

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Franny Eberhart

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Franny Eberhart conducted by Interviewer Filip Mazurczak on November 11, 2017. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive Project's collection of individual 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.

Franny Eberhart's first preservation effort was to work to restore the Church of the Holy Trinity on the Upper East Side, which had been neglected and needed repairs. From there, she attended Columbia University's Historic Preservation program and started working with the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Her preservation career began at the time the New York City Board of Estimate was dissolved and when there was a movement to exempt religious properties from landmark rules, which had an enormous effect on preservation politics. In 1992, she became the Historic Districts Council's first paid executive director and shares her remembrances of how the group grew and evolved through the 1990s and early 2000s. She was also involved in the founding of Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts and speaks about some of their achievements and preservation efforts, including the battle to preserve City and Suburban.

Franny Eberhart grew up in Chicago, Illinois before attending Wellesley College where she studied Art History. She moved to New York City in the 1960s and began working in the art world. She later graduated from Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program and began working in the preservation field. She's been involved with the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, and Friend of Terracotta, as well as teaching a preservation course at New York University.

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey

Session: 1

Interviewee: Franny Eberhart

Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Filip Mazurczak

Date: November 11, 2017

Q: My name is Filip Mazurczak. Today is Friday, November tenth. I am on the Upper East Side of Manhattan on 305 East Eighty-Seventh Street and I'm talking to Mrs. Franny Eberhart. How are you today?

Eberhart: I'm good. Thank you very much.

Q: All right. So as a first question, can you please tell me when and where were you born?

Eberhart: I was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1945, August sixth, the day we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Eberhart: Great childhood. I think Chicago is a wonderful city and I have always been a city person. I've lived in Chicago and New York the bulk of my life with just a few years off for education at one place or another. Had a great childhood, good friends. I went to a very good school, an older brother six years older than me who featured in sort of the beginning of my interest in the arts. My parents were not so much interested in the arts.

They were very civically-oriented folks. They were both very involved in the civic and social life of the city.

Q: You said that your parents were not so much interested in the arts but your brother was and he kind of got you interested in the arts. Can you please tell me a little bit about that, elaborate on that a little bit?

Eberhart: Yes. As I said, he was six years older than me and very able and interested in tons of different things. He was and is a very bright guy. And when I was probably fifteen, I would say—yes, it was the summer of my sixteenth birthday—there was an exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago, which is a magnificent place, on Dada. I knew nothing about anything and my brother wanted to go and he wanted to take me, which was very flattering if you have a brother that's six years older than you.

We knew a woman who had, I think, been partially involved as an intern in setting the show up. She was a Radcliffe [College] student and the daughter of my parents' friends. So we went and I just flat out didn't understand Dada. We went to a lecture that actually our friend Nancy [*phonetic*] participated in and I still didn't understand Dada and it made me really kind of cross that I didn't understand it. That, of course, is a good deal of what Dada was trying to do, trying to confuse and discombobulate. That was really the beginning. I credit my brother with piquing my interest in the visual arts.

Q: Well, certainly Dada's unique since probably the most famous Dada work is Marcel Duchamp's urinal design. But other than the Dada exhibit, do you have any other memories of beginning to be interested in the arts in your childhood?

Eberhart: Yes, it was an unbelievable summer because my grandparents then took me to Italy, to Northern Italy for a month or six weeks. I can't quite—well certainly a month. My grandmother was very ill and she wanted to go back to Italy. So we did. I was there with my grandparents and my aunt and uncle and a couple of little cousins who were—and all of them were very interested in the visual arts. It had skipped my father. This was his family.

So they took me places. They took me to the Giotto [di Bondone], [Scrovegni] Chapel in Padua. We saw a lot of Mantegna. Of course, there was also some classical art around in Northern Italy, just scattered on the ground, sculpture and things like that.

A key moment was when we were going to be going to the Giotto Chapel and my grandfather said he wanted me to read something as preparation before we went. I thought, oh, good grief. It was a textbook that my father had used in college by an art historian named Millard Meiss who was one of the famous German art historians who came over here. I read the chapter on the chapel thinking I would be bored to tears and I was fascinated.

So that really again, Dada happening on one side and then the very basic beginning of the Renaissance coming to me on the other side, and that was really the beginning. I then majored in art history in college and so on.

Q: So you said that your parents are not into the arts but obviously your grandparents who took you to Italy and made you do background reading were. So can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents and your parents and how they differed?

Eberhart: Well, my grandfather was—I don't know if he was on the board of the Art Institute but he was very interested in the arts. He and my grandmother actually collected some prints, late nineteenth century prints which were very affordable in those days, by the artists that you would have heard of, [Pierre] Bonnard, [Édouard] Vuillard, [Pablo] Picasso, [Paul] Cezanne, things like that. That was all around me that I hadn't paid attention to before. That was just part of who they were. My grandfather was a lawyer but this was someone that he cared deeply about, also music. He was just very interested in the arts and many things. He was terrific.

My father was very musically talented. That was his thing. He played the piano by ear. He had a lovely voice until he started smoking. That was his real interest, unlike my grandfather who was interested in very broadly but not in the performing arts, himself personally. My grandmother, I didn't know so well because as I said, she was quite ill when I was a teenager, never was a very comfortable person, alas. I should add to this that my aunt and uncle which is then my father's sister and her husband were very

involved in the Art Institute, not so much the musical side of things but also very involved with the Art Institute. So it was all around me and it was this summer, a very formative time, early teens, that I sort of joined the clan.

Q: After that summer when you discovered Dada and when your grandparents took you to Italy, what happened next with regards to your interest in art? What were the next steps?

Eberhart: I was very fortunate to be at a boarding school that had an art history class. A class, just one, and it was Renaissance painting. It wasn't modern at all. That would not have happened. But it just continued to feed my interest and set my direction, no question about it. So that when I started looking at colleges, I look at a bunch and chose Wellesley College which has a great art department, had a great art department then, great art department now, had a wonderful newish facility done by Paul [M.] Rudolph. Now it's vintage early Paul Rudolph but to us it was very modern. So that was it. I was launched.

Q: Nowadays most young people have no idea what they're going to study when they go to college, that was definitely the case for myself, but when you went to college, did you know right away that you wanted to be an art history major?

Eberhart: Oh, absolutely. That's why I chose Wellesley, knowing that if my interests paled or if the department failed me, if I could get in, it was a very good college, good liberal arts women's college, which was all that was available. Traditionally, historically,

all male colleges were not yet co-ed. This is 1963 that I graduated from high school. So I figured I would find something that I liked but I didn't have to look. Art history remained my focus.

Q: Wellesley College is in Massachusetts?

Eberhart: Yes, outside of Boston.

Q: What was Wellesley like?

Eberhart: Well, socially very conservative. You had a certain—oh, gosh, you don't even want to hear it. It wasn't like a convent but it was—there was limited numbers of nights you could go out. If you wanted to spend a night out, you had to get written permission from your parents and written meant it had to come by mail from Chicago. So you had to plan ahead. If you wanted to be more impulsive, you'd have to get yourself organized and you could spend a night out, an overnight if you were staying at the home of a Wellesley family. So that was the big finagle; women who wanted to spend the night with their boyfriends would sign out to someone's home in the neighborhood. You can't imagine. It sounds absurd now. I sound like a real antique. Within a few years, really a very few years of my graduation in 1967, all of that changed. All of that just blew wide open but while I was there, it was very conservative.

But it was a spectacularly good education. It was a very solid, well-rounded—you had to be well-rounded. You had to take classes in a variety of different disciplines, which is a little challenging for me, and you came out of it with what I've heard someone describe—actually a president of Wellesley later describe and I think it's a great phrase—as a supple mind, a brain that can take things on, think things through, even if they're not in your major field of interest, that you have the capacity to intellectually cope. That is, I think, the definition of a liberal arts education.

Q: Were there any specific people or events at Wellesley that were formative?

Eberhart: One of them certainly was John McAndrew who was the person who taught the basic—he taught one of the basic survey courses but he was a modernist and he was one of the founders of Museum of Modern Art. Wellesley was extremely lucky to have him. He loved Wellesley. He taught there for years and years and years.

So we got a real grounding in the basics of modern art, Twentieth Century art, which was spectacular. He stands out in my mind as the person who was lecturing when John [F.] Kennedy was shot. I will never forget him at the end of the lecture saying that this had happened and we all needed to go back to our dorms and turn on the televisions. But he also was just a spectacularly wonderful teacher with an incredible background. I don't know where else you would have gotten that. Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.], John McAndrew, Phillip Johnson were all there at the beginning of the Museum of Modern Art. So that was fabulous.

The other professor was named Curtis [H.] Shell and he was a specialist in quattrocento painting, Italian quattrocento painting, which I loved and I had imagined, unlikely as it seems, to have a career in quattrocento painting which of course happens to about point five percent of the people who were interested in it. It's not something that you can just get a job in right away. But he was a wonderful teacher. He really fed my enthusiasm for the field.

Q: After you graduated from Wellesley, what was your first job?

Eberhart: My first job was—well, my first job was very briefly for an architectural firm but my first job that stuck and really was kind of the next step in a way was with an art dealer named Martin Gordon who specialized in prints. So I'm back to what I had known a little bit from my grandfather and grandmother. He specialized in late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century prints, which was exactly what they collected.

So it was a little bit like coming home. A lot of art dealers are incredibly knowledgeable. They have to be and he was about prints, again works of art on paper. I forget how long I worked for him. I worked for him really until—and through the time that I got married and started a family and we worked together. After awhile, I started buying pictures with him so that we could deal together. That was really fabulous. When the kids were little, it just got to be too much and I retired. It was a great job and a quirky, wonderful man.

Q: You said he was a quirky man. Can you give me some specifics, some examples of his quirkiness?

Eberhart: Oh, you had to see him in action. It's hard to say. He was very impulsive. If he made a chunk of money on something, he would spend it right away, probably drove his wife crazy. He was very generous, very generous.

The first week I worked there, he noticed that when all of the deductions were taken out of my paycheck—this is going to make me sound like an antique as well—my take-home was under one hundred dollars a week. And he said, “That’s ridiculous! Nobody can live on under one hundred dollars a week.” Well, I was living just fine, thought it was fantastic, so glad to have a job in the arts no less with something I loved and knew. But he gave me a raise right away. First week I got a raise. That was pretty fun. He was very impulsive in a generous way. Yes, he was great. He was terrific.

Q: And this was in New York?

Eberhart: This was in New York. Yes, 1063 Madison Avenue. Later in our time together, we ran some auctions for just prints and also photographs. At that time, the auction market for prints and photographs existed only in Europe. There was no comparable focused auction house for prints and photographs. Marty thought there was—and also Christie’s, Sotheby’s had not yet—the auction house scene for this kind of thing had not arrived in New York. So Marty thought, “Well, we’ll do it.” And that seemed like a very

good idea. We ran, I think, four auctions and then Sotheby's did come—no Christie's came, that's right. Sotheby's was there. It was the only game in town. There was no competition. We decided we would be competition because why not. There were plenty of auction houses like this in Europe. There should be at least two in New York. But then Christie's came and Christie's with a two hundred and fifty-year-old reputation, knocked us out of business.

Q: So you described Wellesley as a very conservative place but then you said that a couple of years after you graduated, it no longer became that conservative. And I think the same thing could be said for the entire United States in the 1960s.

Eberhart: Yes, right.

Q: This was a time of racial desegregation, of protests against the Vietnam War. How did these major social changes impact your work for an art dealer?

Eberhart: They didn't really. We were very isolated in doing our own thing. We had our points of view, our opinions but it really didn't. It's again a little bit of an ivory tower kind of situation. The one exception I would say to that was the time the students were shot down on the campus of—help me—

Q: Ohio.

Eberhart: Ohio, yes, I'm forgetting the name of the town, at any rate. And my boss, Marty, who was a sailor, hung an American flag upside down in our display window, a big display window on Madison Avenue. An upside down flag if you're a sailor is a sign of distress. That was a very bold statement. I was a little nervous about how people might react to it but we had people coming into the gallery thanking us for that statement. That was really the one moment that I could say politics entered our lives at the Martin Gordon Gallery.

Q: There is a song called *Ohio* by Neil [P.] Young about that incident.

Eberhart: Yes, why I'm not coming up with the name of the school but anyway.

Q: Yes, I can't remember either. So you said your husband's a sailor, which means he was from a different milieu than yourself—

Eberhart: My boss was a sailor.

Q: Oh, your boss.

Eberhart: My boss was the sailor.

Q: Oh, okay, I see. What was your husband like?

Eberhart: He was and is a lovely guy. He is involved in building in New York. His family was a general contracting company that had a little real estate on the side and they now have mostly residential units on the Upper East Side. They do all their own contracting and that's what he really loves. He loves the building part of it and he's close to retiring. So we'll see where we go from here.

Q: So I'm guessing your husband shares your love of art.

Eberhart: Not so much, the architecture, not the panel paintings, not so much. But architecture is a strong common interest for us.

Q: I read that you were married in the Church of the Holy Trinity, which is an Episcopalian church that later your first efforts as a preservationist were involved in trying to save that church. So did this church have a special meaning in your life apart from the fact that you were married there, which of course is significant, but apart from that were you a member of this church? Were you tied to it closely?

Eberhart: My husband's family had been and his parents had been married there and his aunt and uncle as well. And the church was like a lot of historic buildings and religious institutions in particular, they had suffered from a lot of neglect over the years, deferred maintenance as we call it in the field. Our older daughter was in nursery school there and I got involved in a fundraising effort. The church wasn't going anywhere. It wasn't—

saved is probably a little too much of a word but it definitely was raining inside. It was definitely wet and probably not entirely safe.

So I got involved in fundraising for the church and we raised a lot of money and did a lot of work, some of it unglamorous, heating systems, stuff like that. Some of it more glamorous, the exterior work, which was important, of course. Right about then, the preservation program at Columbia [University], I think, was founded in 1967, which was the year I graduated from college. So this was around 1970—I don't know, I guess the late '80s, no, that's not quite right, the late '70s I got involved in this fundraising effort.

At the same time, I was learning from a Wellesley friend about the preservation program at Columbia and I thought that sounded like something I'd might like to do one day and ultimately I applied to take just a couple of courses to see how I liked it and see how I liked going to graduate school with some children in the house which I thought might be a challenge. But I loved the work. I loved the field. It suited me and it worked out fine with the kids too. So that was the next step.

Q: From the research I've done, the Upper East Side is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Manhattan. Do you think that this has made your preservation efforts at the Church of the Holy Trinity or elsewhere easier for example or different than if someone lives in a less prosperous area?

Eberhart: It's never easy wherever you are because it's not, I think, society's ethic. It's not one of the first things that our social structure wants to do necessarily and I fully understand that there are more immediate human needs that should unquestionably precede preservation; housing, shelter, food, that sort of thing. But you go where your passion is. So that's where I went. Some of the Upper East Side, the western half of the Upper East Side, the Gold Coast is very wealthy. But you move east towards Yorkville where we are here, and you have a working-class, a working, middle class neighborhood where those kinds of dollars that you think of as the Fifth Avenue dollars, the Park Avenue dollars, those aren't here. So it's unquestionably a challenge.

Q: So overall would you say that your preservation efforts with the Church of the Holy Trinity were successful?

Eberhart: They certainly were with that campaign. We did a lot of work and we've done several since. I've been involved in most of them and we will continue to do—because it's an 1899 building and will continue to need work. Right now, we're putting in the last of four new boilers because the old ones were old, very old. Also they were oil and we wanted to switch to gas. So that has been enormously expensive and we'll probably not finish paying for that until 2020. But we will have done it and it's not going to stop.

Q: Who are your main benefactors in these fundraising efforts?

Eberhart: That first one in the '80s was a little different from what we've been able to do since because the foundation community was waking up to the fact that these historic buildings are not only gorgeous but they also serve their neighboring population. So they are homes to social services. At Holy Trinity, we have, for example, an overnight shelter for sixteen men every day of the year, which we've had for decades now. For years, there was a summer camp for kids who couldn't afford to go to the fancy summer camps. We have feeding programs on the weekends and also for holidays. The foundation community came to understand that if you don't take care of the buildings, where are you going to put these things? And of course, this is all free. We don't charge anybody for this.

So we were able to get good foundation dollars in the '80s. That has kind of dried up and we rely on parishioners, neighbors to a certain extent but not so much. Our great nest egg right now is about a million and a half—which is a lot of money—a million and a half dollar restricted endowment that is dedicated just to the care of the buildings. We're only able to take five percent income out of it every year, which is correct. So that gives us—but that does give us about—it's actually about seventy thousand dollars a year to pay for things like boilers. And that was a gift, one of those wonderful things, that was a combined gift from a parish campaign in the rah-rah days of the '90s when people had a lot of money, and a single gift from one of the leadership friends, not a parishioner, but a friend that gave us that nest egg. That's an unusual thing for a religious institution of any denomination and it's going to see us into the future.

Q: So how are the 1980s—how is now different from the 1980s? Why have these funds dried up from the foundation?

Eberhart: I think foundations are allowed to develop other interests and in some cases, they've been wildly different interests but also the demands are just huge. For example, one foundation that gave us a very nice check, fifty thousand dollars, later went into sort of Arab-American relations. This is early—it feels sort of quaint now but it was very early in the beginning of all the difficulties that we're having now. That became their goal, to try to improve relationships amongst very different cultures. That's wildly different from giving money to a historic building that houses social services.

In other cases, the environmental groups have been enormously challenged. We were able to persuade people who were interested in the environment, that the built environment mattered as much as the green environment but now, I think, as the green environment is increasingly under threat from global warming and things like that, people are focusing on that as a larger issue and not so much on the built environment.

Q: Apart from global warming and other change, there are also a lot of changes, religious changes in America. There are more people leaving the mainstream churches, et cetera. Has this impacted somehow the church?

Eberhart: Yes, sure. The Sunday population is way down. No question about it. It's an older demographic that continues to attend and young folks are not going to religious

institutions pretty much at all. Well, not at all. It's as you know. Thank you for saying that. That is certainly an issue as well. I was thinking more sort of the foundation point of view but yes, from a person-to-person point of view, just counting heads in the sanctuary, they're not there.

Q: That has affected your preservation work how?

Eberhart: Well, we're lucky. We've got this endowment. So we're able to hack away at it. We've got some work that we need to do on the south transept and I can say, "Okay, in 2020 or maybe 2021, we're going to be able to do that work." So we have something that the vast majority of institutions don't have.

Q: So just so I get the chronology right, did you first get involved with preserving the Church of the Holy Trinity or did you first start studying preservation at Columbia?

Eberhart: No, I started at the church. Yes, that was the beginning and then I learned about the program and thought, wow, and got in.

Q: So naturally I think it's pretty clear that you have had a strong appreciation and love of the arts since you were an early teen but was working on the Church of the Holy Trinity really your first exposure to preservation? Was that your first tangible experience with it?

Eberhart: Yes, definitely, yes. I'm still at it but that's the nature of preservation.

Q: And apparently you became passionate about it since you decided to study at Columbia.

Eberhart: Yes, yes, I did and I didn't imagine that I would get a job unnecessarily. I was a middle-age mother of two that hadn't worked in quite a while. But Laurie Beckelman at the [New York] Landmarks Conservancy hired me for a public affairs position and so that was—I was off and running.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about this public affairs position please?

Eberhart: Yes, Laurie had a post called manager for public affairs and it was really just that. It was the person who monitored the [New York City] Landmarks Preservation Commission and the commission's Certificate of Appropriateness applications, monitored the political situation. Preservation is always controversial and the vast majority of folks either don't know anything about it or don't like it. So that became my job and introduced me then to the politics of preservation, which is something they do more at Columbia now but they didn't then, pretty much.

When I started working there, it was the time when the City of New York was redoing its charter, charter revision. The charter was like the city's constitution and one of the goals of the leadership of many religious denominations was to get churches, synagogues, et

cetera, exempted from [New York City] Landmarks Law. So that was a big fight and preservation won because for one thing, that would be unconstitutional. We can forget that. This was not too long at all, I mean it was exactly at the time the St. Bart's case [*St. Bartholomew's Church v. City of New York*] had gone up to the [United States] Supreme Court, if that strikes a bell, St. Bartholomew's Church?

Q: I don't think so.

Eberhart: Okay, well, that had the leadership of various religious denominations very unhappy because the Supreme Court declined to hear a lower court decision that basically said the Landmarks Law is applicable to religious institutions. That was the decision. So it was a hot topic, a very hot topic, very controversial. And again, preservation won but there's always the next fight.

Q: So you said that a lot of political leaders don't care about preservation and don't necessarily like it. From your experience, why has that been so and can you think of any specific examples that illustrate this?

Eberhart: I think a lot of elected officials in New York are basically just ignorant. It's not something that affects their communities. If you're out in some of the outer boroughs and things like that, it's just not something that affects their communities. I understand that but they have an obligation to understand broader issues as they come up. I think there's also a lot of misinformation out there. I think the Landmarks Commission gets a bad rap

for making life difficult for owners, although it is another layer of regulation. That is probably the third and sort of overarching reason, which is that people are just not interested in any more regulation. Building owners of all stripes don't want another level on top of everything else that they have to deal with the city. We all understand that but it has been upheld by the Supreme Court that preservation is a common good, that it is a common good protected under the health and welfare provisions of the constitution. So we'll just keep on fighting the good fight.

Q: And have there been changes in the approach of elected officials over the past several decades?

Eberhart: It sort of comes and goes, I think. It comes and goes. Just speaking about New York City, it depends a good deal on whose chair of the committee that handles landmarks. It depends on how well the Landmarks Commission frankly handles the politics that are involved. Some are better at it than others. There was a period of time where a guy named Ken [Kenneth K.] Fisher was a city council member in charge of the land use committee that handled landmarks and he had grown up in Brooklyn Heights. He pretty much understood preservation and had a constituency that cared deeply about preservation. So things were arguably better under him than under some others. It will always be like that.

Q: And how long were you involved with the New York Landmarks Conservancy?

Eberhart: I was just there for actually three years. It wasn't very long but a very instructive three years.

Q: Can you tell me about some of the most important events or experiences you had then?

Eberhart: The charter revision was unquestionably it. That was really a big deal and it consumed my time there for the first—I would have to look back at the calendar but it was a lot of time. And because I came to preservation from a religious institution and could speak to that and understand perhaps some of the opposition, I was in a very good place to be fighting that fight. I remember driving around—this sounds so quaint again—driving around the city, all five boroughs, getting signatures on a joint letter from the chief religious officials at various religious institutions, saying that they approved of the Landmarks Commission, they approved of the regulations, they had lived under them and they were not all that onerous. There were sources of funding for religious institutions, thanks to Landmarks Conservancy. Anyway, that's the kind of thing I spent a lot of time doing and that was unquestionably the most significant thing that I did there, the biggest fight that we've had in a long time.

Q: And when did you get involved with the Historic Districts Council?

Eberhart: I started getting involved with them in 1992, I think? Yes, 1992, I became their first paid executive director. They had been an all-volunteer group since their founding at

the Municipal Art Society a good number of years before that and they wanted to professionalize with a—what do you need to do? Oh, I did it again [*laughs*]. Sorry. They wanted to professionalize with a not quite full-time executive director. And I was ready for a change, for a challenge. So I took that on.

Q: What was that like?

Eberhart: It was fun. It was really fun. It was fun to work with this group, a board of directors of people who were passionate about their neighborhoods and passionate about preservation, from all five boroughs, great characters. We really wanted to grow the vocal constituency for preservation. The HDC, Historic Districts Council had been founded by the Municipal Art Society to be exactly that. They thought that there needed to be a political voice for preservation that would come from the neighborhoods, come from the historic districts and be able to stand up when the challenges arose. And we did.

It's a big organization now, big for preservation. They have—I forget—like five hundred neighborhood groups that are all under their umbrella. Now just between you and me and this recorder, the groups are sometimes one person. We used to say a person with a letterhead. Now we say it's a person with a website or a person with a Twitter account or something like that. But now more than ever, you can connect people who are like-minded through social media and really build your constituency for preservation and that's what we were starting then in the dark ages of '92. I was there from '92 to '98.

Q: You said that you were involved with people who were very passionate about their neighborhoods, their landmarks from all five boroughs. Are there any specific people who stand out? Any examples of people you think were memorable or significant or influential whom you worked with?

Eberhart: Well, one of the most fun unquestionably and she's gone—probably NYPAP [New York Preservation Archive Project] never got an interview with her but was very remarkable, Mickey Murphy. So when you pack up your recorder and go home, Google Mickey Murphy, Mary Ellen Murphy, who was a journalist. Mickey—I don't know how many years ago she died—she was one of the early women journalists at the School of Journalism at Columbia. She was deeply interested in waterfront issues but also totally devoted to preservation, and my goodness she was tough. She had this gravelly voice because she smoked too much and that's probably what got her in the end. But she was tough and funny and energetic, just about to the end. A wonderful woman, a real character and really very special. And of course, Tony [Anthony C.] Wood is another one. But you know all about him.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about Tony Wood?

Eberhart: Well, Tony Wood is just one of those folks without whom preservation wouldn't exist in New York City, hence NYPAP, preservation history wouldn't be what it is. We wouldn't know what we know. Tony's just always—he's very cheery, very upbeat and always ready for a good fight. And heaven knows we have enough in

preservation. So he is always eager to mobilize us and as one of the founders of the Historic Districts Council, he has succeeded perhaps beyond what they at the Municipal Art Society could have imagined at the beginning, but the idea was right. Tony's ideas seem always to be right—NYPAP is another one. Who thought people would care as much as they seem to about preserving New York City's preservation history? But they do, thanks to Tony. He's a force of nature. He's great.

Q: So you became involved with the Historic Districts Council in 1992 which is exactly a quarter of a century ago—

Eberhart: Oh, jeez [*laughter*].

Q: How has the council changed since then in those twenty-five years?

Eberhart: Well, it's grown. It's grown. It has a profile that it didn't have before. As I said, five hundred neighborhood organizations that fall under its umbrella. It does great educational things. It hosts great gatherings, which are very heartening for preservationists because there are not a lot of us. So when you can get a whole bunch of us in the room as they did this fall to celebrate what they call the Landmarks Lion at the University Club—these incredibly gorgeous rooms at the University Club—it really fuels the army. That's a really important thing to be able to do. It's been very successful.

Q: I know that you attended the Columbia Preservation program, which we discussed and you also taught preservation at New York University. Can you please tell me a little bit about teaching at NYU?

Eberhart: Yes, well, it was fun. It was an undergraduate course in preservation for which there was no model. There are undergraduate majors in historic preservation at places like [University of] Mary Washington and there of course are graduate programs but there wasn't anything for the undergraduate. This was part of the Department of Art History, a sub chapter, architecture and urban design is the program that this was part of. So it was an elective. Some students were more interested than others and some students were more able than others.

But I enjoyed it, in part selfishly because it helped me—well, first of all, keep up. That's what everybody who teaches says. It makes you keep up with your field. It also helped me crystallize in my mind why preservation matters in our society, I think. It was fun for ten years and then I was just kind of tired of doing it and ready to pass it on to someone else. I felt as if I was repeating myself and not keeping it fresh and that's no good for the student and it wasn't really good for me. So I retired.

Q: Do you ever keep in touch with any of your former students?

Eberhart: Not so much. I hope—actually, I hope that they're out there with what a guy named Michael Lynch [*phonetic*] who worked for the State of New York, I think maybe

he does still, described as the preservation ethic. I told the students that I didn't imagine that any of them would probably get jobs in preservation because they're hard to come by but I hope that wherever they went, whatever they did, they would have the preservation ethic in their minds, that they would be involved in land use in their communities, with a preservation point of view, that they would bring that to their communities. I used to tease them and say, "I don't care if you're a dentist in Dubuque, I want you to be aware of preservation, of what kind of preservation needs there are in your community." So I hope they're out there quietly doing these things. Maybe I'll hear from one from time to time.

Q: But you don't know if any of them are—you said that you don't keep in touch with them but there's other ways you can find things out. You don't know if any of them are working in preservation?

Eberhart: There's a couple. One young man whose name—all these names are out of my head—one young man who was very interested in real estate development but again, with a preservation attitude, and I know he's been involved in the sort of regeneration, the re-imagination of the Essex [Street] Market on the Lower East Side. And a lovely woman who I do see from time to time, who works for one of the blogger things out there and also does walking tours. Again, her name is out of my head but I do see her and she actually is involved, although that's not just preservation. She brings again, a preservation ethic to what she does.

Q: Well, you taught at NYU for ten years. That's, I think, a pretty substantial scope of time and you've also retired since then. So have you seen preservation evolve at all? Has it changed or has it been pretty static?

Eberhart: I'd have to think about that a little. I think the key thing is that it's always controversial, that it's always difficult. It's not a first priority, a top societal priority. There will always be challenges. The dollars are always a problem if you're trying to take care of a building. Some of those unfortunate things are the main constants that I think of, in answering that question alas.

Q: Are there any ways in which you think that preservation education can and should change?

Eberhart: Well, I wish for starters that young people, very young people—and the Friends of the Upper East Side [Historic Districts], which is an organization that I'm involved in has an education program for young people, ages sort of five through fourth grade, four or five—I wish that in general the arts were more of a topic in schools. They're considered a frill. They're considered after-school or a little bit, somebody comes in, talks one or two days, maybe you take a trip to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]. I was so lucky to have both a family and education where the arts really mattered and that's just not the case. That of course includes architecture. One professor of mine once called preservation, applied architectural history. In other words, if you care about the history of architecture, you need to begin to care about preservation or you're going to

lose the history of architecture. That was Ned Kaufman who was my professor at Columbia. I wish that our society and our educational system had more of a capacity to make all of the arts, performing and visual arts part of a student's experience but it's not happening.

Q: Why do you think that's so?

Eberhart: Well, again, it's not a societal priority and there's a great deal of stuff you need to learn out there these days to be an educated adult. And there aren't the dollars, I suspect. Some schools like P.S. 6 [Lillie D. Blake] for example, a public school that has a very active—and probably [P.S.] 151 [Lyndon B. Johnson] as well over here—very active parents association that raises lots of money for extra stuff. But it's considered extra. The arts are considered extra. A lot of stuff that should be core to an educated young person are sort of extras, I think. That's a problem.

Q: Well, you yourself talked about how when you were a young girl, your brother introduced you to Dada, your grandparents took you on a tour of Italy with a focus on art. Do you think that this appreciation of art from a young age is what made you involved in preservation? Like for example, do you think that if you wouldn't have had this, you would have been maybe more likely to ignore the state and deterioration of the Church of the Holy Trinity?

Eberhart: Yes, definitely, no question. Looking back, you're reminding I'm now able to do at some distance, there's actually a straight line between that visit to the Art Institute and the Dada show and what I'm doing now and what I've done in between. It's quite a straight line.

Q: So you mentioned the Friends of the Upper East Side. Can you please tell a little bit more about its founding and how you're involved with it?

Eberhart: It's another one of those things that popped out of the Municipal Art Society and Tony Wood. Thirty-five years ago now, the Upper East Side Historic District had been designated not too many years before our founding, 1982, I think. Again, the feeling was that you needed local community-based organizations to support preservation, to be there at the Landmarks Commission, to keep people engaged and interested because the engaged citizen is very important to all of our civic functions and all of our laws and certainly to preservation. That, I think, was the vision. You better interview Tony if you haven't already. I think that was the vision that Tony and Kent Barwick and Halina Rosenthal and Anne Millard and Rita Chu who I think you haven't interviewed but need to. I'm going to make sure that happens. The engaged citizen is very important and that was the reason for the founding of the Friends of the Upper East Side and it's still is what we do.

Q: Are you still involved with them?

Eberhart: Yes, I am, I'm the president of the board actually. Yes, so still at it.

Q: And what are some of the most significant things you've done as president and previously as just a member of the Friends of the Upper East Side?

Eberhart: I think the most significant is a lawsuit that we pursued with the Landmarks Commission actually on behalf of a landmark building called City and Suburban Estates on York Avenue between Sixty-Fourth [Street] and Sixty-Fifth [Street]. It was model housing in its time. It was built right at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and the owner of the building wanted to tear part of it down. He sued for hardship under the Landmarks Law, which one is allowed to do, and the Landmarks Commission denied his request and that went all the way up to the Supreme Court which declined to hear it. We carried that battle along. Here we are again with battles. We carried that battle along with amicus briefs we continued to submit at each step along the way and there have been multiple steps along the way. It's not every day that a little community-based organization finds itself in front of the Supreme Court. It was a proud moment when the Supreme Court refused to hear the landlord's case and sent it back to the local judiciary. So that's unquestionably the most important thing we've done under my tenure.

Q: Do you have any memories that you'd like to share that are very representative of your work with the Friends of the Upper East Side?

Eberhart: Oh, I don't know. I think it's the day-to-day stuff, sitting around on a Friday morning as we do very regularly, looking at applications for changes to landmarked buildings. That's the very fine-grained kind of preservation that you need to do. There's the big fights like City and Suburban but it's the month after month fine-grained observations—the Jane Jacobs' *Eyes on the Street* phrase that we represent. That's really important and fun.

Q: So you mentioned Halina Rosenthal who was an important figure in the preservation movement. Do you have any memories of her you'd like to share?

Eberhart: I knew her only—I did not know her well, I'm sorry to say. But she was very funny, very on target. I know we at the Friends have some of her letters that you just can't believe, you just burst out laughing. Some preservation people are a little sharp-tongued and then there's Halina that had everything wrapped in some honey and some humor. That's the kind of style that I like but it's very hard to emulate. She was one of a kind.

Q: Or how about memories of some of the other founders of the Friends of the Upper East Side?

Eberhart: Well, Anne Millard was one of them and she died, alas, also.

[INTERRUPTION]

Eberhart: I took a picture of it to send to Susan Tunick, the Friends of Terra Cotta. So it's definitely something you need to know about if you're working in preservation in New York and as I said other places as well.

Q: And preserving terra cotta is specifically quite challenging, right? Wouldn't you say that's the case?

Eberhart: Well, terra cotta's a very durable material. The terra cotta is a very durable material. What causes the problems is that historically it was put in place with metal rods in the middle of it. That's how you'd affix the gargoyle to the front of the church. But water gets in them. We can't take care of every joint all the time and then the metal rods rust, and when rust happens a piece of metal will expand something like seven to nine times its original width. That just blows the terra cotta apart. So it's not the terra cotta's fault. It has to do with how the terra cotta is affixed to buildings. Nowadays, when you reattach new terra cotta to a building, you use stainless steel and that will have a longer lifespan, we hope.

Q: And what are some future challenges that you think will affect your preservation work in the Upper East Side or that will affect maybe future generations? Any challenges you foresee coming?

Eberhart: Well, I think the challenge is the future generation, getting the future generation engaged and involved. Too often, they become involved or engaged because of a crisis of some sort. Then often enough, when that crisis is solved, the audience drifts away. We need to keep our energy up. I wish we could keep our energy up not in a crisis to crisis to crisis mode. Again I wish that the arts were more the future of the educational system in general, so that people didn't need to have a crisis to engage, that it was just part of their DNA—that they cared about the built environment. I understand the natural environment—I've lived in the city most of my life. The built environment is my thing and others; we need the next generation to continue to care.

Q: Why do you think that the young generation of millennials is less interested and less willing to work for preservation?

Eberhart: I don't begin to understand the millennials so I'll have to get back to you on that one too [*laughs*].

Q: Do you have grandchildren for example?

Eberhart: I have an eighteen-month old. So we're okay with that. We've got a ways. He won't be a problem. I got that one [*laughs*].

Q: So obviously America, New York are facing changing demographics. For example, in Little Italy, there aren't that many Italians anymore. You're probably more likely to find

a mass in Creole than a mass in Italian—Haitian Creole—at a church in Little Italy. Have the demographics of the Upper East Side been changing in recent years or has it been pretty stable?

Eberhart: I think it's pretty stable. Well, there's the Upper East Side and there's the Upper East Side. Let's remember that. There's the Gold Coast and then there's the rest of the Upper East Side. I think we'll have to wait and see what the Q—what the subway brings. It will bring new high-rises and that is probably the biggest challenge now, as I was talking about the super towers, 432 [Park Avenue], that sort of thing. That affects not just the historic districts but the whole of the Upper East Side. And what that brings in terms of population, I'm not sure. I don't know what those units are going to be like. I don't know how many they're going to be. But that could make a big difference in this community.

Q: And what kind of difference do you think these high-rises could make?

Eberhart: Well, it's always been a transient neighborhood from the mid-Nineteenth Century when Yorkville first became populated. But it may become even more transient. I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Do you think that could have an effect on the work of preservationists?

Eberhart: Yes, because people will be less vested in their neighborhood. It's one thing if you own a co-op on Fifth Avenue, another thing if you've gotten a condo that you're going to have for a couple of years or you're just renting and then you're going to move to I don't know where. I mean it's a very mobile population I think. I think that's what we'll continue to see. As I said, it's always been the case here in Yorkville. It's been the case where people pass through but it may become more so. It's hard to say.

Q: Do you think there's a way of engaging these transient, kind of temporary people who don't necessarily have deep roots here in preservation?

Eberhart: I hope so. I don't have an answer to that. As far as the Upper East Side, we do that with walking tours and we're putting out a book on the history of Yorkville that we hope people will find interesting, that focuses on mostly religious institutions that are still here from the mid to late Nineteenth Century. We hope that that will be something that engages people and that they find interesting.

Q: Would this be like a photo album or more like an academic book?

Eberhart: It's sort of 101. It's kind of Yorkville 101. So it's serious history. It's well-documented, footnoted history but we hope in a very accessible narrative style with both historic photographs and current photographs. So it will be more than a coffee table book but it's not an academic treatise by any stretch of the imagination. So that will be out sometime in the spring, I would say.

Q: What are your hopes for the preservation movement, both here on the Upper East Side or in the United States more broadly in the near future?

Eberhart: Well, that it will become a more accepted value, ethic in our society as a whole and that we engage the younger people, starting from a very, very young age, an awareness of their environment, whatever it is. In the preservation of the built environment, we look to the environmental movement, the green environmental movement with some envy because we think they do it better than we do. So we need to continue to learn from them. But they're awfully challenged as well right now. So it's hard to say. But I would hope that others aren't always facing the kind of fights we are and it's more accepted to value something that is an important part of the health and welfare of our citizens.

Q: How and why do you think that environmentalists are more successful than preservationists?

Eberhart: Gosh, I don't know. We've been watching them for so long. Maybe more people—I don't know, maybe it's a suspicion of people who live in cities, I don't know. There's more open spaces than there are urban spaces, I guess, although more and more—I guess the way the demographics are going, more and more people are living in cities. It'd be interesting to see what the 2020 census looks like for things like that.

Q: Do you have any advice to preservationists, to people who are starting out and just getting involved?

Eberhart: Stay involved [*laughs*]. Just keep at it. It's fun. Your colleagues are great. It matters. Stick it out. The vast majority of people that are involved in preservation in the United States are doing it as volunteers because they care. Don't expect to make a living at it but make it part of your life.

Q: What are the most important lessons you've learned as a preservationist?

Eberhart: It's work. It's a challenge. Yes, it's a challenge. Again, the lesson is this is not a first priority in our society. I'm not arguing at all with the immense human needs that are being unmet out there, particularly in urban areas and things like the horrible drug epidemic now which we really got to get a handle on. So I'm not arguing with any of those. But this one counts too.

Q: Well, obviously money is something that all politicians probably care about and bringing revenue. So do you think that using the argument that if we preserve these beautiful historic buildings, can bring tourist, do you think that can make it higher up on the agenda?

Eberhart: It can bring tourists, is that what you said?

Q: For example—

Eberhart: That's not going to do it. Tourism isn't going to sell it. I think the experience of the tax credit program, the National Trust Tax Credit Program, which you may have run into, shows the value of preservation. That's a program that has actually made money for the [United States Department of the] Treasury. [United States] Congress is trying to kill it as part of this tax package. So again dollars and cents shouldn't be the only thing that you use to calibrate the value of preservation by a long shot. But you can. You can use that if you want. It works, if there's some governmental support. But there does have to be support for it.

Q: Do you know about the work of preservationists in other countries and things that we could learn from them?

Eberhart: Not so much and that was something that I wish I had been able to bring to my class at NYU [New York University] but I just don't, and I don't pretend to. Places like—well, we aren't necessarily talking about Western Europe but places like France and England have been at it for a long time. And in England and Ireland as well, for example, they actually regulate—they will inspect the inside of your home when you're doing work. In America, we find that astonishing. Now we would at least—well, I won't speak for every preservationist but we consider the inside of one's home really sacrosanct. So there are things that we can learn certainly but I don't know them.

Q: So what would you say are the selling points you could use to elected officials to make them more concerned about preservation—what do you think is the top argument you'd use to a politician for example?

Eberhart: It's probably mushy stuff to a politician but basic quality of life is improved with preservation, I think. As the Preservation League [of New York State] says, our past should be a part of our future. That's a good thing. It does make for stronger, more appealing communities. Again, you'd probably have to appeal to their interest in the dollar, that it's going to enhance property values, things like that, I think. Alas, I would like to start with the general and sort of the aesthetic and the quality of life arguments, but ultimately, I think probably for a lot of them, you'd need to get down to dollars.

Q: And what role do you think that nostalgia and sentimentality can play in the preservation movement? For example, if there are plans to demolish a church or a school that someone went to—or a church or school that someone went to is in a state of great decay, does this usually get people to rally around a cause?

Eberhart: Sometimes, yes. It's not the first line. I don't know. It does get people fired up. A classic case was the so-called [Edgar Allan] Poe House in the Village which in the end, I think, was completely ridiculous.

Q: Edgar Allen Poe?

Eberhart: Yes, Edgar Allen Poe lived in this building that didn't look anything like what it had looked like when he lived there. It was to be demolished by, of course, NYU. A huge argument was made that it needed to stand. In the end, they came up with a compromise that's absurd. What's left looks awful. That kind of thing, I think, frankly can go too far. But a lot of historic houses around the country are based on exactly that, that some famous or maybe not so famous person lived there. I have a limited tolerance for that.

Q: You said that the compromise in regards to the Poe House was ridiculous. I don't know the story—

Eberhart: It's really ugly. I mean it's not ugly, it's just stupid. NYU Law School was built essentially, encapsulated the building, put on a faux façade, imagining what the façade might have looked like when Poe lived there. Nobody knows. He didn't live there for very long. It was a giant hoorah that probably had more to do with everybody's antipathy to the voracious nature of NYU and its community—that's been a problem from the get-go—than it did with Poe. I don't know. But it's incredible how many Poe—that said, it's incredible how many Poe worshippers there are all around the world that rallied on that occasion.

Q: Did they open a museum or something like that?

Eberhart: Well, there's a little—there wasn't anything there. There is apparently—there's a little sign on the door, I'm told, that says it's open for a few hours on a Wednesday afternoon or something like that. It was a compromise.

Q: And can you think of any specific examples other than the Poe House in which some sort of a building or site with a lot of sentimental emotional value successfully got people rallying to preserve or save it?

Eberhart: I think my brain's gone right now. I think I'm losing my—it's not coming to me. Yes, they're out there. They're out there. Sometimes it's fair enough.

Q: I mean you were married at the Holy Trinity Church, so obviously that probably played a factor in your preservation efforts, right?

Eberhart: Yes, oh yes. No, as we said earlier, that was before I got involved in preservation. That was really a long time ago, forty-something odd years now [*laughs*].

Q: So you talked a little bit about the book that's coming out about the history of Yorkville. Can you please tell me a little about the walking tours?

Eberhart: We do walking tours on a whole bunch of different things. Art deco this season was one. One of our city's really good tour guides did a tour of the Upper East Side that started at Fifth Avenue and then went down to City and Suburban. So you're actually

going downhill because you're going down towards the river. And that was interesting because it was not only architectural but it was a social history. That's the kind of thing we do. You name it, we're happy to do it. We did a tour of certain parts of Central Park from time to time. Lots to look at here.

Q: Are these walking tours popular?

Eberhart: Yes. We get—depending on the topic, we get anywhere from a few to twenty-five to thirty people which is really all you can do on a walking tour. It gets hard to talk, if you're the tour guide.

Q: Is there a dominant demographic group?

Eberhart: Older.

Q: Not many people my age?

Eberhart: Probably not, no.

Q: So from what you say, I guess one of the key challenges for preservationists is to get people my age and younger involved and interested.

Eberhart: Yes, yes.

Q: So we'll be slowly winding down. At the end, I just wanted to ask is there anything you'd like to add, anything you'd like to talk about?

Eberhart: Your questions have been good.

Q: Oh, thank you [*laughs*]. I hope my professor agrees.

Eberhart: Yes, your questions have been good and you're doing it on the fly too. It's not just a list. So you're responding to the narrative as we go along here.

Q: Oh, that's good.

Eberhart: That's good [*laughs*].

Q: But is there anything you'd like to talk about or anything you'd like to add about preservation, about yourself, about your work?

Eberhart: I will probably get back to you with that last question about the houses, about buildings that were saved just because of the person who lived in them but right now, my brain's gone, I think.

Q: Well, I suppose one example I could give—there's lots of examples of buildings that are decaying but they're used for something completely different. Like for example, in South Dakota, there's a small town called Gary, which used to be the home of the School of the Blind but it was later moved to Aberdeen in the 1980s. So for a long time it was abandoned. There's graffiti everywhere. It was decaying. A lot of people claimed it was haunted and claimed they'd seen ghosts and stuff [*laughter*].

But a couple years ago, some developer bought it and turned this blind school into a lodge mostly for pheasant hunters because South Dakota's big for pheasant hunting. So he saved this historic building from decaying but at the same time, its purpose is completely different. Do you think that's a good thing?

Eberhart: Oh, sure. Well, we used to call it adaptive reuse. Now we call it repurposing. I don't know who decided to switch the name but I'm happy with repurposing. That happens all the time, yes. That's a really great way to go and particularly with larger institutional buildings, you see that a lot. There's a hospital in London I was reading about a week or so ago that's become condos which seems a little odd but that happens all the time. All the industrial buildings in Soho, stuff like that, that were all industrial buildings are now loft spaces. They were culled for different reasons than that, now they're residential. That's very good stuff.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

Eberhart: No, I think I'm going to rest [*laughs*].

Q: Okay, thank you for your time. It was nice talking to you and I wish you all the best—

Eberhart: Thank you.

Q: —in your work with the Friends of the Upper East Side and with the preservation movement.

Eberhart: Thank you. Thank you very much. It's been fun.

Q: Oh, I'm glad. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]