UNCOVERING THE ROOTS OF LGBT PRESERVATION

The Reminiscences of
Andrew Dolkart

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Andrew Dolkart conducted by Interviewer Liz Strong on April 8, 2019. This interview is part of the *Uncovering the Roots of LGBT Preservation* oral history project.

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

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey | Session: 1

Narrator: Andrew Dolkart | Location: Manhattan, New York, NY

Interviewer: Liz H. Strong | Date: April 8, 2019

Q: Today is Monday. It's April 8, 2019. My name is Liz Strong. I'm here with Andrew Dolkart for the New York Preservation Archive Project oral history on LGBT preservation in New York City. Andrew, to get started, why don't you just say when and where you were born and a little bit about your life growing up.

Dolkart: I was born in Brooklyn. So, I'm a native New Yorker. I grew up in Brooklyn. My father was a high school chemistry teacher. He was chairman of the physical science department at Lafayette High School and my mother was a housewife for much of my childhood. At one point, she went back to work part-time. I was educated through eighth grade in the public schools and then I was the classic failing student. I tested well but I was unmotivated, completely.

So, my public school family sent me to private school. I went to Poly Prep [Country Day School] from ninth grade on, which was a great experience for me. That's why my mother went back to work, to be able to afford to send me to Poly Prep. I had a basically nice middle-class upbringing. We traveled extensively in the summers all across the country, every summer, to different places. We visited lots of historic sites and national parks. I think that was very influential on getting me interested in places.

Q: On your travels, how did you find that Brooklyn was different or unique from other places in the country that you may have traveled?

Dolkart: Well, I grew up very urban. My parents really introduced me to culture very early. I was going to the theater when I was eight years old. I was always going to museums. Every Saturday, I went to art class at the Brooklyn Museum and I used to spend most of my Saturday afternoons after that wandering around the Brooklyn Museum. They used to have treasure hunts for kids and all kinds of stuff. And then my parents would pick me up later.

Going away was a completely different experience. The reason we went away is that the National Science Foundation paid—post-Sputnik, paid high school science teachers to go and get higher education, because there was this fear that America wasn't up to snuff with science. So, my father applied for these all the time and he went to school, but basically, we had great summers.

I was in Maine, I was in Bowdoin [College] in Maine. I was at the University of Montana and Carleton [College] and then six summers in Colorado. I met lots of people from very different backgrounds. I saw lots of rural places. I went to ranch camp. I actually miss horseback riding, only on a Western saddle though. So, it was a great eye-opening experience for me because I really got to experience all kinds of different people.

Q: And you mentioned seeing historic sites on these trips. Are there any in particular that stick in your mind? Can you give me an example?

Dolkart: I remember once there was a debate whether we should go to some natural site or we should go, I think, to Helen Keller's house, and I was very insistent that we had to go to the house as we were traveling. But we went to lots of national parks because my father was very interested, as a scientist, in the natural world. But as we traveled, we always went to see house museums. We went to Monticello and Mount Vernon and all these places when I was growing up. It was just a part of what one did.

Q: So, tell me a little bit about how you grew into preservation work from this early interest. What was the point A to B there?

Dolkart: Well, it took me a while to get interested in preservation. There wasn't a natural movement to preservation. There wasn't really much of a preservation field when I was growing up. I went off to college. I went to Colgate University, which was very rural, and I had a fantastic experience there. I was very interested in theater. I did a lot of theater. At some point, I really realized that I really didn't have talent to be an actor, but I have to say that I'm a very good teacher and I give really good walking tours today because that's my theater. I know how to project to the last row. As the director always said, you have to learn to project to the last row.

So, I was interested in all of that and I still am. I think to me, I can actually trace it to one particular event [that] really began to turn me into a kind of proto-architectural historian. And that was, I was on my junior year abroad and we were studying in London and I was taking a history of the British novel class. We were reading *Pride and Prejudice*, to this day, my favorite novel. And the professor sent us to Osterley Park House, which is an eighteenth-century house

by Robert Adam in the outskirts of London. It was just the most thrilling experience. Suddenly the novel came alive and the place came alive and it was such a transformational experience visiting Osterley Park.

And I actually spent the rest of my time in London looking at buildings. I remember I had a list of Christopher Wren churches and I would check it off every time I got to see the interior of one, which was not easy, as it still is not today. They're often closed.

That really transformed what I wanted to do. I changed all my theater credits to English and I graduated as an English major, but [I realized] that I could go on in art history. Art history had always been something that I was really interested in. I went to museums, as I mentioned, ever since I'd been a kid. But I never realized that's something you could do, rather than just having fun. I decided I wanted to go to graduate school in art history and I became increasingly interested in architectural history. I also discovered on the shelf of the Colgate library—I worked in the library and I used to shelve books and, one day, I discovered the first edition of the *AIA Guide to New York City*. That also was really inspiring to me.

After I graduated from college, I spent the summer wandering around New York and really becoming increasingly interested specifically in New York City. So, I took art history courses for a year. I didn't have enough art history courses to go to graduate school and then I applied. I went to the University of Delaware and I was really miserable. At some point, I realized that art history really wasn't what I wanted. Not that I wasn't interested in what I was learning, I was very interested in it, but I had this realization that art history and the things we were discussing,

fascinating as they might have been, were for art historians. They weren't going to change the world. I grew up in this very left-wing household and I wanted to change the world. I wanted to do something that had an impact on the world.

And then somebody told me about the Historic Preservation Program at Columbia [University] and it seemed like the perfect marriage for me. Architectural history and especially New York and doing something that could affect people and people's lives. This was in the '70s at a time when the preservation movement was really developing and the Historic Preservation Program at Columbia was relatively new. Landmarking was relatively new and it was just incredibly exciting and dynamic. I never looked back. It was the best thing I ever did.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you, as you're talking about just wandering around New York City where you had grown up, but it sounds like you were seeing it with new eyes. I was wondering if you could paint a picture for me of what you were observing, what you were exploring, because 1970s New York City is very different from New York as you walk around today just in terms of the landscape.

Dolkart: In many ways, New York is very different. But in many ways, I think New York is very much the same and I got particularly interested in Brooklyn. I grew up in Midwood on a block of absolutely no aesthetic interest. It's interesting now, I can say. They were interesting vernacular semi-detached two-family houses but they're never going to be landmarked. Nobody's going to really notice them.

So, I didn't grow up in a wonderful architectural environment, but I started becoming really, really interested in the architecture and development of Brooklyn. I spent lots of time riding my bicycle through Brooklyn neighborhoods. Also, by one of the great flukes of all time, after I had been accepted at Columbia, I was looking for a job during the summer. I was going to temp agencies and things. Of course, I wasn't a great typist, so nobody was going to hire me. I was very depressed about that.

I've always been a great ballet fan and I went to the Stuttgart Ballet and I bumped into a woman who I knew from Colgate but I didn't know well. We were friends but we didn't socialize a lot together, Annie Friedman. We started talking and she asked me what I was doing. I said I had been accepted at the Columbia Historic Preservation Program. I was going to start in the fall and I really wanted to work at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. She said, "Well, my father's just been hired by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to run a survey program and he's looking to hire people." Incredible coincidence.

So, he hired me. But what happened was, because the city was so inefficient, I didn't actually start working until September when I was already a student. So, I had the whole summer and my parents couldn't force me to be looking for temp jobs because I had a job. It was going to happen any minute.

So, I spent the summer wandering around the city, and one thing that I did was I got a hold of the Landmarks Commission's Park Slope Historic District Designation Report which had only recently been designated. I went up and down the blocks reading the descriptions. I taught

myself how to look at buildings and how to describe buildings. I learned a vocabulary. It was so valuable to do that.

This was the time when the South Street Seaport was new. It's hard to believe now, as it's this shopping mall, basically. It was this incredibly exciting place to go. My friends and I got really interested in going and we would go wandering around in that area. They had square dance nights, all kinds of great things. I got really interested in that neighborhood and the old New York and even in the new things, because there were all these really dynamic, new buildings going up, with really interesting and fun street-level parks and events, most of which are gone now. I just lapped up everything there was about the city.

Q: Tell me about coming to Columbia. What was it like at the time? What were your expectations?

Dolkart: I don't know that I had any huge expectations, except that I was going to learn about preserving architecture, which I loved. I didn't know what to expect from the program. I had met with Jim Fitch, James Marston Fitch, the founder of the program. I was a student in his last two years at Columbia. I just hoped to meet other like-minded people. I think to me, that was the most valuable thing, meeting the other like-minded people. I can't say that I got one hundred percent the greatest education in the world. It was still a program that was trying to figure out what it was going to do, but we had some great classes.

I had some amazing professors. David [G.] De Long, who later went on to found the program at

the University of Pennsylvania. I had a professor [Bill Foulks] who taught a classical language in literature class that was just so brilliant. It was just great.

[James Marston] Fitch would say to us, "Okay, I've got a bus this weekend. We're going to Boston." And we'd all pile in a bus. There were about fifty people in the class. We'd pile in a bus and we'd all go to Boston or we'd all go to Philadelphia or we'd all go to Buffalo or wherever he felt like taking us. We would meet people that were doing preservation and it was very exciting. We were defining a new field and it was great.

Q: What can you tell me about learning from Fitch? Who was he as a person or a character?

Dolkart: Fitch was brilliant in many ways. I would say that by the time I had him, his best teaching days were over. But what was incredible about him was how inspiring he was and the intensity of his commitment. Not only to preservation, but to the students as well. I don't think that his classes where he stood up front and taught a class, those weren't very good. But his person and his persona and his personality were amazing. He was so brilliant and such a great thinker. That was what was most important about my experiences with him.

Q: Did he give you any direct advice on your research or your thesis or anything like that?

Dolkart: No, he was not my thesis advisor. Bill Foulks was my thesis advisor. Bill was the person that taught the language in literature class. And my thesis was on Brooklyn—— "City of Churches: Protestant Church Architecture of Brooklyn [1793–1917"]. Its preservation overlay

was that I was identifying lots of really important buildings that had never been identified or researched before and identifying who the architects were. A lot of these buildings, when I later went to work at the Landmarks Commission, a lot of them got to be landmarks because I really pushed them. The thesis was a really important part of education at Columbia. In fact, in those days, your fourth semester was entirely thesis work.

Q: It sounds like you have a particular interest in churches. Am I getting that right?

Dolkart: Well, I have an interest in urban neighborhoods, particularly in New York. I'm very interested in religious institutions because they tend to be the stand-out buildings because people were willing to invest in those buildings. They often acquire corner sites. Also I'm interested in religious institutions because they are an amazing record of the development of a neighborhood. You can trace how neighborhoods grow and change and who lived in them by looking at the religious institutions.

I'm interested in architecture, but I'm not just interested in them because it's brick or stone or what style it is. I'm interested in them because they have lives. I think buildings have lives and the lives are those people that have moved through them and moved through neighborhoods. That's really important, that buildings are part of the life of the city, past, present and future.

Religious institutions can really tell us about the peoples. If you look at Harlem, you can tell that the first generation of religious institutions are really grand Protestant churches. They were very expensive. The most prominent architects designed them. It tells us who resided in Harlem in

those early years. And then the next generation tended to be German-Lutheran churches and synagogues and Catholic churches. So, new groups of people are moving into the neighborhood. And then tracing how those white Protestant congregations or the white synagogue congregations transformed into African-American, Caribbean-American churches tells us about the changing character of the neighborhood. In fact, as these churches are now failing, it's telling us something else about the history of the neighborhood.

So, it's a continuum here. That's a really important thing about religious institutions and why from both the architecture and the kind of social-cultural history, I think they're really fascinating.

Q: So, at the same time that you're starting at Columbia, you are working on this survey. Tell me about what that—

Dolkart: Well, I worked at the Landmarks Commission as a researcher in the survey department. They had gotten funding from the federal government to do a survey of Brooklyn, looking for potential historic districts. It was a windshield survey and I worked as many days as I could in the summers. Sometimes I sat in the backseat in the windshield survey, but mostly I wasn't part of the actual windshield survey. But the windshield survey delineated areas that were potential historic districts. Then we would go out and survey every building.

I surveyed in Flatbush. My big—not my thesis, but my big research project in my second year at Columbia was called *The Suburbanization of Flatbush* [*: A Study in Architecture and*

Development] which I did an independent project on. I was really interested in surveying what now gets called Victorian Flatbush, Prospect Park South and Ditmas Park and those projects. I surveyed in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights and Fort Greene and Clinton Hill.

I was out in a lot of Brooklyn neighborhoods. Then I was hired full-time after I graduated, and we wrote reports on those neighborhoods, which were proposals for historic districts. I wrote the report on Prospect Park South and Ditmas Park and Prospect Lefferts Gardens and Clinton Hill and Crown Heights. Those were mine and still today, some of those districts are being designated. I still have those reports and they're very useful. Then my colleagues wrote some other reports on Bedford-Stuyvesant and on Bushwick and other areas.

So, the survey was a great first experience. Then we later did a survey of the Bronx. That was the most depressing thing I ever did, because it was at a really low point in the history of the Bronx when there were just vast vacant lots and burned-out buildings everywhere. But we drove up and down every block in the Bronx. And in that case, we were looking both for potential historic districts and individual landmarks. We discovered a lot of really good buildings, many of which were then subsequently designated as landmarks. So, it was very valuable.

Q: So, you were active in LPC [Landmarks Preservation Commission] right around the time of the 1978 ruling about Grand Central Terminal [*Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City*]. Did things change there as a result of that ruling, about how you acted or the climate in the—

Dolkart: Not for me, but I wasn't part of the administration there.

Q: Fair enough.

Dolkart: I can't really say because I didn't have that much to compare to.

Q: Also, it had only been around for like a decade or two, a relatively new organization. What can you say about what the climate there was like and how maybe it's changed over the years?

Dolkart: It was less professionalized. Not that the people weren't professional, but that we didn't have everything codified yet, what we were doing. They were beginning to do that. There was a lot of debate about what was a landmark and what should be landmarked. It was kind of an exciting time to be there. I was there at a transitional time. I was hired by Beverly Moss Spatt. She was a really interesting person to work for and that was for about a year or two. Then Kent Barwick came in and I worked through Kent Barwick's tenure.

Q: Tell me a little bit about who they were as people, and what it was like to work with them.

Dolkart: Well, Beverly Moss Spatt was a planner—is a planner—and Abe Beame [Mayor Abraham D. Beame] appointed her as landmarks chair. She was very interested in the juncture of landmarks and planning. Sometimes that worked for the good and sometimes maybe not so much for the good. She decided in Park Slope that nothing within one hundred feet of Seventh Avenue would be designated. So, the historic district has really weird boundaries along Seventh Avenue.

The altered pieces of a row are in the district and the intact pieces of the row are outside of the district. But she was incredibly dynamic and worked very closely with the staff. She really liked people and she liked the staff. She liked talking to the staff and finding out what they thought. The agency was small enough so that there was a very personal relationship that the chair had with members of the staff.

Kent Barwick, still to this day, is a mainstay of preservation in New York. He was one of the rare chairs that actually had a preservation background.

Q: How did that impact the work there?

Dolkart: I think that he was willing to do more. Lots got designated during his period. He was willing to stick his neck out for historic districts, especially for the Upper East Side Historic District, which is very large and was very controversial. There were proposals to remove the avenues and just do the side streets. He said, “No, that wasn’t right.” Because he was already a player in the best sense of the word. He knew everybody; he could go and talk to everybody. They may not agree with him, but he was very persuasive and got a lot of things done that maybe other people would not have gotten done.

Q: When you were doing these surveys, I think especially of Brooklyn, I’m curious, did you learn anything about the borough that was new to you, even though you had grown

up there?

Dolkart: Well, I did not grow up in one of the historic neighborhoods. Growing up, I really didn't know very much about Brooklyn in general. In both doing the surveys and then I moved over to the research department and I started writing the designation reports. I was able to really contextualize all these districts and get a really strong understanding of how Brooklyn and the rest of New York City too——(I wrote designation reports elsewhere [i.e. for sites in the other boroughs])——grew and developed, and the different kinds of architecture, especially the architects.

I always say when I give lectures——if something was designed by a really obscure architect——–that they are obscure in every household but mine. Because I now know all these really obscure architects who worked in New York. And I wrote the designation reports for Fort Greene and Clinton Hill and Prospect Park South, Prospect Lefferts Gardens. It was great to really focus in and get the nuances of New York City development.

Q: Do you have a favorite neighborhood?

Dolkart: I think Clinton Hill has always been my favorite neighborhood because there are these great overlays of development. You have remnants of when it was a suburban neighborhood and then you have row houses. Then you have the enormous mansions. It's one of those neighborhoods where you take away the cars and the streetlamps and you're back in the nineteenth century. And I think Crown Heights too is a great favorite of mine, Crown Heights North.

Q: We talked a little bit about your interest in churches. But do I have it right that you also have an interest in tenement buildings and housing?

Dolkart: Well, I'm interested in all kinds of things. [Laughter]

Q: Of course.

Dolkart: I'm interested really in the vernacular streetscapes of New York, the everyday buildings that we take for granted. It's an interest that's developed and I think that that's because of the Tenement Museum. After I left the Landmarks Commission, I started doing freelance work. I had my own consulting business. I would get calls from people. I would write National Register [of Historic Places] nominations and I would work for community groups that were trying to get landmarking.

One day, I got a call from Anita Jacobson, who was one of the founders of the Tenement Museum. She invited me to come down. They had just found a building and they wanted somebody to write a history of the tenement and would I come and look? Because I was doing consulting, I didn't say no. I said sure, I'd come down, but I couldn't have been less interested. It sounded like the most boring project I could ever think of.

I went down and it was like visiting Osterley Park House. Standing in the tenement changed my life. It was so thrilling. The research on the tenements proved to be incredibly interesting and

thrilling and really changed the way I look at cities and urban areas and the importance of the everyday vernacular buildings. It's not like I hadn't been doing that. I'd been researching row houses for years, but I never put them in that context of the vernacular. I had written a lot about this——really, I think I may have been the first person to write about speculative builders and their importance when I wrote the Fort Greene designation report, which my name is not on. In those days, you didn't get your name on your reports, but I wrote that one.

But I just started thinking about the city in a completely different way, about how the everyday architecture of tenements was so important to what the city was. About what it meant in the physical fabric of the city, not that this was architecture with trained architects, but that we're talking about putting together buildings with premade pieces and following the exact letter of the law to squeeze as much rentable space out of a building as possible.

Since then, I've gotten really interested in speculative apartment houses, especially six-story apartment houses. I'm writing a book on garment lofts now because everybody can tell you about the labor history of the Garment District. Everybody you meet who's a native New Yorker has some ancestor who worked somehow in the garment industry. But nobody can ever tell you anything about where this took place. I think it's really important to give a stage to all this history. The life of the city in these everyday buildings, I think, is really, really important.

Q: How do you think preserving these urban buildings contributes to the everyday quality of life of people now?

Dolkart: I think there are two answers to that. One, the quality of life has to do with scale and materials, the use of beautiful materials, brick and terra cotta and cast iron and stone. Especially on the Lower East Side, this may have been substandard housing but the scale is a very livable scale. So, I think preserving livability in a city is really, really important. But I also think that if all those tenements on the Lower East Side were demolished—we had a new urban renewal and the rest of Lower East Side that was not already urban renewed in the post-war period was removed—we've lost a connection to our history.

How do we know who we are or where we're going without knowing about the immigrant conditions of our ancestors in the nineteenth and twentieth century? It's of course incredibly timely, connecting the immigrant past and the struggles of immigrants with the debates now. The anti-immigrant language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which is exactly the same as the [current] anti-immigrant language. Oh, they're never going to learn English and they're never going to become Americans. That's what people said about my grandparents. It puts into perspective so much and I think that's really important.

I was walking with my father once on the Lower East Side and we passed an apartment building on East Broadway called the Mayflower. And my father said, "That's where I was born." Suddenly, what could have been a more amazing story, that a Jewish developer hires a Jewish architect to design a tenement, names it the Mayflower, and then my father is born there. It's all about Americanizing it. That's been the vision of immigrant America for the most part, that people came here by choice and they were going to become Americans. My grandparents were very determined they were going to become Americans and their kids were going to be

Americans. It's all summed up in this one apartment building.

Q: I'm curious about that a little bit, how immigrant identity changes throughout the generations. Maybe an early generation is more interested in Americanizing and then later generations are more interested in the history before the family came to this country. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Dolkart: I don't think that those are mutually exclusive. I think that most immigrants either came here and planned to stay, or in many cases, immigrant historians will tell you Italians often came and intended to go back. But many of them never did. Their children became Americanized. Just because everybody today seems to be interested in their heritage and paying to find out what percentage French they are or whatever, doesn't mean that—to use that odious term that has come up lately, that they have dual loyalty or something. They're just curious about their past.

I see that as a professor, now you see more and more young people with Spanish surnames whose parents or grandparents were immigrants from South America or from Mexico. Now they're the next generation that's becoming part of this contributing their ideas to America. But they're no less American than the descendants of the Pilgrims are.

Q: Tell me about your personal relationship with your family history.

Dolkart: For me, I have a passing curiosity, but I don't have any pressing desire to go to Poland or Russia or Belarus, I guess, to see where my grandparents came from. My grandparents left

there. They came here. That's what I see as my roots, not going back to the Old World that they chose to leave.

Q: So, the Mayflower is your roots.

Dolkart: Yes, in a sense. I consider myself an American. That's not uncritically. But that's where my roots are.

Q: Tell me about, as we've gone on this tangent, some of your favorite projects that you did while you were a consultant.

Dolkart: I loved working for neighborhood groups and I still occasionally do when I get the time. I worked with groups in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill and in Flatbush and at Tudor City, on the Upper West Side and Carnegie Hill and the Upper East Side, Tribeca. I've worked for community groups all over and I love that. I loved researching these areas that hadn't really been researched yet, doing small books, like *The Texture of Tribeca* [*: An Illustrated History*].

I think one of the most fulfilling projects—I often would work when a building was endangered, work to try to get the building landmarked. I would speak at the Landmarks Commission. Maybe the most fulfilling project of all was when a developer named [Peter] Kalikow purchased the City and Suburban Homes Complex [City and Suburban York Avenue Estate] on Seventy-Eighth and Seventy-Ninth Streets between York Avenue and the river and planned on evicting well over one thousand affordable housing units, or the people in those housing units, and tearing them

down and building luxury housing. Then there was this incredible uproar. He said, “Okay, I’ll only demolish the four that are closest to the river.” But there was a huge project to get these landmarked as cultural landmarks. They’re not architectural masterpieces. They’re relatively simple buildings.

I worked really hard on that. I wrote a book, a little book on it and I got an oral historian involved. We interviewed people in their eighties and nineties who had grown up in City and Suburban and I got other colleagues involved. With just our little community effort versus Kalikow’s effort who hired these hugely expensive consultants, historians—historians I still can’t talk to—who wrote thousands of pages about why this should not be landmarked. Which actually, I think ultimately helped to make the argument for why they should be landmarked. I think they overdid it perhaps. I felt a little like David and Goliath and we won. It was landmarked. They’re there and Kalikow sold them and now they have an owner who is very appreciative of the complex and has good relationships with the tenants. It’s not like he’s not interested in making a profit. Of course he is, but he’s not interested in throwing people out of the building. I think that [it] was so fulfilling to work on that. And I worked on trying to stop this egregious Michael Graves addition to the Whitney Museum. That was very fulfilling.

One that we lost was the Charles Gwathmey addition to the Guggenheim Museum. To me, that’s one of the worst projects in New York in my lifetime. I really despise that project. It takes away from the dynamism of the museum. Of all the projects I ever worked on, that’s the one that I’m most sad that we didn’t win.

Q: It sounds like this is where you get to bring your kind of activist drive to do something that is good for people and your love of architecture into the same—

Dolkart: Yes, it is. I do love doing activism in my own sort of architectural history researchy [sic] kind of way. I'm not out there lying down in front of the bulldozers. I hate having to call people on the telephone and lobby them. That's not something for me. But I love taking what I know and using it in a positive way. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to change the world. I see that projects that I've worked on have had a positive impact.

The other great project was for the Municipal Art Society. There was a lot of development pressure on Fifth Avenue, south of Fifty-Ninth Street and the Municipal Art Society asked me to do some research on buildings that I thought were important on Fifth Avenue. And there were a couple of buildings that they really wanted me to focus on, but I was free to do any other buildings. I always look up when I'm walking around like lots of people who love architecture. The ground floors have been changed but you look up.

And I had noticed walking around just north of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church that there were some really, really filthy windows on the upper floors of a building that looked really interesting. I had no idea what they were, but I was curious. Now, suddenly I had the opportunity to research them and find out what they were.

This was a building that had one of those going out of business, rip off the tourists stores on the ground floor, and there was some sort of fashion business on the upper floors. I just took the

elevator in and I went up to the fashion [business]. I said, “Can I see these windows?” They said yes, so they let me take a few pictures. They were really filthy, but you could see there were flowers and plants growing in the cast glass. They had a sort of [René Jules] Lalique-like look to them. But I’m not an expert in glass, so I called up Nonnie [Alice Cooney] Frelinghuysenm, who was a young curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art whom I had never met. I explained what this issue was and I asked her if she would come and take a look and tell me what these were. Right away, she said yes.

We met and we went upstairs and she said, “I’m pretty sure they’re Lalique.” But we had to prove it. So, I started doing research. It turned out it was a [François] Coty perfume store. Lalique had made Coty’s bottles. Right there was a link. I did the thing I hate the most, I got on the telephone. I looked in the telephone book under “Coty” and I called up the number that was there and I got this secretary. And she said, “Wait a minute, I think I have somebody who can answer this question.” So, I got a vice president of Coty, which was part of Pfizer; they had bought Coty and he was really interested. He said that the person that would know was this guy who had been the vice president and had been very close friends with Lalique. He gave me his telephone number. He [Jean Despres] was in his eighties or his nineties. He was in retirement in Florida and I called up and his wife answered. His wife was the hat designer Lilly Daché, which was really thrilling because there’s some song that mentions Lilly Daché, so I knew the name.

So, I talked to this guy [Despres] and he told me the whole story. He confirmed that yes, they were Lalique and that Coty had commissioned the glass. They’re small panes and the frame, the metal frame was already there. Lalique had to design these panels to fit into the framework that

was already on the building. There were plants that rose up.

So, we leaked it to the *New York Times* and they did a little piece about it. They were going to be demolished. The building was going to be demolished, along with a building that had housed the Rizzoli [Bookstores] store. And the developers were planning on demolishing it and we leaked it. There had been an effort to designate the Rizzoli store building and Landmarks had resisted. This building, nobody noticed it. Nobody thought there was anything in it. Nobody had even proposed this. Now they had a hook that Landmarks could use.

So, the Landmarks Commission held a public hearing on the two of them and designated the buildings. And I have to give credit to the developer, especially a man named [Gooch "G."] Ware Travelstead. I never had any interaction with him again. I have no idea what he did later in his career. But they could have come and smashed those windows overnight and it would have been a scandal for a week.

Just like when [Donald J.] Trump destroyed the sculpture on the site, that he promised to give to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] to build Trump Tower. People were scandalized for a week and then it disappeared. But they really worked with the Landmarks Commission and the community. The building that's there now is set back about twenty-five feet from Fifth Avenue. It saves the Coty and Rizzoli buildings and they read as three-dimensional buildings. The atrium was used for Bendel's [Henri Bendel], and I don't know what's in there now, but I consider them my windows. They were restored as part of the whole project and that was thrilling.

Q: That's marvelous. A quick pause before we—yes, grab some water and also try not to touch the table with your foot.

Dolkart: Oh, okay.

Q: If you can manage it because we kind of get a little bump sound in the microphone. So, around this time that you're consulting or maybe you were still at the LPC, you connected with OLGAD [Organization of Lesbian and Gay Architects and Designers]?

Dolkart: No, I was consulting when OLGAD was founded.

Q: Okay, so '90-ish—

Dolkart: I can't remember exactly what year I left the Landmarks Commission, but I left one year before Kent Barwick left. Because I got a fellowship to study the works of four Brooklyn architects. I called them a set of regional architects of Brooklyn. I took a year's leave from the Landmarks Commission and then when the year was up, I decided I was going to try to go freelance. I remember talking with Kent's successor during his first week there, basically handing in my resignation.

So OLGAD, I was already doing freelance work when OLGAD was founded. These people that I knew, Jay Shockley and others, we all got involved in trying to have a kind of preservation focus at OLGAD.

Q: Were you one of the founding members or did you come in afterwards?

Dolkart: Afterwards. I was not involved in the founding of the organization.

Q: What do you think people gained by being a member of an organization like this initially?

Dolkart: When OLGAD was founded, there were lots of these professional organizations for gays and lesbians that were being founded. I think it was that people were being out more publicly and I think people were searching for other like-minded people, rather than just meeting people at bars. Now there were these other social and professional avenues. Most of these organizations were short-lived. OLGAD doesn't exist anymore. But it was a really great way of getting people that were interested in the built world and the urban environment together. I think it was great.

Q: What were some of the early conversations or aspirations of the group? Was it just to be a social support group or did they have loftier projects in mind?

Dolkart: OLGAD had loftier projects in mind and they did do a number of things. We were part of a subcommittee of OLGAD that was the preservation group. But OLGAD for Stonewall 25, not only did we do our map but OLGAD did a gay space symposium that was really, really interesting. I think it was the first time that this had ever been done, to bring people together to discuss what gay space was. And I think the conclusion of that was there aren't any gay spaces,

with very few exceptions like maybe bath houses. But there are spaces that gay people make their own.

That was really thrilling, and they did an exhibit on architects who had died of AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. Then we did our map. Really positive things came out of it, and I'm sure that other things came out of it too that the architecture section did that I might not have been that aware of.

Q: What do you think you gained personally from connecting with this group?

Dolkart: It was the first time that this whole bunch of gay and lesbian preservationists—and preservation is a field that has attracted lots of gay people to it. We actually got together and worked on a project. I think that was really important. Of course, it became the genesis of what ultimately became the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

Q: Was it exciting to be doing things at this time? Was it a little scary?

Dolkart: It was exciting. I don't think we were ever scared about anything.

Q: That's good. [Laughs]

Dolkart: I always say that we live in a bubble here. We're really lucky in New York. Even twenty-five or thirty years ago when it wasn't quite as accepted in New York, we didn't feel

threatened in any way.

Q: Were you part of the group that tried to nominate Stonewall [Inn] in ‘94, in addition to the map project?

Dolkart: Well, it was Gale Harris’ idea to nominate Stonewall and she wrote a letter to the [United States] Department of the Interior about this. I think that didn’t happen for several reasons. One is that she got this idea a little bit too late. There really wouldn’t have been the time there.

I know you’ve probably heard about this letter from Jay Shockley, but I have a different take on the letter. They wrote a letter back saying no and it was very clear they didn’t want to touch this. But I don’t think the letter was quite as homophobic as my colleague Jay thinks it was. A lot of it was couched in a typical National Register language of context. They’re always interested—still today, everybody’s doing LGBTQ-thematic studies. They need a context. How do you fit it in? Well, nobody had ever proposed any gay buildings. How do we judge this? How do we know that this is really important, if there’s no history that we can plug it into?

I think that that ultimately is what they were saying but they weren’t saying it in the nicest way they could have. It was clear that they didn’t want to do this, that this would have been too controversial for them. So, it fell through. Basically, we focused on the OLGAD map.

Q: So, there was no precedent for this. It had never been done before, to landmark something

specifically for LGBTQ reasons.

Dolkart: No, it wasn't until we actually did the Stonewall nomination in 1999 that the first building recognized for its LGBT significance was put on the National Register.

Q: And that's the kind of precedent they would have needed, something like the book that came out around that time, *Gay New York* [*: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*] would have been—

Dolkart: I don't know if you want to jump forward to talk about that or you want to talk about the map.

Q: We can jump around, it's fine. We'll talk about all of it.

Dolkart: Okay. The idea of doing Stonewall as a National Register nomination popped back in about 1998 as the thirtieth anniversary of Stonewall was approaching. I got a call from some staff people at the Department of the Interior. They had a lesbian and gay group. It was spearheaded by one of the—I don't know what his title was, but he was a political appointee. I think he was in charge of Indian water rights, and a few career people at the National Parks Service, they wanted to do this. They thought the time was right to do a Stonewall nomination.

They called me and they asked me if I was interested. I said sure, absolutely and I got in touch with Gale and Jay. We decided that we were going to do it. But the National Parks Service

people thought we should have a sponsor. So, we called Kim Stahlman who was the executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. We asked them if they would be the sponsor, and they agreed. They didn't really do anything except sponsor us.

We set off and wrote. The biggest problem for us was how to draw the boundary for the district. Because we didn't want to do just the Stonewall Bar building because the events, the rebellion or the riot or whatever you want to call it, they took place out on the street. But how did you draw boundaries for this? This was a real problem until our colleague Kath LaFrank at the [New York] State Historic Preservation office said, "Use the guidelines for Civil War battlefields," which I just love, that's what we did. We used the guidelines for Civil War battlefields to decide which streets we would include, because the guidelines say you can include where the action took place but not where you prepared for action or where there are aftermaths of the action. So, we include Christopher Park and the streets around.

So, that was brilliant. Then the other great thing was that David Carter, who is a historian who was writing a book about Stonewall and had done intense detailed research, agreed to help us. He gave us a lot of information which was great. Because I had written many, many National Register nominations in the past, I was the lead writer on it, and Jay and Gale really helped a lot and David provided a lot of information.

We were very nervous. We kept the whole project kind of quiet. We were particularly nervous because this was the period of Jesse Helms in the Senate. He was an incredibly reactionary, horrific senator from North Carolina, really homophobic. We were afraid that if he got wind of

this, that the whole thing would blow up. It was during the [William "Bill"] Clinton years. Government workers were sympathetic to this. First, we went through the state and that went very well. Then it got sent down to Washington and it slid right through. And a year later, we upgraded the nomination. Stonewall became a National Historic Landmark.

Q: Let's hop back now and talk a little bit about the map. What was the genesis for that idea?

Dolkart: Stonewall 25 was coming up and we just wanted to do a project. We're all very place-based. We were really big on the power of places and we realized that people really weren't aware that there were places around New York that had gay and lesbian history to them beyond Stonewall. Wouldn't it be fun to do a walking tour guide and map?

There were about six or seven of us that were interested in doing this and we sort of split them up. We split up the entries, mostly in Greenwich Village and Midtown and Harlem, with a few miscellaneous sites like Central Park and a few other sites. It came to pass and we had a good time doing it. We were all friends before and we're friends and colleagues after it was over. I can't remember who designed it. It was great. We were giving them out free. We think that it was the first such map in the United States.

Q: How was it received?

Dolkart: Oh, everybody loved it. What wasn't to love? It was a great souvenir for people coming to Stonewall 25.

Q: As a group, did you put in sites that you were all for the most part aware of already, or were there any discoveries as part of the project?

Dolkart: There were probably individual discoveries from one person to the next, but we all threw in the sites that we were interested in.

Q: Two of the neighborhoods highlighted in that map are Harlem and of course the [Greenwich] Village. One is doing quite well in terms of being preserved. A lot of sites still continue. In Harlem, there's been a lot of loss. Can you talk a little bit about the difference there?

Dolkart: It is true that a lot of sites in Harlem have been lost. A lot of them had been lost before we did the map. Even today, with the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, we're always looking for sites in Harlem because so many have been lost. I don't know how to explain it, why so much has been lost in Harlem. Some of it was lost to urban renewal, because there weren't development pressures in Harlem until relatively recently. Of course, Greenwich Village was designated as an historic district really early on in the history of the Landmarks Commission in the late '60s. It was one large district.

So, that really protected a lot of buildings like Stonewall that would not have been natural to have been protected. Whereas in Harlem, the historic districts that were done early on were relatively small and they focused almost entirely on row house neighborhoods. Commercial buildings were easy targets, vernacular commercial buildings that just got torn down. But I don't

know enough about the postwar history of development in Harlem to give the definitive answer to that question.

Q: Okay. So, moving forward a little bit, between '99 and the early 2010s—

Dolkart: I should mention one other thing that I did that I'm very proud of that was even earlier. It was very small, but I think was really pioneering. In 1992, I was hired to write the *Landmarks Guidebook to New York* [*Guide to New York City Landmarks*]. I had this idea—there had been little tiny guidebooks before and they had very short entries on the historic districts. I said, "We're not able to discuss really significant buildings because they're in the historic districts that were designated early on. There are no individual landmarks [within most of the districts]. How can we have a guide to New York City landmarks and not mention the Jefferson Market Courthouse, for example, or some of the incredibly spectacular churches in Brooklyn Heights by the most important architects in America?"

So, I suggested that in some of the major historic districts that we break out buildings. And when I was doing Greenwich Village, I decided to sneak in some gay and lesbian sites. I put in Stonewall and I put in an apartment house on West Twelfth Street [171 West Twelfth Street] that I refer to as "Lesbian Flats." It was a number of women couples who were in the circle of Eleanor Roosevelt, they lived in this building. I said, "Well, we'll see what happens," and it was all being edited by Marjorie Pearson who was the director of the research department at Landmarks. She was fine with it. Good for Marjorie. They weren't on the architectural level of Jefferson Market Courthouse or [Richard] Upjohn's Church of the Ascension on Fifth Avenue,

but she was fine with having this cultural overlay in there. That was actually the first time that anything relating to landmarking in New York had any mention of any gay issue.

Q: And you just wrote it and hoped for the best?

Dolkart: I just wrote it and hoped for the best. It was little. It's a small thing but small things build up. I think that that kind of set a stage for the acceptance. In landmarking, we can talk about these things.

Q: You think it kind of loosened the jar a little bit.

Dolkart: I'm hoping so. [Laughter] Then Jay Shockley and Gale Harris started adding LGBT overlays to a lot of their designation reports.

Q: Moving forward again, between 1999 and early 2000 and 2011 when you guys had this preservation conference where you talked about *Beyond Stonewall* [*: Recognizing Significant Historic Sites of the LGBT Community*], what kind of activities were going on in that time?

Dolkart: Ask that again.

Q: In '99, you co-authored the Stonewall nomination. We talked about that a little bit. I'm skipping around, which is part of the confusion. The next thing I have on my list is that you guys did a panel, *Beyond Stonewall*—

Dolkart: Oh, the National Trust [for Historic Preservation].

Q: Exactly. I'm kind of wondering in the ten years in between those, what kind of activities did you have going on?

Dolkart: Well, not many. We would talk because we're friends. Jay and Gale were doing their thing at the Landmarks Commission, which was great. But we didn't do anything formally during that period. We wanted to. We always talked about how it would be great to do it. Then with the *Beyond Stonewall*, I think it was really valuable because—I can't remember, had we gotten our grant yet?

Q: No, no, it was a few years beforehand.

Dolkart: Yes, a few years before. But we were talking about the possibilities of doing this kind of thing, that people should start thinking about that. Everybody's histories were being told, except that our histories weren't being told and that our sites were not being interpreted. That was a big thing, interpretation of sites, house museums where clearly the person was gay or lesbian but that was never mentioned.

So, this panel was great because there was a pretty good-sized audience in there. I think it inspired people to think about that. We know that somebody from Kentucky was there and they were very inspired, and then they applied for a grant. There was somebody there from Historic

New England and they were also thinking about changing the interpretation of some of their houses. In its small way, it was an important event. Also I think it was an important event because the fact that the National Trust had this entire panel on this topic, I think it was really important, an important move for a group that likes to be for all the people but in many ways, is also very conservative.

Q: Had other cities or localities started doing projects like this, of recognizing historic sites for their LGBT history?

Dolkart: Other people were thinking about that, but I don't believe that other cities were doing very much. I don't think that San Francisco, for example, had any LGBT-related landmarks yet.

Q: So, coming out of this conversation or out of this panel, was that part of what inspired going after the grant in 2014?

Dolkart: Well, I think what inspired us to go for that was that it was being offered. There was this grant there. It was exactly for the type of thing that we had been wanting to do but we never had the wherewithal to do it. And I think the timing was also good because Ken [Lustbader] was semi-retired. He still does his family business, but he had left the [J.M.] Kaplan Fund where he had been working and Jay was retiring from his job at the Landmarks Commission.

So suddenly, there was the possible financing and the ability to actually do it. I actually called up my friends in the State Office of Historic Preservation and said, "You think this would fly?"

They were very enthusiastic about it. So, we applied and it was pretty last-minute. Basically, Ken and Jay put together the nomination because I think I was grading final exams or something. From what we understand, we were the highest rated application in the country. Maybe it's wishful thinking, but that's what we were told.

Q: To hop back a little bit before we dive into this current project, I want to get a sense of your personal timeline. Because you became a professor around 2008-2009, is that right?

Dolkart: About then.

Q: Tell me about that transition. How did that take place?

Dolkart: I had been consulting and I was really happy doing that. I was an adjunct professor. I love teaching. I had been teaching classes here at Columbia, both in the preservation program and a class about New York architecture for another program called "The Shape of Two Cities: New York/Paris." Then suddenly a full-time position opened up in the preservation program. I guess it was my mid-life change. I decided I would go for it. If I wasn't going to do it now, when? I applied and I got the job. Then I became the director of the program for about seven years and I'm still a professor in the program. So here I am, a tenured professor which is not what I set out to do because I never went the PhD route. I wasn't expecting that I was going to be a full-time professor. I loved what I was doing but I just decided this was a new challenge.

Q: Tell me about stepping into the academic world and how that was different for you.

Dolkart: It was different. I did have to give up a lot of my freelance work. But I still try to keep a finger in that because I really believe that we're a professional school here and we're training people to be out there in the preservation world. And I think it's important that the professors are out there in the preservation world and we know what's going on and we're active in our communities. So, I've kept that up.

Besides all these things, the other thing that we haven't talked about is I'm also a writer. I also write books. That was also important. That's how I got the job. I would never have gotten it right out of graduate school with my master's, but I had already published a number of award-winning books. So, that allowed me to do it. I do try to write more now, although there's not that much time. That's what professors do. And I try to do a little bit of freelance work. I do an occasional National Register nomination. I like giving public lectures and walking tours and things because I like to get people interested and excited about the things I'm interested and excited about.
Q: How do you think you've been able to contribute to the field of preservation by working with students?

Dolkart: Well, it's incredibly fulfilling to be training another generation of preservation professionals. To me, the most moving thing is to—I teach the students their first semester when they come in. They have two required courses that I teach and I see them when they're young and new and they're just beginning to learn. And then I love to see them leave two years later as professionals. It's just the most amazingly fulfilling thing. Then I bump into them at conferences or they contact me because they have a question or something, and I find out all these great

things that they're doing. They're all over the country and all over the world doing preservation, and what could be better?

Q: So, this again is another way that working with people and doing things for people has come to the fore.

Dolkart: Yes.

Q: Tell me about how the department had changed from when you were a student to when you became an adjunct and a professor?

Dolkart: There was a lot that was still the same here at Columbia. The basic foundation of the program, which is about architecture in the built world, was still very much there. And the idea that preservation is a diverse field. When I was a student here, we had to choose that either we were architects, conservationists, planners, or historians. Those were the four fields within preservation that Fitch had chosen. That was still very much a part of it, that we were going to be a program, that even though we're in the architecture school, that wasn't necessarily for architects but you could come to if you had an art history background or a history background or a journalism background or anthropology or really anything if you had a passion for preservation. I think that is the real important foundation for the preservation program and the preservation field too.

One of the things I did when I became director—it was actually the first thing I did—was I got

rid of the idea of having to choose one of those things, because I don't think that in the twenty-first century, we do one thing. We all do lots of things. I know a lot about building materials but I'm not a hands-on conservationist. But it's important for historians to know about materials or for planners to know about design issues. We try to teach all those things. The students can then focus in, but we try to be as diverse as possible. When I was here, it was really focused on the nuts and bolts of the building, the brick and mortar. By the time I came back, cultural issues were a lot bigger and understanding architecture within larger urban contexts became much more important.

Q: Those themes fit really well with your project of focusing on LGBT history, because that's such a pressing issue for cultural preservation. It seems like the LPC hasn't really changed over to that mode of thinking quite yet.

Dolkart: Well, the Landmarks Commission, I think has been very slow to deal with cultural and historical landmarks. The law says that you can designate for architecture or history or culture but really—when I did an exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York that I co-curated with Donald Albrecht to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Landmarks Commission, I really looked at the designations, especially how the early designations came about. Mostly they were for architecture or a building that was very old, so vernacular buildings from the seventeenth century. And that was basically it. There were a few buildings over time where somebody really, really famous lived, Theodore Roosevelt's birthplace is a good example of that.

There was in the 1970s, I guess, a little flurry of interest in doing sites of importance in African-

American history. All the major African-American churches in Harlem for example were designated. But that was just about as far as this kind of historical work had gone. They hadn't done any LGBT sites, but they were equally behind in doing lots of other cultural sites. I think the Commission has always struggled with the idea of well, how do we regulate sites that aren't architecturally distinctive? They're used to looking at architecture. I have always said this is a completely bogus argument. I see it as an excuse not to do it, because all you have to do is say okay, we're going to try to regulate this so that change—what's the important period of significance of this building, historically or culturally, and as change occurs, we're going to make sure that those features survive or are restored back. That's it. It just doesn't seem to me to be a very difficult concept. But the Commission has traditionally had difficulty with it.

Q: And around the early 20-teens or late 2000s is when people started talking about getting Stonewall landmarked—not just on the National Register but really protected. Were you involved in that conversation?

Dolkart: Really, I have to say that Jay Shockley is the one and only force behind it. It was through his being on the Landmarks Commission staff that he in-house was constantly harping on it. There were people on the outside that wanted this and it wasn't getting anywhere but I really think the credit goes to Jay for not letting up on this issue. Then I think it became politically expedient to do a gay-related site. Stonewall was the obvious first step in 1999 and so far, it's been the only step. But for Stonewall 50, we expect that to change [Note: In June 2019, six individual landmarks were designated for their LGBT significance.].

Q: You talked a little bit about writing nominations and I happened to hear you wrote the nomination for Julius' Bar and for Earl Hall [at Columbia University] and also later amended the nomination for Alice Austen House. Can you talk a little about those projects?

Dolkart: One of the things that the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project is doing besides our website, which is our major project, is that we're doing National Register nominations as well. Part of the grant that we got from the National Parks Service was to do a certain number of National Register nominations. So, when we started our project, I think there were two or three sites that had been listed on the National Register for LGBTQ significance. Now today in April 2019, we think that there are twenty-one. There may be some recent ones that we don't know about but still, that's pretty pathetic when you think that there are 93,000 sites listed on the National Register. We have now done five of those sites, [including] Stonewall, and I wrote three of them. Julius' Bar [is another site], which we did to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the so-called sip-in and we got it listed the day before the fiftieth anniversary of the sip-in. That was really thrilling. Do you want me to talk about the sip-in or is that—

Q: Please do, as part of the significance of the place.

Dolkart: Julius' is a bar in the Village and its history as a bar goes back to the nineteenth century. The bar itself as it currently exists, we think, dates from the early twentieth century. We can't find any evidence, but just from the aesthetics of it, my guess is it's from the teens or the '20s. I wish I knew more, but we just couldn't find that information. It was in 1929 or 1930 that it became Julius'. It opened as Julius' during Prohibition and the only reason we know that is

because it's not listed in the 1929 telephone book and it's listed in the 1930 telephone book. So, that is why we think it was founded then.

It was a straight bar and it was a sports bar, a celebrity bar. Then in the 1960s, it began to attract gay men, mostly relatively conservative. It became a mixed bar, straight and gay. I think the fact that it was mixed and that the gay patrons were not flamboyant in any way is probably what led to its survival when there were crackdowns on closing gay bars.

It was written up sometimes in publications. One 1964 guide to Greenwich Village said that the bar's audience was very attractive men and theater types. These were euphemisms that gay men would have understood what this meant. There's this amazing book called *New York Unexpurgated* [*: An Amoral Guide*] which is basically a look into the nightlife and the less than acceptable nightlife of New York. It's written by a pseudonym, Petronius. There's some evidence now that Petronius was a woman. The section on gay bars is written in an incredibly insulting way. It's called "The Fag World," but it is incredibly knowing. In the 1960s, you couldn't get away with getting a major publisher to publish a gay guide to New York. So, it's couched in this very nasty language. But in great detail, they go into each bar and what its audience is like. You know exactly which bar you want to go to. It talks about Julius' as attracting couples in the back and significant collegiate groups, many from gay colleges, which I loved that idea. What are they talking about, gay colleges? I'm assuming Columbia was one of those.

So, it was a mixed bar. That's one part of the story. Then we go to the [New York] State Liquor

Authority's rule was the mere presence of a homosexual was unruly, and that you couldn't knowingly serve a drink to somebody that was gay. So, three members of the Mattachine Society decided they were going to challenge this rule and what they were going to do is get some reporters together and they were going to go to a bar and they were going to say that they were gay and they wanted a drink and wait to be denied service.

They all met at a bar in the East Village on St. Mark's Place, a Ukrainian-American bar, and the newspaper reporters got there first and they told the owner what was going on and the owner closed the place. So that wasn't going to work. Everybody gets it. So [for] the next stop, they decide to go to a Howard Johnson's. They ask for the manager. The manager comes over. They say well, we're homosexuals and we want a drink. He laughs at them and serves them. Then they saw that didn't work. They go across the street to a Polynesian place called the Waikiki and the same thing happens. They're served.

Then they decide to go to Julius'. Julius' had been raided. They were very careful about what they did, because they could be closed down. So, they go to the bartender and they say we're homosexuals and we want a drink. There's this very famous photograph that Fred [W.] McDarrah took of the bartender putting his hand over a glass. Now the question is was this spontaneous or did somebody tell the staff that this was going to happen, that it was staged? Dick [Richard Joseph] Leitsch, one of the people that was there, changed his story over time. We don't know for sure about that. But nonetheless, it got the publicity that they wanted. It is this spectacular photograph, first of all.

The *New York Times* did a piece, very nasty, and the *Village Voice* did a piece that was just great. So, it was out there. There were two other reporters. There were four reporters along and I haven't been able to find the other two. Supposedly the *New York Post* wrote an article but I scoured the *New York Post* and I could not find it.

It caused a bit of a scandal. The State Liquor Authority said they never had such a rule, that you couldn't serve a homosexual a drink, which was a total lie. So, it increased awareness of this really outrageous rule. At the same time, there were efforts to stop entrapment of gay men in bars. These two things were sort of coming together to make bar culture a little bit more welcoming. This was a major step on the road to the legitimization of gay and lesbian bars.

Q: Can you talk about preserving bars as a way of preserving, as you said earlier, there were no gay spaces, there were spaces that then became—

Dolkart: Well, Julius' is a great example of that. It was a straight bar. It was a sports bar. It still looks today exactly like it did when it was a sports bar. The same horse race pictures and celebrity photos are up there. It transformed from a straight sports bar into a mixed bar into a gay bar.

Q: And what about Earl Hall, which has sort of a similar transformation?

Dolkart: Earl Hall, it's here at Columbia. That was a big thrill for me to write the National Register nomination for Earl Hall. Columbia has the oldest gay collegiate group in America that

was founded in about 1965. It was founded with the support of the chaplain's office and the chaplain has his office in Earl Hall. Their early meetings, of what was known as the Student Homophile League, were in Earl Hall. It was a very small group. They had the backing of the chaplain's office. They applied to be officially recognized as a student group just like any other student group and that was agreed to.

The next day, the founder, Stephen Donaldson, which was his pseudonym, Stephen Donaldson, leaked this to the *New York Times*. All hell broke loose because the alumni were not happy. In the Columbia archives, there's a pile of the most homophobic letters about this. And the Columbia administration, they just didn't need this. They had just accepted this as any other student group. They didn't expect that this was going to happen.

Eventually it dies down. They don't stop the group from meeting. They had an agreement though that the Student Homophile League would not do social events. So, there were no dances or anything like that. They had information panels. They would go to dorm floors and meet with students and talk about these issues. They'd put out lots of highly politicized broadsides on various issues. So, they existed for a number of years with their offices in Earl Hall.

Then post-Stonewall, they morphed into a much more activist group called the Gay Students at Columbia and they started in 1970 holding first Friday of the month dances at Earl Hall, in the ballroom of Earl Hall. Those were incredibly popular. They were a really important alternative to going to the bars. They attracted students but they also brought in people from outside. They advertised in the *Village Voice*. So, people came and I interviewed lots of people that had gone to

the dances, including Columbia students and people who were unaffiliated with Columbia. They grew into, by the late ‘70s, a really major part of the gay social world in New York. Lots of people came and they had a better sound system. They were really, really important.

So, the National Register nomination celebrates the Student Homophile League and the first Friday dances. Columbia is putting up a plaque. In fact, we dedicated the plaque last week. It isn’t hanging yet. They’re going to do some work in the building, so they decided not to hang it yet. But Columbia was very supportive of this project and it’s really thrilling for me as a Columbia grad and as a professor here to have a Columbia site listed.

Q: I also want to ask about the Alice Austen House because the amendments to nominations are a fairly recent phenomenon, right?

Dolkart: Well, an amendment is not a recent phenomenon as an idea. People have amended nominations. Usually a nomination gets amended because the National Register usually requires a fifty-year cutoff. So, early historic districts listed from the 1960s missed things that were less than fifty years old. For example, I know that Beacon Hill in Boston was amended that you could do more recent history. But the idea of amending a nomination to reinterpret the significance of a site, especially from an LGBTQ perspective, that’s what’s new.

So, we amended the Alice Austen House. The Alice Austen House, it was the home of the great photographer, Alice Austen, one of the first women photographers on Staten Island, right on the water. It’s a city house museum. It was already listed on the National Register. It’s a city

landmark and it's listed because of its architecture. Parts of the house date back to the last years of the seventeenth century and then it was turned into this picturesque Victorian cottage. It's really very beautiful. And it mentions that Alice Austen is a really important photographer and lived there, but what it misses is that she lived there with Gertrude Tate for over forty years. This relationship was really key to who she was. She took a lot of really transgressive photographs of her woman friends. One of my favorite photographs is Alice and two of her friends in male drag, with a very pointedly placed umbrella. It's really key to understanding who Alice is. So, we have now reinterpreted that site. We're not saying it's not important architecturally. Of course it is, but it also has another layer of importance. We're sort of queering the architecture in a sense.

We're now also doing an amendment to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Chelsea. Architecturally, it's a great church by Minard Lafever with additions by Richard Upjohn. It was listed for its architecture. But it was also the site of meetings of lots of important gay and lesbian groups in the immediate post-Stonewall period. That's gone to New York State for review.

Q: Do you have other favorite sites or projects that were focused on during this time, for the LGBT Sites Project?

Dolkart: Well, I think the LGBT Sites Project's big project is the website. That's really the major thing that we're all about. That's so significant because it's out there for the public. That's why we're doing this. We're not just doing this because the three of us like this idea. We wanted to get this out and get people excited that you could look at places that were familiar or unfamiliar with an LGBT lens. This was very powerful to see places where gay people and gay culture

developed. Not just places of activism, not just Stonewall or Julius' but places that are crucial to the history and culture of New York and America.

I think that is the heart of what our project is all about, getting this word out there and getting people involved with this and to look at the city in a different way. I have developed a tour of the Village. I just started doing this a few weeks ago -- and my favorite place is St. Luke's Place in Greenwich Village which is a really beautiful block of spectacularly intact Italianate houses. Tour groups go down this street and you can stand there and you can talk about the Italianate row house and all the details on it, if you want.

People talk about people that lived on the block. Traditionally, it's that Mayor James J. Walker lived on the block and mayors' houses have two lamps in front of them. You can see the two lamps where James J. Walker lived. But this also was a really important place where a lot of gay people lived. One of the arts power couples of the early decades, of this century, Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott, had a rowhouse and Marianne Moore lived in the basement. Arthur Laurents, who was the librettist for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, had another house and Paul Cadmus and Jared French and some other artists had another house. There's a whole different way of looking at this block. It just makes it so much richer. It's not that the architecture's not important, but there are other layers that you can see in this block.

Q: How do you think creating this online resource of this map will change attitudes in the preservation field or contribute to changing it?

Dolkart: Well, I think one of our hopes is that there will be more and more preservation around LGBT sites, not only on the National Register level but on the local level as well. I think there will be some local landmarks relating to gay issues in time for Stonewall 50. I think that is going to happen. We've been discovering sites and we've been advocating for sites. We want both to identify sites and interpret sites and preserve sites. We don't think that all the sites that we've discovered are going to be preserved. In fact, sites that we have on our website, one has been demolished and another is in the process of being demolished. It's sad but we understand that that's going to happen, that every site is not going to be preserved. But at least we have preserved the knowledge of that site. We have photographed the site and people will know that it's important. I guess we'll splash a "demolished" on it, in hopes that other sites will not be demolished, that there will be more sites that become city landmarks or are listed on the National Register.

Q: Are there any losses that bother you in particular?

Dolkart: Well, the one building that's been lost is the Paradise Garage, which was a major disco which I only was in once. But it was really important in both the pre-AIDS culture and then it was the site of really the first, huge fundraiser around AIDS. That's the only time I was at the Paradise Garage was for that event. It was really important in the history of gay men getting together to deal with the AIDS crisis. So, I think that's kind of sad. Also, it had a very large minority crowd that went to the Paradise Garage. There aren't a lot of places that are extant to which African-American and Hispanic men went. I think that was kind of sad that this was lost. Then the building on Fourteenth Street that's coming down now was an early home of the Gay

Activist Alliance, which was a really important post-Stonewall organization.

Q: What do you think is next or what do you hope for the future of growing the LGBT Sites Project?

Dolkart: Our biggest hope is that we can continue. When we founded this, we wanted to make it at least to Stonewall 50. But now we've gotten this going and it's been so exciting and so fulfilling. We've won some awards and we really want to continue. The first thing is we have to find the money to continue this. I think that is a primary issue.

We have about 160 sites on our website now. We're hoping it will be up to two hundred by Stonewall 50, but we have several hundred more sites. Sometimes we have the site or sometimes we have the person or the event. We don't have the location yet. So, we want to really continue with this because it's not a finite thing. We want to continue to get people interested and involved with this. We hope to inspire a younger generation to do this. That's particularly important because I think people tend to not know that there is this rich history of LGBT life in New York and we want to make sure that people know that LGBT history didn't begin with Stonewall. There's a lot of history before that. I think it's important that younger generations are aware of that, or are aware of the early gay liberation issues or aware of the AIDS-related issues. We just want to continue going and doing what we're doing and doing it better.

Q: Do you have a sense for who accesses the site or how it gets used?

Dolkart: No. I know we've been getting very good traffic on the site. I think I heard we've been getting over fifty thousand hits a month. Ken Lustbader will be able to tell you that. But people tell us that they've found things on the site. What's crucial of course is we're not doing this just for us. We want people to be on the site. It's getting word out. Our social media has been very effective, I think. We have a good number of followers. Getting people to use the site is really important.

Q: Have you noticed similar projects happening in other places? Have you been able to inspire some other projects?

Dolkart: Not yet. There have been theme studies that have been done. We're seeing this. We're not the only thing that's going on in the country. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, there have been theme studies and a few landmarks. There are a few buildings up on websites about Los Angeles from the Los Angeles Conservancy. There's a Kentucky theme study. There's a Maryland theme study that's being done now. Other people are doing things but we haven't seen anything as comprehensive as what we're doing yet. We're really pioneering in doing a comprehensive survey of sites of LGBT significance in the broadest definition of that. We're hoping that we'll inspire other people to do it. But first of all, you have to have the time and you need a little bit of funding to get it going.

Q: You're not only making a history that was previously invisible visible but you're tacking it to a landscape, a built environment that people can see. How do you think that impacts people's lives?

Dolkart: Well, that's I think the most important thing for us. That defines what we are. We're not just a history project but we're a built world physical history project. As preservationists, we all feel that place is a very powerful thing. To be able to stand some place and see the building where some event took place or some person lived of significance is a lot more powerful than seeing a little plaque that says so and so lived in the building that formerly stood on this place. Maybe they lived in a little shack and there's a fifty-story building on the site. That's not as meaningful, I think, as this is the place where it occurred. That is our focus. All of our sites are extant sites. To us, that's key. As preservationists, all of us who are trained in place, that is crucially important.

Q: You described earlier in the interview, walking into the Tenement Museum and learning about that being a life-changing event for you. Have you been able to see maybe students of yours or other people have similar interactions with some of these sites?

Dolkart: I see a growing interest in queer history. I have a thesis this year on lesbian bars. I've had a thesis a few years ago that looked at how gay and lesbian people were interpreted at house museums, where the person being discussed was gay or lesbian. It looked at Walt Whitman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Alice Austen, and a few other people. So, there is a growing interest in this. Even this year, we're doing a studio that focuses on social inclusion in the Columbia neighborhood.

There's a lot of interest in LGBTQ among the students, not necessarily among the gay students.

It's just something that a younger generation in particular is very interested in this issue. I think for younger people, especially if you grew up in one of the more liberal parts of the US or Europe, they don't even understand the issues of discrimination. It's kind of eye-opening for them to learn about the history of this. They're basically completely accepting, what's the problem? They've been really interested. One of the students was doing research on Riverside Church and wrote up a little entry for our website that we're going to put up. It was part of the research she was doing. She said, "Wow, this is great." I'm going to put this on the site.

Q: That's marvelous. Would you like to reflect a little bit on the changes that have taken place in the world between Stonewall 50 and Stonewall 25?

Dolkart: Well, there are changes that have been good and changes that have not been so good. I think that in our little bubbles, like New York and San Francisco and London and places like that, it's just so accepted. Twenty-five years ago, I could be walking down the street with my now-husband and somebody driving by in a car is yelling "faggot" to us. That doesn't happen anymore in New York. I don't know anybody that's had—I'm sure it does a little bit, but it doesn't happen in the way that it used to. Of course, gay marriage is the most obvious change.

I think that certain places, LGBT issues, are accepted as part of the conversation, but that of course is not the case everywhere in the world. It's certainly not the case everywhere in the United States. It was very interesting, we held a symposium here the day before yesterday on LGBTQ site preservation. And we had the lead author of the Kentucky theme study come and speak. I wanted somebody from a place that was less obvious. It was just amazing that Kentucky

did this. But what she said that I hadn't really thought about was at the time they did this, Kentucky had a Democratic governor. He was defeated by a Tea Party candidate. They now have a Tea Party government. So, the things they proposed in this theme study are not being acted upon because the political climate is just not right for that in Kentucky anymore.

So. sometimes everything doesn't move forward in a progressive way. There are places in the world where, of course, we could not have had that symposium and you and I couldn't be sitting here discussing all these issues. I could be stoned to death in Brunei and gay people are being scapegoated in Poland and other places in Eastern Europe. I've seen things get better and some things are either unchanged or in fact, have gotten worse. Because now that LGBT issues are talked about, it's easier to scapegoat them. Probably nobody even talked about gay issues publicly in Poland twenty-five years ago but now, it's in the public discourse. So, it can be used as a negative thing. I live in a world where it's just a part of people's lives. But everybody is so excited about our project. You don't have to be gay to think our project is great here in New York.

Q: What are some of the challenges that you see moving forward to seeing more sites designated specifically for LGBTQ reasons?

Dolkart: In New York or anywhere?

Q: Well, in New York, since that's where you're working.

Dolkart: Well, I think a case has to be made for the designation of any site. We have to make a case that particular sites are really important, more than just kind of average importance. More than just this was a gay bar here. I think that the government is open to it, so I'm optimistic. I certainly think getting things listed on the National Register is fine. Even in the federal political climate, sites are getting listed on the National Register. The staffs at these agencies are just continuing to do their jobs.

Q: If you could send any advice to yourself back in time from when you were first getting started, not just on this project but on OLGAD or anything else, what advice do you think you would give yourself?

Dolkart: I don't know. I always tell people that if I had to live my life over again, I'd do it in exactly the same way. We just did it. Sometimes we did things and maybe we weren't thinking about are we going to get any negative feedback from doing that OLGAD map. It never occurred to us and we didn't. It was all positive. I have no regrets and I can't think of another way I would have done it.

Q: What about advice you might give people who are just getting started now, possibly just in the preservation field more generally?

Dolkart: I think people should follow their passions. Everybody has to make a living. Work at your job but if you have a passion, do it. Do it on the weekends and do it in the evenings. Make a difference. I think that's what's really important. That's what we preservationists should be

doing, making a difference.

Q: Do you have a plan for all your notes and records and research regarding this project?

Dolkart: Yes, Columbia is getting everything.

Q: Really?

Dolkart: Yes.

Q: That's already been established?

Dolkart: I've already decided. [Laughter] No, I also have a huge collection of rare ephemera about New York and that's all coming to Columbia.

Q: Tell me about that collection of ephemera.

Dolkart: I collect paper ephemera because everything I do is about New York. I write about the architecture of New York. The LGBT Project is focused on New York. I collect books and paper ephemera about New York that relate to the built world. That will all go to the rare books library here [Avery Architecture and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University] and whatever papers of mine they want are theirs.

Q: That's fantastic. Well, that was my last question. Is there anything I should have asked you about, anything in particular?

Dolkart: I don't think so. That was very comprehensive.

Q: [Laughter] Good. Well, thank you so much for your time and your stories.

Dolkart: You're very welcome.

Q: I look forward to being in touch as we kind of wrap this up.

Dolkart: Good.

[END OF SESSION]