

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Lorna Nowvé

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Lorna Nowvé conducted by Interviewer Katie Nolan on October 13, 2007. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive's Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

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

Lorna Nowvé worked at the Municipal Art Society (MAS) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She then became associate director of the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation and later a film and television producer. In this interview conducted by Pratt graduate student Katie Nolan in 2007, Nowvé provides a broad perspective on the climate of the preservation movement in New York City at the time of her involvement. She discusses the role of MAS and its then-subsiidiary, the Historic Districts Council, in preservation battles, and recounts her experiences organizing rallies to save Grand Central Terminal, helping promote MAS and grow its membership, planning walking tours, and helping MAS move from a cramped office in Rockefeller Center into the Urban Center at the Villard Houses. Nowvé also addresses how the city and its attitude toward preservation have evolved in the decades after the Grand Central fight.

Lorna Nowvé was one of the founding members of the Historic Districts Council and worked at the Municipal Art Society (MAS) during its earliest years in New York. She was a forceful public advocate in the fight to save Grand Central Terminal; leading tours, handing out leaflets, and organizing a train caravan to attend Supreme Court hearings. Nowvé, during her time at MAS, helped create the Urban Center—a public space for New York's architectural and planning communities to convene. After leaving the Municipal Art Society, Nowvé worked with the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation to preserve Bryant Park, using private fundraising and corporate sponsorship to turn a decaying space into a public good. Nowvé was also an accomplished film and television producer.

Transcriptionist: Unknown

Session: 1

Interviewee: Lorna Nowvé

Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Katie Nolan

Date: October 13, 2007

Q: This interview is going to be on October 13, 2007, at the Kress Foundation at 174 East 80<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. This is Katie Nolan interviewing Lorna Nowvé.

Nowvé: No-vay.

Q: Nowvé. Thank you. So this interview is going to focus on the major events in preservation that happened during the 1970s and '80s in New York. We're particularly interested in the Municipal Art Society [MAS] and Historic Districts Council [HDC] and the role you played in these two organizations. Just to kind of get started, what drew you to preservation and when did you begin it in your life?

Nowvé: I grew up in New York City. I think it sort of gets into your bones. You're aware of everything that it has, all the textures, etcetera. I went to college in Wisconsin, which was a great, very different experience for me. But I missed New York, and I started to study architectural history and such out there, which was strange, because it was very rural. I was designing parks and doing a lot of open space planning. Yet I was also trying to figure out how I was going to apply my interest in architecture and history when I moved back home, to New York City. That's when New York was starting to go through its fiscal crisis. So it was very interesting to read about the city that I really loved, that was my home, struggling so.

I came back to New York, and I started to look for work. I wrote Margot Wellington, who was then the executive director, the first executive director, of the Municipal Art Society, a note. I had read a profile about her getting her new job in the *New York Post*, which back then was actually a very reputable newspaper. I think perhaps Roberta Gratz had written the profile. I just wrote a letter to Margot explaining that my love for the city was drawing me to try to find a way to work to make the city better. Margot responded—apparently, she even kept my little cover letter, which had a typo in it, on her desk for a long time—and I got this job, which was pretty incredible. It was a dream job coming to New York to work at MAS, which was then holed up on the 45<sup>th</sup> floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. With this incredible view of midtown Manhattan, so in a way you saw your work cut out for you. So that's how I got to MAS.

Q: About what year was that?

Nowvé: This was around 1976.

Q: What position did you have when you went to MAS?

Nowvé: Whatever the lowest position was *[laughs]*. There was a staff of maybe four people. It was Patricia Jones, Laurie Beckelman, Margot, me, Joan Altman, and a part time bookkeeper named Gloria Troy, and then one of the board members, Ron Friedman, who had been active with the Asia Society. He was an older gentlemen who was retired, and made it his business to come in and look over the books, as it were. He also produced a weekly radio program on

WNYC called “The Livable City.” Those archives might be very interesting for you to go through, because every week they had intense interviews with people in the preservation and architecture in New York City.

So it was a very small office. We were cramped together. We would have board meetings in fabulous locations, and it was, as you know, an amazing board of directors back then. It always has been so. These were people who were really very much a part of New York. There was really no glamour back then. They didn’t have the Urban Center. We had our public programs. At that time we were organizing the fight to save Grand Central [Terminal]. We had a satellite office in the bowels of Grand Central. We had weekly classes on New York architectural history. I don’t know if you have talked to Barry Lewis. Barry Lewis is an amazing resource. He basically taught me everything I know about New York City architecture. He taught free classes, or maybe we charged a pittance, on New York city architectural history. Some of the classes were held down in Grand Central. Other times we had one at the Merchants Institute and all these other places around the city. Then we were organizing our walking tours. So we had our weekly tours in Grand Central, and then we would have walking tours in different parts of Manhattan. I was involved with those as well. We had volunteers whom we trained. All that out of these little cramped offices in 30 Rock.

Q: Do you—like what specifically what role that you played?

Nowvé: I organized all the tours and the public programming and I worked with Laurie Beckelman on those. I gave tours. We had volunteer staff at the Grand Central office, I gave

tours at Grand Central. Did a lot of advocacy. I worked with Ron on the radio program and I actually did some interviews. We had a weekly or monthly newsletter, I worked on that. Then it just sort of grew and grew and grew. I was very interested in public advocacy part of it all, so I loved access to the public. I really liked organizing the classes, organizing the tours, because that way I got to know our members. It was very interesting to see what their interests were, because that helped guide the bigger missions of MAS in terms of how it was going to go public, because it had been about eighty years since it had started. Some would say it was an elite organization, because it tapped into a very rarified group of New Yorkers who were very connected and very devoted. But they never had a large membership. The whole notion of membership for MAS was rather new. One of the things that really spearheaded and helped grow its membership was the sale of that famous, Saul Steinberg poster, *The New Yorker* cover of The New Yorker's View of New York.

Pete Spellman, was one of the board members, worked at *The New Yorker*, and he was able to get us these incredibly beautiful glossy ads in *The New Yorker* stating that if you bought a poster, you got a membership at MAS. Our membership rolls tripled. It was amazing to see the mailman come in with money for us. Not necessarily people who were in New York City, some people just wanted posters. But then we started to really build a membership base. Of course, the Committee to Save Grand Central was brewing then. That was really, from my perspective, because I was just starting, what helped put MAS on the map in terms of public perception and in terms of what muscle MAS could contribute to saving the city. I was very much involved with that. It was very exciting to see what we were doing. We were handing out leaflets around Grand

Central, we organized an enormous rally. This was around the time of the Supreme Court case [Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City].

Q: Right.

Nowvé: It was very interesting to think about raising public awareness. People looking at Grand Central and looking at the renderings of what the Breuer Building might do to it, and getting people really angry about the prospects. Talk about grassroots! We leafleted outside by Grand Central. People would buy t-shirts, they would do all sorts of gorgeous, very funky handmade T-shirts. They're real collectors' items. Then of course we held this huge rally on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, right before the Supreme Court hearing. We shut down 42<sup>nd</sup> Street outside the terminal at lunchtime. Mrs. [Jacqueline Kennedy] Onassis, who as you know was a very public, very accessible advocate for all of this, came to the rally.

We had performances, we had all sorts of speeches. There—I don't know if you've seen photographs of what it looked like, but there were hordes of people. Of course everybody came to see Jacqueline Onassis! I mean, let's not fool ourselves, but they realized that this was a challenge to a landmarks law that nobody really quite understood. People were afraid of what the implications were going to be. So on one level, it was important because we were trying to save a building, but of course the lawyers were very interested because of what the legal ramifications might be. You took a very public event, a very emotional event, and you realized that it had potential to have very, very far reaching legal implications in terms of eminent domain and everything else.

Then we rented a train and we brought people down to Washington the day or the day before the hearing. Which was amazing, because we had all these old train cars attached to whatever locomotive we could muster, as it were. People paid to go down to Washington DC. One of my most memorable parts of that whole thing was—there was a beautiful observation car, which was the last car. And sitting there was Rogers Whitaker, who wrote the E. M. Frimbo stories about train travel in *The New Yorker*—a legendary *New Yorker* writer. There I was, this kid right out of college, sitting with this elder statesman of train travel and everything that *The New Yorker* meant, talking about history and watching cities go by. It was pretty incredible. Then we got to Washington. There was a rally. Those who could, attended the Supreme Court hearing. Then months later, the decision was handed down and Grand Central was saved, and that was a huge moment really. That's when I think MAS changed in terms of the public's perception. In terms of our believing that it was okay to dabble in public advocacy. Personally, it was great—to say I was part of that.

Obviously, we were still looking for other things. People were coming and telling us about endangered buildings. I was very much involved with that. People would call me and I was the one who would be in touch with the Landmarks [Preservation] Commission. Worked very closely with their staff, as was Laurie Beckelman. I'm sure you're talking with Laurie. We also went to hearings. I was the one who testified before the Landmarks Commission, so that we would come to the board—the board had various committees—and ask permission to go and speak on behalf of MAS in favor of the designation of a building or a district or whatever. So that was amazing for me, because that was a cross-pollination. I was able to talk to people doing



similar things—at the Landmarks Conservancy, there was Carol Clark who was doing that. And other people. Then dealing closely with the Landmarks Commission staff. They had a pretty fairly sized staff back then, so they were able to do the research. Of course, they needed us to rally the community and go and testify and what have you. Our board members were so resourceful, because we had some of the top architects at our beck and call. They, if we needed them, would come and either write a letter or testify on behalf of a designation or potential designation. Even a—what's the turn of phrase—a certificate of appropriateness and such.

Do you want me to elaborate on anything?

Q: You're actually touching on everything that I want to talk to you about. So it's just working out.

Nowvé: That's good.

Q: Did you, I don't even know where to go now. So then you became involved in HDC [Historic Districts Council]?

Nowvé: Yes. I don't remember how it evolved. Tony [Anthony Wood] and I would have these long breakfast meetings about it, because HDC existed already. But it was a way to see what the various districts, or potential districts, were facing. They all had similar problems in terms of enforcement, as well as perhaps expansion, as well as public information. Informational signs started to show up and the Landmarks Commission finally decided, hey, we could actually

change street sign colors, and put those little signs up so people know what on earth we're doing. It was interesting, for people realized how many historic districts there were in the city. The districts needed—because they're all volunteers—I think they needed a unified voice. It was something like therapy sessions for them to understand what everybody else was going through. So that was a very active and very diverse organization, because you had some communities, like Brooklyn Heights with Evelyn Ortner and everybody else who had always been there and always fought, and were really at the vanguard of creating historic districts. Then you had small districts that were saying you know, "Can we do that? Can we do that?"

The biggest, I'm jumping ahead in a way chronologically because I think the most controversial one in a way was the Committee to Save the Upper East Side, because that sounds so elitist. People would say, "You don't need to save the Upper East Side. Look at it." If you realize, wait a minute. There's a lot of pressure there. Especially development pressure on the commercial spine of Madison Avenue, for example. We made people understand, "Yeah, it's the Upper East Side, but look at it!" Look at what a little gallery it is of architectural styles, and single-family dwellings it is. So that was a very controversial and very interesting effort. Also, how do you define boundaries of historic districts? As I recall, there was one designation that expanded, I think. I'm not really sure. But Holly Whyte was instrumental in that.

I don't know if you've been reading about William Hollingsworth Whyte. Holly Whyte, was a writer. He was a very, very interesting man. Also from *The New Yorker*. He wrote a very famous book, maybe in the '60s, called *The Organization Man*. It's great to read his writing. Do you know Fred Kent? Of Project for Public Space. I don't know if they're still around. They had a lot

of financing from the Rockefeller Foundation. Holly actually filmed people's activities of New York City. I hope you can get a hold of these films. They're classic films on the way people use New York City streets. He studied Paley Park, which used to be off 53<sup>rd</sup> Street off Fifth. He would film people using it and going through the thought process of, do I enter or do I not? What drew them; well, there was a waterfall. First they have to sit down, oh, there's a wire chair here. It was hilarious to watch footage of people when they decided to sit down—no, not sit down, first they had to move a chair a half an inch, then sit down. They had to mark their space.

He used that kind of people studies to talk about the importance of the first- and second-story life of Madison Avenue. That you couldn't just look at preserving the storefront, you had to look up and understand that Madison Avenue is a very major spine. Of course, I was learning all this. I mean, talk about an education. I applied and got in to the Historic Preservation program at Columbia. I decided not to go, because everybody wanted my job and I didn't even have a degree in it. I was learning from Fred Papert, I was learning from Hugh Hardy, I was learning from Holly Whyte, I was learning from Mrs. Onassis. That was my classroom. To sit with Holly Whyte and for him to get people excited about looking at Madison Avenue as a major part of the Upper East Side Historic District. Saying there can be change, you know, we understand that it's all about economics on Madison Avenue. We're not going to make them have pretty little storefronts. But if Fendi or whomever wants to do it, make a statement, make a statement that's going to be somewhat respectful of the scale, but also make Madison Avenue exciting.

That was very interesting. I think it helped people understand what historic preservation needed to be, in terms of the fact that it was not to freeze things in time. That it was flexible. That the

Landmarks Law was flexible. That it wasn't going to be so rigid. It wasn't going to make you run screaming from the room and say, to hell with it all. Holly's one of those people who said Madison Avenue can change appropriately. It also meant the Landmarks Commission had to be a little more flexible. They couldn't be set in their ways—that they had to be sort of Modernists in a way and understand and have a sense of humor. That you could have beautiful side streets like East 71<sup>st</sup> Street, and you could have Madison Avenue and say that it was an historic district. So we did it.

Fred Papert was one of my biggest idols. He was a Board Member of MAS, and had a very strong background in advertising. He was very connected to the Kennedy family, which is how Mrs. Onassis got involved with the Municipal Art Society in the first place. He was an ad man, even though he wasn't doing advertising anymore. He was the guy who wanted to save 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, and did. He got Theater Row started. I remember Theater Row. I forget—there was one landlord, I think, who owned all those buildings off 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue they were going to be condemned and I remember there was a struggle. If somebody could write a check to the landlord, they could save that row. Fred had this idea well that if you could save those buildings, you could turn them into off Broadway theaters, and save them and create an Off-Broadway theater district. That's the kind of thing that Fred Papert did. Fred Papert started to talk to board members about the fact that MAS had this little office, it needed a more public space. So I was one of those people who was sent out with a camera to look at potential spaces that could house a public space. We'd go out and photograph potential spaces, and we had real estate brokers doing it as well.

Of course I knew that that wasn't going to be the way it was going to happen. That somebody behind the scenes was going to make a call or have an idea. Lo and behold, people start to look at the Villard Houses. What the heck was Harry Helmsley going to do with the Villard Houses and what on earth—how was he going to incorporate that hideous building into these five attached residences on Madison Avenue? Well, what if you put an urban center in one of them? That'll look good, and then you could preserve some interior spaces in the other parts of the Villard Houses. Lo and behold, we all had hard hats and this thing was being built—in back of St. Patrick's Cathedral. How about that? It took a long time. It was funny to go two blocks from 30 Rock and realize that we were going to have a home. We got that home and that changed everything.

Q: When was the—when was that?

Nowvé: You'll have to look it up. I don't remember.

Q: Okay. What would you say was the reason for the creation of the Urban Center?

Nowvé: I think just its name. We needed an Urban Center, we needed a public place. There was no public space, no public place to create a forum and visibility for planning issues. It's interesting that the Jane Jacobs exhibit is up there now. How timely. I never thought anyone knew about the Urban Center—they knew about Urban Center Books, but we never had crowds, we never had a blockbuster event. We had some of the most misguided events. Our opening event, in my eyes, was one of the biggest wastes of money I've ever seen. We had Philip Morris

money thrown at us, we got these huge displays that were trying to explain urbanism—it was just ridiculous. Maybe it drew people in, but to me it was just a waste. It was more about—we've got two gorgeous galleries on Madison Avenue. We could draw people in, to go to the bookstore, they'll see exhibits that'll really inform them. We finally had spaces for classes. We had office space. We could expand our workspaces. We had the Information Exchange.

We had this room, maybe a hundred by twenty feet. It was started by a graduate of the Columbia preservation program named Darlene McLeod, who I think is a preservationist now in Florida. She was involved with the Preservation League of New York for a while. Darlene and some volunteers would assemble all of this stuff, clippings. Of course you have to remember this was before the internet. This was before really sophisticated computers where you actually had to cut out newspaper clippings, file them, so that if a student or a planner or architect wanted to find out about preservation or history, they'd go to this little room and have access to journals, magazines, clippings, letters, photographs, whatever. It was this funky little thing called the Information Exchange, which was just that. People used it. We had volunteers who helped. So the Urban Center was interesting because it gave the Municipal Art Society a place for such activities.

Then we had extra room, so in moved The Parks Council, The Architectural League and The AIA [American Institute of Architects] of New York. We could share the space. We could have group programs. So there was this cross-pollination. That's what it was important for. I don't really know how many people came. We had some standing room only events, we had our newsletter, which was sent to an extensive mailing list. The big thing also was getting listings,

that was another thing I did. Trying to get our events listed in the *New York Times* every week, and *New York Magazine*. Calling up and pitching ideas and getting little listings here and there. Just to get the word out. It was a desperate attempt to get people to know what we were doing. Because there was no internet. You really had to do mailings. We had a mailing house. We had people who stuffed envelopes and put out the word, and they came the Urban Center and it was a great space.

I remember I curated one exhibit on the Historic Districts Council. We had these gorgeous big panels with photographs depicting the character of each district. I wrote text describing the various districts and what have you. Hopefully it let people know that they existed, and perhaps they then went on the weekend and went to explore Cobble Hill and went out to look at Mott Haven. We also had gotten a small grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to do a series of maps, so people could actually do self-guided walking tours, just of the different districts. That never really came to fruition, we did a few of them. But the idea was to sell them. It was really nice to have a public place, and also to know that if we wanted to talk to the people at the Architectural League, we could just go downstairs and talk to them.

Q: How influential do you think the press was in all of the things that happened in the seventies and eighties?

Nowvé: That's a great question. It was very important. There was Ada Louise Huxtable, who was on the board at that point. She was not that active, but you knew that something written by Ada Louise Huxtable was going to get attention. Then there was Paul Goldberger. You had all

these people who would sometimes fight with our board, there were times where they would really engage them in a very intricate, intellectual debate about what was going on. So the press was very important. Not just in terms of public information, but in terms of editorial comment. Suddenly it was hip and happening to write about preservation. One of the things that really interested me, and still interests me, is how to make things sexy and palatable to the public. Preservation was very hot back then. It was really very funny. I think you had to make it accessible, you couldn't make it elitist. You needed good writers, you needed smart writers. You needed people to write about different buildings and issues.

I think New Yorkers felt proud and started to appreciate what they saw in the city, mainly because they did read about it more and more. There were writers like Roberta Gratz, writing for the *New York Post*. *SoHo Weekly*, there were a lot of local papers back then. *The Upper Westsider*. If you could get an article in the local papers about a preservation issue, people commented about it. So yes, the press was very important.

I think MAS had a problem originally because it was seen as elitist. You couldn't get any press or even activity from the *New Amsterdam News*, for example. Their editor promised to come to a forum I'd organized on preservation and he just never showed up. I remember there was some misrepresentation of some of the things MAS was doing, and we felt really betrayed because I didn't want us to be seen as elitist. I mean, we weren't doing some tokenism, "Oh, we really care about Upper Manhattan"—this is all one big city. It was sometimes interesting to go to a public debate at the Landmarks Commission and hear the truth and then see how it was interpreted in



some newspapers. So that the press continues to be important. It's just how often do we read preservation issues in the *New York Times* anymore?

Q: I seem to think that there is at least one article a day or very little bits in the real estate section.

Nowvé: There were more then. I think, or maybe it was my bias. We didn't have the internet. We did a few other posters again to get people to expand membership, *The New Yorker* was really helpful with that. I think we started to get more writers on the board, which helped. Joseph Mitchell was a member of our board at that point. Advertising was important. How do you finance that? What kinds of grants can you get? What kinds of donations you could get from various posters and such.

Do you know about the Committee to Save St. Bart's [St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church]? Have you touched on all of that? That was a disturbing thing, because we got involved with a fight, which eventually we won, I think more because of internal politics of the church. But we got involved in an effort to block the building of a tower over St. Bart's and the congregation itself was torn. The head of the church, Tom Bowers, was the dividing force. He really was the one who wanted to build a building, and some of the older parishioners were against doing it. We got involved on the merits of the fact that it was a bad idea. Mrs. Onassis was very involved in that. From my perspective, it was fascinating to watch her work, because you knew that if Mrs. Onassis—and she knew this too—she knew that if she, showed up an event, you got the press. You respected it. But she didn't always speak. She hardly ever spoke. She spoke a couple of

words once, and it's on film, at the Grand Central rally, but by either putting her name on a poster or letterhead, or on a handout, or maybe putting her name in a press release, you get press. We had 8 AM meetings once a week plotting what we were going about the movement to save Grand Central. She showed up at every one of those meetings to talk about strategy. It was really impressive and very interesting. She was brilliant. She was in publishing then, so she again she knew the power of the press as it were, both from her former life and also she knew who and what she was. We caught some flak about that fight. Just because it was a question of well, did the church had the right to exploit its air rights to preserve itself? So if you go back, I think you'll probably find some clippings showing that it wasn't all fun and games back then.

Q: What would you say that MAS' role—the relationship was with the LPC before Grand Central, after Grand Central around this time?

Nowvé: I only knew it during and afterward, for the most part. The commission knew that they needed MAS, and I guess internally was a very tactful and very delicate thing to sort of whisper in the ear of a board member, "We need your help with this." Their hearings—it's a brilliant process, it's a public process. You make it more public. You tap into the membership of the Municipal Art Society. We had little alerts in our newsletters: "Write letters" or "Do what you can" or "Call." But it was primitive when you look back on it. But the Landmarks Commission—were we allowed board members who were members of the commission? I guess not, that would have been a conflict. I would get calls from staff members saying, "We really need your help with this." Or they would say, "We really need you to testify here." And we did. It was a very, very close relationship. A very sophisticated one, because they could ask for a

specific comments and input from our board members. Jim Polshek was on our board, as were Hugh Hardy, Lew Davis, Charles Platt. There were a lot of architects who could jump into the fray. Then MAS got very sophisticated—I'm jumping back again.

Before we moved to the Urban Center we needed money. It wasn't going to be cheap to do that, and this was at a time when the whole notion of an MBA [Master of Business Administration] was sort of dodgy. No one really wanted to say that art and commerce could cohabitate. We got a grant from New York Telephone Foundation, and they had a business consultant analyze the structure of MAS—its board, its staff, who did what. We actually had somebody sitting in on our meetings, sitting in with Margot Wellington watching what everybody we did. Actually studying it as a business, which was on one level horrifying but by same token it was very important. We then hired a MBA, Henry Ng, to become our person who would look over our fundraising and help us expand. It was really essential for us to do that. That brought us into the real world in terms of finances.

That's the type of thing that of course, the Landmarks Commission couldn't do, until they started the Landmarks Foundation, which I guess Adele Chatfield-Taylor started. They could then dabble in commerce, and bringing in money and grants for preservation. I'm sort of scattered in all of this, but I'm just thinking about how we were growing on parallel tracks. Then the Landmarks Commission had a series of very smart public relations people on staff. One young man named Alan Haber, who was really brilliant in coming up with angles for stories about what the Landmarks Commission was doing. We could all work together. Then he'd say, well, we're

going to create these press releases about what we're doing but we need you to goose it up too. So we could work on that together.

MAS had a part-time publicist named Joyce Matz who worked with us, but she'd also worked with Alan. There was this whole little mafia that we had going on the staff level. Which was really great. It's as if you could have everybody on your speed dial—if we had speed dial back then—saying okay, what do you need, what can we do? It was good. We could use our walking tours as another way of brainwashing people to say “Oh yeah, there is a hearing tomorrow,” or what have you. The Landmarks Commission was also at this tiny little building. They moved a lot. So their hearing rooms were cramped and horrible. It wasn't really a fun thing to do, but we tried to cram people in there. Who was it—it was Gene Norman who was chairman then, then Kent Barwick? There's a whole thing with Kent—Kent's at MAS, Kent's at the Landmarks Commission, Kent's back at MAS. So in a way, it's all very incestuous, if you look at the various board members and commissioners and everything. It was one big happy family.

Q: Who would you say were your main opponents?

Nowvé: Hm. Real estate developers at that time, and real estate attorneys who were doing their jobs. Howard Zipser was a very influential real estate attorney at that time. He was hired by the [Harry and Lena] Helmsleys of the world and everybody else. Nobody wanted to be told what to do, so there were some ugly fights. So certainly it was the developers. It's interesting how—look at the building patterns in New York. There was a time when there was really a lot of building, and then the economy was hurting, so suddenly preservation was easier because nobody had the

money to build buildings. The Fisher Brothers Building over on the Racquet Club on 53<sup>rd</sup> and Park was going up. Again, people started to look at what was left of low-rise midtown Manhattan. By George, it was a landmark or a potential landmark. So while they were all sniffing out air rights, they were getting very sophisticated in their interpretation of what they could and couldn't do. We had to get more savvy in terms of, "Okay, if you're going to build over the Racquet Club, what's it going to look like?" So a lot of buildings that you see came about through having to play with your enemy. Let's face it—all these guys know each other. They all belong to the same clubs. It wasn't like they were from different sides of the tracks. It was always a gentlemen's agreement.

The ugliest part, and I don't know if you've been studying this, is the whole thing with the theater district. I don't know if that's come up at all. That was, beyond Grand Central, the saddest and the nastiest battle that took place while I was there in terms of what the Marriott was going to do to the theater district, and what it did do. The fact that we lost three beautiful theaters because of that piece of crap over there. That's where John Portman came in and Marriott came in and they said, "We're going to put up a building that really belongs in New York City, that we've built in Atlanta and every anonymous city in the country, and we're going to do this here." How do you convince theater owners, struggling theater owners—how do you convince the huge Shubert Organization to preserve their building if people are sniffing out their air rights? It was horrible. You've seen footage of them tearing down the Helen Hayes Theater and Christopher Reeve and other people getting arrested for protesting that stuff. That was a huge blow to see historic buildings torn down. I was too young to see Penn Station [Pennsylvania Station] demolished, but those images were sort of similar. It was a very sad time. That's when

everybody had to realize, “Well, what’s going to happen?” How to get the Shuberts to agree to any kind of preservation if it means that they’re going to claim that we’re killing the Broadway theater, because they can’t operate their theaters, which were old and needed renovations and what have you.

I remember when—you can look up this date—when “Cats” was going to move into the Winter Garden Theater. They had to carve a hole in the ceiling for the big moment when the cat rose to heaven or whatever. They had to convince us—I don’t know whether the Winter Garden was a landmark interior at that point—but they had to show us that they could put the hole back in the ceiling after “Cats” closed. They took a bunch of us up to the roof, and I’m afraid of high open spaces. Looking at this hole in the ceiling. Knowing that, “Hey we’ll put this back if the show ever closes.” Thinking, okay, well now they’re also talking about how technological changes were going to affect the interiors of these buildings. Here we are saying preserve your interior, renovate your interior, modernize your interior, save your air rights, and don’t tear your buildings down. So look what’s happened. It sort of worked. They are landmarks—you pay a token price added to your ticket for the preservation fund or whatever that is and that sort of worked out. But there was a lot of animosity between the Jujamcyns, the Schuberts and Nederlanders and all of the preservation organizations. But the public was outraged that we lost those theaters. Look at the Marriott.

Then it’s interesting—what happened to Times Square. The original ideas were kicked around, and then there was no money and everybody went away. But I remember going with Hugh Hardy to the New Amsterdam Theater. They weren’t showing porn that day, they were showing

some stupid movie and there were about five people doing god knows what in the theater. Hugh knew about all these hidden spaces downstairs and beautiful smoking rooms and everything. He spoke so eloquently about the potential for the New Amsterdam Theater. You'd think, "Okay, but how is this going to happen?" I left MAS by that point, I went on to Bryant Park [Restoration Corporation]. It was very interesting to understand the way this is changing—to sit up at the Marriott and look out on Times Square and know that it wasn't going to be any longer.

Q: Do you think it was not successful, what they did to Times Square?

Nowvé: Well, it's not Times Square anymore. It's something else. We've lost a whole generation of people who knew what it used to look like. The fact that there was strict zoning about signage and everything is sort of the new approach to it. We lost a lot of buildings. There are a lot of facades that are gone. But again, how do you deal with economics these days? At least the theaters are beautiful and at least they're there for the most part. That was successful. It's a really good question. I think there are times we have to say change is good. I know that I changed a lot; that I have become more flexible in what I think is acceptable. I still have this outrage when I see something that's been defaced and torn down—for what? They just tore down a building on 72<sup>nd</sup> [Street] and Broadway [Avenue], because they ran out of money and—oops. So you still have that, but it's a shame because now it's economics more than preservation. How do they teach it in school now? What's your perception of preservation in this climate?

Q: One of the focuses in my program is learning how to work around real estate and development. Learning the tools so that you're not, it's not just advocacy driven or but you have all these other tools at your disposal to save things.

Nowvé: Uh huh.

Q: But you know it's different in New York than anywhere else, I guess. Because of the real estate market.

Nowvé: I guess so. It's interesting how other cities are realizing that they had these great downtowns that can be preserved and turned into "hot spots." Pittsburgh, other towns, because they sidestepped a lot of development. Now they can say they've got these great old mill buildings or what have you and use that for preservation, and make that the economic engine. So. That was the Theater District. That was not a fun time.

Q: I did a report on that project, so—

Nowvé: Really. What's your perspective of what happened?

Q: Um, they did save buildings, but exactly, it's not Times Square anymore. It's just like the commercialization of history.

Nowvé: Well put. That's true. Do you make it a theme park?



Q: Yes.

Nowvé: Yes. Yes.

Q: But unless you have, I mean buildings can't stand alone. You have to have money. They have to have some use. Otherwise they're just getting, you know, be neglected and fall down.

Nowvé: Well, they're not falling down.

Q: So talking about Grand Central, you expressed that you kind of, that you can't—you just felt it was such an important event and you were a part of it. Besides Mrs. Onassis, why do you think it was a successful campaign?

Nowvé: It was a very sophisticated campaign, and it worked on different levels. From the grassroots standpoint, it made people aware of Grand Central. Everybody going around it, going through it every day. It was taken for granted. It wasn't in great shape. But suddenly they would start to look up and they would start to look at the carvings, the light fixtures. Some of which weren't working but they realized, "We could lose this." On that level we made the notion of preservation part of the vernacular. Then you informed people, just randomly, because they were having contact with the building that might not be there—well, that might be drastically altered. So it was successful in that regard. It was successful because it helped lawyers and administrators and politicians understand what a Landmarks Law could be. I think that

politicians in other cities were waiting to see what was going to happen, because they didn't have such instruments in place. Perhaps before they were going to write or were going to explore preservation policy locally, they were going to wait to see what was going to happen with this.

In terms of the Municipal Art Society, it was like, "Hey, you know, we can do this." It was a very empowering thing. It was time to take off our white gloves, roll up our little Brooks Brothers sleeves and get into it. It got to be a runaway train in a very good way. Because people were responding. There were a lot of events, there were a lot of meetings, there were a lot of fundraisers—because again it was a very expensive endeavor. There was one fundraiser, a really hot night one summer. I don't remember maybe '76, '77, at the [Grand Central] Oyster Bar with Mrs. Onassis and the rest of the board. I don't remember how much they charged, but you couldn't even move in that space. The ice sculptures that they had brought in were melting faster than the ice in people's drinks. But people were willing to cough up money, and let's face it, I don't want to be crude, but it cost money to do that campaign. It was good to tap into those people's pockets, because they had money. You'd also see people who had no money give you a quarter on the street to help with the fight. It was like a people's campaign. When was the last time you got that in New York City?

Q: Yes.

Nowvé: We don't do that anymore. I mean that wasn't the only one, but it was breathtaking to see. It was incredible to see just handing out fliers—and nobody wants to pick up fliers in New York City. It's the last thing you want to do. But you'd shout out, "Save Grand Central", people

would actually stop and they'd take the flier. They'd come to our little, little nook, which was also a little bookstore. We had traffic down there, and people would come and talk about it. You'd also connect, because everybody had a sense of history about New York. I wish we had done what you're doing now back then in terms of getting people on record reminiscing about Grand Central and their memories of it. Everything it meant to them. It became a very public, emotional thing. It sophisticated MAS, we learned how to fight a fight. Taught the board that it was okay to do it. It brought in some money, which we needed, which we spent. We were fiscally, very, very careful about everything.

Then you had Earth Day, in the early seventies—we had the movement which I was very much a part of when I was in high school. We realized, “Hey, we can save the planet,” which is weird that thirty years later, we have to do it again in a very desperate way. So you had an early green movement in the early seventies. How do you take that energy and turn it into the built environment, instead of the natural environment? That's what was happening with Grand Central.

Q: Were there other groups involved in the Grand Central?

Nowvé: There were. If you look at the amicus brief that was filed, there were a lot of organizations, both in New York and nationally, who became pro bono advocates for the campaign. If you look at that, there were other community groups and such. I don't remember if we had corporate sponsors for the campaign. That would be very interesting to see in the archives, whatever the archives look like. That's a good question. We were going at it alone in

the trenches, as I recall. But what we were doing ultimately—we were the instrument of the Landmarks Commission, because the Landmarks Commission couldn't really do this. So you're asking about the relationship. Well, guess what? You know, we were basically helping to do their work for them. We were working for the City of New York.

Q: What do you—how do you see this all affecting today, preservation today?

Nowvé: I think some people take it for granted. It's just sort of what's done. I'm not really part of the movement anymore, I don't really know what it feels like internally any longer, to be able to keep it going. As an outsider now, I think people expect the Upper East Side to look this way. People take it for granted, which is human nature. You don't know what it took to get to where we are. What it took to preserve things. I don't know what goes on in school. I don't know if kids are taught about architecture—I mean in junior high or high school. Are you talking about New York City or—

Q: Yes.

Nowvé: New York City.

Q: New York City Preservation Movement.

Nowvé: I'm not even aware if there is one? Is there one?

Q: Yes *[laughs]*.

Nowvé: Tell me.

Q: Well, um, it depends, there are lots of different versions of what's more important and what's going on, I would think. There's a lot of people who really believe that the LPC isn't doing what they are meant to do, and they're trying to fix it.

Nowvé: Do you think—how are they slacking off, as it were?

Q: They're allowing things that they shouldn't be allowing, changes made in historic districts or additions to buildings that they wouldn't have accepted that wouldn't have accepted before.

Besides the fact that they have way more work than they're capable of doing. Yes. Are they being proactive enough in going out and looking at new districts and buildings? Or are they just sitting there and people are you know, applying to them, and they're not getting an answer.

Nowvé: Actually, two things come to mind, because if you think about it, every district, every area of New York City is being developed now. Everybody's moving into areas that were off the map. So you're right. New pressures. How do they keep up with the fact that people are now—you know, Long Island City, Astoria, Bedford Stuyvesant, Harlem, everybody's moving in. All of these in rem buildings that were city-owned and abandoned for twenty years. Suddenly, uh oh, someone wants them. So how do you respond to that, because nobody's looking. Everybody's moving in and you've got all these new financial engines. Dormant neighborhoods are being

revitalized, which is great. But you're right. How do you preserve it? It's like the next wave of development. In the outer boroughs, where people may not be as sophisticated, but you think people moving in now are getting very smart about their neighborhoods. You're moving into a beautiful brownstone area that's been neglected and now you want to preserve it. But what if a developer wants to come in and just guts them? So it's as if you can't be caught off guard. I drive around a lot around Fieldston in the Bronx, which may or may not be an historic district now. I think the Commission was really asleep at the wheel at one point because all these mansions were just torn down. In New York City! It's such a weird part of the city. Irreparable damage. Just so many of those houses are gone. I was thinking, "Where's the Commission in all of this? Are they responding? Just as where is the community? Do they know what to do about all this? Are they being heard?"

Q Do you think the community had more of a role in the seventies and eighties?

Nowvé: I do. I really do. I think people felt more empowered. Maybe it was just our nature back then. People were used to fighting. You had an earlier generation of the Margot Gayles, the Ruth Wittenbergs, people who were getting up there in age. Margot Gayle saved SoHo. She was the doyenne of cast iron architecture. Ruth Wittenberg helped save West Village. You had the Ortners who did Brooklyn Heights. Talk about grassroots, you had people who did it at the very beginning. They were passing it on. I think there was a real spirit of activism back then. I think people are more compliant, they're more apathetic, they're more self-involved now. Not that they weren't then, but it was easier to tap into people's emotions and get them involved. But also you didn't have the internet. You couldn't just create a blog; you couldn't create a website. You

couldn't tell people to have a voice heard with the click of a button. People had to work harder. They did. It was really amazing, to be in your early twenties and be a part of it, because you're the ultimate idealist. At that point, you think you want to save the world and you can save the world. People responded to that. After I left MAS, I went to Bryant Park. I don't know if you want to go into any of that. You know about Bryant Park and the whole fight to save in back of the New York Public Library?

Q: About how like what you're talking about with [William Hollingsworth] Whyte and how it was not, people didn't hang out there. It wasn't safe, and—

Nowvé: People said it couldn't be done. Looking back on it—it was like, “What's wrong with you people?” People actually told us the park wasn't worth saving because you had to walk up the steps and it was overrun by drug dealers. That part of Midtown wasn't yet redeveloped. Home Box Office had just moved in. They were horrified, “Uh oh! We've got all of our people here.” They gave us a check for a hundred thousand dollars to try to clean up the park. The library was renovated. There was going to be all this activity, but there were people on the local community board, mostly Fred Beckhart, who said “It just can't be done. Nobody will ever go in that park. You go, “Are you crazy?” You'd show them these gorgeous renderings that Laurie Olin and Hugh Hardy had done—forget about whether or not the restaurant should or shouldn't have gone up there. People actually said it couldn't be done. You'd go to Community Board 5 meetings and people would say, “Forget it. It's not worth it. Go away. Go do something else.” You'd go, “Is it me or is it you?” *[laughs]* Now you look at that park, and you just want to throttle the people who told you, “No, it can't be done.” That was a funny time.

Q: Do you think they didn't feel that way towards preservation? It can't be done?

Nowvé: They thought that the social forces going on along 42<sup>nd</sup> Street were going to preclude any kind of preservation, renovation, anything. This was the case where if you build it, they will come. It was really, really the case. Nobody was crying, but we did show them where we were going to tear down trees. They did get hysterical about what the restaurant was going to be. That was actually fun—that was actually one of the cases where I was advocating development, and something that should have been preserved. It was really good to say, “You know what? It's okay. Lives will not be lost *[laughs]*. Two trees will die.” But what brought you to preservation? Why did you—

Q: I have a lot of interests. I really like history. I like—I always look at old buildings, and I thought, “Hm, a career.” Melding interests, yes.

A : Well it's interesting you talk about careers, because I started to realize that people who were getting out of Columbia [University] and other programs were going to work in the private sector. They were finding places, developers, consulting groups who needed their skills to do parts of environmental impact statements, for example. Which I thought was so smart and so clever. Because how many jobs were there at MAS, the Conservancy? I mean, there were what? Thirty of us altogether? Some people wanted to earn a living *[laughs]*. It was very interesting to see how preservationists were getting sophisticated, as was the private sector. The sort of work with the enemy, as it were. But in a very productive way. I thought that was very cool and very



interesting to see how some architectural firms hire preservationists to be on their staff—not just to interpret what they were doing, to help advocate and promote what they were doing in the outside world.

Q: Were there preservation firms the way that there are today?

Nowvé: There were a few. I don't remember who they were—but yes, there were a few, and they were smart. Rambusch [Studio] did preservation, but they were doing bricks and mortar. Who are the groups now? Who are doing it? Who come to mind?

Q: Most of the ones I know are just departments within a larger planning firms, or there seem to be a lot more in California. But. Higgins Quasebarth [& Partners, LLC], I think. Or—adaptive reuse. They do a lot of that kind of stuff.

Nowvé: There were some that were doing it.

Q: Just one going back. So HDC was created by MAS, and then it kind of, it became its own identity. How did the relationship change, or did it change, when they separated?

Nowvé: I wasn't there then.

Q: Okay.

Nowvé: I was there when it was still under the aegis of MAS. Tony and I were talking a lot about breaking it out and creating a separate entity. Those were good talks, because I think we felt that the critical mass existed at that point, to break off and do it and empower them. It looks like it worked. MAS didn't really serve as an umbrella organization, that's not really what it was about. It was about being its own force. If HDC was going to be strong enough and definitely have a life, it was important for it to spin off, for its own identity, to get its own financing, to find a different kind of constituency than perhaps the broader, generalist approach than MAS was going to have. So it happened. Tony is the one to talk to about that. Those were fascinating meetings, just to really talk to people in other parts of the city and to realize they had been doing it for so long, with virtually no attention. There was a woman named Joan Maynard who was part of—oh, darn it, it's an area in Brooklyn. Sweetsville? It was an old slave colony that was sort of rediscovered in a part of Brooklyn, and she had done—

Q: Weeksville?

Nowvé: Yes. She had done her research. She had found out a lot about it, and she got the community involved. I realized—there were all these people, who didn't care about MAS, who didn't care about anyone else. But this was their neighborhood; this was their square block. It's so amazing and so exciting to see that they had their neighborhood, they wanted to preserve their neighborhood, and they did it. Then they'd come up and go, "Oh, you're doing this too? Oh yeah, this is what we're doing—and oh, I'll try that." It helped the public discover—people loved walking tours. I guess some people still do. Now I think people want to go on walking tours to help scope out real estate in the areas that they may not know otherwise, but there are people

who are really curious about what on earth was going on. The Kaplan Foundation would give us money, and we'd organize neighborhood tours. Again, Barry Lewis, who you really should talk to. He used to do a show on Channel 13 with David Hartman where they'd walk through different areas of New York City. Barry—I guess he still lives in Queens. In Kew Gardens, I haven't seen him forever. We would do these tours that he and I would organize, and we would spend crazy, crazy days driving around different boroughs to plan a daylong tour of every area. We would have to eat our way through the area, also, because the whole idea was to take people to planned communities in Queens, and have a great lunch, and then meet with the community leaders. We'd do these bus tours—they would leave the Urban Center at nine in the morning and get back at six. They were packed. With people who grew up there and hadn't been there for a long time, or people who would say, "Oh, yeah, I heard about Lefferts Garden, or something like that, but I've never been and I'd been afraid to go there," or whatever. We'd throw them on a bus, get them a box lunch, have them discover some great soul food restaurant there. They'd feel like they had been to France for the day, because it was basically taking people on a little journey, and then you'd say, "Well, this is a historic district." They'd say, "Really? I thought Greenwich Village was a historic district." We'd say, "Well, it is, but this stuff is going on." New York had this thing back then—maybe it always has—but it was just always Manhattan. But now it seems everybody moving to the outer boroughs, it's much broader than that. People weren't that curious or they were lazier or scared, perhaps. Now, do you live in Manhattan?

Q: No. I live in Brooklyn.

Nowvé: See? Mostly everybody I work with lives in Brooklyn or Queens.

Q: I still don't think that people who are from Manhattan rarely go beyond Williamsburg or Brooklyn Heights. Park Slope. You know, that's about as far as they go.

Nowvé: But the economic forces are such that, how far out do you live?

Q: In Bay Ridge.

Nowvé: See? Think of how great it is there. Think about the diversity there. Economic forces and curiosity are bringing people out there. It's no longer this myopic view. Back then it was. You know, if you ran a preservation battle in Bay Ridge or wherever—

Q: We do.

Nowvé: Well—and what's happening?

Q: Um. There is an old church that is going to be torn down for a condo, and people don't want it to be. Because it's over a hundred years old and it's beautiful.

Nowvé: Uh huh. And?

Q: People are trying to get involved. It's not probably going to work. Because it's falling apart and the zoning allows for very tall buildings. But—

Nowvé: Do you feel like the Landmarks Commission is going to respond to you?

Q: Um, no, because the building is literally crumbling. The stone, it should not have been used for the outside of the building. You know, it's a religious institution, so they, "Oh we're poor. We need more money to—for our soup kitchen." They don't have a soup kitchen, but—

Nowvé: Yes.

Q: You know what I mean? So the LPC is not paying attention. The Conservancy can't help fund it because it's way too expensive. But people are still trying.

Nowvé: Good.

Q: I heard Bay Ridge is the new Park Slope, so maybe if more of these yuppies come and move to my neighborhood, they'll be more "save it." So if we hold on for a couple more years.

Nowvé: That's true. But that's what it takes, and I guess that's what the Historic Districts Council was all about, in terms of local pride. It sounds so sappy, but that's true. Because people move to an area for whatever reason, and it's their home. It's all they've got in terms of their landscape identity or whatever you want to call it. We tried to respond to that, and it was fun to be a staff member doing that, because it was like answering the help line. Where people would call—you'd get really weird calls sometimes. But if you didn't get the call, let's say, about that

church, how else would you know about it? It's not like anybody was doing windshield surveys of everything. I remember getting a call one Friday—these things always happen before long weekends. Surprise! They were sandblasting the subway kiosk at 72<sup>nd</sup> and Broadway on the weekend, which was a huge no-no. How do you stop it on a Saturday in the summer? I'd get calls like that.

There was, I forget the details of this, but you know the building that I guess Phillip Johnson wound up designing opposite the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] with that faux mansard roof? There was a townhouse there, I believe. I remember getting a call on a Friday afternoon right before Memorial Day weekend or something like that. The building was being threatened. Who do you call? Like what's 911 for buildings? I called Jim Polshek. I said, "I got this call and they want to tear down the building over the weekend" and blah blah blah. What do you do?" So you call daddy, basically [*laughs*], and one thing led to another, and they stopped it and got Johnson involved. But literally that would come out of getting a call at of some random hour about a building being threatened. Does that exist now? You know, who do you call?

Q: Yes.

Nowvé: So.

Q: I guess Landmarks West! or Greenwich Village Society, or?

Nowvé: Arlene Simons in every area, every zip code. That's an interesting case study, Landmarks West!

Q: So why did you—you left preservation, sort of for Bryant Park.

Nowvé: Yes.

Q: Did you think that maybe you would come back to it? Or did it, was it a passion you weren't, you know, going to pursue professionally? Or—

Nowvé: I wanted to go from broader scope, like looking at the whole city, to literally caring about a square block of New York City, which was an amazing opportunity. Where I could take all those skills, all that knowledge, all those resources, and literally apply them to a square block in Manhattan. So that was great. But I also wanted to be in the movie business. I decided that I could use those skills the same way as a film producer. But Bryant Park was fun. Because we knew we were right. It was sort of cut and dry. But it was a long fight, and it changed. Again, we had a lot of money coming in because many companies were starting to move in. We also the fact that the New York Public Library—the myth was, or maybe it was really true, that Mrs. Astor was on her way to a board meeting at the library, and she couldn't have the people she was bringing in to give money to the library being accosted trying to sell drugs on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street *[laughs]*. What are we going to do with the rest of this park? Everyone made the right calls.

There was a co-op—these people were crazy. This beautiful building on the south side of 40<sup>th</sup> Street, some people moved into a co-op or condo with rats jumping off their scaffolding because the garbage dump for the park was across the street from their house. So these people had lovely apartments with an incredible view of the park were like, “Can you help us here?” Then everybody else was starting to sniff out all the real estate around there, because eventually something was going to happen. So we had a lot of money coming in, but that was an interesting thing in terms of how do you finance preservation?

Bryant Park has a very weird lease with the city, which was patterned after a lease that the New York Zoological Society has with the city—there’s a dollar-a-year lease and it’s a public/private partnership. We used that lease as the basis for Bryant Park, so that we could raise private money to maintain the park. Because the city would say, “Well, that’s a great idea, it’s a great project, but it’s expensive. If you want to do everything you want to do in Bryant Park, we can’t afford it. This is why it’s such a hellhole now.” That’s how we came up with the—there’s an assessment, a window tax for everybody who faces Bryant Park. Back then it was about three cents a square foot, or something like that. So that the neighborhood actually helps finance the preservation of that park. But also look at all the corporate sponsors. You want your name on something there? *[laughs]* You want the third tree on the left in your name, it’s no problem.

It was interesting, it was fun to do. Then after a while, I just couldn’t do it anymore. I just burned out. It wasn’t fun anymore. It was the same personalities. I knew I did not want to run an organization, which is why I think I stopped pursuing HDC. It would’ve been a natural thing I think for either Tony or me, or both of us, to run it. It just wasn’t what I was interested in doing



anymore. I really felt I had done it. I could point to a lot of things in New York City and say I had a hand in them. That's a really wonderful feeling, and it will always mean a lot to me, and gives me a lot of pride. But after a while, I burned out. I started to not like some of the people that you had to fight all the time. I started getting fed up with community boards. It was time for somebody else to come in with a new attitude, a better attitude, perhaps a different perspective. I always had a good attitude.

I'm very proud of the fact that I was always often a very good go-between, between forces, which is what I also like doing in film production. Just bringing everyone together, trying to bring everyone to the table to talk. Even in Bryant Park, there were people within our team who didn't really necessarily get along all the time. I would find I would go office- to-office and sort of smooth things out and make it work. That was a really interesting team. It was a real microcosm of everything that's done in any kind of preservation activity, I don't care where it is in the world. If you have something that needs to be saved, you have a mission, you have a plan, you have public input, and you have the choice of losing it forever or not. In this case, the heart of New York City. It still makes me laugh.

Q: Is there anything that you think that we haven't talked about?

Nowvé: I don't know—it would be up to you in terms of what you, what holes you need filled in.

Q: You've covered basically everything I was going to talk to you about, but sometimes stories come to mind when you're talking. You're like, "Oh, I should mention that."

Nowvé: Stories, stories, I'm sure there are lots of stories. There was always a struggle of how to be sophisticated in our approach—in terms of our press materials, in terms of slogans, in terms of the approach that we were going to do. Because MAS was a class act. You wouldn't want to cheapen anything. She was joking and it was really sort of cute, but we were talking during the St. Bart's thing, and thinking about what could we do to raise people's awareness, and Mrs. Onassis said, "Let's go around putting bumper stickers on people's cars at night so they never see us" *[laughs]*. People wanted to play. People wanted to let their guard down and really see what it was like to fight and to be passionate. It's okay to be a sophisticated businessman, but there are times when, you you're a person, and you have to play.

I think it's very interesting to look at the make-up of the board of directors back then. We had Bill Bernbach on our board—his firm was one of the top ad agencies in the world—Doyle, Dane, Bernbach [DDB]. They had Coke, they had Volkswagen—all the famous ads from that time. Frank Stanton of CBS was on our board. If you needed an ad campaign? You'd go to the guys who sold Coca-Cola, and they'd help you with an ad campaign. You'd go up to Bill Bernbach's office, and he'd say, "What do you need?" J. Walter Thompson did all the ad campaigns for free for Grand Central. Another of the biggest ad agencies in the world at that point. "What do you need? You want posters?" You had all these junior ad execs, doing posters for us. That's sort of amazing. Go in the subway—you'll see all these great ads that are also done pro bono, and you know that they've got great minds doing them for worthy causes. I wish I had a list of the board members, because they were real personalities. They had different perspectives. Do you know Hugh Hardy—have you ever met Hugh Hardy?

Q: No.

Nowvé: Somebody should talk to him, he's just—I mean, there's a firm that was doing adaptive reuse before there was even a name for it.

Q: Um—

Nowvé: I mean, if I think of other stories, not that I've suppressed them, but *[laughs]*. I'm just trying to think of other fights. Good and bad. Because those were the big ones. We lost a lot, a lot of churches—that was the big thing. You're right, you'd have people pleading poverty and lack of resources and diminishing congregations. I guess that's when the Landmarks Conservancy started their—was it Sacred Trust?

Q: The Conservancy?

Nowvé: Yes.

Q: Sacred Sites.

Nowvé: Yes. I guess that's when that was started. Shirley Ferguson was one of the people who started that. It was a very touchy subject. It took a whole other kind of tools, I guess you'd say, to—I mean, what did we lose? We lost All Angels [Church] on the West Side. We lost Mt. Nebo

[ph], which was on West 86<sup>th</sup> Street. We lost so many churches because we couldn't match the forces. Was it All Angels—now parts of it are at the Met, I see the pulpit, and it's like, "Yes, it's a beautiful relic," and you think about that when you go to any museum and see an artifact, "but where's the rest of the building?" I don't remember any other real specifics, but I know there was never a dull moment. I just remember—we had great parties. MAS has great archives, because every year they give out awards. I organized an annual meeting at Radio City Music Hall. That year, we gave one of the awards to the city councilman who created the Pooper Scooper Law, which was when people started to have to clean up after your dogs. "Annie" was playing on Broadway. I don't remember if it was Sarah Jessica Parker or not, but we had the little girl who played Annie at that point bring the dog, and she and the show dog presented the award. I got to produce this huge event at Radio City Music Hall, which is really cool. The MAS special events, especially their annual meetings, are always huge events, I don't know if you've ever been to one. We always scope out the coolest places, and often times it was a place that was going to get an award, like the Brotherhood Synagogue on Gramercy Park, or Radio City [Music Hall], or all these theaters that had been saved, or were going to get an award anyway. It was always so much fun to come up with not only the recipients, but really clever ways to present the awards, and the stars—whoever was going to give the awards that was some funny little tie-in.

Then after a while, they started to present the President's Medal. I think to either a person or a really spectacular preservation effort. You'll see them every now and then around New York—these big, gold circles that were the awards that were given out. So that was our annual meeting, which was a membership meeting. I don't know if they still do it, but they'd have an annual fundraiser. A huge black tie affair, and those were very tony, tony events. You'd spend a

month's salary on your dress *[laughs]*. It was an interesting mix to go to the annual meetings, because you'd see the members. People you'd recognize from the walking tours, but they'd be sitting side by side with heads of all the major corporations in New York who were writing big checks. So those guys were able to see just who the membership was, what the membership was. That was fun, because I think there was something in those events for everybody, and everybody felt that they were a part of MAS. Which I think was very important. So yes, by being part of MAS, you were then a part of the preservation movement, and you were a part of sophisticated urban planning—whatever that was going to be.

The other thing we haven't talked about, actually, is the role of the [New York] City Planning Commission back then, and the Board of Standards and Appeals and everything else that came into play. You had the Landmarks Commission but you also had City Planning, which has a very different set-up now, from what I understand, to the way it was back then. Because if you needed to fight a landmarks designation, you'd have to go to the Board of Standards and Appeals, I guess, to get it overruled. It's probably much more complicated and sophisticated now. But you'd have to, the whole notion of hardship was a big factor in terms of, "Well, if you're going to bestow landmark status on this building, and they can show economic hardship, then I have a valid challenge to that." The Landmarks Commission wasn't the be-all and end-all for that. That came through the City Planning Commission. I guess from what I've read it's very different now.

Q: I don't know how the hardship thing works, but I mean, the commission, you know, there's the lengthy review process. But the city councilmen can always say no, and then it won't be a

landmark. The planning commission then has the next thing of they can shrink the boundaries or whatever. So this, it's a many stage process. You have to get the okay from a lot of different people before it will become a landmark. But sometimes people try to say it's a hardship when you're like, but you just bought a five million dollar building. You can fix the cornice. You know? Things like that.

Nowvé: Who has the final say then? Which agency?

Q: Well, any one along the way can basically overturn it. So generally unless the commission knows they're going to get the support of the local council member, they won't even bring it up to the hearing. But—

Nowvé: Wow. It seems easier back then. I forgot all about the City Planning Commission, because they would get involved. Especially if they were hardships as it were—

Q: But I think also then it was—there were so many buildings that were being nominated, whereas now it's like twenty-eight, you know, or more years later where all the obvious buildings have already been designated.

Nowvé: That's interesting, too. Then you had the whole notion of what to do when buildings turn fifty, like Huntington Hartford Museum [Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art] and other buildings. Okay, are they significant? We didn't really have that—the whole notion of modernism. Things that were fifty years old then—this sounds so weird!—were definitely old.

They were from the twenties. They were part of a tradition that made sense, in terms of the evolution of architectural styles. Now you're dealing with things from the fifties and the sixties that requires a whole other notion of what's worth preserving. I think it's, this is very, from my perspective, very interesting way to interpret what's significant or not. Because we don't have a lot of really cool fifties buildings here.

Q: Yes, I know.

Nowvé: So you need to have different tools and different perspectives.

Q: Well, but then you have—preservationists just learn to fight for buildings that they think are pretty ugly.

Nowvé: Isn't that interesting. So what do you do? You're gritting your teeth, going, "Oh, technically—"

Q: But we've all, I think preservation itself, the movement has also started to focus more on cultural value, and public identity and memory and stuff. So even though a building might not be aesthetically pleasing, it's still like, "This was an important building to all of these people, and it means a lot of them." So that's why we have to fight for it.

Nowvé: Which is good, because that goes, as I said, to the sort of emotional landscape, not just the bricks and mortar. I can't think of anything else.

Q: Well, I can just give you my email address, so if—

Nowvé: Yes, do.

Q: So if you—

Nowvé: I will.

Q: Why did you agree to this interview?

Nowvé: Because it still means a lot to me. I feel like, not a traitor because I haven't done anything bad *[laughs]* but it still means a lot to me. I am very moved by it all and I still appreciate and am always aware of the environment. It's a very, very important part of my life. I made friends in that movement who are friends to this day. A lot of them are still working in the trenches, and I always feel like I'm so superficial, I work in Hollywood, I'm so sorry! But when I got the call, I was really touched, because MAS means a lot to me, and every now and then Vanessa Gruen or somebody else from MAS will call me up and ask for a contact or something. I'm really happy to help. I was there with a group of pretty incredible people, and at a very influential time in this city's history. I'm grateful for it, and if I can impart any of that, it means a lot to share that perspective. I hope I've gotten that across to you in some way. But we're sort of witnesses to history, as well as facilitators, in a way. We were just doing it. I never thought about it. It was just what you did. I just, I often found myself sort of pinching myself. "This is my job?"



This is what I'm doing? And I'm actually—" It's great to be able to have results, tangible results, what I do now takes forever to do something. There, it was literally—within a few months or so, you'd see if what you were doing was having an effect. You'd also have contact with people a lot, and that always meant a lot to me. We were never isolated. We were always part of the community of putting communities together. That was really good, to feel that we were facilitators. I just loved getting the call and it was really fun to meet you and talk to you about it.

Q: Well, I'm glad that you agreed to do it and like I said I think it will be really important for preservationists later on to be able to listen to these and see the documents and get someone who was really there. You know? The last thing I meant to ask you is if you have any papers? Any correspondence or whatever that they can take a look at.

Nowvé: I started to go through some things, and I'll find some things. I found this weird letterhead. I have to give you a piece. Because I think I had the last piece of it; I thought it was so cool that I brought it home. There was a committee to save the Tweed Courthouse [Old New York County Courthouse]. Which obviously they succeeded in doing. I'll get it to you—very cool letterhead, because obviously they had someone fabulous design it. The members of the board is like a Who's Who of history back then. This predated me, luckily, because Giorgio Cavaglieri wound up doing the design for the preservation of the Tweed Courthouse. I've got stuff like that and I'll put some things together. The sad thing is when we were in 30 Rock, we didn't have a lot of space, and we had a little closet, which was about ten feet square at the most. It's where our supply closet was. But there also really incredible photographs, just priceless photographs of various preservation efforts which I assumed moved to the Urban Center, and

then into the Information Exchange. I don't know what happened to them after that. They were literally next door to the Xerox paper. Those are the MAS archives originally. So there was really no, we had no archivist back then.

Q: Well that's how I think it goes now in a lot of places. It's like, "Oh, it's just this stuff." You know? Just put it there.

Nowvé: I'd think that people now would be more sensitive to it. It's not like we weren't responsive to the historic significance of it, it's just that we had other things going on. "Well they're in that box. They're safe."

Q: If you don't have the space, then what are you going to do?

Nowvé: We had no space. We had a great view. But no space.

Q: Okay, I'm going to turn this off. Is that alright?

Nowvé: Yes, it's fine.

Q: All right. Thank you very much.

Nowvé: Thank you. It was good talking with you.

Q: Again, this is Katie Nolan interviewing Lorna Nowvé on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

[END OF INTERVIEW]