INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of

Christabel Gough

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Christabel Gough conducted by interviewer Adrian I. Untermyer, Esq. on October 13, 2021. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive's Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a 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.

In 2020, *New York Magazine* dubbed preservation activist Christabel Gough the "quietest influence in New York" for her four decades of almost-uninterrupted presence at meetings of the Landmarks Preservation Commission; she followed the calendar, monitored the hearings, and testified on many items with a view to affecting policy. Throughout this oral history with attorney and urbanist Adrian Untermyer, Gough offers her unparalleled take on the landmarking process and offers a set of practical lessons for the preservationist of tomorrow—all while sharing memories from nearly a half-century of going "down to the Commission."

Born to the Washington, D.C. power couple of Roger and Christine Stevens, Gough was educated at Girton College, Cambridge and returned to the United States, where she met and married harpsichord maker Hugh Gough, settling in Greenwich Village. After a building-owner rammed a station wagon through his structure's façade in an attempt to avoid landmark regulation, Gough grew acutely aware of the forces threatening her community and jumped headfirst into the advocacy that would define her life for the next forty years.

Gough joined forces with her neighbors Ron Kopnicki and Matt McGhee in 1983 to form the Society for the Architecture of the City. Gough serves as Secretary and the group's self-appointed "Dr. Watson." Together, the trio began issuing the legendary *Village Views*, a publication intended to influence individual Commissioners on preservation emergencies large and small. Gough also began her tradition of reviewing every proposal coming before the Commission, attending the resulting hearings, and testifying on nearly every item.

Thanks to her painstaking review of the Commission's docket, Gough found herself immersed in almost every high-stakes preservation battle over the ensuing years. *Village Views* also called attention to preservationists working outside the establishment, like Michael Henry Adams and Horace Carter in Harlem, and Clarence Irving and Reverend Timothy Mitchell in Queens, as well as aggressive landmarks commissioners like Anthony Max Tung. To recognize these efforts, the Historic Districts Council named Gough its first-ever Landmarks Lion in 1990.

Gough remained active during the following quarter-century, including as an early booster for preserving the distinctive clocktower at 346 Broadway. This effort resulted in the seminal preservation case of *Save America's Clocks v. City of New York*. During this time, Gough also bid adieu to her longtime Greenwich Village apartment and began splitting her time between the landmarked Tudor City complex and Hudson, New York, where she was able to rescue three much-damaged early 19th century houses, each restored in accordance with conservation best practices.

Transcriptionist: Brandon Perdomo	Session: 1
Interviewee: Christabel Gough	Location: Hudson, NY
Interviewer: Adrian Untermyer	Date: October 13, 2021

Q: Today is October 13, 2021, at approximately 4:00 PM.

Gough: Yes.

Gough: And you are, in fact, Christabel Gough, correct? [laughs]

Gough: I am.

Q: And you consent to this interview for the New York Preservation Archive Project?

Gough: I do. Sounds like marriage.

Q: Speak now or forever hold your peace [laughs]. Anyway, my name is Adrian Untermyer. As you know, but our audience might not know. I'm a board member of the New York Preservation Archive Project. And we're so thrilled to have you here today for your close-up [laughs].

Gough: Well, thank you.

Q: Most people, when they think about sitting down for an examination by an attorney, they'll be

tossing and turning in bed, but you've gratefully agreed to share a little bit of your life and your legacy with us today, with the eye towards the future generations. But, before we do any of that, where are we?

Gough: Where are we? We're in 7 Union Street, in Hudson, New York, which is a very historic house, which was on the edge of falling down about ten years ago. And I bought it for a very small sum of money given its condition. And I've been spending many years repairing it and bringing it back to the way it was.

Q: Wonderful, wonderful.

Gough: And I furnished it because I didn't think it would look right unless it had furniture of the kind that it was made for. The scale wouldn't be right otherwise. And we needed some paintings, which we have from a local auction gallery. And, here we are! What can I say? I'm happy about it.

Q: I'm happy about it too. It's a magnificent location. And we're joined here by two paintings, one of a gentleman who's up on the wall, painting a portrait, and the other of a lady who is seated by a harpsichord. And, before we came in here for the interview, there was a praying mantis on the wall. So we have we have music, and we have art—

Q: And we have wildlife.

Q: —and we have wildlife, yes! [laughs] I mean, so art and animals, right? That's how I grew up. You know, my folks, always in the arts and always with animals. And that's how you grew up as well, your mother and your father, patrons of the arts—

Gough: Oh I see, you've been doing research. You know about the Animal Welfare Institute. That's fortunate, because I don't have to talk about it! [laughs]

Q: One thing we should tell posterity in this interview is that you and I have known each other many years, so I didn't have to do much research. I'm just thinking back to our conversations. But won't you tell me a little bit about your parents, Roger and Christine?

Q: I should tell you first about my great grandfather, at least, who was a legal-minded person, which would be interesting to you. He was a county judge in Wisconsin and a member of the Wisconsin State Senate, and—

Q: And his name?

Q: Robert Lees. I have this problem—I don't always remember things in conversations—but he is Robert Lees, yes. And his little daughter was my grandmother. And then we go on to my mother, who, as you have already noted, was an animal nut and the founder of the Animal Welfare Institute and the Society for Animal Protective Legislation, SAPL.

Q: Rolls off the tongue! [laughs]

Gough: Whereas my father was initially a real estate man in Detroit, and that was at the time of the [Great] Depression. So he did not go to Harvard because there was no way to pay for it. So he just went out and did real estate deals. [laughs] Moving on from that, he found that he liked real estate, but he didn't like—I think I can say this now, because they're all dead—he didn't like dining with real estate men. He found it boring. So he started investing in the theater. And he rescued, from the Ann Arbor, Michigan—where we then lived—drama festival, a revival of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, directed by a man called Valentine Windt. Many, many, Broadway actors and actresses—not the great stars, of course, but—wanted to be in Shakespeare, but there was no opportunity. So he had a wonderful cast. And it was such a success that it was brought to the Empire Theater, no longer extant in New York. And he made friends with various theater people and put on hundreds of plays during the course of his life in both New York and Washington. So we had the animals and we had the theater. In this, I grew up, as an only child—shy and frightened with everyone. [laughs] Leaving the home, I went to college in England, and I got married. And that didn't work out at all! And—so I came back. I mean, I don't want this to be a huge biography but you asked me!

Q: Well, it is biographical, so I think an element of biography would be fine!

Gough: I'd really rather talk about the Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC, the commission].

Q: You know, we will absolutely get to that, Christabel.

Gough: Okay, so what more can I say about my past?

Q: Where did you go to college?

Gough: Girton College, Cambridge. It's part of the University of Cambridge in England.

Q: And did you notice the buildings when you were in Cambridge?

Gough: Lord, yes. I mean, it's marvelous!

Q: Right. And what did you notice there?

Gough: Trinity College, King's College. I mean, there's a street called Kings Parade—have you ever been there?

Q: Never.

Gough: Well, it's all these great old colleges, which started in the Middle Ages. And through the Renaissance, every style, new building, you know, inserting new buildings, anything they added—a very beautiful place. And the river runs down on the other side in which one can go out in punts.

Q: A river tuns through it. [laughs]

Gough: A river tuns through it. It really does.

Q: And do you remember any of the courses that you took when you were there?

Gough: Well, yes. I wasn't the most studious person, I'm afraid.

Q: Today, you're known as a quite studious person!

Gough: Well, when I got there, I was extremely serious. And I worked terribly hard on the first paper that I wrote, and I was reproached, by the professor. At that time—I don't know how it is now—but you had what were called "supervisions." Two people would go in and sit with a professor and produce their essay and she would tell them what to think. She told me that. She said, "You wouldn't want anyone to think you're showing off."

Q: Okay!

Gough: So I said, "Okay, I wouldn't, would I?" thinking, I can always go out for coffee instead! So I really never did any work at all after that. I was so irritated. I mean, I went through the forms. I graduated, I'm happy to say, with a third-class degree—the worst grades you can get and graduate.

Q: Steerage! [laughs]

Gough: Steerage. And I didn't really explore English literature, which was probably a terrible waste, but I found it was more fun to go out.

Q: Did you explore architecture or design? Or the arts?

Gough: Not at all, not at all—there was total specialization. You did nothing but English literature. I had to take that because there's absolutely no way I could have passed an entrance exam in any other subject. I mean, chemistry? Not so much.

Q: Right.

Gough: So my choice was purely practical.

Q: Were there other women there at the time?

Gough: Other women? My God, I was at a women's college!

Q: So it was segregated between men and women still at that time?

Gough: Yes, it still was. But the lectures were mixed.

Gough: Interesting.

Gough: Yes, it was much better. [laughs]

Q: And speaking of the mixing of the genders, you alluded to an ill-fated marriage, which I didn't know about.

Gough: Oh, well, why would I have told you? I don't know why I let that out at all! Yes, yes. We didn't get along so we divorced.

Q: Right. And, do you happen to know what year that might have been? Roughly?

Gough: Goodness, I scarcely remember—must have been—must have been in the [19]70s.

Q: In the '70s. And so then, by that point, your eyes were sort of looking back towards the United States.

Gough: Oh, no, I came straight back. I was divorced in the United States. I escaped.

Q: Oh, wonderful. You got one of those good American divorces! [laughs]

Gough: Oh yeah, absolutely. Mr. Kleinberger represented me.

Q: How did you find yourself back in New York?

Gough: Well, I fled England and—well, I—obviously, my parents were living there, and I turned up unexpectedly with a black eye in the family apartment.

Q: Wow. Wow.

Gough: I got a little place of my own of course, obviously. And I was in New York straight on after that.

Q: In a little place of your own. Tell me about it.

Gough: It was a rather sordid—it was two stops from a rooming house. It was studios with an iffy bathroom and a hot plate.

Q: Right. At least the bathroom was down the hall.

Gough: That was it. And that was in Beekman Place. So it was very popular with people who wanted a Beekman Place address, but it wasn't—it wasn't that.

Q: Wow, fascinating. There was a gentleman that you later met. I want to show you something actually, that I brought with me today, something that you gave me many years ago when you were leaving a subsequent apartment. But that gentleman and you used to buy these all the time.

Gough: Oh, yes.

Q: What is this, Christabel?

Gough: Well, actually, this is from later than—my husband died before I was buying these, but it's a little church in Russia.

Q: Right.

Gough: And it was the thing that an antiques dealer on Bleecker Street was specializing in. I thought they're really sweet. And I put them along the mantel. But my husband was a musical instrument maker, he specialized in harpsichords, and clavichords, and fortepianos. And he was British but left London before I met him, and set up in New York, because it wasn't a good thing to do in London, really, there wasn't much interest—there was much more interest in using the original instruments and playing early music in New York. So he set up in the loft on Bleecker Street, and the reason I met him was that my mother had—when she had to furnish an apartment in New York, she went to Sotheby's and bought whatever didn't cost very much to fill the space, and one of them was a derelict square piano, which nobody wants. I don't think now they would even sell it. But she brought it home. And there it sat, poor thing, with the strings all curled up, and the keys not working. So I thought, why don't we get this fixed?

Q: Yes.

Gough: And she said, “Well, I don’t know. I’ll try to find out.” And they went out all the time and then she found herself at a dinner, sitting next to Bill [William Richmond] Dowd, otherwise known as Dowd of Boston, the harpsichord maker. And she asked him if he would fix it. And he said rather scornfully, “Well, it’s not the sort of thing I do. But, I’ll tell you someone who might. His name is Hugh Gough.”

Q: Hugh Gough! [laughs] Rings a bell.

Gough: Yes. So, my mother called him. And I was deputed to receive him to show him this unfortunate little instrument. [laughs] He looked it over. And he said, “Yes, I think I could do that.” And we actually carried it straight out and put it in his Citroën station wagon, Josephine, who was a very sick girl. You know, the old Citroëns, they rise up when they start—that’s an air thing. I don’t know what it’s for or why, but you turn it on and I think you do something with your foot. Up, up, up, and away, and we took the square piano by Christopher Ganer, 1780—we took it to Hugh’s loft. And the two of us carried it upstairs. And that’s how I met Hugh.

Q: Wow.

Gough: I worked for him for a while.

Q: Oh, right. [laughs]

Gough: Because after giving up on England and marriage, I started making jewelry. And that involved using small tools and things, which is similar to what might be done when restoring a square piano in terms of handling pliers. So I agreed to become a restorer without any formal training of any kind, but I think that Hugh knew more about it than anyplace I could have gone to study anyways [laughs]. So that was what I was doing.

And during that time—now, let me see if I can remember this properly—there was a preservation emergency in Greenwich Village where we were living. Yeah, okay, I've got it. I had already met Matt McGhee and Ron Kopnicki, who were my colleagues and leaders at the Society for the Architecture of the City. Matt had a store on Christopher Street—an old building, of course, a lovely old storefront. And next door to it was a not quite so old but still fairly venerable building, which had belonged to the Behlen paint suppliers. They left, and it was bought by a person who hadn't really focused on the fact that it was in an historic district. And he didn't want the storefront. And being a man of action—one night we heard a sickening crash! That is, when I say, "we," Matt and Ron heard the sickening crash. Matt, rushed to the window and saw Mr. Oros, such was his name, backing his station wagon out of what was left of the shop, which he had just driven it through at three o'clock in the morning.

Q: Oh, my.

Gough: And so this was an introduction to historic preservation.

Q: [laughs] I think it's a good metaphor for some of our preservation battles—a station wagon

through the front of the store. Let's back up. Ron and Matt have been co-conspirators of yours for decades now. Give us their full names. And tell us a little bit about who they are and how you met them.

Gough: Matt McGhee, who consented to be the treasurer if he didn't have to do anything, and since we haven't any money, he didn't have to. Ron Kopnicki is the president, and I am the secretary. And what I like to say is that I'm Dr. Watson. Ron is Sherlock Holmes. And Matt is Mycroft Holmes. So we originally had some other co-conspirators but they dropped out over the years. And we never attempted to be a membership organization. There's Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation [Village Preservation] still alive and well with a huge membership. So it seemed—and there also other little political groups in the Village, and it seemed really absurd to start another one. So we didn't.

We published a periodical, which was Xeroxed, actually, more than published, in the local copy shop run by delightful man called Clausen Cannon who did everything for us, he loved the *Village Views*. And so we thought our aim was to write about the Landmarks Commission—to interview commissioners, which one could still do then. That began to taper off towards the end, if it were—being allowed to. But we got quite a few interesting interviews and we would write for it, illustrate it. I would go out and take the pictures, and Matt that would choose them and arrange them and crop them. And Ron would edit. He's a very good editor—not so much for drafting. I mean, if you ask Ron to write an article, you know, come back in another life. [laughs] It never happens. But he will fix, beautifully, and he will add—he will do it then—and as an interviewer he will ask devastating questions.

Q: What was your intended audience for *Village Views*?

Gough: The commissioners.

Q: The commissioners. And if the public read it?

Gough: No, it was fine. We had subscribers. We had a couple hundred people getting it at one time. But the major aim was to influence the commission itself. Which, I mean, you know the "three-minute limit"—

Q: Mmhmm.

Gough: I have fought with it for, decades. And it really, you know, you can do a lot in three minutes, and more than you think. But nonetheless—

Q: I always try and beat the warnings so that I can get something out and not to worry about competing with them. But—

Gough: Yeah, indeed. Indeed. Well, I mean, you know about time limits too, no doubt, in your work. But we also monitored because most people in preservation, they are interested in a particular topic, and they go down and say their three minutes and then they go away again. They may not be seen again. But we thought, "No, we're going to monitor this." And I, being that I

was now the workshop assistant of Hugh Gough—Hugh Gough, who worked all around the clock every, every day. Didn't care at all whether I worked on Tuesday, or Saturday, or Sunday or Monday. So, I was totally free to go and sit there and listen. And I did. And I took notes. Because it really does help to know what's going on, which—it was much more available in the newspapers, of course, then because David Dunlap had *The* [*New York*] *Times*, and Joan Shepard had *The Daily News*. And they came! They actually came and sat there, like me. And listened.

Q: Why do you think they came?

Gough: I think they were both interested in preservation, and they thought they had an audience for it. That it was a special topic for them.

Q: And why don't you think they come anymore?

Gough: Because nobody sends them.

Q: Right. Why doesn't anybody send them?

Gough: Oh, ask the editors of *The Times*—

Q: Right.

Gough: *The Daily News* will, very occasionally, do something. *The Times* confines it to the Real

Estate section on Sunday. And there's a very good column by John Freeman Gill, but it isn't in your face like the front of the second section of the daily, which is what David Dunlap used to have.

Q: I think what I'm getting at is—so the *Village Views* spoke directly to the commission. *The Times* speaks directly to the commission, of course, and City Hall, but what they're getting from *The Times* these days is what? Real estate drivel.

Gough: Thank you. [laughs] I mean, Mr. Gill's column is not real estate drivel. He is very, very sensible. But it doesn't always come out. And it's not sufficiently directly tied to events because that's not his beat.

Q: And notably, it's the successor to Christopher [S.] Gray's column—

Gough: Right. Right.

Q: —in those many years.

Gough: Yes. Well, Christopher Gray wasn't too much directed towards preservation. He was more interested in architecture.

Q: Oddly enough, he did get some converts for our force. I also learned—and I was going to bring them for you today but I brought sunflowers instead—that the trick to getting into

Christopher Gray's archives, as told by Mosette Broderick, is cream puffs!

Gough: Oh, really! Well, you know, Mosette is a woman of many wiles. [laughs]

Q: Indeed! [laughs]

Gough: I didn't know that. Christopher Gray did help me, on occasion. We would be down in the library's—you know, the, the—

Q: The catacombs?

Gough: Yes. And he knew how to find things better than me. And it wasn't always easy. [laughs] And he helped me a couple of times, very kindly, which, I mean, I had tangled with him, giving testimony at the commission, because he was available as a consultant also. So we had to disagree sometimes.

Q: [laughs] As we all do! So you were—you were sort of breaking bread with Ron and Matt, you were working in Hugh's shop, you were going down to the commission. And this is all sort of centered around Christopher Street. Tell me about where you ended up living on Christopher Street. Give us the address first. And then tell us about the apartment.

Gough: 45 Christopher Street. Well, it was it was in a 1930s building in the historic district. And it was a perfectly nice 1930s apartment building. We were on the second floor. I don't know

what to tell you about it! [laughs]

Q: Well, you know, when I went there the last time, when you were moving out. And—

Gough: Oh, I'd forgotten about that, it's so long ago now.

Q: [laughs] You gave me all sorts of things, such as my ottoman named Otto. All these other treasures—you had called me and Kelly Carroll—

Gough: Oh, that's right! Oh, you came then.

Q: Yes. And you said, "Hey, you know, I have all this stuff. Please take this. Otherwise, I'm going to have to pay movers for it!" And we obliged. And it was just such a wonderful place. All my little lunch tins, all that came from that apartment.

Gough: Well, you see, I was moving into a very small apartment, naturally, being alone then. And I really couldn't get it in, you know. And I didn't have houses in Hudson, then.

Q: Right. Right.

Gough: So, I was very grateful for everyone who took things.

Q: We were grateful to take things. [laughs] But the thing that always struck me about that

apartment, was that you had a publication, which you disparage, since it was on a copy machine––but it was a publication. And it was called *Village Views*.

Gough: Yes.

Q: And you had the most magnificent village view, overlooking Greenwich Village from that second-floor perch.

Gough: Oh, it was pretty. There's a little triangular park, Sheridan Square.

Q: Right, Sheridan Square, and a very significant place. Stonewall right in the neighborhood.

Gough: Indeed! Indeed—I was next door to Stonewall.

Q: Right. So tell us a little bit about that mélange, and the sort of characters you encountered around there in that time?

Gough: Well, I don't really know what to say to that. [laughs] I mean, I was a member of the block association. We were initially the Historic District Committee of the Christopher East Block Association. Matt, Ron, me, and John McShane, who's been dead for thirty years. And Ernest Leogrande, who was writing for *The* [*New York*] *Post*. That was a huge help for us. It was not about preservation—I think it was about night clubs!

Q: [laughs] More of them, less of them—something in the middle!?

Gough: No, it was saying, you know, if you wanted to go out—that kind of column. But where were we?

Q: Oh, just talking about life on Christopher Street.

Gough: Okay, well, I harangued the Landmarks Commission. And I never stopped. I may have to stop now, I don't know if it's any use anymore! [laughs]

Q: Do you remember the first time you went down to the commission?

Gough: I don't know if I do. Goodness, what would it have been? It may well have been about the storefront that the man drove through. I think it probably was.

Q: Right.

Gough: I'm pretty sure it was, yes. Because, the young lady who was supposedly reviewing the item didn't seem to feel that it was too bad a thing, really.

Q: Ah, interesting.

Gough: And so naturally, we laid into her. [laughs]

Q: That started a theme that carried on through the ages.

Gough: Yes. Yeah, I believe that was why I first went down, because the community board also felt that it wasn't the proper procedure. [laughs] Indeed, it wasn't.

Q: But it wasn't up to them, though, was it?

Gough: No, they are advisory.

Q: Right.

Gough: And, once it's been demolished, there isn't a lot of advice you can really—but, you see, the other thing was the decision of the commission about the demolished storefront—you asked about early days, and these were early days. And at this time, there was a school of thought, shared by the executive director of the Preservation Commission—

Q: Who was—

Gough: Lenore Norman. Her view was that if anything survived, we would do anything to preserve it. But, if it's destroyed, we would prefer to see a new modern design. So their idea of a new modern design was a piece of junk, an anodized aluminum storefront, you know. It wasn't a new design, it was just like sending out for coffee. And they slapped this hideous thing into this

little building. And we thought, "No, no, no!" [laughs] One of our first *Village Views* interviews, we got Frank Sanchis, who is still, naturally, a figure.

Q: He is indeed a figure.

Gough: He very kindly agreed to be interviewed; he was Director of Preservation at the LPC then, and that was really a way of getting one's feet under the table, of course, to interview people like that. And it was very educational. And he didn't altogether defend the Behlen's decision as a general policy. As I recall, he said, "But some things are so fine, that you wouldn't want to do that." I think it was clear that at that time he didn't think Behlen's storefront mattered, because it wasn't a great work of architecture--like the Taj Mahal, or something. But the commission did modify its policy eventually, to allow replacements in a variety of styles. We fought tooth and nail for that.[1]

Q: Well, I want to get at two things based on that. First of all, you're talking about a tension as old as time, that's still alive and well in the preservation community, right? You have a building that was there, and it's gone. And you're not just going to leave it there like a knocked-out tooth. So you need to build something else. Where on that spectrum, to you, between build it exactly as it was, and build something entirely new—how do you find your way on that spectrum? Where's the proper place in your view?

Gough: I think it's perfectly possible to be at either end. I think you can build a reproduction

[1] See also CHRISTOPHER EAST BLOCK ASSOCIATION, SIXTY NEW SHOPFRONTS IN THE GREENWICH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT: A FAILURE OF PRESERVATION POLICY (1983), posted on www.villageviews.org

building, if you want to—it won't be old, won't be quite as well made. But it may fit into the district in a way that nothing else could. If you were trying to recreate a streetscape, on the other hand, that's also actually possible to put in a completely modern building provided you know how to design it. That is, the missing link, of course, in many cases. And some commissioners feel that they're not empowered to criticize in every way. I mean, they don't openly reject something because it's a piece of junk—it wouldn't be polite and they might have to stop serving sooner or later. [laughs] That can be a problem.

And then of course, there's a balance for commissioners. I mean, you can do a lot of good serving on the commission if you know what should be done, which many do—and to lose your place at the table, over being doctrinaire about one item. It's a judgement call. And you see that all the time. And depending on the mayor [laughs] it makes it more or less serious. Because they're—I mean, I happen to be friends with one of the commissioners who got kicked off commission.

Q: Who was—?

Gough: Anthony Max ["Tony"] Tung, who said what he thought about the building that was built at the back of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street, and he was up for reappointment and he found he wasn't going to be reappointed.

Q: Under which mayor?

Gough: Must have been [Major Ed] Koch, mustn't it?

Q: Must have been, yes.

Gough: Yes—I trust, I'm going to check that, I believe it was Koch. Yes, sure, it was Koch. It wouldn't have been [Abraham] Beame, that was earlier.

Q: We'll leave that to posterity, going through and cross referencing your interview. But I want to touch on the other thing that I thought of—you always say, and I've heard you say it probably eight-hundred to a thousand times now—"down to the commission." Explain to me—it's almost a pilgrimage going down to the commission.

Gough: Yes.

Q: Going down to the commission from the Village, what was that process like for you? How did you do it? When did you do it? Where was the commission in those years?

Gough: Several places, but always downtown, and always in the City Hall neighborhood. And what did I do? I got on the subway and went down there! [laughs] It didn't strike me as a big deal.

Q: Right.

Gough: It was, you know, twenty minutes on the Subway. That's nothing. Well, actually, the most dramatic time when going down to the commission was 9/11.

Q: Right.

Gough: The train stopped in the tunnel for the longest time, and I thought, "What on Earth is this!?" And then they did get us to a stop, and I got out. And I came up. And I saw that there was a huge hole in the World Trade Center with smoke coming out. And I thought, gosh, that looks like a terrible fire but there's nothing I can do about it. So I ran into the commission. And I actually got up in the elevator before the bells started ringing and everybody was to vacate the building, which was, of course, a city building. And this was the only—I believe from some notes you showed me you're going to ask me about my honors. The only honor that I value at this point, still [laughs] is that the commissioners were all going down in an elevator—a 9/11 emergency departure. They held it for me.

Q: Oh, Christabel. That's amazing.

Gough: It was Jan Hird Pokorny who held it for me—a gentleman. And I barreled in there, and I got out and I sort of ran home. And as I walked briskly home—because I realized I wasn't fit enough to run all the way to Greenwich Village; there was no transportation. And by the time I got up to Christopher Street, I looked back, it wasn't standing anymore. So up and down to the commission.

Q: Indeed. The World Trade Centers, speaking of that spectrum earlier, down on Radio Row, where an entire neighborhood and a giant transit terminal were all demolished for them. The design—I mean, it was breathtaking, and it was symmetrical. And it was very Japanese. I mean, what did you think of those buildings architecturally, and the plaza as well?

Gough: I can't say I devoted any thought to it, it was an inimitable—I didn't find it very impressive, but it was very large.

Q: It was large, yes. [laughs]

Gough: It was Minoru Yamasaki, wasn't it?

Q: It was.

Gough: Yes. I don't think that it was necessarily the best thing he ever did. But it was, you know, his "parti."

Q: I prefer Oberlin. But you always think about the World Trade Center. And then you think about St. Vincent's [Hospital], which was such a safe haven for all those disasters, going back to the *Titanic*.

Gough: Oh, yes.

Q: That was another neighborhood institution of yours. Tell us about St. Vincent's.

Gough: Well, it's gone.

Q: Right. Why is it gone?

Q: Well, I mean, they sort of sold it.

Q: And what is it now?

Gough: Condominiums.

Q: Right. And how do you feel about that?

Gough: You know, if you monitor for thirty years, you see destruction over and over and over again. And I think people who didn't monitor may have taken it harder than I did. I didn't actually attempt to do much about that because I felt that I had an interest—that my husband had been there repeatedly, in his last illness, and I didn't feel I could go down there and give them hell. So I actually just didn't go in. I wasn't there.

And indeed, since you're interviewing me in Hudson, I may say that the reason I know about Hudson is that I was going to the commission, and I was thinking, "What can I possibly say about this situation?" And I thought, I'm not doing it. I had actually—I shirked my duty—we

had prepared testimony for the Society for the Architecture of the City, Matt had dictated it, and I thought, I'm not going to go and say that, I'm sorry. It's the only time I've ever done that, actually. And instead, I got off the train and got on a train going north and went to Penn [Station] and took a train to Hudson.

Q: Right.

Gough: I had seen Hudson because we had friends who live in Hoosick, and sometimes I would take the train, and Walter and Berta [Burr] would come and pick me up at Hudson. And so I took the train to Hudson. And I thought, maybe it's time to leave New York. And I went into a real estate office, and asked to be shown houses [laughs]. And I was. And actually, that's how I found 233 Union Street, a nice little house. And Hudson was not fashionable then, so it was just waiting for me.

Q: It was—it was. Walter and Berta, who were they?

Gough: Well, Walter Burr is a harpsichord maker who was a colleague and friend of my husband—younger—and Berta also worked in the harpsichord workshop but she's also a painter. And if we were in a different room, I could show you her paintings, which are lovely. She's now doing cloudscapes. They're rather like an abstract. But they are actually clouds.

Q: Well, we're pretty sure our audience won't be able to see them as I will after this interview. They sound like lovely people.

Gough: Oh, yes. They're still operational in Hoosick. In fact, I'm seeing them tomorrow.

Q: Oh – how lovely! Beautiful buildings, and beautiful people. It sounds like what was going on in those days for you—you were surrounded by people like Ron and Matt. And you were living in beautiful Greenwich Village. But—

Gough: Well, you know what, I never thought of Matt and Ron as beautiful people—of course they are, in a real sense!

Q: Oh, yes, absolutely.

Gough: But not what the press means by that. [laughs]

Q: You're sort of in this crucible, almost. And at the same time, I refer to these years as the adolescent years of the LPC. When you're young, you know, 1965, the commission is an infant and it was born out of a very particular moment.

Gough: Yes. But the people who did that were not infants. They were extremely sophisticated, and canny negotiators. And it's pretty amazing that we got the Landmarks Law that we got, which was of course negotiated. And, [Anthony C.] Tony Wood, who you—I mean, your president—

Q: Never heard of him! [laughs]

Gough: Well, he had the sagacity to interview some of those people before they died. And we published those transcripts in *Village Views*. So Tony is the historian who really knew what to do. And so, later, much later here, I am being interviewed too, not knowing quite what to say to these questions! [laughs]

Q: So it was a distinguished infant, but it was an infant, nonetheless. By 1983, when you were starting to get involved, it was more of an adolescent. It had grown up a little bit, but hadn't—

Gough: Oh, it wasn't—that's actually a bad analogy.

Q: Good. Why is it a bad analogy?

Gough: Because in the '80s that was the best time for the commission. And that was when we had really brilliant commissioners, and a mayor who was more hands-off than some others, although, certainly concerned. And occasionally, perhaps intervening, I'm told, by one of the people got fired. [laughs] I recall his saying, "Well, how do you know?" And he said, "Well, you could feel it." And, so—goodness, have I lost the thread?

Q: Not in the slightest. No, I was asking you to characterize the commission in those years.

Gough: Oh, characterize the commission, yes. Well, those were the glory years—it wasn't

adolescent at all. It was the other way around—retrograde progression! [laughs] No, those are the glory years. And that was when Dorothy Miner was there. So that was when the great legal successes came, through Dorothy.

Q: Tell us about Dorothy.

Gough: Well, she was a terribly good lawyer, at a time when it was somewhat new for women to be lawyers, so she went into government. I'm sure she would have been devastating in private practice. But she went into government and tried to steer the commission in the right direction. And she was their advisor when they won St. Bartholomew's at the Supreme Court [of the United States] [*Rector v. City of New York, cert. denied* March 4, 1991 (No. 90-900)].

Q: And how did you meet her?

Gough: Well, she sat in on every meeting and so did I. I was not one of Dorothy's protégés. I sometimes attacked the commission—in fact, I usually attacked the commission—and Dorothy really didn't approve of me at all. In fact, I think she sort of forgave me at the end of her life when she—I mean, everyone knew. She was ill and she was going to die. And she came up to me and said, rather sarcastically, "Well, at least you stayed with it."

Q: At least you stayed with it.

Gough: Well, I did. And she recognized it.

Q: Right. Who were some of the people who were on the commission? Describe the ones that you felt were doing the right work. And were there any on the commission who weren't, at that time?

Gough: Well, the people who were doing the completely right work, really, were Elliot Willensky and Tony Tung. There were some appointments later of people who took a broader view of things. It wasn't catastrophic at all. It didn't become really problematic until quite recently. And I think, not only—I don't think people went on, normally, with the intention of being problematic, but they sometimes felt that they had to be part of the administration.

Q: Interesting.

Gough: And during the time when we had a chairman who didn't feel that way, you could afford to have—there are eleven commissioners, one of them is the chair. So, if it should happen that five people are really serious preservationists and five people are a little bit here and there, or some of them might be interchangeable at times—but, five and five, that sixth vote wins. That's the chair.

Q: Do you recall any occasions where that came into play? Or—

Gough: Oh, I do, indeed, most within the last year.

Q: Right. Right. But not from those years?

Gough: Do we really want to do that? Well, let's say, since it's a Village one—we're talking about the Village—demolishing 14–16 Fifth Avenue. That was one of those five-six votes.

Q: And did you feel like you needed to speak to the chair in order to anticipate that deadlock were it need to be broken?

Gough: Well, we all—not just me but Andrew Berman brought a squad of people who had done serious research on the buildings, their history. Nobody in the public felt that this building should be demolished. They were originally two townhouses, two of a row, that had survived. And they continued as single-family houses until the Village went out of fashion. And then they were bought by an investor who turned them into tiny apartments, you know, four studio apartments or more to a floor [laughs] and twenty people were living in them until it came to be thought that it would really be a wonderful investment to build a larger apartment tower for a very different kind of person. So they were acquired. I don't know the details of how that worked. Andrew Berman could tell you, no doubt—but they were acquired, and they started getting the rent-controlled people out, or buying them out if they had to. And finally they vacated it. And then, rather to my sadness, they hired the firm of Robert ["Bob"] A. M. Stern, who I do regard as a wonderful preservation architect, of course, but he was the head of the firm—he didn't design this thing. Excuse me, this "thing." [laughs]

Q: [laughs] It is a building, you can dehumanize it if you want. It's not human!

Gough: No. Well, and he came and spoke in favor of it, supporting the demolition. And that's life. It wasn't a really fine building by any means. And it was much altered. It was part of the history of the Village. It was of the right size, because they didn't add to it. They just stucco-ed it over, put in basement entrances, and broke it up into a million little, tiny studios, which were inhabited by a number of distinguished people, artists, writers. And it was part of Village life in a way that a luxury apartment tower never will be.

Q: Precisely.

Gough: I don't believe they've demolished it yet, but, I mean, it's next. So losing that building—there's a question of studios. Townhouses that have been turned in studios and also cheap apartment houses being turned into studios. And we made a video actually, called *Studio Windows*.

Q: Oh! [laughs]

Gough: We talked about that that period of transition and tried to document it. And so it was sort of sad to see studio windows turning into a luxury tower. But of course, those buildings don't have, really, architectural aesthetic appeal in the way that some people would say that particular buildings, marvelous designs by who knows what celebrated architect—and of course that's sacrosanct. But, what is this!? It's just a little stucco building that a few famous artists lived in. The studio window, it isn't original. I'm talking "Columbia-ese" essentially. "The building's not

in original condition." Well, damn. Few are, actually.

Q: Things do happen over time! [laughs]

Gough: Well, that is indeed part of a broader view of the preservation movement. But if you want to justify a demolition, there are a lot of ways to do that, too. And everybody who's been to Columbia knows how.

Q: Hmm. That's true. Talk to me about that Columbia program.

Gough: I'll never have anything to do with it again if I tell you much! [laughs] I believe you've interviewed Michael Henry Adams, who is one of the naysayers, probably. [laughs]

Q: He says things other than "Nay."

Gough: He says a great deal, as you know. Man of a few-thousand words, as my father used to say. No, actually it's the lone wolves, now, who are advocating for preservation in the way that everybody used to. Michael, [Theodore] Ted Grunewald—the notorious Ted Grunewald, the notorious Michael Adams—both quite *shocking* to some.

Q: But you keep company with them. We just saw them on September 14 [2021] at Untermyer Gardens. Why do you keep company with them?

Gough: Because they know what's what. And they're extremely hard workers, and extremely successful. I mean, I have no way—Michael, actually, writes for *The Guardian*. And Ted has a lot of press connections. Fifty years ago, he could have been a terrific press agent. But he's very knowledgeable because he has a certain architectural background. And he seems to have genius for offending people. [laughs]

Q: And that is half the battle, sometimes! [laughs]

Gough: I think it would be fair to say that both of those gentlemen are difficult, but I don't intend to be put off by someone being difficult if they're a good preservation person.

Q: You're sitting with me, aren't you? [laughs]

Gough: [laughs] Well, anyway, no. I mean, it's a battle, and you want people who can shoot!

Q: Yes, yes.

Gough: And many people don't seem to grasp that they need to shoot any longer. They think it's about parties and medals and little publications, and—

Q: Or money, and they go and shoot for the other side.

Gough: Sure.

Q: So let me put it this way. Some people speculate that you go up to Columbia because you love old buildings, you incur tens of thousands of debt, and you have to pay it off somehow. And so, then you work for the other side. And some help with the—

Q: Heavens! I mean, and that's okay. Right.

Q: What's your opinion of that?

Gough: I never thought about it before. I mean, the people who go to Columbia go and become consultants—well, I think we know who we're talking about. Well, I mean, who am I to say what their motives are? I mean, they may believe in what they do. It's perfectly possible to believe that it's important to tear down an old building and put up something else. I mean, my own father [laughs] may have thought that! In fact, I know he did, on some occasions, think that. I don't think he actually tore anything major down. Actually, he was a little bit apologetic about it. I remember his saying to me once, "When I got started in real estate, real estate was about existing buildings. But it isn't anymore."

Q: Right.

Gough: Yes. So that's where the divide comes. I think that it is perfectly legitimate to think that what—I don't like the word "developers" actually—I prefer to say "investors" because that's what we're talking about.

Q: And it categorizes their motivations.

Gough: But if the investors didn't have advice from firms like Higgins & Quasebarth [LLC], it might be a great deal worse, I acknowledge that! [laughs]

Q: You know, we're talking about preservation consultants. We're talking about Andrew Berman marching down to the commission with hordes of people. We're talking about a small group like *Village Views* writing a newsletter designed to influence the commission explicitly. So, what strategies were working, and which weren't, in those times?

Gough: Well, I don't think we know, really, because it's entirely up to the commissioners how they vote. And we don't really know why they take certain positions. I mean, we like to try to guess, but it's really in their hands, and more than the commissioners, the chair has enormous influence. And it's only very recently that, I think, we now have a chair who really believes in development, as they mean it. I think she sees it as important for the city.

Q: And remind us who the chair is today.

Gough: Sarah Carroll.

Q: Right.

Gough: So I'm just going to say that—it's probably not a good thing to say—but I think that the situation has become so dire now. Because it was her vote that caused the demolition of the Fifth Avenue building that I was talking about, and several others. It was her vote that—because the approval of a humongous tower at the South Street Seaport, which is a low-rise district and was maintained as such, fiercely, for decades—the LPC indeed designated the vacant lot there in order to maintain the character of the district. And how many chairs—probably six, I would have to start counting on my fingers—kept it that way. People came in with tower proposals and they did not get approved over and over again. But this year? Be my guest!

Still, the developers haven't got the zoning they need. They have to get a zoning change also because back in the days when the administration was prepared to cede certain small quantities of territory to preservation, they changed zoning in the South Street Seaport Historic District to make it possible to build, but not the way a major developer would want to. I mean, imagine the river view because of the low-rise blocks at your feet. And it only got more valuable as the years passed. It became more fashionable to live downtown, and now it's a real plum. And this sugarplum was set in motion by Sarah who voted the sixth vote to approve against five to deny. Now they have to—I was just saying, the LPC had gotten zoning favorable to preservation and the developers now have to overturn that also. So they're working on it, but they had to get their Landmarks approval first. The LPC decision leads. So City Planning thinks, "Well, the Landmarks Commission said this, this tower, is fine, so, it's fine!" So I suppose they'll get everything.

Q: Right. Sarah Carroll came from within the commission.

Gough: Sarah Carroll has spent her entire career working in the commission. She has worked her way up from new hire to executive director. And then, she was chosen. And everyone in preservation knew her and she had been wonderful so they all supported her. And, in fact, a letter was written signed by every preservation organization you ever heard of. And Simeon Bankoff, who is a really smart man, did think to check with me, as my signature was already on it with the logo of the Society for the Architecture of the City. And I said, "Simeon, you can take that off!" And he didn't say a word. "Okay," he said, and he did. And I wasn't signed on. I was questioned about that later. The counsel for the commission came up to me in the halls, "Christabel, you didn't sign on to that letter!" And I said, oh, Mark—[crosstalk].

Q: Remind us who Mark is.

Gough: The current counsel, Mark Silberman. He was curious, but the reason that I didn't want us to sign the letter was that I had monitored while she was executive director for Meenakshi Srinivasan, who was an absolutely brilliant women, and did everything she could to destroy the commission, in my opinion. And she [Meenakshi] was held back. I mean, we fought the rule changes that she wanted—Simeon led that, everybody worked on that—and she didn't get everything she wanted. But she did get one thing that she wanted—and that was Sarah.

Q: There was another thing she wanted. I always referred to it as "Backlog 95."

Gough: [laughs]

Q: Much worse than an operating system! What was the backlog? And how did it arise? And how did it end up panning out?

Gough: Well, the backlog consisted of buildings and districts that the commissioners and the staff thought—at that time the staff thought should be designated, but you couldn't get it through the City Council, or the Board of Estimate, originally. And so it was magnificent inactivity. It just sat there waiting until—and I dare say that's totally outside anything I could know about but I assume that various chairs tried to see whether they could get it through now, and they couldn't. And sometimes you could! I mean, sometimes the ownership would change or something and you could. But the backlog grew—the backlog of things that ought to be designated—but you couldn't finalize it because there are these checks and balances. I mean, it's not just what you want, it's what some other people might want too! And so it came to be larger and larger. And then the real estate dogma was, this is an outrage! We want a decision! And Meenakshi's first thought first thought was, "trash the whole thing!"

Q: [laughs] To be clear, we're talking about the Pepsi-Cola Sign, the Coney Island Pumping Station—these are landmarks in any sense of the word.

Gough: Well, yes. I mean, it is historic. Why am I not remembering the exact quote? It's a rather subtle quote. It's or, not and, but it makes all the difference. Architectural or historic significance, is protected [by the Landmarks Law].

Q: Right, right, right.

Gough: So we—when I say we, I mean, I worked on it, everybody worked on it, Simeon did a noble job on it—and we wrestled it down. And of course, we had commissioners on our side too, obviously. The thing that was perhaps unfortunate about it was that there's now a huge body of rules for staff decisions. And that's not something that one can just say is wrong, because the original people who shaped the law thought that there would be a very much smaller number of protected buildings. But now there's a very large number of protected buildings, and it becomes unwieldy to have the commission see everything. So then we have rules, which are administered in the dark, and usually very well. And the rules that got through, I think, are very defensible. And some that weren't didn't get through, but there are chinks in the armor, both in the law and in the rules, that I actually never foresaw, that there are things that a chair can do that no chair ever did.

Q: Give me an example—was the backlog an example?

Gough: No, the McGraw-Hill [Building] lobby was an example!

Q: Ah ha! Talk us through that overlooked part of the landmark process.

Gough: Well, when things were working properly, there was always a rush: gotta save this gotta save that. And when interior landmarks became possible, the thought was that—you see, if you are going to change the interior of a designated individual landmark, you have to get a Certificate

of No Effect [CNE]—no exterior effect. It used to be a CNEE. But it's a certificate that it wouldn't impact the designated features. And you have to get that, and the chair has to sign it. So at that point, the chair knows that you are planning to gut the place or something. And at that point, she has forty days—this is a city rule—

Q: Forty days and forty nights.

Gough: Yes, forty days and forty nights. And you can do that—you can get it through the process, can schedule a vote immediately. Or on the other hand, you can sign the CNEE—that is the correct method. So no one knew, because that's not published. So then comes Theodore Grunewald, wanting to preserve it, and he discovers that it's too late, alas. Nevertheless, he makes a heroic fuss, and gets it written about, and kicks up the dust. And the commissioners didn't know that the lobby was being destroyed.

Q: I walked by it the other day. A loss, to say the least.

Gough: Well, it's most unfortunate. And what ought to have happened was they ought to have moved then. I mean, this is the textbook example. Because the lobby is an extension of the exterior. It's not even alien to the original designation. But people thought, what's the rush? We can always do it. Now, no so much. Well, that's my example.

Q: You're going to bring a tear to my eye, Christabel.

Gough: But that's what can be done if everybody isn't pulling for the same end.

Q: Yes. So something strikes me, given this conversation, that I've never thought about, and I'm interested to hear your reaction. Having worked as a professional preservationist and just a rabble rouser of my own for so many years—and I haven't been alive that long—I never thought about this targeted aspect of it. We always just, you know, you get a mob to go down to the commission, or you try and plant some story, or you do something out there gimmicky or whatever. But it sounds like hyper-focusing on the individual commissioners might actually be an effective means of advocacy. What's your reaction to that?

Gough: Well, sure. That's what we've always tried to do, but you can't talk to them. That's why we published. I mean, many of them feel they shouldn't even be chatting with you about something that's before them. Some of them don't really enforce that. But basically, it's not—lobbying isn't really very straightforward. But through the newspapers, through publications, through testimony—and you can always write a letter. And everybody does all of those things. But if you don't have the six votes, you don't have the six votes. And then there are the things that don't even come to them—like the McGraw-Hill lobby. And that's at the discretion of the administration.

Q: To what extent did you hyper-target individual commissioners—within your testimony or within *Village Views* or your other advocacy?

Gough: Well, we interviewed a number of commissioners for *Village Views*, which was a chance

to talk to them. We interviewed Tony Tung, one of the best interviews.

Q: Who was Tony? Tell us about Tony.

Gough: Tony Tung? Well, he represented Staten Island. Kent Barwick searched desperately to find someone from Staten Island.

Q: And he did!

Gough: And he did—boy did he ever! [laughs] Tony had an architectural background but he diligently applied himself to the study of the law. He built up notebooks of references, which he brought along to his interview, by the way. And he was absolutely fearless right up to the end. I do recall his saying there was a controversial item coming up and he said, "I have to go and visit my mother in California." [laughs] But shortly after that he was indeed fired.

Q: I want to throw a couple more names at you that have come up here. Elliot Willensky.

Gough: Yes. Marvelous man. Totally knowledgeable. I mean, you don't think the AIA Guide [American Institute of Architects Guide to New York City]—

Q: I've heard of it! [laughs]

Gough: Yes. Well, I think it was better when it was much better when it was all written by Elliot.

Q: [laughs] I agree. That's why we, some of us keep old editions.

Gough: Oh, god yes! Oh, no, that was brilliant. I even have a copy—it was originally mimeographed and handed out at the AIA, and I have one of those, he gave it to me. But I feel bad about singling people [commissioners] out because numerous people have done a really good job. And it's not, you know, you're not paid. You have another career, you give more and more days as the workload increases. And I don't think we've ever had people who weren't knowledgeable. And I don't think we ever had anybody who was really just a real estate shill. I think we had architects who didn't believe in old architecture.

Q: Ah. Interesting.

Gough: But they're good people and all, and also the staff.

Q: Yeah. So what happens?

Gough: What happened?

Q: What happens?

Gough: Bill de Blasio came in and appointed Meenakshi.

Q: It's that simple, huh?

Gough: I thought so.

Q: Why do you think Bill de Blasio appointed Meenakshi Srinivasan?

Gough: Because she was brilliant, highly competent, and could do what the people I suppose he felt were important for the future of New York—namely the builders—could use. That's speculation, of course, probably libelous.

Q: Public figure.

Gough: Okay, thank you! [laughs]

Q: Helps to be sitting down with a lawyer sometimes. You know, I've dealt, now, more and more, because I'm doing more construction law practice, but I come across these people—the box checkers. If you're an engineer, whether it's a matter of tearing this thing down, or whatever, it comes down to dollars and cents, and checking a box for the grant or whatever else you're working with. And Meenakshi, I think she saw this backlog—again, more speculation—and thought, "Oh, boy, what a disorganized mess, this commission. It's probably emblematic of other things going on." How was she wrong?

Gough: Well, when she allowed them to come up again under pressure, some of them did get

designated. Others didn't. As an administrator, she wasn't wrong. As a sentimental lover of old buildings, not so much. [laughs]

Q: Let me throw some more names at you that have come up here. Your fellow Landmark Lion––so much has been said about him but maybe you can just tell us about the man, Kent Barwick?

Gough: Well, Kent Barwick, I can't tell you a huge amount about. He was a brilliant operator but I didn't know him personally. I still don't.

Q: That's funny.

Gough: Well, not really. I mean, I was a bad odor with Dorothy Miner. I wasn't anybody. I didn't have constituents. I was just a troublemaker basically [laughs] as were we all, Matt and Ron. But Barwick was extremely effective and got a huge number of designations through. And he was a glamorous figure—he would appear late at night at the Board of Estimate in black-tie and ready to party—

Q: [laughs]

Gough: So he was the pillar, but you know, people serve, and they leave.

Q: Yes. Another fashionable gentleman who came up in our conversation. One Frank Sanchis.

Gough: Oh, heavens! Well, Frank, I used to argue with his—he had much more hope, let's say, for modern design, which actually is possible!

Q: Yes, indeed!

Gough: So, but the trouble is, if you can't be severely critical on its own terms, and you don't want to say, "Well, you can't do a modern design here," but you have an architect who doesn't know how to design. Well, then you have a problem.

Q: Right. You brought up, Simeon Bankoff. And I was trying to think back on how you and I actually first met, and it must have been through Simeon.

Gough: Undoubtedly.

Q: Yes.

Gough: Like so many other people.

Q: Right. Tell me about that.

Gough: Well, what about meeting you?

Q: No, no, not about meeting me. About Simeon!

Gough: Oh, what has Simeon done? He's held that organization [Historic Districts Council] together on a tiny budget, paid next to nothing unlike other heads, executive directors who earn six-figures. I don't know exactly what Simeon gets, but it's less—I do not know.

Q: Got.

Gough: Right. And he is extremely diligent. He's brilliant at managing people. He has held together programs, and they have their annual event. He gets good people to speak there. He shepherds the preservation committee—doesn't let things that are too terrible get through. And, really, he is the Historic Districts Council [HDC]. And I think you're aware that he isn't there anymore.

Q: I am very much aware. Yes.

Gough: Yes. So as far as my view is, that was it. I wouldn't rely upon the Historic Districts Council for anything. They have a huge board of directors, most of whom have—I don't know what they think they're doing, I've never seen nor heard of them. I don't know how they—well, a lot of people like to belong to an historic preservation organization. But that's not the same thing as going for the kill. So they got rid of him. And it's unclear to me exactly how it was done. I don't think it matters. I mean, the thing that matters is the fact—I think that I understand that some fashionable objections were made to him. I am inclined to doubt that this did indeed occur. I mean, I've known him for decades.

Q: He's a convener, isn't he?

Gough: Oh, absolutely. Yes, he brought, he brought in a lot of people. And it is today, in my view, I mean, the Landmarks Conservancy is effective in that they give out a lot of small grants to people who are working in churches. But originally, it was the three—the Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society—I've mean, only rarely does one hear from the former two in terms of the commission, because my view of preservation in New York is centered on the commission. And there's—it's not, at all. And I think that HDC is going to join that party.

Q: You know, Simeon often said something that always resonated with me: the commission is important but it's more than just the commission too. And I think you embody that because you're a person who's at the commission literally every week, with only a few exceptions over the last few decades. But you also practice what you preach. And we spoke earlier about where we are right now.

Gough: Yes.

Q: And the other homes you've restored in Hudson. So, how do you do it, Christabel? How do you make it about the commission without making it about the commission?

Gough: Well, I don't see myself as a major factor. I never have [laughs]—I mean, suppose it were just me, and there were no commission.

Q: [laughs]

Gough: No, to me, the commission is the central thing. The fact that there is a Landmarks Law, that we would have nothing otherwise. And we're rapidly going back to having nothing, which is what [Geoffrey] Platt and [Harmon] Goldstone tried to remedy all those years ago. But it's not enough to have a law, you have to enforce it too.

Q: If you could open up the hood on the Landmarks Law, what would you tweak?

Gough: Well, I would suggest that Certificates of No Effect should be published.

Q: Mm-hmm. What else?

Gough: I am not a great believer in opening the hood. Dorothy Miner was totally opposed to it under any circumstances because she feared that the opposition would take the opportunity to get their stuff in. And that's not a foolish fear either. So I don't spend my time thinking, if I had my druthers, how would I change the Landmarks Law? I think that the treatment of the Certificate of No Effect is a calculated risk, which we now see we can't afford to take anymore. But it could also become less important if we had a chair who was committed to historic preservation, in the real sense, not just in the academic record.

Q: Right. No, and I get that instinct completely. I mean, in my practice, we don't want to open up

the hood on some agreements, because the other side would—

Gough: Well Dorothy was a brilliant lawyer. If it hadn't been the date that it was, I think she would have had a much more prominent career. I mean, you know Portia, in Shakespeare, but after that there wasn't so much for the ladies! [laughs]

Q: Right. So, so maybe that's a change that could be done administratively without amending the law—

Gough: Absolutely!

Q: Or maybe a lawsuit or something along those lines. So—

Gough: Well, I love lawsuits, but it doesn't seem to have much effect actually. And actually, with the composition of the Supreme Court [of the United States] that we have now, you have to be a little careful. You don't want to get appealed to the Supreme Court, and knock the whole law out!

Q: Right. So, speaking of lawsuits, you once told me something about another name I want to throw at you—and I'll quiz you at the end and you can tell me who it was. This woman, you were involved with a battle involving the New York Public Library, which doesn't quite narrow it down for you since you've been very active with the public library over the years. And you were wondering, how you could put the brakes on a disastrous proposal. And you said, "How do

I get their attention?" And she said to you, "Why, you sue them, of course!" Who was that?

Gough: Do you want me to tell you? It was Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, who was a former commissioner.

Q: Right. Formerly known as Barbaralee Diamonstein, which I think is long of a name enough.

Gough: [laughs] Her books are under that name. And she said, "Sue them—sue them, repeatedly!" [laughs]

Q: Who is Barbaralee?

Gough: Well, she, she's a very smart lady. And it [suing] does attract their attention. You don't actually win [laughs] but, I mean, I think it shows that you're serious, because it's costly. And inconvenient. But if you just sit there and take it? Well, they think, well, okay, we did that, now we're going on!

Q: And when do you decide to sue? And when do you decide to step aside?

Gough: Well, I didn't sue at all for many years. And then I don't think I've—well, let's say that we were speaking of 14–16 Fifth Avenue. I did not attempt to litigate that because I thought that it was completely bulletproof in terms of procedure. They heard it, repeatedly. [laughs] They voted, and we lost by one vote. It was a discretionary decision, and they made it. And I don't

think there was a ground for litigation. If you think of one, please tell me! [laughs]

Q: No, definitely.

Gough: No, there wasn't. It's really only in cases where there might have been some perception of irregularity that you can do it. And also, if you're looking for an interpretation—because, in the case of the Clock Tower [Building at 346 Broadway], as you're probably aware, there are a lot of issues involved in that—I actually, just before meeting you, I looked up—I Googled it, of course, being that it's 2021—and I found that there was an article in the *Harvard Law Review* about it [133 Harv. L. Rev. 1790 (2020)], which I had never seen—

Q: I was not aware of that.

Gough: Well, you should read it. It's quite sensible. It analyzes all the ways of looking at the decision. And it's very smart. I don't know who the person who wrote it is. I only just saw this. For some reason, it escaped me or maybe it escaped Google.

Q: It escaped me too. And we're going to be speaking about Save America's Clocks in great detail after the break because I think it's an excellent case study of all your advocacy. I want to throw one more—

Gough: Well, I was not the main person in Save America's Clocks, at all. You see a clock over there—

Q: I do—

Gough: Well, actually, this is one time when I am not going to give you a name because the people who were completely outraged by that action—it was numerous groups and people—and the attorney, Michael [S.] Hiller, was prominent in this, of course. I do have a relationship with him. He represents me sometimes—I was not a plaintiff in the Clock Tower case, I didn't have any grounds.

Q: I was a plaintiff in the clock tower case.

Gough: Congratulations!

Q: Through HDC. And I also worked for Justice [Ellen] Gesmer, subsequent to her writing the decision—for anybody who's ethically-minded, listening. [laughs] But, why don't we jump in, since we're on it already? Save America's Clocks. The cite, for posterity—I'm looking at you, voice recorder, 33 N.Y. 3d 198, at the Court of Appeals—it started off in 2013 with the sale of 346 Broadway in lower Manhattan, and it ended in 2019 at the Court of Appeals, where they reversed the First Department decision by Justice Gesmer. She is a rowdy and rambunctious jurist, as many who have been following the certification battle of the last year might know, and we can leave that to our audience to look up. [*Gesmer et al. v. Administrative Board*, Sup Ct Suffolk County (2020)].

But the reason I wanted to choose that [the Clock Tower] as a case study was because of the shifting city. You described these sort of halcyon days—I never should have referred to it as an adolescent LPC because—

Gough: —no, you really shouldn't have!

Q: It's so pejorative! [laughs] I was thinking in terms of chronology—

Gough: No, it's the lifetime of the commission, as if the commission were a human being, but it's not like that! [laughs]

Q: [laughs] Right, more of a Benjamin Button situation, where it started old and wise and now it's regressed. But chronology—clocks, it's all related.

Gough: Oh, yes. But does it matter whether a clock has an action? Well, to a number of people who belong to Save America's Clocks, it matters a lot! [laughs] And I think it matters too. I mean, there are people that will take a harpsichord and turn it into a cocktail bar because the case is decorated. But you know, it was musical instrument once—it was a timepiece once. A timepiece is a very symbolic thing, and tearing an original action out of an historic clock, in my mind, is a ridiculous thing to do! And they did it. And they are now allowed to do it. But I thought it was wrong at the time, and I think I probably—well, actually, we were speaking of Theodore Grunewald.

Q: We were.

Gough: Theodore Grunewald is the man who found Michael Hiller, the attorney. So I have worked with Michael Hiller repeatedly.

Q: Yes. Michael—why do you like working with Michael?

Gough: Which Michael are we talking about now?

Q: Hiller. [laughs] You have a lot of Michaels in your life.

Gough: I do. I do. It's a problem. And even more than that!

Q: They all raise their hand when you say, "Where's Mike?"

Gough: "Here!" [laughs]

Q: Right.

Gough: Another Mike was here yesterday [laughs]—

Q: Michael Hiller, Esq. Why don't we do—?

Gough: Michael Hiller, Esq. is a very serious public advocate. Many, many, many people who belong to large firms—and Hiller is the head of his firm—but people who are in large firms, who maybe actually agree with you and support you, but guess what? They're conflicted out. And that's a huge problem because to find a competent attorney to represent you in a preservation case is no joke. There are a couple of people—

Q: Those people being—

Gough: Well, this is embarrassing. [laughs] But let's stay, for the moment, and then I will go on to the—well, there are one or two—I will go into them. Michael Hiller is very aggressive. He wants to be on the morally righteous side. If the case is like that, he will take it. And, you know, devil take the hindmost.

Q: [Laughs]

Gough: He will take the fight. Seriously. And he's very smart. He will make your case and, at some levels of the judicial system, it will work, as you've seen, but not necessarily when you get up to where it really counts.

Q: Right. How does he make you feel as a client?

Gough: Happy! [laughs]

Q: Right.

Gough: I was questioned about details of procedure at the commission and things like that that I've observed, and who's who and that kind of thing. But he is a tremendous boon to preservation. And I think it's important to object when things go terribly wrong. And they have. But Michael has been willing to help us. I should also be mentioning Michael Gruen, who is in the same category.

Q: Right.

Gough: And then, there's Jack [L.] Lester, who is also old-hand at this. And after that, well, who do you know?

Q: [laughs] Michael Gruen, he brought that *Gruen vs. Gruen* matter all the way up to the Court of Appeals [68 N.Y.2d (1986)]. And Save America's Clocks also made it all the way up to the Court of Appeals. But it started with that sale of 346 Broadway. Tell me what that sale was?

Gough: Well, it had been a government building and it was sold for a condominium. I don't know a lot about the sale. I know the consequences, though, right?

Q: Right. And so, how did it end up before the commission?

Gough: Well, they have a lot of changes they wanted to make and they came in for review.

Q: And those changes were?

Gough: Oh, a huge number of changes. Windows, doors—clock towers.

Q: Yes, clock towers.

Gough: And there were interior changes that were reviewed. It wasn't—the only thing that I personally thought was utterly heinous was the Clock Tower.

Q: Tell me about that Clock Tower.

Gough: Well, it's a huge timepiece with a unique action, which horologists find extremely interesting. Also, it was beautiful and it sets the building apart from many, many other large office buildings of its period. And it seems a shame, to me—perhaps I'm an incipient socialist—that it should be gutted in order to make a luxury apartment for one person at the top of the building, a penthouse. It seemed to me that it would have been appropriate to keep the clock mechanism, get an easement to maintain it, and let that happen.

Q: Let's remind people of that clock mechanism too. There were two gentlemen who would go up there and physically wind it, correct?

Gough: Oh, totally! Yes.

Q: Tell us about it.

Gough: Well, it had to be wound and it had to be cared for. And they were both passionate about clocks. And they worked for the city, and they managed to arrange it, and they did it! They did it for years. And you should interview them, actually, because I don't know a lot about that aspect of it. I know what they described when they testified at the commissions. And it's a mechanical mechanism—it's a sensitive thing, just as an old harpsichord can be a sensitive thing—you have to know what you're doing to make all the intermeshing parts work. And it has to keep perfect time. And it might want to strike a few chimes and other good things that we like about old cities—"boom, boom, boom." It's quite a precious thing. And if you wanted to interview people in Save America's Clocks, they would tell you all about it. I am not really knowledgeable about it!

Q: But you got involved with it regardless. And how did that come about?

Gough: Well, through the review. So, naturally, a number of people testified, who were utterly appalled.

Q: Right.

Gough: And we got together and we got Michael Hiller.

Q: Do you recall where you got together?

Gough: No, not immediately. I don't actually think about that. Well probably, initially, just outside the commission offices—outside the meeting room in the hall.

Q: Right.

Gough: And—where have we met? I remember meeting him in the bar. [laughs]

Q: Well, maybe it was downstairs after you go under the [Municipal Building] vaults, and you walked that little triangle plaza there next to the Brooklyn Bridge outside of—

Gough: Well, that would be nice. I'm—

Q: Where I would take my commission lunches! [laughs]

Gough: Well, you can't go that far, and it's getting shorter and shorter! [laughs] When it was more relaxed, you could go somewhere and have lunch. [Now] you really can't. You have half an hour—and go! They [commissioners] have sandwiches at their desk, and you have to—I don't try to eat. Most people don't. Some people pack sandwiches and picnic outside behind the—

Q: Definitely an overlooked part of the landmarks process—the food! You go to Gene's [Restaurant], you go to The Century [Association]. These are the preservation haunts! [laughs]

Gough: Yes, Gene's certainly is.

Q: Yes. Don't ask me about the food.

Gough: It's really better than it used to be. [laughs]

Q: I am having dinner there on Friday with Carol [H.] Krinsky and her husband [Robert]. I was the one who introduced them to Gene's. And I went there for the first time with them. And Carol ordered the Duck L'Orange, which I thought was rather auspicious order for that place! [laughs]

Gough: Well, I've been going there so long because it's near where I used to live in the Village.

Q: Right.

Gough: And they moved on to having real glasses of wine [laughs]—when I first went there they would serve dinner wines in sherry glasses and it was horrible! At some point, somebody had said, "Wake up, this isn't the way they want it!" No, you can eat perfectly well—well, you did!

Q: Yes.

Gough: I mean, I'm not saying it would win an international award or anything but it's perfectly good for dinner!

Q: I think when they brought her the Duck L'Orange, it wiggled! [laughs]

Gough: It was still alive! [laughs]

Q: But anyway, so the commission, what did they do, with respect to the clock tower? What did they decide?

Gough: They decided that they could disconnect the mechanism, store it somewhere—ho ho ho––and electrify it.

Q: For the record, Christabel just said "ho ho ho."

Gough: Yeah, right. The reason I'm saying "ho ho ho," is that there are a number of documented events of things being stored from the commission and who knows where they are now.

Q: Right.

Gough: This goes back thirty years. Storage is not a good option.

Q: Right. And I do want to go on this tangent for a second. Aren't they the official archaeologists of the City of New York too?

Gough: I guess so.

Q: Yeah. Do you think—

Gough: I'm not sure I know the answer to that. They have an archaeologist on staff. But is there another archaeologist?

Q: Right.

Gough: I don't know for sure

Q: I believe that's one of their hats, and do you think that's a good idea?

Gough: To have an archaeologist?

Q: No, to have them be—would it be better suited to be in Parks [Department] or something along those lines?

Gough: It's probably safer than the commission, I would think.

Q: I would think so too.

Gough: Parks? Well, anyway, that would limit it to parks.

Q: Well, Parks does all sorts of other fun stuff. I think about Hart Island in the Bronx, for example—all the talk of transferring it to Parks. Parks has a [Permanent Art &] Monuments division, an Art & Antiquities division—

Gough: Oh, that's right. They do, don't they? So there's no reason it couldn't be shared.

Q: Yeah. I just worry about the commission looking after these objects, to be honest.

Gough: Oh, they don't.

Q: Right.

Gough: But I don't know who would do a better job, either. But that's only limited to what they've designated, anyway. So there needs to be another—and you're reminding me that there isn't even another. I had a feeling.

Q: Right. Hopefully, it's not [Department of] Sanitation. You know where it would end up! [laughs] But we don't want our audience to read between the lines too much. The clock was an interior landmark, which is the whole reason why the commission had jurisdiction in the first place over this interior winding mechanism. And Save America's Clocks, with plenty of guidance from you and others, decided to sue with respect—

Gough: To preserve the mechanism.

Q: Right, with respect to that decision.

Gough: Quite right too. But it's—as you will appreciate the complex legal situation—there's more than one issue involved. I just read, actually, an article in the *Harvard Law Review* that made that a little clearer to me. I mean, I had just been sort of thinking, how could they destroy this wonderful historic object? But there are takings issues involved, because there is legal precedent that the exterior is not a taking, and in historic districts it's not a taking, but there is no apparently specific legal decision that preventing something happening to a designated interior would not be a taking. It appears that that could be argued.

Q: But in any event, Justice Lynn [R.] Kotler did the right thing [at the New York State Supreme Court], didn't she?

Gough: Of course!

Q: And what did she do?

Gough: Well, she thought they should preserve the clock, as indeed they should. And they could, but we didn't have a sufficient body of people, of goodwill, who were willing to let that go. And whoever—I've actually forgotten who was developing it or investing in it, as I prefer to say—

Q: Wasn't it [R. Donahue "Don"] Peebles?

Gough: You're absolutely right. Yes it was. So, I mean, he wasn't interested in old clocks, let's say; he was very interested in old, old, old penthouses.

Q: [laughs] Right.

Gough: I mean, one point of view would have been to leave it until you have a new owner. But they weren't going to do that.

Q: And it was appealed up from Justice Kotler to the First Department. And what happened there?

Gough: We won.

Q: Right, you won.

Gough: So Peebles continued—

Q: —pushing, didn't he!—

Gough: —and we lost.

Q: Right. So there were two dissents. And so the Court of Appeals took it up. And I understand you were in Albany that day. I understand because you told me! [laughs]

Gough: I was in Albany. I went up for it. I sat there listening in horror and amazement [laughs]––didn't make a difference. I wanted to know and I wanted to show support for our legal team.

Q: Right. Right. And what was it like being in this beautiful interior landmark, in any sense of the word?

Gough: Indeed. It is.

Q: Right, deciding the fate of an interior landmark?

Gough: Well, I don't think that their legal thinking was actually right. But I wouldn't want to do an appeal to a higher court, which—also, they wouldn't have taken it. But I think that appealing to the Supreme Court [of the United States] today is not a good thing to do.

Q: Right. Why do you think I picked this as a case study?

Gough: Well, it presents complex legal issues, was that why?

Q: Pfff. [laughs]

Gough: I should have brought that article with me. They—you know the legal mind—they broke it down into different aspects and all of them were totally legitimate and important. The fact that the decision was a disaster for all of them was [laughs]—

Q: *Dred Scott* [*v. Sanford*] was a "well-reasoned decision," as some people—

Gough: Exactly, exactly. Got it.

Q: That's actually not why I picked it [*Save America's Clocks*, as a case study], but I think that's a good take on it. I didn't even think about—I mean, it is a fascinating case from a legal perspective. I appreciated all the thinking that went into it, frankly. I think the fact that there were two dissents is an indicator. And that's precisely why, under the rules, that these things go up to the Court of Appeals. But to me, it was never about the law. It was about the clock and the people who got behind the clock, and it was all these different types of, just, ordinary folks who––

Gough: Oh yes, it was very popular! Everybody wanted it. People love their landmarks. And, sometimes they're disappointed.

Q: [laughs] And you found all of them?

Gough: Well, I mean, they found—we all converged. People follow the calendar. We converged to complain—to testify against.

Q: But I'm really not aware of any one person who's at the commission as persistently as you who would have even been in the room.

Gough: Well, the Historic Districts Council sent someone for a long time. And perhaps they still will again, I mean, now there's no "room" [due to COVID-19], so it's hard to tell who's where. [laugh] But the pattern in the past was that I would be there and someone from the Historic Districts Council would be there, and according to what was on the calendar, someone from one of the local societies, or more than one person, would come up and address that item and go away again. But to see the whole panorama of it—not so much. But for a long time, there was a lot of press interest. I think I may have said that before. David Dunlap, Joan Shepard, and Owen Moritz and Sydney Schanberg at *The Times* after he returned from Cambodia.

I am going to mention that I'm 82-years-old, and I'm probably not as sharp as I used to be! [laughs] No one is. I find that my contemporaries forget names all the time.

Q: I have found that too. And I am occasionally guilty of that as well. What is your name again, by the way? And where are my glasses? [laughs]

Gough: Oh, that. Oh dear! [laughs]

Q: Yeah, I think it really epitomizes, to me at least, and I could just be off-base but, you know, to me, you're a friend, right? And we see each other out and about and I've visited with you here in

Hudson and collaborated with you on all these campaigns over the years. But you're really a friend to the commission and you offer—what I love most about you is your unconditional love. You love beautiful cities, beautiful buildings, unconditionally.

Gough: And proper administration of the law.

Q: Exactly. Which isn't too much to ask. [laughs]

Gough: No, I think it isn't too much to ask. But people get distracted.

Q: Right! [laughs] And I think it was that unconditional love for the process and for the commission that kept, and keeps you going there—or, logging in, now. [laughs]

Gough: Oh, well, I would see this all the time, that somebody would come—a group of people from the Village, perhaps, would come in, and they were testifying against something that got approved. And they would be heartbroken and furious, and they would say, "Okay, what's the use of this?" And they'd walk out. And I would watch them do it. And then I would go and sit down and hear the next item. Because I think that's what you have to do. And also, you will never get a fair picture because the considerable majority—I was almost going to say the vast majority—of items really aren't politically influenced. And you won't fully appreciate that if you only go to the ones that were.

Q: Speaking of 346 Broadway, back when I was younger and I got a ticket for urinating in an

alleyway after drinking too much wine—

Gough: Good God, man! [laughs] Shocking, shocking!

Q: Notwithstanding that it was in Kings County in the historic district, they shipped me off to Manhattan, where they had, I think, three or four summons parts in those days on the first floor of 346 Broadway.

Gough: Indeed, indeed!

Q: And my case was adjudicated [*People v. Untermyer*, N.Y. Crim. Ct. (2013)], where the attorney from Legal Aid, who had one leg, asked me [laughs] he asked me, "Do you have some sort of a medical condition that you could—." And I thought immediately to the *Seinfeld* episode where Jerry Seinfeld says, "I have Uromysitisis poisoning!" [laughs] But I said no, tried to be honest, and I paid my $50 fine and went on. But in many ways the commission reminds me of that criminal court, where you get a million people coming through on their stupid tickets. And every once in a while, you get Donald Trump, Jr., or someone like that! [laughs]

Gough: That's it! And that's one reason for staying with the commission and with the law because it does work, in a lot of cases. There are an increasing number of special cases that don't work, and that, I think, ought to be noticed. And hopefully, another mayor may be willing to modify that kind of policy. And I gather that Eric Adams does have some preservation connections, which people are telling me—preservationists might think, who's Eric Adams?—

but he has funded things in Brooklyn that that are preservation-oriented at Green-Wood [Cemetery]. And so it would not be fair to think that he has no interest.

Q: And I would hope that he—especially in South Brooklyn, so many of the items down there, and Ocean Parkway with the apartment buildings, and all these things that his workaday voters may care about. Coney Island Boardwalk, perfect example.

Gough: Yeah, absolutely.

Q: Right. People disparaged it. They thought, oh, what do they care about the Coney Island Boardwalk? But it's a special place. Yeah, it may not be board in parts anymore—

Gough: Oh, don't remind me of that substance.

Q: Remember, and versus or. And versus or.

Gough: Yes, we have to fight for the or a little harder than for the and. Because one of the features of the law is that there are three architects appointed to the commission. And one historian.

Q: Mmhmm. Who's the historian these days? [laughs]

Gough: Oh God. Or one historian or landscape architect, I think, if you look at the charter. So

who is that? Gosh, I'm not sure. This is terrible, terrible, terrible.

Q: We should go through one day and do a little—speaking of box-checking.

Gough: Let's do that. Who could it be? [Gough subsequently determined that the designated historian at the time of this interview was Adi Shamir-Baron.]

Q: But the funny thing about being a historian is, you know, the way I became a historian is one day I started saying I was a historian. [laughs] That's the way it works sometimes!

Gough: Well, who should know better than you?

Q: Who should know better than yourself? Exactly. One of the other reasons—you know, I hate to keep returning to it but it is such a font of all these—fount—excuse me.

Gough: A sacred fount, as Henry James would say! [laughs]

Q: It was a real Times New Roman [laughs] of this shifting city. [Rudolph] Giuliani to [Michael] Bloomberg, to de Blasio—very different ideologies, all of them. And then you look at the state level, of course, and the federal level and all that. But I don't think the '80s commission would have even dreamed of having this interior landmark become a private house, because number one, that'd be crazy. And number two, it's an interior landmark, right?

Gough: Oh, yes.

Q: So what was happening in the city, in your view, over those Giuliani to Bloomberg to, now, into de Blasio's tail-end years?

Gough: Well, my personal view is that, until de Blasio, the mayors—although they were very interested in investment projects—did have some respect for the law and for the fact that it was part of a system of checks and balances. And I don't think we ever had the kind of appointments that we're getting in this administration.

Q: Right. And within the city, do you think the people who lived here changed? Or do you think it was just a matter of this political representation, or the moneyed interests?

Gough: I think it's, to some extent, a generational change. I mean, a lot of people who are no longer with us were fervent preservationists, including commissioners and chairs and the people who got the law enacted in the first place. And I don't necessarily see them replaced by people of equal stature who are younger.

Q: Interesting.

Gough: I think also—is there a word, "professionalization?"

Q: There is and I've used it, yes. Excellent point.

Gough: Yes. And I think that as people feel that they are a professional preservationist, which I find rather comic—but they look down on people like me because I am not a professional. And volunteerism is—I mean, you get the stream of feminism that "You really shouldn't be volunteering, you should be paid for your services!" But I wasn't brought up to think that way. My mother was always a volunteer "for the animals," as we used to say. And I think that all of the people who were active in trying to protect the Clock Tower were volunteers, totally. And the idea that one of the key things is raising money, I think you can go too far with that. Having membership benefits and parties—

Q: And then you have to maintain all that, too.

Gough: Oh, yes. It was the beauty of Simeon Bankoff that he was such a good administrator that he could do that and do the real stuff too. But some people just do <u>that</u>. You know who you are! [laughs]

Q: People were shocked that he actually picked up the phones.

Gough: Oh, yes!

Q: One of the first things I realized, working there.

Gough: He had a small staff and if they were all out doing something, he answered the phone. I

mean, he's a practical soul. He wouldn't not answer the phone because it was beneath his dignity. He wouldn't! [laughs]

Q: Although, he had a wonderful way of always answering the phone as if he was totally disinterested: [speaking in quiet deadpan] "Simeon Bankoff." [laughs] Even though it might be a call he'd been waiting for for years. "Simeon Bankoff."

Gough: A cool cat!

Q: "Black Tie." You know how he—Henry [J.] Stern? Right.

Gough: His Parks Department nom de plume, right.

Q: Right. So for the record—

Gough: But of course, because Simeon always dresses in black and white, his tie is always black. It doesn't have to be a tuxedo.

Q: [laughs] So for the record, that ["Black Tie"] was his name under [Parks] Commissioner Henry Stern, who gave everybody in Parks a nickname, and I believe distributed a book containing all those nicknames.

Gough: I don't know—

Q: You were friends with Barry Benepe.

Gough: Yes, I know Barry Benepe.

Q: Do you know his son's Parks name?

Gough: Oh, did his son have a Parks—? Oh, he has several sons. The son I was friendly with did not work for the Parks Department.

Q: I share a name with one of his sons, Adrian Benepe.

Gough: Oh, Adrian Benepe. Oh that one! I don't know Adrian.

Q: His Parks name was "A-Train."

Gough: Okay, that was reasonable. Right, because he was "going through!"

Q: He was Manhattan [Parks] Commissioner and the A Train goes from the top of Manhattan to the bottom.

Gough: Oh, that's why. Okay.

Q: And his name starts with an "A."

Gough: That's fine. I was thinking it was because he was the "express!"

Q: You know, Adrian was Parks Commissioner under Bloomberg. And there was—so, I want to talk about this because this goes back to our discussion of the spectrum: Washington Square Park. I have two degrees from NYU [New York University], love NYU. Some things that it does; you can go to *The New York Times* and see some of the things I hate that NYU did. But that's another story. But the renovation of Washington Square Park, which Adrian did spearhead—the local activists in the Village said, "we don't want gates on Washington Square Park because it is a traditional gathering ground and we don't want to disturb that." And there's a big fight back and forth, back and forth. And so finally, it was decided, no gates. Of course, what do you see when you go to Washington Square Park now? Police barricades chained to the neo-historic railing that are just dragged into place as gates.

Gough: The fight about gates was not a preservation fight at all. It was outside of that. Its preservation consequences can't be helped, I guess. [laughs] But when there was an outcry, it was, I believe, if I remember properly, led by block associations and political people.

Q: Right, right.

Gough: Not by me, in any case.

Q: Right. But objecting to the openness of the park and the impact on the neighborhood character.

Gough: Well, if you happen to own a condo opposite, I mean, of course you object. It's frightfully noisy and smelly. Generally difficult. [laughs]

Q: Right. And then there are, like you said, the political club types, the community board types. We're talking today about overlooked parts of the landmarks process. You know, sometimes we overlook these groups, sometimes we look at them too much. But these political clubs and these community boards, what is their proper role? When are they at their best?

Gough: Well, you know, I've never been a member of a community board, I really haven't.

Q: I'm proud to say I haven't either. I sued my community board once! [laughs] [*Untermyer v. Miles* (Sup Ct, Kings County 2014)].

Gough: Okay! But you know, live and let live! I don't really know how they work or what they do very well. They certainly are not a major factor in terms of following the commission because I don't think the commission cares at all. And why should they? They [Community Boards] are advisory. Usually what they do, where I've noticed particularly is important too, where I would know what the items were more intimately, over a longer period of time. They would write these incredibly long, detailed, "whereas, whereas, whereas—" and they [those representing the Community Boards] wouldn't be given the time to read it. So they would just say, "We're

against it!" [laughs] And it wasn't helpful, frankly. Because nobody cares. They [the LPC commissioners] don't have to [care about Community Boards], and they don't!

Q: Right, exactly! But these are the people who call into [The] Brian Lehrer [Show on WNYC], and do all these things around the city. And, in preparing for our talk today, I went back and listened to your Brian Lehrer interview—television interview—which, you may recall. The topic of that was the "Manhattanization" of parts of New York.

Gough: Of Brooklyn, particularly.

Q: Of, Brooklyn particularly, yes, but I think it could be applied to other parts.

Gough: Certainly!

Q: People may say it even applies to Hudson now, which some people call a sixth borough, whether rightly or wrongly.

Gough: Well, we don't have any towers yet. I suppose we will. Well, it's like water finding its level; when there are attractive areas that are for sale at a lesser price and might be attractive to people from Manhattan if they [investors] Manhattanize them a bit. And, I recall, I think I was given some sort of award for complaining about it and that's where that speech came from. And sweet people from Brooklyn took me out to dinner afterwards and they said, "I hate to tell you this, but it happened already."

Q: Right. And Lehrer, he was kind of incredulous. He almost was having fun, you know, "What? Could they Manhattanize Manhattan?" That was sort of the vibe. And of course, Manhattan has been Manhattanized.

Gough: Well, where did the word come from? [laughs] We're not finding it from the Indian city of *Manahatta*!

Q: But one consequence of Manhattanization was your—what I think of always as your catchphrase, "I didn't leave the Village, the Village left me."

Gough: Matt McGhee said that, actually.

Q: Well, you know, all good artists steal. [laughs]

Gough: I'm happy to repeat it. Yes, well, the change is in—in terms of who can live in a particular neighborhood, real estate is absolutely key. In New York, rent control slowed the process. But basically, if people of goodwill, who may be artists, can't live there anymore, and they've gone to Bed-Stuy [Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn] or wherever they've gone, you're going to have, well, a different community board, first of all. And you're going to have different access to elected officials. And you're going to have a different way of looking at things. And you're not going to want things to be shabby. And shabby can be nice! And that was one of the problems that I keep coming back to at 14–16 Fifth Avenue. But that was just not paying its

freight, basically.

Q: Right. Interesting. So you left the Village and you came up here, to beautiful Hudson, but you also went to another beautiful locale.

Gough: Yes, I naturally looked for a landmark to live in and I looked to Tudor City where I could get a tiny studio and always have somewhere to be in New York. And then I became involved in restoration in Hudson—like this place where we're sitting now. Because I—to belabor the obvious—I couldn't do it in Manhattan! Too many zeros! [laughs] But I very well could do it here. Good lord, you couldn't buy a kennel for a dog in New York for what I paid for this beautiful building! [laughs]

Q: Right. And Tudor City. Your apartment has this beautiful view of the Chrysler Building and the Ford Foundation—

Gough: Yes, it does.

Q: All these beautiful landmarks that you may not have single-handedly helped to protect, but you've upheld the spirit of the Landmarks laws, is that correct?

Gough: Well, yes. And I was involved in trying to protect the—you said Chrysler, what's the other one we're talking about? That I can see from my window—Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation was undergoing a rather hideous renovation—the new president, Executive Director–

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Q: Darren Walker, yes.

Gough: —who was, contrary to what the Historic Districts Council may think now, not a preservationist.

Q: Landmarks Lion Darren Walker.

Gough: Well, I was thinking of giving mine back. But that's not to denigrate him. He has other very legitimate interests. And he was not interested in the preservation [of the Ford Foundation Building]. He thought it needed renovation. I have heard on the grapevine that even the architects that he had hired tried to stop him throwing away the furniture. And I mean literally. And he didn't. I bet he does take advice. He's not an idiot, obviously. He insisted on putting in, to my mind, more than was necessary in the way of access for the handicapped. And I say that as a person who had both a father and a husband who were confined to wheelchairs before they became electric, and I pushed many a wheelchair into many situations.

Q: You know what you're talking about.

Gough: I mean, if you can't get in, that matters. If you can get in by going around a little bit, in my opinion, there could be something else more important. And they did reduce the amount of damage to the [Building's central] court for—I mean, the idea of where you had to be able to get

to. I mean, getting a wheelchair into every level [of the court], please. I mean, it's totally impossible—the scale makes it impossible. They did some. They didn't do as much as they originally intended to. And they did what they did, and I thought the quality of the work that they did was lamentable. A person who I will not identify once hung out of the window of my apartment and yelled obscenities, and his wife pulled him back! [laugh]

Q: Well, that brings us I guess to the "Shake & Shuck Club."

Gough: Oh, no! No! [laughs]

Q: Just kidding. [laughs]

Gough: Just kidding.

Q: So, you mentioned your award from HDC. He actually has a name, Primo.

Gough: Primo!

Q: First Landmarks Lion, 1990.

Gough: Yes.

Q: How do you feel about being a lioness?

Gough: Well, I loved it at the time because Sydney Schanberg presented the award and I adore him. That's something I should have been mentioning. *New York Newsday* used to be a huge preservation force.

Q: It used to be a force, period. Yes. It was a publication.

Gough: Well, yes. But they really did important editorials—

Q: Yeah, but now it's how Long Islanders found out about the [New York] Mets scores this morning, with some exceptions. You know, it's, I mean, it's—

Gough: Well, it just isn't a metropolitan daily anymore.

Q: It's a Long Island rag.

Gough: Yes. Well, you need that too, but it's not performing the function that it did. So I was certainly absolutely thrilled to be given this unusual object [laughs] by Sydney Schanberg, yes. Those were really the old days of the Historic Districts Council. We were in some strange restaurant with a balcony and nobody could hear and I had to yell! And I hope that they heard, or maybe they didn't. But anyway, everybody had a good time. [laughs]

Q: Why did they say they honored you? What was the rationale in their view?

Gough: Well, I think just because I was monitoring and commenting.

Q: At the commission.

Gough: I think that the idea of monitoring—going down as a regular thing, was something we came to understand was useful, because back then it created a certain pressure for real debate, seeing the public there taking notes. I was not the only one doing it. Margaret Moore monitored for The Drive to Defend the Ladies' Mile District, and later Sandy Levine and then Nadezhda Williams for the Historic Districts Council. I'm talking about people who had an interest in policy.

Q: That gave you a position of somewhat prominence. And when we had our Pride of Lions gathering in 2015, it was you there with Bob Stern and Barbaralee, all these folks. And, as a result of that, I mean, you're the most modest person I know, certainly, but you've been able to get a certain gravitas—*New York Magazine* just did a profile of you a couple of months ago.

Gough: Well, the woman who wrote it [Zoe Rosenberg, of *Curbed*] has been following preservation for years. It isn't about me, it's about the movement, which seems to be straying a little. But she wasn't straying, so—

Q: But here I am, a board member of NYPAP, which is dedicated to preserving the history of preservation—

Gough: Well, that's so important, now, because that may be all we have—it's history.

Q: Right. But, I'm sitting down with you.

Gough: Well, that was your choice! [laughs]

Q: It does say something, though. I mean, you are a figure—you're a matriarch in many ways.

Gough: Well, I'm 82. I really don't—

Q: You can't not be a matriarch when you're 82, I guess! [laugh]

Gough: And I don't have any children! [laughs] I don't think I want to be Ms. Personality here; it's not about me. I mean, when I think of all the people who have worked hard volunteering, and as commissioners, and who are dead, what on Earth would they think if they saw some of the decisions that have come down this year?

Q: Right. You mentioned you don't have any biological children, but you have a lot of preservation children.

Gough: No, not really.

Q: No—there is one gentleman who bellows, among other things, “Save Harlem Now!” [both bellowing together]

Gough: Oh, well, that was one time when I—[laughs]

Q: Tell them who you’re talking about, first of all.

Gough: I’m talking about dear Michael Henry Adams, who wants to save Harlem—

Q: —Now! Not later!

Gough: Not later—now, for twenty years. Well, we mentioned Simeon Bankoff earlier. I was sitting in my apartment, the telephone rings, it’s Simeon. “Christabel,” he says, “we have to do something—Michael has chained himself to the doors of the Landmarks Commission. And he’s yelling, ‘Save Harlem Now!’ And Jennifer [Raab] called me and asked me what to do.” Because she didn’t want to call the police immediately because she felt it would be wrong, which was nice of her. And indeed, she did not call the police immediately, and Simeon said, “Christabel, you’ve got to go and get him to stop.” So I picked up my purse, ran to the subway, scooted down.

As soon as I got off the subway, I could hear, [shouts] “Save Harlem <u>Now</u>!” And I ran, literally, there, and sort of said, “Hello, Michael. Oh Michael, why don’t we go and have a nice lunch?” It was lunchtime, by then. “Why don’t we go and have a nice lunch, and we’ll talk about getting a

State and National Historic District?" And Michael thought about it because he does like a nice lunch. And he said, "I will. But not yet." And I said, "Michael, I can't stand here with you because of my relationship with the commission. So I will walk around the block and then perhaps we'll go." He said, "Good. We will." But, alas, Jennifer did eventually call the police. And as I was rounding the block, I heard [imitating sirens] "Whoo-ha, whoo-ha, whoo-ha." They came and cut the chain and took Michael away and he was arrested, and all that stuff.

Q: Well, it's easy to chain yourself to a building. It's harder to de-chain yourself.

Gough: I don't know what happened to the key. Because it was itself a landmark—the commission—at that time. And it had a big double door with two handles.

Q: Right. And just remind them where you're talking about.

Gough: [100] Old Slip.

Q: Right.

Gough: Well he somehow got the thing through the two handles so no one could open the door. And around him—I think he may have put it around his waist, actually.

Q: Oh, wow.

Gough: You would have to ask him. I don't really remember. But he was chained to it and it wasn't working. And no one could get in, except through the fire exit in the back. Which did not fit the Republicans' idea of the fitness of things.

Q: And he's a friend [of yours]. A wonderful guy.

Gough: Absolutely. Yes, he's worked hard for preservation against enormous odds. And still is. I mean, he's submitting an article today. It's one of the reasons I'm unprepared to talk to you because Michael sometimes asks me to look over his work. [laughs]

Q: Well you fooled me, Christabel! [laughs]

Gough: So I think Michael has been a tremendous force for good. I can't say he saved Harlem, but that is really hard to do! [laughs]

Q: Yes, but he certainly made a dent.

Gough: But it is sometimes the people who don't work too well with organizations who will go out and do something because they don't care if they lose their standing with the organization.

Q: That's right. That's correct. Who are the others that you're hoping will carry on your legacy?

Gough: Well, first of all, I do not consider that I have a legacy. That's just—

Q: Everybody, by definition, has a legacy. Whether it's a good one or a bad one is just another question! [laughs] Everybody has a legacy, Christabel.

Gough: Well, I have no idea who would be foolish enough to do the things I've done. But I must admit that when I see the decisions are coming from the commission now, I rather regret having devoted so much of my life to trying to keep them doing what they were meant to do because I don't know if that will ever happen again.

Q: Interesting. In that environment, what is the strategy for the preservationist of tomorrow?

Gough: Well, different people have different views of that. I've taken a very narrow view of working within legal enforcement, but it's certainly totally legitimate to work on restoration of buildings and building research and public opinion—I really don't want to put down those activities because they're very important too.

Q: Yes, I was having a drink with Simeon a couple years ago, after I left HDC. And he shows up, "Sorry I'm late, sorry I'm late." He's like, "You know, I think I figured it out." [laughs] Figured what out? But sure, go ahead. And he said, "You know, there are three ways you could do it. You can either regulate it. You can buy it. And—"

Gough: Well, let me tell you. Buying it. It used to be the only way, and it may be again, soon. Well, what was the third?

Q: You made me forget the third! [laughs]

Gough: Oh I'm sorry. I'm glad someone else forgets something. I forget everything!

Q: This is what happens when you make me smile.

Gough: No, wait. Let's start again. [laughs] 1-2-3!

Q: 1-2-3. I feel like [Governor] Rick Perry—"Oops!" [laughs] In any event, Christabel, I had promised you a break like an hour and fifteen minutes ago, and I didn't want to interrupt this because this was such a wonderful look back.

Gough: Well, maybe we've done the whole thing.

Q: I think we have. That's why I raised this.

Gough: Well, then I could show you around this old house.

Q: Which you've already somewhat done. And then maybe we can have a cocktail?

Gough: We could have a cocktail! And when do you have to go back?

Q: My train is at 7:37PM. So that leaves us the perfect amount of time.

Gough: Oh, perfect. Yes, we can have a glass of wine. I can't make a cocktail. I don't have a cocktail shaker here! [laughs]

Q: You have a plastic bag? No, I'm just kidding. In any event—

Gough: In any event, we could go back to—you're getting the seven o'clock?

Q: 7:37, so we've got a little bit of time. But before we bore everybody with logistics: Christabel Gough, signing off, as they say—a little rhyme. Here with Adrian Untermyer. Once again, it is October 13, 2021. Christabel, on behalf of the New York Preservation Archive Project and posterity, I thank you.

Gough: Well, thank you for having me. I think that's what you say.

Q: Good evening, everybody, whatever time it is where you're listening.

[END OF INTERVIEW]