INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Edward Kirkland

New York Preservation Archive Project

2010

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Edward Kirkland conducted by Interviewer Becky Collins on March 25, 2010. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive's Project's collection of individual oral history interviews 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.

Longtime Chelsea resident Edward Kirkland first moved to the area in the 1960s. He quickly became involved in the preservation of the area, stemming from his interest in history. The history of an area is very important to whether it should be preserved and he speaks at length about the historical significance of many areas of Chelsea. Mr. Kirkland advocated for the establishment of the West Chelsea Historic District, the Hudson River Park, and the Chelsea Piers. Gentrification has been a contentious issue in Chelsea since the 1960s, and he discusses how the rezoning through the Chelsea Plan addressed affordable housing concerns, bringing together preservationists and reformers.

Edward Kirkland is a lifelong advocate for preservation in Chelsea, serving on Community Board 4 for almost three decades until stepping down in 2012. He was instrumental in the decision to not demolish the railroad tracks that form the basis of New York's High Line as chairman of the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee. A former member of the Historic Districts Council and his Chelsea block association, Kirkland has had a hand in almost every Chelsea preservation group since the 1960s. His fight to preserve the Chelsea row-houses spans over fifty years, as does his commitment for including affordable housing in any new Chelsea development plans.

Transcriptionist: Unknown | Session: 1

Interviewee: Edward Kirkland | Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Becky Collins | Date: March 25, 2010

Q: Okay. So, I am here with Ed [Edward] Kirkland. This is Becky Collins. It is March 25, 2010. So, Ed, I was hoping to first get a little bit of an idea about your background, how you came to New York, what were you doing before you started working in preservation and planning.

Kirkland: Well, I came to New York because I decided I didn't want to spend my life teaching French. French was the thing that I had prepared for. Not going all the way, but I did it once and then I thought of finishing a dissertation and then going ahead and spending the rest of my life doing what I've been doing for the last few years before that; it just was not inviting. So, I came to New York and eventually I got into computer work. But, I tell you, I had a dream of mathematics actually, but I started out with college. So, I got into computers when it was fairly early and when it was very useful, but no, I never did anything very great there. It was just a job, but it was interesting.

Q: Great. And when did you first move to New York and then specifically what year did you move to Chelsea?

Kirkland: Oh, dear, I mean, so many years have gone by. I moved to New York because that was sort of a graduate thing. That was around the end of the '50s. I didn't always stay here, but I moved definitely I would by the early '50s I had moved to New York. I moved to Chelsea a good

deal later because what happened was the woman who was of course to become my wife, and fortunately she is, but she was a friend with another friend. We had been in this church group and another friend of her and of ours and I, moved her into a new apartment. She was one of the few people in New York who had be evicted for a smaller building to be built, a fire station.

Q: Wow. What luck for her I guess, right.

Kirkland: Well, she moved into Chelsea and eventually I moved in and married her, but I always figured it, my oozing into Chelsea, because I lived at the Y[MCA, Young Men's Christian Association] on Twenty-Third Street before. It was a bit by bit thing.

Q: Got it. Can you kind of paint a visual picture or kind of talk about what Chelsea was like when you moved in there and how it's kind of changed over time, talking about, you know.

Kirkland: Interestingly enough when I first moved there Chelsea was just beginning to be gentrified, especially in the area around the Chelsea Historic District, around the [General Theological] Seminary and so on. The *[unclear]* development and a few other places, but that was the center of gentrification and the people there after a while if they got settled one of things they did of course was get the Chelsea Historic District and then the Chelsea [Historic District] Extension. Now, I moved in—I think the Chelsea Extension was going on when I first moved in, but I did not become aware of what was going on until just about the finish of it. Just about when it was finished and people were still talking about it.

Q: Got it. And can you talk a little bit more, you said the Chelsea Extension?

Kirkland: Yeah, there was an extension that was separately done about three years later. Partly I think it was that the seminary as I remember was resistant, you know, which is what *[unclear]* plan was, he gave a whole block for the seminary. Of cause he actually taught at the seminary. But a little like Gramercy Park was given to give a foundation of a gentile neighborhood. So, the seminary park was supposed to be a gentile neighborhood and it turned out at the time it really was. But, as I dream, as I sometimes said, of a green suburb died out when the railroad came through along Tenth Avenue and that was the Hudson River Railroad and of course that lead to Death Avenue and then the development of the waterfront. He complained about there being landfill from everything including stable litter and so on and then people are still having problems with the landfill there.

But, it was a—I mean, he wrote an address to the people of New York full of outrage—a fascinating thing and there will be a book at the public library. But anyhow, these people came in looking for affordable, and at least what they saw as possible attractive, housing where they could raise their children because the school was pretty good there, a pretty good public school there, and gradually it became a core of gentrification and gradually it spread and the extension really was political. It would have been extended more except the head of one block association didn't believe in it and persuaded his block association to fight that part of it so Nineteenth Street, which should be in the district is not, and parts of Twentieth [Street].

But, as I say, gradually the piers were already dying then and of course, they died completely and so the working class neighborhood gradually that braided and of course, now Chelsea is one of the more elegant neighborhoods in the city. Although there are pockets of—there are the public housing projects and the middle-income housing on Penn South [Mutual Redevelopment Houses], which keep it from being a totally upscale area.

Q: Okay. And then do you know about what year the gentrification really started to take place?

Kirkland: Well, it was taking place before I was, you know, when I was just sort of moving in and of course I couldn't give one year to it because it took—

Q: Yeah, it's a process.

Kirkland: It's a slow process, which hasn't quite stopped yet, to be frank. I mean, there are these old rent control buildings. One of the goals of the Chelsea Plan was to discourage displacement. I mean, it wasn't purely a preservation plan, although that was part of it, it was to discourage displacement of residents and businesses. It was also to preserve the urban design, the urban character, the scale, which was only partially a preservation thing, and we were the first to propose affordable housing at thirty percent. But of course, you've read that that was alien at that time. We stopped the first time around because we had made these commitments to the housing people and we couldn't get anywhere. The second time we said to them, "We're not going to get it but at least it will discourage displacement." So they allowed it. So, we had good relations to

them and we still do and it has discouraged displacement. But, of course, there's not a single business on Eighth Avenue, which has survived from the pre-gentrification era.

Q: Now, you mentioned that you were thinking about teaching French and that you have a background in computers. So, how did you first become involved in kind of this preservation movement?

Kirkland: Well, it was interesting. I think I owe it to my father, who is a historian, partly and he was always interested in—we bought a summer place I remember in Vermont for a few thousand of dollars, I mean it was a cabin with acres and acres. And of course, I said, "Oh, this is a Colonial." And he said, "No, this is a federal house." So, he was interested in that. Whenever we went down to Boston he would often point [Henry H.] Richardson stations and that kind of thing. So, I was always interested in that kind of issue and I read a great deal of history, so when I saw what the issues were I began to get interested in them. I joined the block association because my wife said it's a good thing for you do and I was already tapering off having worked on contracts and so I was no longer working full-time and she said you should do something so, eventually I ended up in block association. Then, I got on the [Manhattan] Community Board [4] because one of the council members wanted to defeat a proposal, which was actually a compromise for the neighborhood, she wanted to defeat it but fortunately, I didn't get to the Community Board in time to vote because otherwise I would have voted for it.

Q: That's funny. So you kind of learned planning on the fly it seems like.

Kirkland: Well, it all started, I mean, as I keep saying, and I reviewed this recently for another one of these historicals or whatever.

Q: Oh, yes. Yes.

Kirkland: Well, two weeks ago the block association people had an interview with historicals. So, I went over these things in Chelsea. It all started because these people had got their designation, got their district designated, I think the extension and other things, and then a new white brick building went on Twenty-Third Street and it was quite high and it backed onto the historic district. But of course then you realize that Twenty-Third Street if it would have been designated like Greenwich Village where it was a whole community designated, but by that time the [New York City Landmarks Preservation] Commission was not doing that kind of thing. So, we said the only thing we can do is zoning. So, when I got on the Community Board I looked into the zoning. this was after the '61 *[unclear]* zoning there was a lot of material around, of course we discovered that the zoning was designed, it was the *[unclear]* Yiddish tower in the park so tall buildings and old buildings around it, so we discovered that.

Then I joined the committee of the board, which was called *[unclear]* Chelsea Preservation and Planning and the head of it, his grandfather had a saddler shop, saddlery in West Chelsea, and he remembered it so romantically he really hoped to preserve that kind of a flavor. So, he started off and he made the connection with Columbia [University]. He sent out an inquiry, he had had called it a formal RFP [Request for Proposal], and Columbia were the only people to pick it up. So the group, Elliott [D.] Sclar, was the leader and Seth Kesassin *[phonetic]* who moved on but

Sclar is still at Columbia, studied Chelsea and looked into it. In the meantime, I was studying and I discovered of course that new things were coming in. First of all there was contextual zoning, which was completely inconsistent with it. It was something new because people were getting worried about the affect of the *[unclear]* zoning if you could call it that.

So then I got into contextual zoning and then, of course, because I was a social thing, the Chelsea Plan was also to provide affordable housing and in the beginning I saw really no way of incorporating it. Eventually, when another member of the board and I were talking about it in his apartment he said, "Well, what are we going to do over east of Sixth Avenue in that old loft area?" Suddenly it came to me that's where we would allow new buildings to be built. Large buildings because the context was allow reasonably large buildings. We'll up zone it and we'll allow large buildings and on a condition of thirty percent affordable housing. But, of course, as I said, that went nowhere. It was defeated two times. They just turned us off. Sylvia Deutsch and even Amanda Burns *[phonetic]* both—no, Joe Rowe *[phonetic]*, Amanda Burns was at the end of the process. But fortunately, Joe was sympathic to our plan because I had gone to him because he was the head of the planning committee and zoning committee at [Manhattan Community] Board 5, which was right next to Board 4, I went to the—I said, "Well, we want to change one side of the street. We feel both sides of the street should be changed, mostly down zoned." So I had to go to Board 5 and Joe was chair of the committee. And he said, "Oh, Community Planning."

So, his family really parked Joe in various places, Citizen Housing there. Well, no, I guess they made that the zone but Citizen Housing Planning Council was not very great. And then, I don't

know how he got into the head of city planning. When we were negotiating with Joe and we agreed not to bring up the affordable housing, I would talk to the head of Manhattan office, who was sympathetic. He was interested too in housing and he said no to us because we had down zoned Eighth Avenue, which is the main street of Chelsea with a subway line under it and you don't do that zoning. Joe said I understand it because it's the heart of Chelsea, it's the center of Chelsea and if you wanted to *[unclear]* so he half persuaded them it was at least a good idea.

So, I talked to him. I mean, not I, but a couple of us; Ross Graham who was then chair of the board and who had been on the committee for a long time. Then we wait a week, and then we get the response to what Joe had said, and then we start all over. So everything took twice as long then if we had been able to talk directly to Joe, but Joe didn't have the courage or whatever to make a decision or even a tentative decision; "Oh, that's interesting, we'll talk about it next week." So everything was a long process and of course, we had to go through it and then we had to publicize it for a long time, in those days on public access television. There are a lot of people involved with this. I was sort of the planner but I didn't really lead the push to have it adopted. Fortunately, the [New York City] Council member then, Tom [Thomas K.] Duane, who is now state senator, had lived on the block and the block association and he was in favor of it. So all of the electives were in favor of it, Dick [Richard N.] Gottfried, so we were very lucky, we got it through, but it was a long, hard struggle. Then, of course, you have to go through the whole thing again because they've got a plan and then you've got to rezone it in accordance with the plan so we didn't get over it until Amanda Burns time.

Q: Yeah. Actually, I read something interesting. It was—let me it's in the—let's see here.

Kirkland: Is it the transcript of a previous one?

Q: No. Actually, it was someone who said using zoning isn't a way to kind of instate this low-income housing.

Kirkland: Well, no actually you can't really do it to preserve the existing housing but it has been used, and this is in the zoning, inclusionary zoning, it's a bonus, as you undoubtedly know for affordable housing.

Q: Definitely.

Kirkland: And that's of course what we were proposing. We didn't call it technically a bonus, but, as I said, partly it was so new an idea they wouldn't want to do it and we said the zoning should be done on vacant lots and they were used to that, making that kind of change. They do all these kind of things nowadays automatically but the whole idea was just so new and so horrible that it just never got going. Actually, now of course the board is one of the leaders in getting affordable housing, although it's mostly in West Chelsea and in Clinton, which has always had a history of that. The Clinton Special District had provisions against demolition and a strong enforcement of regulations so that was very early on. That happened at the time when the convention center was built.

Before the convention was built, when they thought the convention center was going to be built at the west end of Forty-Second Street roughly, instead it was built where it is, but this neighborhood with all kinds of political connections, you know, was worried about the displacement and the gentrification, very, very rightly, because it is. I mean, right up next to Times Square you have these low lying buildings most many of which still hold a lot of regulated tenants. Of course, gradually gentrification is taking place but it's very slow.

Q: It's very slow.

Kirkland: It's very slow.

Q: I wanted to talk about the Chelsea 197A Plan a little bit more but because you've already been interviewed about that I was hoping to first move to the more recent West Chelsea Historic District.

Kirkland: Okay. I can talk about that. That actually appeared in a strange way. At that time, the city was not ready to face rezoning along the waterfront.

Q: Got it.

Kirkland: We weren't sure but we had proposed rather low heights because N15 *[phonetic]* is quite low and it was a doddled height. But we had no political commitment, but we wanted to be able to plan that because we wanted the whole idea of Chelsea sort of growing gradually from

the water, which N12 *[phonetic]* is very low, but there the N23 *[phonetic]* is the water front zoning is very low to FAR [Floor Area Ratio]. And then working up towards the center of the island that was the urban form we were trying to preserve. But they wouldn't do it because they could see the piers going, they could see them burning because a few years later they started to burn and very few of them are left, but they just wouldn't touch it for years.

But, it wasn't until essentially Amanda came in and of course, there were two things that pushed that. First of all, the idea that all manufacturing zones in the waterfront would become upscale residential, upscale in every sense, bulk and income, residential areas like Williamsburg and that was likely to happen in Chelsea and then of course the High Line. I introduced it to the boys, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, who did the High Line because Joshua David was a member of the committee and the Community Board, the Chelsea Committee, and *[unclear],* Robert Hammond and said, "I'm really interested in the High Line." Of course, I was very skeptical of any proposal for the High Line. And I said, "There's a fellow on this committee who's interested in the High Line too Joshua but he isn't here today." But he kept nagging me or nagging the board office so eventually I had to introduce them, and I did, and everything went from there.

Q: That's great. And can you talk—?

Kirkland: Yeah, but the point is you were talking about the waterfront because of the High Line, which of course is another preservation issue sort of because the High Line is one of the things I keep trying to talk to them about is, "Remember it was a railroad." And every once in a while a

few more rails appear in the next section. Because the original proposal, we were going to show a drawing, showed a lot of rail and now except in places there's very, very little. You can go a couple of blocks and not see it and you think that culturally it was a railroad. Well, other places like around *[unclear]* where they've got all the side branches and so on you can actually see that.

But anyhow, so in a sense, it's a preservation action, but the point is all the people who had property under it or right next to it hadn't been able to develop it. There was one of the longest running lawsuits like *[unclear]* and Dickens *[phonetic]*. Before it was very interesting, the commerce commission eventually came out of the railroad board or something. It lasted so long that the organization transformed itself entirely even by name to get it torn down. But eventually this—and I think most people in Chelsea wanted it down because if you came off of the water, if you walked down that way, you got shat on by pigeons and so that it was a real—so they thought it was just ugly. But of course now—there are still a lot of wonders because in order to do this—and it also fit *[unclear]* they've up zoned everything along the waterfront to a huge amount and I saw this coming.

I mean, we've been trying to plan, but because there are one or two people who believe very much they say, "Oh, it should be a manufacturing zone." I mean, even though it's against all reality and one of them is going to fight it obviously till the end so we couldn't plan. But in the process, I realized that there was a historic district there. So I planned it almost exactly with the boundaries it had and it was in our papers, in our sort of summary of what we proposed there, which is very vague but it did include that. So when the up zoning for the West Chelsea/High Line rezoning occurred, Chris [Christine C.] Quinn, she's wonderful, the council member, the

speaker of the council, got it in the points of agreement at the end of the *[unclear]*. So the Landmarks Commission says all you need to do is to survey it, but that's a big broad hint. And they did indeed survey it and, of course, we were worried so the alderwoman, Christabel Gough—do you know her?

Q: No.

Kirkland: She's a very active preservationist, but she sort of doesn't seek publicity and she usually works by herself. Anyhow, she is a leader in a very small group called the Society for the Architecture of the City. Anyhow, she has money, in family money, and so she paid for Tony [Anthony W.] Robins to make a survey of this and essentially he proposed very similar boundaries. So these two things together and the pressure, I mean, then they couldn't avoid it. Here they had a survey saying it's good and they had points of agreement and the elected officials nudging them and so they went through the whole thing. And it really is a—and of course it's a compliment—and it went through and it's been reasonably well regulated and it's a compliment to the High Line and it's very—and of course that is how that happened. It happened as a part of a planning effort but the idea was that it's been carried out because we tried to get the board force, a lot of people have a board force, after what happened at Williamsburg, before it happened at Williamsburg. That was a bad case where the EIS [Environmental Impact Statement] didn't make any serious survey of historical resources and there was no way of trying to enforce it.

But, we pushed for both the western rail yards and for the West Chelsea to do a serious survey. I remember talking about it at the [New York Department of] City Planning and Columbia made a big survey of it to Dorothy Miner, who knew of it because always kept in touch with what was going on, and she had a studio they proposed for some of the larger districts so, there were all these forces. But, the point is, the idea of linking any significant up zoning or rezoning, the idea of making a serious study of historical resources, and they're not accepting these, mostly the rail yards and West Chelsea, said, "There's no mitigation. Because there will be threats but there's no mitigation." But, we said, "Unless they're designated." I said, "Okay, you mitigate it by designating them." So, I mean, I think that we were among the people who pioneered in getting this idea across. I mean it's almost as important as the district itself and now it's becoming standard and I think it's the whole board not just West Chelsea.

Q: Yeah. Actually, that was one of my questions I feel like this designation of this area really set a precedence for other things. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Kirkland: Well, that's all. I mean, we were *[unclear]* but once we saw it as the historic district. I mean, I've been terminated off the board and I don't want to get back on. So, I'm on sort of the *[unclear]* board of advisors. But, it is a—we took it up. I think it's getting the idea. And after the disaster of Williamsburg, I think even the Landmarks Commission realized that something was wrong. And of course Chris Quinn of course, I mean, she's a real preservationist as long as it doesn't cost too much politically. I mean, she's fundamentally an ambitious woman, but I don't think this is a sacred cause to her, but I think because she was Tom Duane's chief of staff in his office; that's when I first met her. Well, it's an interesting society. When I first me her she had

been a flaming lesbian activist in the West Village, but she was somewhat more subduedly dressed when she was working for Tom. Then one day I went in and I saw her in a business suit, a skirt. My jaw dropped and I didn't say anything but I said to myself, "This woman is ambitious."

Q: Yes. That's funny.

Kirkland: Indeed, she was. So, I mean, I don't think she's ever going mayor. I'm sorry this is on the record, but I think realistically it's going to be very hard for her, but I know the way she is though because she's very able and she's very hard working. I don't always agree with her, but she has been a friend of preservation if it doesn't cost her. For example, someone from her staff was sort of hovering over the first meeting of the new subcommittee, the lenders committee, the one on the Brad [Bradford S.] Lander chairs, although Brad believes in preservation in a general way, but to make sure that the Lamartine Place Historic District went through. Of course, I was involved in that too. I didn't start it. But, anyhow, that's how West Chelsea occurred. I mean, this is not a coherent history—I mean, it was jumping around, but that is how it occurred and I think we have been influential there. Lamartine Place is very interesting.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: Because, I mean, we looked at this area facing Penn South and I said, "Those buildings are just too much changed to be designated landmarks." I think they were. They have really been very heavily changed. They're still row houses, respectable row houses, but there have been all

kinds of *[unclear]* but we were able to down zone them. There was a very active block association in that area at the time, North Chelsea Association, which seems to have disappeared largely, which was very strong on it so they wouldn't let me make a trade of this area. And of course the city was interested because not so much Twenty-Ninth Street but Thirtieth Street behind it was filled with SROs [Single Room Occupancy Hotel] and by this time the city was realizing that the laws *[unclear]* buildings was putting more people on the street. Before that, the city had tried to get rid of them, out of the way, you know, in their message, but then, of course, many people had no place to stay otherwise, so the city became interested in saving SROs and there was a lot of SROs on the street.

Also, very interestingly, because of Moynihan Station, there's a society issue; who knows whether it's ever going to happen. I know they've got $83 million, but it's got nothing more then to improve the platforms at Penn [Pennsylvania] Station roughly. The [New York] State Historic Preservation Office took a look at that area and they said that Twenty-Ninth and Thirtieth Street are a potential historic district because of the history they included. The woman, I never knew, one day she called up a few years ago, of course got in in 2008, she got in—no, it just got in this year, it was West Chelsea got in in 2008. I got this voice, "I'm Fern Luskin. I live on Twenty-Ninth Street and they're tearing down—they're going to alter a building just a couple away and it was an abolitionist house." I said, "This must be the mysterious woman on Twenty-Ninth Street," and indeed she was and she discovered it. I said, "Look we can't get it historic. I mean, practically it's going to be immensely difficult to get it through on architecture, but if you can document it as an Underground Railroad station then you've got a chance." I said, "This is very important."

So, she did and she was looking around and I forget she was in some library and she opened a book and it was Joseph [H.] Choate. And I think she remembered that Joseph Choate had been in the house at the time of the draft riots because the house happened in the draft riots, the [James] Gibbons and [Horace] Greeley they were coming at, and he had been in the building. But, this was a biography of his written by his family after he died, one of these testimonials based on his correspondence. She found a letter and said, "Jesse was just looking through and it said—" From Choate who was a great friend of a families of the draft riot. "I remember sitting at this table with William Lloyd Garrison and next to us was a—with us, was a jet black Negro on his way to freedom." That glorious quote and of course they found more evidence but that thing alone I've been quoting all over town because it's such a wonderful—

Q: Yes, it is.

Kirkland: And it's really the only really documented station in Manhattan. There are presumed ones, there's the Fifteenth Street Friends Meeting, but they were ambivalent about. They kicked the Gibbons' out because I think they were too active. Maybe because they let the Negro in the parlor.

Q: Yes. Well, yeah, that's very exciting.

Kirkland: Then I worked with the people because there was a member of the—she got in touch with the Quakers. I said there are these abolitionist groups and she got in touch with a woman

called Julie Finch who was very active—a great specialist in the history of the Underground Railroad in the Fifteenth Street Meeting and, of course, the Quakers were very much of course involved. The Hicksite Quakers, not the Orthodox Quakers so called. But, even so, the Gibbons were thrown out for whatever reason. Gibbons was on the floor and she was the only person who fought Dorothy Dix to a standstill in the hospitals of the Civil War—she was extraordinary. And founder of the [American] Correctional Association, which is still going and her house went to the city finally got around to landmarking recently. It's beautifully restored preserved federal house.

But anyhow, so that by concentrating on getting it and, of course, the elected were all for it. Once you prove its abolitionist, whether it's god and other work and Dick Gottfried was the liberal elected sort of split up Charles and it was Dick Gottfried who led it, but of course Tom Duane was strong behind it too so, they got that very fast. I couldn't believe the Landmarks Commission was acting so fast on that. But of course, as I say, it's god and motherhood and then that wonderful quote.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: And, of course, we said the men in the house escaped in the riots over the roofs and that's why you preserve the flat—so the idea of the historic district because you couldn't build *[unclear]*—was important because that's how they escaped and came down to a carriage, which somebody had hired, and how they knew it, because they were worried that something was going to happen. At the far end of the block, a Jewish gentleman let them down. I sometimes wonder if

it could have been related to the first location of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, which was on that block. But I'm not sure because there seems to be some *[unclear]*. It was intended. The first year or so they just rented a floor in a house or something like that before they had any real asylum and so it was right on that block. I wondered if there was some connection there, but I've never—

Q: Never heard anything.

Kirkland: I didn't know what his name was, but I don't think it was a man who was connected with the Orphan Asylum. But, that's at the other end of the block and of course, the building is a fascinating building. It's not designatable, but it's got the long windows on the second floor of a public meeting hall.

Q: Oh, okay.

Kirkland: That's an interesting form in the northeast. They had one in my small town in Brunswick. There was a store on the ground floor and then above it there would be—because the open space—because this was wood beam construction, on the second floor would be actually the large room where I went to dancing school, where I never really learned how to dance, but in Brunswick, Maine. But this one was there and that was where the Orangemen started out for the 1870 Orange Riots when they were attacked by the Catholic Irish who had moved in and dominated Chelsea. It was a famous event and the militia panicked and shot people and Jim [James] Fisk [Jr.] fled from that.

Q: Very exciting times it sounds like.

Kirkland: Yeah, but that was down the block and I don't think we'll ever get that landmark, but I think it probably will make, may make, the potential landmark district for the register. I'm not sure but I'd like to see that.

Q: It kind of brings up an interesting point. Throughout our conversation, you've been talking about elective officials and that kind of stuff. I kind of wanted to talk to you about how politics has kind of shaped your work in this area in Chelsea and how kind of your relationship with politics and kind of your thoughts on that.

Kirkland: Well, I mean, one of the things, June, my wife had a—suggested to me that I join the Reform Club [Chelsea Reform Democratic Club] because one of the leaders in Chelsea—some of the leaders of Chelsea, Bob Treadland *[phonetic],* were one of the founders of the Reform Club. Chelsea was just gentrifying; in fact, it was doing that famous place in the West Village. It was founded in the West Village that's when people *[unclear]* the Reform Club. The Reform Club actually has always elected liberal. They took over from the old school, the tenement people. This was one of the places in town where the gentrifiers were strong enough and they aligned themselves with some of the people in the housing projects who are not the traditional Irish Democrats. And I remember just about the time we first moved there the Reform Club became the official, the regular club in the area. So, it's always produced forward-looking elected officials. I mean, of course, there was Tom Duane, Chris Quinn later. I think, of course Tom, and

there's somebody in between I'm forgetting, but the point is there's always tended to be an alliance and an overlap between the brownstoners, let's use that word a little bit.

There are some brownstones in Chelsea, they're mostly brick, they were mostly brick, and the Reform Club because they're the people that came in. They're the people that run the block association. So, essentially, it comes from the same pool of people working in different ways. The Reform Club, of course, obviously supported the Chelsea Plan; they supported the historic district and all. I mean, that's automatically, because it's all part of the same people pushing forward. Although I never joined the Reform Club myself, but I know a lot of people in it. And you'll see the candidates come out of it sort of like Tom and Chris came out of that, to some extent.

Q: So, they were tremendous allies for you.

Kirkland: They're almost automatic allies for this kind of thing because they worked for the plan and for affordable housing in the same way. But, the board at least has a history of going for affordable housing, but people who have been for it have been in Clinton because of the special relationship there and a few individual people like Joe Restucha *[phonetic],* a very interesting character. He produces affordable housing in existing buildings and he fixes up the buildings historically. We managed to—when we saw that one of his advisors tried to put him up for an award from the Preservation League of New York State, I busted everybody I could too to get him it and he got it and he was so grateful.

Q: Oh, that's great.

Kirkland: But he's a hidden preservationist, but it's very interesting.

Q: Oh, okay.

Kirkland: Oh, he led—because Clinton the northern part of the border hardly anything in any historic—only a handful of buildings, there must be three or four in all the area, and of course he's pushing these big tenement. Because he asked the firms, he asked if they've got good architecture and whole blocks are in good mid Nineteenth Century architecture.

Q: Yeah.

Kirkland: And so it's very interesting. I think some of them will eventually get through to be historic.

Q: Oh, that's great.

Kirkland: It's going to be very interesting. So, it's all this group of people who overlap and have similar interests and concerns. Of course, many of the reformers don't give a damn about landmarking themselves, but they're aligned with the people so they go along because the other people would go with them, you see.

Q: Got it. Yes. I'm kind of interested what is it that you most appreciate about the West Chelsea Historic District, is there like a building or just—what's the most special thing to you?

Kirkland: Well, it sort of is because it ties in with something actually that I did. First of all, some of the buildings were very handsome, extraordinarily handsome. They date back to the days, I mean, over quite a period of time. Some of them go back to the late Nineteenth Century and many of them were the early part of the Twentieth Century, but when manufacturers, of course, were proud to manufacture in these buildings and they them in New York City and New York City was the leading manufacturing city in the world, just as was the leading port for a fair period. And of course China has taken over all of that now.

No, I mean, I got interested in it just because I went down there. Of course when you first went down there it wasn't really very safe and of course any man who went down there would be approached by a prostitute. In that area, it was the females. There's an area down around Seventeeth Street and Eighteenth Street, which is the area between the female prostitutes and the gay ones, the transvestite prostitutes—

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: —who were in the Gansevoort Market and the Village were the strongest ones.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: Then there was the area around the south end of [Robert] Fulton Houses where you were—I don't know, I didn't go there the reputation was too bad.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: And of course, going out, of course, even then, I was in my 60s and possibly that I would be going out with—

Q: That's funny.

Kirkland: But one of the things is, I've always involved. I've been deeply involved with the Hudson River Park. I was one of the first and Bob Treadland was the leader there in different ways and pushed for the Chelsea River Park, which also elected officials had been forming a large park, which Bob was at the charge for when I had been aligned with him, is going to open up at the very west end of Twenty-Third Street.

But just north of that in the original plan—south of it there were the Chelsea Piers, which none unfortunately keeps its façade. They tore down the last one—the ground was unsafe. The Chelsea Piers were refaced earlier because they were trying to get—I think it was his *[unclear]* who would then get it to the city. It stayed there but then of course of the whole shipping just broke down. Most of that was when they rearranged everything for the large ships and I went overseas from the Chelsea Piers in the Second World War.

Q: Oh, you did!

Kirkland: I didn't realize it, but I came up—because I remember I was looking north and I said, "I wonder if we're going to make the Empire State Building." Because the Empire State Building you could just see. It was at night of course. We didn't quite because we turned in, and that's the only place that it could have been was in the Chelsea Pier.

Q: Oh, that's so funny.

Kirkland: So, I went overseas with the [American] Red Cross ladies giving me donuts.

Q: That's so funny.

Kirkland: But anyhow, just north of the Chelsea Piers, which is where the passenger ship terminal is now and even more were the three rail yards. Remember, the only railroad that connects to Manhattan is the New York Central [Railroad] and, of course, in one of these were the terminal stores, so-called Terminal Stores because of the railroad, but it's now the Thirtieth Street Yards. In those days, it was a much more diffused area. These trains just came in down Eleventh Avenue and just turned right into this gray yard way. You can still see how it's turned and you come right into this open space. And I'd just love to get it as an interior landmark, but I'm sure people would hate that idea, and it is publicly open, and I really think it might be an interesting idea because it is very historical. And in some places you can see where the platforms—one of them you can see where the platforms were. They filled in most of it at the old

platform level because that's the entrance to the old stores, but it's still maintained extraordinarily.

But, anyhow, this was when [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan in his highway act when he was trying to get it in too, there was money for preserving historic features, and so I worked with the Hudson River Park, it was the [Hudson River Park] Conservancy then. Now, they *[unclear]* the people I know. I said, "Can we get the money to raise one of these float bridges?" Which is in good shape, there's the Baltimore and the Ohio [Railroad Float Bridge] one, which when I first went to Chelsea it was still being used. You could see the cars coming in on the float and the engine would go out with a few dummy cars, empty cars, so not to put too much weight on the barge, and then pull them off and they'd go into the rail yard. And that's how other railroads, bedsides the New York Central, made a connection. There are these rail yards all over even in the Bronx, in Brooklyn, and so on. There's still one in—because when the Pennsylvania tunnels were built there was one for the freight connection, but the tunnels were so expensive through the tunnels, but there's a ferry across from them south of Red Hook. Then there's the float bridges and the third barges are still running. The New York connecting railroad still runs these connections, but they've frayed up to New England.

But, anyhow, so this one was in New York Central and it was in pretty good shape and so they got an estimate. And I said to them—Noreen [Doyle] was the vice—I forget I think she was essentially what she is now, she's the executive vice president of the group. "That doesn't seem like a very realistic estimate." It was $600,000. We'll try to get that anyhow and she did. People she fought in this meeting, but they were all the bicyclists, so they got the money for bike trails.

Q: Oh.

Kirkland: But she managed to get this $600,000 in from the—I forget, the name will come to me—rail line and eventually that became the nut by which they did it. It cost $3.25 million to take it out because even though the timbers mostly came back, the engineers were so fascinated by this they kept calling me up, "Are we going to take it, we going to bring it back?" And so on. It was a great adventure for the highways. There's these huge *[unclear]*. These things are incredible. And they took it down to New Jersey somewhere and they fixed it up and it's about eighty percent original fabric. But, they couldn't—but in order to make it float they would have had to dredge the harbor and getting the permit was so—you just can't do that. So, it's held up unfortunately on pilings, although the caissons are still there, gradually rusting of course, but they are there. So, this led into—some of these tracks led into some of the buildings in the West Chelsea Historic District.

Q: Oh, okay.

Kirkland: Because I can remember when say the famous Starrett-Lehigh Building, I can remember a rail car sitting at the bottom of that. Of course, originally the rail cars would go up in elevators, so that never really happened, they even laid a few rails, but then trucks came in so it wasn't seen there, but the rail cars did come in. It was built over an existing rail yard, which was fun. There were three float bridges, there was the Bolder High *[phonetic]* on the south and then there was the Lehigh Valley [Railroad], that went into the Starrett-Lehigh building, which is built

over a rail yard, most of the rail yard was gradually built up, and then there was the Erie one, which went into the terminal stores and there was a little yard north of that and they were all connected by tracks. Originally, there were tracks all through there in these industrial areas in the waterfront.

I can remember in Baltimore years ago, all that area next to the piers every street seemed to—they were stone mostly or brick laid streets and they had rails on it and they had this sort of truck like thing—of course originally it was done by horses—this sort of truck like thing that sort of pushed these cars around. It was very interesting at night. Well, that was the way it was in the West Chelsea Historic District, but essentially, it tied in with the float bridge.

So, that and they just had such handsome buildings and it was so close to not happening. But, now, of course they're all being gentrified, and of course some of it being used for art galleries, which is great. They've opened sometimes a little more than I would have liked, but perfection *[unclear]*. So, it's a great success as long as the art district stays, even so, because some of it can be used for residential use because it takes a long time for an art district to die. People keep saying it. Madison Avenue, Fifty-Seventh Street, there are still a lot of galleries on Fifty-Seventh Street. So, I think even if they—maybe the center will move to Williamsburg or somewhere else, but I think a lot of it is going to stay in Manhattan for a long time, so I think the art galleries will be pretty safe tenants for quite a while, but that's what I really liked about it. Just some of the buildings are really, like I said, such handsome quality. You can see they used to make Reynolds Wrap there for example.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

Kirkland: Yeah, well the old *[unclear]* but Reynolds [Metals Company] owned the company, owned a couple of buildings and they actually did manufacture it there. Then gradually it all turned to offices but you can still one of the chimneys. There were three of them when I first moved in.

Q: We were talking a lot about the railway, obviously that's a big part of the area there, and you talked a little bit about the High Line and not having as much of the tracks kind of present. Can you talk a little bit about that like why that's important to you?

Kirkland: Of course, it does reflect at least the original past because of course the New York Central was connected, but also the original railroad went down Tenth Avenue.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: I mean, it went along essentially Greenwich Street up till there and then it turned along Tenth Avenue, which was roughly along the original shoreline. Not exactly, but then it came up. But, of course, that was famous in Chelsea because the trains came through and, of course, they did two things they ran over people, kids and so on, but also above all, it scared the horses. No one could realize that runaway horses were a real menace in New York City. Franklin Pierce's son died from a runaway horse in a carriage accident, this was very real. They weren't joking, it was a real thing and all kinds of things spooked the horses in the Nineteenth Century and they

would runaway and many things would happen. I mean, of course you've got a wagon full of goods you lose the goods and maybe the wagon driver, and that's not good.

So, as you know, the famous thing is of course that the law was passed that all trains—first of all, all the engines, and they only had steam engines in those days, were sort of boxed in, I call them dummy engines, and the only thing that stuck out really was the chimney, the smoke stack. Almost everything else was fit in so that it would frighten the horses less and they had to proceed by a man or a boy on foot or on horseback waving a red flag; that was a requirement. So, since this and Tenth Avenue and further north Eleventh Avenue where the same thing happened were both called Death Avenues because there were so many accidents. The people on the horseback waving the red flag got the glorious sobriquet of Death Avenue Cowboys.

Q: Oh, that's funny.

Kirkland: So, anyhow, I've always been sort of a rail fan too, but it was a wonderful story. And, of course, they went down along Washington Street, a long way downtown and gradually it cut back. Because the railroad originally started at Chambers Street and the Hudson River Railroad was downtown and then gradually it got—that big area, which was originally the—oh dear—the Episcopal Park, I'm blocking on it, not St. Charles—St. Luke's Park. I forget anyhow, there was the famous church, the *[unclear]* church there and there was a park around it, again another idea like Gramercy Park with the church. That is now the exit from the Holland Tunnel. That's been open space from the very beginning of New York City. So, anyhow, an essential part of the history of the west side was that railroad.

Q: Got it. And speaking of open space, the Hudson River Park you said that you were instrumental in getting that.

Kirkland: Yeah, I was one of the many people. I wasn't the lead, yeah.

Q: Why is that important; why is that space important?

Kirkland: Well, I mean, of course, waterfront space is important but also like the preservation of some of the piers, the Chelsea Piers are more or less intact. The structure is intact on the inside, the facing is not, but of course that's a private one. But, for example, Pier 57, which is a very interesting pier because it was the first of the Chelsea Piers and it burned down and then it was replaced. And how was it replaced? This was burned down right after the World War, I think of '47, and what they did was instead of building another pier on wooden pilings they got someone from the army who had figured out a way to supply the army at the Normandy Landing. And that was with caissons, with these big concrete barges they moved in and used them as piers so they could bring boats to it. Well, they went up to Newburgh, they dug out an area and made a sort of embankment around it, pumped it out, built these three huge caissons of reinforced concrete, let the water back, hauled them down by tug in the Hudson River, I remember this at the time, and sank them at the Pier 57 and then on these three huge concrete boxes they erected a pier.

And that was one is preserved in fact the question is how to use it. How do use it is a problem. I've been the head of an advisory group for this for years. We eventually chose someone to do it

and then they got into all kinds of—it was dubious anyhow, but they couldn't make it. And now of course now they're trying again to print out—because the Hudson River Park depends on the income from things like this, places like this, in order to keep going. It's supposed to be a self-sustaining park and thank god, they aren't getting into the same problems as the Brooklyn Bridge Park, which many of the people in the neighborhood regard as a disaster. People who originally supported it are just horrified what has happened there.

But, that's River Park, I mean, by and large is a great improvement. And preserving the character of this extraordinary historic pier, which of course isn't at all like the others, is one of the things that we're trying to preserve. I mean, we carried them further but they reused—people had all kinds of dreams. What to put on the roof is one of the great questions, but the main thing is to keep the internal and the external structure. I think we recommended one candidate and we'll see. And they're still bargaining, but of course this is the hard time for that.

Q: Oh, definitely.

Kirkland: I mean, one of the people that they were going to go in with, which was an auction house, I'm not sure is going to be able to carry it out, carry out their obligation. So, what's going to be in place of it I don't know, but that was one of the attractive things. So, all these things fit together in a sense. But, no, to me the park—but eventually because it is such a huge amenity this is one thing I'm glad to save anything historical or record anything historical in it that's fine, but fundamentally this is park to be a park and a waterfront park.

Q: Got it. Kind of looking retrospectively with the Plan 197A and then also the West Chelsea Historic District, was there ever a time where you thought that it was just going to be stopped, that you weren't going to be able to be successful?

Kirkland: Well, of course this was really two parts. The 197A was after the first attempt. I mean, I would have gave up on it. Actually, it was Ross Graham who got so interested in it. She had been on the committee. She was one of the chief staff members for Senator [Manfred] Ohrenstein who was our senator and the minority leader, [New York] State Senate minority leader. She was even his chief of staff for a while and she got him interested in this so it made it easier to make 197—when they did the [New York City] Charter revision—it made it easier to get a 197A Plan. Then she became chair of the Community Board and then she wouldn't let me go until I went through the whole process all over again, she just beat me to it. I was so discouraged, but I mean, no, she was wonderful. I mean, I'm just one of the people. I had the ideas, but a lot of people publicized an attack and even pushed me into doing the right thing, so we finally got a compromise.

It has worked. I mean, it has worked to protect generally the urban form, not as well as we had hoped, and the historic district. It wasn't down zoned enough. I tried to down zone it a little more but they said, no, we don't do R6 [Residential District 6] in Manhattan—but they had done it for the Village. How Doris got preservation, she just shrink wrapped the Village, the historic district really and onto the Village, and done an extraordinary job. Very early on when all these things were new she managed to do it.

Q: That's great. And then, do you feel like with the West Chelsea Historic District because it was a little later, do you think that that process was easier?

Kirkland: Yes, it was because the historic district was there. I mean we were very lucky in a way. ,We had it there and we were going to include it as part of a separate plan, but because of the dissension in the committee we were never able to. I mean, we've got a lot of side planning work done, but I was never able to get over it because one of these people was very difficult and of course a lot of the people were on the board at that time came from the housing projects and they of course had jobs and they in fact had jobs *[unclear],* so they supported him, so I had just given up hope. But, being able to—I mean, so I would have given up hope but it wasn't until the West Chelsea rezoning and I suddenly said, "These resources should have been saved from the very beginning." I had talked *[unclear]* at the City Planning and elsewhere and I went up to Dorothy Miner and talked with her about the proposals. Our proposals were smaller, but we still had them and we may do them in the southern part of Chelsea. But, no, I had given up, but I saw this opportunity and I was lucky enough to be able to seize it.

Q: Great.

Kirkland: And as I say, the Chelsea planning I had given up but because of some people who believed in it, especially Ross, it did go forward. Oh, yes, I gave up more than once on both of these.

Q: How kind of has the preservation movement changed since you first got involved till now, your experiences now? Do you feel like it's changed at all?

Kirkland: Well, it's interesting, the first part of it, I mean, I wasn't involved, as I said, in getting the—although I know the people involved and that was when I first became aware of it and I knew about it a little bit through the newspapers. I was always interested in this kind of thing. But, you see the first thing that I was actually involved with, or active myself, was the Ladies' Mile [Historic District], which you probably know. Jack Taylor and Tony [Anthony C.] Wood, of course he was really our leader. I mean, I haven't seen him for a long time but he was really the—but Jack Taylor was really the man on the ground for a lot of the work and this woman, Christabel Gough, from the Village, and I. We were sort of the active group who actually put it through, I mean, although Tony was always there of course influencing the politician. But, of course, preservation at that time was something new, relatively new and not so accepted and, of course the Ladies' Mile was the first non-residential of any significance, first historic district of any significance. There was nobody there. You were frightened when you went up Sixth Avenue at night. It was frightening, absolutely not a soul and Broadway almost as bad.

Q: Oh, that's so funny.

Kirkland: Incredibly, you can't believe it now.

Q: It's so different, yeah.

Kirkland: Even by day, there was nobody there. There were all hulks of buildings, which of course would have been the major department stores at the turn of the Twentieth, or just before, at the light of the turn of the Twentieth Century. It was Pennsylvania Station that pulled the retail district up to the north. We were just there and I didn't even know what they were so eventually I found out. But, preservation is now sort of accepted, I mean, just in the zoning. I mean now preservation, I mean originally it was just lip service to preservation and environmental impact statements, but now I think it is. Partly it's because there are preservationists and I am one, try to get these things, make a serious investigation, and then linking it with mitigation up to zoning and just a general influence. I mean everybody at least pays lip service to preservation or practically in those days. I mean it was the gentrification and it was gentrified and *[unclear]*.

Q: Yeah. That's all right.

Kirkland: I'm exaggerating.

Q: Yes, of course.

Kirkland: But you get the idea.

Q: Yes.

Kirkland: It was not part of the normal conversation. It was not essentially a part of the normal conversation about development and planning. Now, it's definitely become a part of it. And the

fact is that [Michael R.] Bloomberg had—they were able to persuade Bloomberg to give money to the city. I'm never quite sure how it happened. Somebody got to Bloomberg. I think it was Amanda, I suspect, who got to him because they put more money into the Landmarks Commission, which was really had such small staff, it had gradually cut back in the poor days, and it was always a marginal agency. Well, I don't know, maybe having [Robert B.] Tierney as a politician in it, I don't know, but he seems—because boy is he—I've seen him working at Chris Quinn's State of the City speech and he was just working all the politicians around. So, I think it's become part of the system, part of planning in a way automatically. You have to think about this and you get into trouble if you don't.

Q: Got it. And are you satisfied with where you think all this is going, preservation, zoning, like do you feel like we're moving in a good direction, New York City?

Kirkland: Well, the whole of the direction, but the point is I don't think there's been the real—I mean, the point is preservation and development, all these things, they need to become all part of planning thought, a basic part of planning thought, and I'm not sure that this has happened yet. Preservationists are a separate group where most other kinds of planners are not a separation groups. I mean, in effect preservationists are in effect planners. I think to incorporate—I mean, places like Columbia, I think, have tried to incorporate these two things. For example, Elliott Sclar, I think our ideas are in association, I'm not sure. But I think the ideas are spreading in the planning schools but to get them—in some planning schools I don't think so, but at least in many of the cities like New York where preservation is strong, I think while it's part of the

conversation and part of the discussion it's not a basic part and the trouble is the fact that it isn't the basic part, I think is bad.

Sometimes you have to say, we can't save this. I mean, I'm not talking about the fact that politically because so many—you have to balance things and I don't think there is any view which has really incorporated that idea. I'm sure there are plenty of individuals that are combining planning as an essential part of preservation, but being able to accept tradeoffs and preservationists won't accept tradeoffs. Other planners will, but preservationists will not. And until we get to the world where preservationists have enough influence and confidence to be able to admit that they have to make some tradeoffs and so on that they really will not be entirely and actively part of the process. Its coming, I think, but preservationists are still too prickly, too purists. Partly of course, because they come from a completely different approach, I mean, incorporating history. I wonder sometimes because sometimes I think Europe, of course in these old towns, cities in Europe, I mean, everything is historic so how do you make these tradeoffs, I don't know. And in Philadelphia, places like Philadelphia and parts of New York City, we're getting a little the same way. We're trying to preserve early Twentieth Century things and yet some of these things aren't so great. I think a true deep understanding and balance of these things is lacking on both sides, preservationists and planners. It's coming I hope into planning schools but it's not there yet.

Q: Was there anyone that you worked with on both of these projects or through the time that you were doing this that you kind of think was ahead of the curve that kind of embraced these things that you talked about?

Kirkland: Well, I don't know. No, I don't know. I mean, Tony was always a big purist, has always been a purist preservationist, and that's one reason why I guess I'm not quite so close to him. Not that there's any—well, one time on the Historic District Council meeting we sat on opposite sides of an individual issue, so since then we haven't been that close. That's fine, I mean, good heavens I'm used to it by now. But, the drive of the old-fashioned preservationist has not been to really incorporate it into planning but just to preserve and I think until you incorporate it into planning and realize the options of alteration even occasionally the destruction and keeping the thing. Except this is the whole spectrum, take it as a whole spectrum, and recognize when it's most desirable but sometimes you realize you have to fit things in. This to me, I think, is the next step and I don't know whether it is—I think some individuals, I mean I like to think I'm one that will see it that way, but I'm sure there are others and people in planning schools but I don't think it has happened among really the body of preservationists.

And of course it's good, I mean, we don't want to give up. Just as we don't want to give up the affordable housing, I mean, all these things and yet sometimes these things are in conflict and we have to accept it and take a trade and get something back for losing something. And I think until this world, this incorporation, this hasn't happened yet.

Q: What are you most proud of in your work with Chelsea is there one thing that you fought especially hard for that happened that you feel a great attachment to or accomplished with, what do you—?

Kirkland: Well, I don't know. I mean, the Chelsea Plan essentially was the most significant thing because it was a pioneering thing. We were the first planning boards to admit one and the second one to be adopted. And, although as I say I gave up on it at some time, but I think that in a sense was the most significant thing I have done. I'm very happy about Chelsea, but in a sense I mean it wasn't until suddenly I realized that the West Chelsea rezoning could be an opportunity for the preservation that I began to push for it, and in a sense it was sheer luck that we got it in. If we hadn't had a sympathetic ear, if we didn't have Chris, well probably both as a speaker, but certainly as a council member strongly in favor of it, it would not have happened. The Chelsea Plan did make its own way on its merits more.

Q: And what's next for you?

Kirkland: I don't know. I'm 84 so I don't—

Q: You've got time. You've got projects I'm sure, right.

Kirkland: Well, I'm very—right now I know yes, there are things, I mean, for example I've been secondary to *[unclear]* to trying to get a law for protection in Clinton, I think he's trying to get too large. But, I mean, yes, I would like to get more of Chelsea protected historically. I mean, that's sort of a follow-up on that because our streets are just about as good as some of the ones in the Chelsea Historic District, for example. But I'm lucky I suddenly realized that Eighth Avenue was going to down zone, but it's still so valuable now—at least it was before the crash—that people were tearing down three story buildings to build five story buildings because that's about

what you could build, or six, you could build five or six story buildings, and it was worthwhile to do that and so they were throwing that in. So, suddenly I looked at these pair of federal houses, which they were so far north they never got in any survey of federal houses. I said, I'm getting worried, because the federal houses on that same block, although altered by recognition, but you knew it by it's Flemish bond and the gable side but nothing else was original of it. So, I said, I'm worried about them. So, I put it an RFE [Request for Evaluation], I got the Community Board to support it and now they've been designated. Just about the same time that West Chelsea was.

I mean, I never expected that I just said, let's do it, because I was worried about it, but now of course there isn't the pressure there, the development pressure, but there will be, there will be again because we won't be able to get Eighth Avenue down zoned again. I don't think maybe we should but whatever, but these will stay. Although one of the owners has hardship, she had lost a major tenant, but I hope someone tells her that now she is landmarked and because it's contextual zoning all around it she can get her assessment lowered.

Q: Oh.

Kirkland: Because you can't build high on it and you can't transfer—because all around it is contextual it's practically impossible to transfer your heir rights. I mean, there's plenty of room to transfer them to, but it doesn't pay off.

Q: Do you think that if you, let's say you didn't move to West Chelsea and you moved someplace else, do you think that you would be involved in the same kind of things or is there something about West Chelsea that's very near and dear to you?

Kirkland: I don't live in West Chelsea. It was one of the historic districts where nobody lived in. Literally there was not one legal and I don't think illegal. There had been some illegal residents, but they had been forced out. There was not one resident in West Chelsea. There were some in Ladies' Mile, but there were not any in West Chelsea. It was almost the first historic district of any size with not a single legal resident. And there are very few now because mostly it's manufacturing. We made sure—we and the City Planning agreed on most of it being zoned for manufacturing, because that way it allows the art galleries and we got an extension and it allowed art museums there. I mean, the art museums weren't legal in N15 *[phonetic]*, so we said let's make it legal, especially in the historic district, because that's good in itself, but it's a reinforcement for the art district and there are a couple now.

So, I think we are—well, as I say, I don't know if I would have lived somewhere else if I would have done it, but I think it would have all depended—because I sort of fell into it. I really fell into it. I was interested in this kind of thing, but I could have turned into some other—I mean since it wasn't that interesting; the kind of work I was doing, computers, and both my wife and I were beginning to think about cutting—she had been working and teaching nursing way out in Brooklyn in a college and had these long train trips we both sort of decided to cut back on things. But then, she thought this was—I mean, she took up the IRP [Institute for Retired Professionals], the education, and I took up this. So, I think it is—no, there's nothing about—I think Chelsea,

yes, it was a good place for my interests that I could find and I was a sucker for West—I believed the whole west side was set up because they didn't know what to do with it, but they had the idea that at least they should have a walkway or something like that along the highway, they were going to build this nice new highway there. So, when they had this big meeting at the [New York] Institute of Technology and Chelsea is sort of halfway up between the north and the south end and there was a big ad in The West Side Task Force *[phonetic]*, it was called originally, and then they had the speech on what they were going to do, they were all very big on what they were going to do. So, I was down front and I raised my hand at the public thing and I was the first person called on. I said, "Don't you think that the main thing that we need on the west side is a promenade all on the west side of the roadway?" And I just walked into his hand.

Q: That's great. I'm sure he appreciated it.

Kirkland: That's what they were for but also, I mean, it showed that so many people cared about it.

Q: Yeah.

Kirkland: But of course, I wasn't in favor of west *[unclear],* but I wouldn't say that publicly. Anyhow, so no, I had no idea. I mean, I take the course of one's life, I have no idea.

Q: Yeah. Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you want to cover or do you have any final thoughts or anything?

Kirkland: No, I'm not sure that I have anything. I think I've been giving you a series of final thoughts all the way through.

Q: Yes. Well, thank you so much. This was really great. I learned a lot and I'm very excited about it to share.

Kirkland: Yeah, I'm glad it was interesting. Well, I should be interested—will you send me a transcript of the interview?

[END OF INTERVIEW]