, most of the buildings have been beautifully restored.

Moore: Yes.

Q: When did people begin to move back to Ladies' Mile? Because I guess, exactly like your husband, people were probably moving there for cheap rents.

Moore: Yeah, people were moving there in the 1970s for the cheap rents. And they liked the fact that the windows opened.

Q: Right. *[Laughter]*. It's an amazing feature.

Moore: Yes *[Laughter]*.

Q: That was kind of the same period as SoHo, but it does seem like it has taken a bit of a different track than SoHo. They both are very urban type of shopping center now, but Ladies' Mile seems like it still has a lot of these—maybe SoHo does as well—has a lot of these publishers and creative industries that have stayed there for those huge spaces.

Moore: You're right, you're right. Yes, I'm not aware that there are publishers in SoHo. And Ladies' Mile was a publishing center.

Q: Who was opposing the district?

Moore: The real estate industry.

Q: Were they the only big opponent?

Moore: Talk to Jack Taylor about that. He'd probably have a better memory of that.

Q: Do you remember any of the arguments against the district? What were they saying? The real estate industry is typically against every new historic district.

Moore: Yeah. You could look at some of the old newspaper articles and get quotes from there. And I'm sure, again, that Jack saved all these articles meticulously.

Q: So how did Jack Taylor become involved?

Moore: I'm not sure. I can't remember that. But he was the one who went with me when we did the slideshows and we went all over town. We went to Queens and all kinds of places *[laughs]*.

Q: That's great. And then the commission, do you remember who was supportive?

Moore: Well, Tony Tung and Elliot Willensky and Gene Norman was too. I remember we had Gene Norman over to the studio and Truman gaffer-taped his chair to the floor, because he knew that Gene was a big man and it would move around. It was a double

slideshow and he wanted Gene to stay in the center and see the two pictures accurately. He gaffer-taped his chair to the floor so he couldn't move around. And Christabel came with pastries. She knew what he liked *[laughing]*.

Q: That's great.

Moore: Is Gene around?

Q: Oh, he is.

Moore: You ought to talk to him.

Q: The New York Preservation Archive Project has been undertaking a large oral history project with all of the past LPC chairs, so that includes Gene Norman.

Moore: That turns out now to have been a very good time for preservation.

Q: Exactly.

Moore: We didn't necessarily think so at the time.

Q: Right. The whole commission itself was very turbulent at the time.

Moore: Yes, the mayor kicked Tony Tung and Joseph Mitchell off the commission. Mitchell had been our staunch ally in shooting down the Polshek building [in the Village]. They held the commission up for years and their punishment was to get kicked off.

Q: How do you think that affected the campaign to save Ladies' Mile?

Moore: To save Ladies' Mile? I don't know that it did, because I think Gene Norman recognized the importance of it and the commission did spend a lot of time researching. I think they realized it was an important neighborhood. I didn't sense a lot of opposition from individuals on the commission.

Q: So the public hearing was in '86 and then it was finally designated in '89. It just took them a few years to—

Moore: It may have been because of the research. It was extensive research. I gave them a lot of material, but they did a lot of work and all the very extensive, meticulous write-ups that they do.

Q: They did an amazing job.

Moore: Yes.

Q: Because it was how many buildings?

Moore: I think it was four hundred.

Q: Four hundred. Yes, that does take some time. So you don't think anything of that was political or that the commission was dragging their feet?

Moore: You know, I think the letter campaign made an impact, because we had the [New York City] Board of Estimate then so we were getting letters from all the boroughs. I had a friend who had actually been involved in [Edward I.] Koch's campaign and she came to our apartment one time and she looked at my tiny office and said, "You have conducted a letter-writing campaign from here?!" My office was about this big *[laughing]*. So apparently, the letter writing campaign had an impact politically, because [David] Dinkins voted for it and Koch voted for it. They were both on the Board of Estimate at the same time. The Board of Estimate approved it. We had to get them to approve it and so that's why we went all over town getting letters from important groups in other boroughs.

Q: Right. So did you ever have a feeling that the district wasn't going to go through?

Moore: You never know, right. The real estate industry is very powerful.

Q: It's very powerful. I heard once that the two most powerful forces in New York are real estate and preservation.

Moore: Oh *[laughs]*.

Q: Preservation can be powerful too. So what do you think were your unique contributions to the district? We talked a little bit about including the side streets.

Moore: I did the research. The research Tony said was probably worth one hundred thousand dollars. I think that's why Andrew Dolkart wanted to be hired to do the research. I was willing to just do it because I found it fascinating and I cared about the neighborhood. I just did it. I had worked in the fashion industry so this was an industry that I cared about.

Q: Were you still working in that industry? Is that how you got access to all of the archives?

Moore: No, I wasn't working anymore. They just—

Q: They just let you in.

Moore: —let me in *[laughter]*.

Q: Did you do a lot of architectural research as well?

Moore: I did it too. I did it too. I sat at the library.

Q: Just pulling everything together that you could?

Moore: I wrote the book and obviously, I had to research it to write the book. But I'm very self-taught other than my handful of courses at Columbia.

Q: The book was obviously a very big factor in all of this. Do you think a book would be just as effective today?

Moore: It could be. Yes.

Q: We should go through some of the key players. Jack Taylor.

Moore: And Christabel, very important.

Q: What were her contributions?

Moore: Well, one of the most important things I guess was her encouragement in what we were doing. She did a certain amount of research too. Truman and his secretary put it all on the computer. But Christabel also had done research and I'm not sure whether she

gave it to them. You'll have to talk to her about it. But I know it was her idea to do the book and I'm not sure we would have done it if she hadn't suggested it.

Q: Do you know what else she was working on at the time?

Moore: I think she was getting *Village Views* started about then. You've got to talk to Christabel about that.

Q: I'll have to look at the dates, yes.

Moore: Yes. Because a lot of that is fuzzy in my head.

Q: I'm just curious what else she was working on at the time.

Moore: We had her support. But it was our main focus, whereas she was doing *Village Views* and she was focused on a lot of other issues.

Q: Right. And a lot of the other organizations had their own agendas? Or were they very influential on this?

Moore: I don't remember that they made any significant contribution, other than giving their support.

Q: But it probably helps just to have organization's support.

Moore: Right.

Q: So it was mostly the Society for the Architecture of the City and Committee to Save the City.

Moore: Yes.

Q: And the Historic Districts Council was really involved.

Moore: Yes. Well, Tony Wood.

Q: Tony, because he was chairman of the Historic Districts Council at the time.

Moore: Yeah *[laughs]*.

Q: And you were one of the original board members?

Moore: I think we were. Christabel was on it too. I think we were fairly original on it.

Q: Did you represent Ladies' Mile or did you represent the Village at that point?

Moore: I'm not sure.

Q: So HDC started as a conglomeration of all these people that represented different historic districts, right?

Moore: I guess I would have been there for Ladies' Mile. I lived in the Village, but the Ladies' Mile was my focus. Christabel was more focused on the Village issues.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Were you involved with the battle of Bryant Park that was going on at the same time?

Moore: Oh, boy. I was there testifying too, because the rear façade of the library was modeled on the Biblioteque *[unclear]* in Paris.

Q: Important to preserve. But the restaurant went through.

Moore: What's there now?

Q: I forget the name of the restaurant.

Moore: Is it a big one though?

Q: It blends in with the park pretty well—

Moore: But does it hide all the façade?

Q: No. It's doesn't hide all the façade, but it's very noticeable when you walk through the park, you see it more than the façade. But it's one story.

Moore: As I recall they weren't doing a huge thing, though they wanted to.

Q: It looks like a park structure. It fits in pretty well. It's interesting some of these things are forgotten. We never learned about the battle for Bryant Park in school.

Moore: It was just one of many. But they kicked Tony off the commission for that.

Q: It's good on these anniversary dates to celebrate stuff like that.

Moore: Yeah. I still have a Save Tony Tung button somewhere.

Q: Oh really?

Moore: Christabel had them printed up.

Q: That's great. You should keep those buttons.

Moore: They're up on a high shelf in my library.

Q: Do you have a lot of your archives together?

Moore: It's not like I have a formal archive. I've got this closet where things go. My Ladies' Mile scrapbook is out actually in the living room because I had to bring it down to show the reporter from the local newspaper. He was fascinated that we had all these snail mail letters *[laughs]*.

Q: I actually went through, with Friends of the Upper East Side the Halina Rosenthal Archives recently.

Moore: Ah. Yes.

Q: And there are just boxes and boxes and boxes of letters, because she was such a letter writer. There would be two letters in a day to the same person, you know what I mean? But it is all very organized and in banker's boxes.

Moore: Yeah, I should do something about it.

Q: You should because we sometimes inherit these boxes and when they are organized it is easier to donate them to organizations with proper archives. We've actually had a lot of

interest from the New York Historical Society. They're trying to expand their Twentieth Century collections. Your Ladies' Mile materials would be perfect for them. We could group them together with Jack Taylor's archives and create a really amazing resource of all this information. We get researchers coming by to look at all of these materials, so it's helpful for future preservationists and just researchers to have access to all of these things. So you should definitely work on it.

Moore: I know I've thrown out stuff. Truman took pictures of Park [Avenue] South. We were going to push for that and I did throw away those slides, because I can't keep everything.

Q: You do have to be selective sometimes.

Moore: But I did keep his Ladies' Mile slides and they are all in labeled boxes. Things are not altogether the way they should be. Some things are set up on high shelves.

Q: Right, even if they're all just shoved into one box, it is probably more helpful than anything.

Moore: And I saved a certain amount of my research, because I xeroxed a hell of a lot of stuff at Avery [Library]. I did a lot of research there. I sort of lived there. It was one thing I could do since I was taking classes there.

Q: So was this going on while you were taking classes?

Moore: Oh, yes. So I was a student there and I could get into the library and research Ladies' Mile.

Q: It's a great resource to have.

Moore: Right. So I saved a certain amount of that because I just thought it was important.

Q: And this was the material that you handed over to the Landmarks Preservation Commission researchers?

Moore: I gave them a lot of stuff, yes.

Q: I bet that helped them a lot.

Moore: We put things on the computer and we gave them this huge printout. I don't think I have that anymore.

Q: That's great, research divided by buildings and things like that?

Moore: Yes. All the cultural significance information, because I did a lot of that.

Q: That's great. I interned once at the research department at the LPC and so I know how difficult it is to get any kind of research leads.

Moore: Yes. Nobody down there knew to go to Condé Nast *[crosstalk]*.

Q: Exactly. I would never have put that together.

Moore: It wouldn't have occurred to them, yes.

Q: And that's an amazing resource to have because all of those old ads. They really enliven the book, too.

Moore: We got support from people like FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology]. I believe we did the slideshow there, I can't remember. Jack may have a better memory of where we went around, but we got a lot of the fashion world to support us.

Q: Interesting. I know Tony Wood has some archives on Ladies' Mile too. I think he has some of the more administrative things like printing costs and slideshow presentation schedules. I haven't looked through all of them, but I think he has a lot of that, so it's probably helpful to see where exactly you were reaching out to.

Moore: I've got all the letters. I saved those.

Q: It would be interesting to see your collection, because I'm sure that Jack Taylor has duplicates, but you probably have the originals. Because I've seen the letter from *Vogue* and from a lot of the other big names and it's really impressive. Not even knowing anything about it, it's really impressive to see all of those names and you're right, the nice paperweight with the big letterhead really does wonders *llaughs]*.

Moore: Yeah. We got some good—after that slideshow at the beach, we realized we had thirty good letterheads to go for. They'd signed on and I think the mayor paid attention. We were saying we wanted to drown him in letters.

Q: Right. It's an effective technique.

Moore: Yes.

Q: So back to the Historic Districts Council. When you were on the board there what exact work did you do?

Moore: I had meetings at my house or my apartment.

Q: And that would be for citywide issues or just for Ladies' Mile issues?

Moore: Yeah.

Q: How involved were you after the district was designated?

Moore: We stayed on top of it to monitor the district. Christabel and I were both on it. Oh, she and I kept monitoring the commission too, so we'd go to these meetings. I left HDC when I left—I guess I was a member until I left New York.

Q: Right. When did you leave New York?

Moore: In '94.

Q: Why did you move to Charleston?

Moore: Yeah. We were demoralized. You go down to the commission, everybody testifies and then somebody reads what they're going to do. The commissioners talked about it in the back room, they decided which way they're going to go with it, before they listened to any of the testimony. It was just—I'm amazed that Christabel can do it. I got demoralized. And my husband was ready for a change. He realized that he could—it was very expensive to maintain the studio—that he could do a lot of things from Charleston. He could fly up to New York City for the day and take pictures and he had clients come to Charleston.

Q: Is he from South Carolina originally?

Moore: He's from South Carolina originally, yes. He wanted a little more comfortable way of life. Charleston has changed a lot since then. There are now one hundred restaurants in the historic district.

Q: Do you hear that the LPC has changed or do you think that it's the same now?

Moore: I haven't kept up with it, but I felt that it was changing under Gene Norman. And when Tony Tung and Elliot Willensky were on the commission, we felt that we were being listened to and that our testimony was taken seriously by a number of individuals on the commission. It was when I realized that my testimony didn't matter that I got demoralized.

Q: Why do you say that? Can you think of specific examples?

Moore: Well, because I saw them reading their decisions. Reading it. They weren't sitting there writing it. They had written it earlier before they came to the meeting so that the decisions were made in the back room and they were just going through the process of what they called a public hearing. I think that happens a lot of places, but I'm sorry to see it happen here. It was very stressful and just disappointing. And I have to credit Gene Norman with keeping it fairly honest.

Q: Well, to be so passionate about something, it is difficult sometimes.

Moore: We're struggling in Charleston right now with cruise ships. We have been put on a watch list by the National Trust [for Historic Preservation] and by the World Monuments Fund and still the mayor is not listening to us.

Q: Because those cruise ships bring so much money into Charleston I'm sure.

Moore: But not to Charleston. The [South Carolina] Ports Authority gets the money. Charleston should be getting money for each person that comes and our mayor hasn't insisted upon it. And he has a reputation for being a preservationist. He's upset because we're on these watch lists, but he still hasn't changed his stance.

Q: Is there anything to do about it? Can they dock somewhere else? Because they dock right near the historic district.

Moore: Right. Right in the historic district. Yes, they could dock about ten blocks farther. But still within the city limits, they could dock, there's a huge port. They've moved the cargo up there and there's plenty of room for them to move the passenger ships up there. Somebody from my neighborhood realized that and studied the situation. There's a lawsuit involved led by the Coastal Conservation League, which is an environmental group. It's being handled by the Environmental Legal [phonetic] people or something like that. But our neighborhood has signed on it and so has another major neighborhood right there on the waterfront, and two preservation groups are involved. They are suing Carnival [Cruise Line]—and the city and the state have joined with Carnival, which is a

foreign corporation. It's not incorporated in America. The city and the state are against the downtown historic district.

Q: What's the current status on that?

Moore: Well, the rumor is that because Carnival has had these two major disasters, you know one in Italy, that they may be so distracted that they haven't re-upped their contract. Because they haven't gotten final approval for the look of their buildings from the BAR, and so they haven't started building anything. The rumor is that they may not be.

Q: That's interesting. How would you compare all of these processes in New York and Charleston, knowing both of them so well?

Moore: It sounds like pretty much the same thing. You've got this wall. In New York City we have the LPC, but in Charleston we've got the mayor and of course the BAR is appointed by the mayor, so.

Q: Right.

Moore: *[Laughs]*.

Q: Do you think there are many organizations in Charleston that are really pushing against these big—?

Moore: Oh, not as many because it's not a big city.

Q: True. But it sounds like there are a lot of neighborhood organizations.

Moore: We have neighborhood groups. And you've got the Preservation Society and the Historic Charleston Foundation. They hired a research firm to look into the economics of it all and they have repudiated all these claims that the state is making about how it helps the city. It doesn't.

Q: Right. But I thought the argument was so interesting to compare these cruise ships to huge structures. It's like them building a huge structure on the water at the end of so many of these historic streets.

Moore: And you don't like a hotel over fifty rooms in the historic district, but there are a thousand rooms on this ship. They're polluting the air and the sea and we have the seafood industry. All of our best restaurants have signed on, written letters.

Q: Has the seafood industry noticed things have changed since the cruise ships were there?

Moore: Yeah.

Q: When did they start coming?

Moore: In full force about a year ago. We had some all along, but not so many.

Q: Right. I remember when I was there a couple years ago there were one or two ships.

Moore: Yeah, they weren't a big problem. Even now we don't have that many, but it's becoming a greater problem there. They have plans to build a dock that would hold two huge Carnivals at one time. So six or seven thousand people to a hundred thousand people at one time. That's a lot.

Q: Yeah. I've also read that a lot of the tourists on these cruise ships don't really spend that much money.

Moore: They eat and sleep on the ship.

Q: Yeah, exactly. They don't really support—

Moore: They may buy an ice cream cone or a t-shirt on land.

Q: Right.

Moore: And they clutter up the streets, they tie up traffic because there are all these cabs and cars bringing them to the ship, so they tie up traffic downtown. My cab driver was talking about it this morning about how he thinks it should be moved too, because he's been caught in some of those traffic jams when the ships are in.

Q: Yeah. It's sad to think of traffic jams in Charleston.

Moore: Yeah, it is sad. So, it's not all that different in Charleston I'm afraid.

Q: Right. So my last few questions, some of them we've talked about, but how do you think the civic sector has evolved since the 1980s?

Moore: There's no way of knowing.

Q: Do you keep connected and follow New York City preservation?

Moore: Oh, yeah. I stay in touch with Tony Wood and Tony Tung.

Q: Can you share your thoughts on some of the individuals you felt have made the greatest contributions to preservation advocacy in New York?

Moore: Christabel and Tony—the Tonys are amazing. They haven't gotten discouraged and I'm in awe of that. There were people like Halina Rosenthal who were important, but I didn't know her that well. And Arlene Simon, she's kept at it.

Q: There's a new generation with Andrew Berman from the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, who is very political. I don't know if you've heard much about him.

Moore: Oh, good. I haven't. No.

Q: He takes more of a political route with a lot of the advocacy issues. He's active just across the street with a huge NYU [New York University] plan. Have you read anything about that?

Moore: Oh, where they want—the flowers not towers. Yes. That would be horrible to remove those gardens, they're so humanizing.

Q: I know it's amazing. I guess NYU has a plan just to fit insane amounts of buildings in there. I guess they picture this whole—two big complexes, the silver towers and the ones right across the street.

Moore: Are there people fighting that?

Q: Oh, yes, they're fighting very strongly against it and I think they've gotten the neighborhood mobilized. Because they're basically putting buildings in all of the open spaces that are there, which would really be unfortunate for the neighborhood. And then the buildings themselves are so significant, too.

Moore: Can the press help?

Q: I think the press has been pretty helpful. It's such a hot issue because NYU is involved. And I think Andrew Berman really incorporates the power of the press.

Moore: The press has been helpful with the cruise ship issue and I haven't been involved in that. That effort has been led interestingly by a man who lives half time in New Hampshire, but he's a marketing media expert. He has been operating like Christabel, sending the facts to individual reporters, when they get the facts wrong especially, and to the editors at the *Post and Courier*. And the *Post and Courier* have started writing these dynamite editorials, and they had a great one again this morning, which gives me hope that we'll do something because we've got the press so firmly with us. And we got somebody today from the medical university who wrote a very important letter about the air pollution and how it was important that Charleston make them plug in and use shore power rather than generating all that black smoke.

Q: Right. There was an article about Andrew Berman, the executive director at the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation that was against his practices of

really pushing—they called him the obstructionist. The press can also go against you so it's hard to find that balance. Maybe Christabel and Halina Rosenthal had the press on their sides because they were really pushing on people but doing it in a manner that—

Moore: A very gentle, persuasive—very sweet. Christabel is always very sweet. But it does help to work on the press and educate the press, because a lot of times it's just ignorance. This friend of mine, Jay *[phonetic]* in Charleston has been doing blogs and informing the press.

Q: I think it is really important. Nowadays, another one of the great things about doing advocacy is that there are so many different formats to go about it. There are all these blogs, for example.

Moore: Yes. And all the email connections. I get emails, hundreds of emails.

Q: It's great because you can be on these email lists and you get the information in five minutes instead of waiting to mail something. It's a lot quicker and they have countless architecture blogs now. A lot of these—with Friends of the Upper East Side, we're fighting for the City and Suburban, First Avenue Estates. THey want to demolish two buildings in that complex and they're basically going through the hardship proceedings. I feel like the press has gotten really into it because these blogs will pick it up first—neighborhood blogs. These neighborhood blogs will then be picked up by the citywide blogs and then finally the newspapers pick it up, *The New York Times* and all that. Once

it's big enough—once it's on enough websites, I think people start to become interested in that issue.

Moore: The internet has become a very powerful tool.

Q: The hard part is knowing how to use it. It's really being able to read it effectively.

Moore: I'm not that savvy about using it. I do email.

Q: I think the most difficult part is reaching out the younger people who are inundated with all of this information and you have to find good ways of pulling them in, too.

I think I've gone through all of my questions. I don't know if you have anything else that we might have missed.

Moore: I am amazed that I do remember so much. You've sort of jogged my memory. I wasn't sure what you wanted to hear.

Q: Ladies' Mile is such an amazing story.

[INTERRUPTION]

Moore: Somebody who I realized who's played a role, and that is Danny Meyer. Not so Ladies Mile, but you look around, Madison Square, and look what he did with his four restaurants and Shake Shack. I think he helped organize the Friends of Madison Square. He is somebody who the preservation world should recognize and he might in turn be helpful to you. He is a name.

Q: He is a name. You're right, he did, he focused a lot in his first few years on—he opened the Union Square, then what other restaurants?

Moore: Then Gramercy Tavern, because they were within walking distance of the green market.

Q: Is that why he focused on that area?

Moore: Yes. Then he did Madison Square, and he lived I think almost across the street from Maialino—he's still all in that area. Madison Square was a really rundown park at that time.

Q: Well, the whole neighborhood. I remember reading somewhere that Truman was saying that his accountant didn't want to come down to the studio because they were too scared to walk through neighborhood.

Moore: Yeah. From Madison Square to Union Square was just—it was a dump. I really think that Danny could be some sort of a spokesperson for it.

Q: And were there any kind of key moments when that was starting to turn around?

Moore: You would have to ask—you could ask Danny Meyer's office, I'm sure they would know, but I think I read somewhere that he was instrumental in forming the Madison Square—Friends of Madison Square or something like that.

Q: And giving it a sense of place too. Because I think the battle was around the same time they coined the name Flatiron District.

Moore: Yeah. And he opened his four restaurants so it becomes a destination and then Shake Shack.

Q: Right. And when did all the shopping come back?

Moore: That was starting to come back when we were still here. Bed, Bath & Beyond was on Sixth Avenue, but they hadn't restored the building or anything.

Q: Right. Was it entirely dead when you guys were there in the beginning?

Moore: In the beginning, yeah.

Q: No open stores?

Moore: They were warehouses. I think Armani was one of the first to come. He went into the Judge building and he was an early person.

Q: It seemed like a lot of these places, like ABC Carpet and Home, they would move into a building and then they would restore a lot of it.

Moore: They wrote good letters. Yes, the owners of ABC Carpet were good.

Q: Right. And then I assume the real estate industry—though they were against it at first—made a lot of money off the lofts and the apartments. It's mostly residential now from what I know, on the upper floors.

Moore: Is it?

Q: Is that true or—?

Moore: I don't know. In the Truman's building it was mixed.

Q: I don't know how much of it is still kind of commercial. I know in the Flat Iron Building there's still a lot of publishing companies and things like that. Anyway Danny Meyer could be in interesting person to speak with, about what his views were.

Moore: He could be an interesting name to be supportive of local issues in that area. He would care.

Q: He would care. And now that he's become such an institution, I feel like he'd be an interesting person to talk to. Because his restaurants are in so many different neighborhoods—one in Times Square, one on the Upper East Side now—

Moore: And in the Whitney [Museum of American Art] and MOMA [Museum of Modern Art].

Q: I forgot about his Whitney restaurant. It'd be interesting to read—I'll have to go look at the list of all his restaurants.

Moore: There's a lot, and Shake Shack. I don't know how he can do it and still be humane. And he still cares about my mentions in the Mercury. If I go to a restaurant, there's a little note from Danny on the table.

Q: That's amazing. What a powerhouse.

Moore: How does that man find time to do that kind of thing. But I think he cares about the neighborhood. I feel that's very sincere.

Q: He's obviously been in that neighborhood for quite a while. I don't know if he's a New Yorker born and raised, but he definitely has some kind of passion for the neighborhoods that he locates his restaurants in.

Moore: I think he's always lived in the area, but I don't know where he grew up.

You think you have it?

Q: I think we're good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]