UNCOVERING THE ROOTS OF LGBT PRESERVATION

The Reminiscences of

Jay Shockley

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jay Shockley conducted by Interviewer Liz Strong on April 3, 2019. This interview is part of the *Uncovering the Roots of LGBT Preservation* oral history project.

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

Transcriptionist: Matthew Geesey Session: 1

Narrator: Jay Shockley Location: Manhattan, New York

Interviewer: Liz Strong Date: April 3, 2019

Q: Today is April 3. It's a Wednesday, 2019. My name is Liz Strong. I'm here for the New York Preservation Archive Project interviewing Jay Shockley for our LGBT preservation oral history project. So Jay, let's start with your early life. Tell me when and where you were born.

Shockley: I was born in Baltimore in 1951.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your childhood or your family.

Shockley: My family is from Maryland on both sides. On my dad's side, probably from the seventeenth century in Maryland, on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay and southern Delaware, although his mother's family came in the early nineteenth century in far-western Maryland, in the Appalachians, a coal-mining family. His dad's side of the family was farmers. My mother grew up in a tiny village in the Blue Ridge [Mountains] of Maryland just over the hill from Camp David. They were Irish and Germans who came to Maryland in the 1720s. So I have very strong Maryland roots.

Q: And you know your family history, which is actually kind of unique, I'm learning.

Shockley: Really?

Q: Yes, most people—

Shockley: I find that surprising because most people that are historians or historic preservationists in particular, unless it was recent immigrants and so on, they seem to know it going back.

Q: Historians and preservationists, yes, but people in general, no.

Shockley: That's true, yes, yes.

Q: [Laughs] It's definitely a marker of the field. Was it common in your family to talk about family history, or is this something you went and looked up later?

Shockley: It was actually both. The lucky thing was my father's parents were actually quite unusual. My granddad was the eldest of twelve kids. So when his father started ailing, he had to take over the family farm. He had to drop out of eighth grade. But my grandmother, even though she was from a coal-mining family, she graduated from college in 1911. So she was very educated, and obviously, in those days, a woman in a coal-mining family, basically a secretary, a nurse or a teacher were about the only options because they weren't going into the coal mines.

The two of them together were the most amazing storytellers, and my grandmother, as a teacher,

frequently it was the—typical nursery stories or childhood stories. But they always told basically an oral history of their families. So, unlike my two siblings, who apparently don't have any memories of that or it didn't sink into them for whatever reason, with me, I still remember it to this day. It really informed a lot of my interest in history of the family. It was obviously so place-based that that really made an impact on me also.

Q: So the stories that she was telling you, these were places that you could see around you and visit.

Shockley: Yes. Sometimes not with them because—for instance, my grandfather would mostly tell about his farm life on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and southern Delaware. But in the mid-'20s—a lot of people don't realize that the Depression didn't start in '29 when the stock market crashed. For people who weren't the one percent, it affected them a lot sooner. So he was a young farmer, had two kids, and the bank took away his farm in the mid-'20s. He had no life left in the farming community, so he moved to the mountains where my grandmother grew up and started a new life there. But all of his reminiscences were about that life. So I never was able to––that's not true. We actually had family reunions on the Eastern Shore, so I would see some of his life there.

Q: Would you say this is what set you on a path of being interested in history and preservation or was it something else later on?

Shockley: Well, I'd say it actually came in waves. As I just explained clearly, I had this family-

based history with going way, way back and all in Maryland. It's not quite like Scarlett [O'Hara] in *Gone With the Wind* that she always has to go back to Tara, but it's almost like that. Specifically with them and what I was exposed to as a child, despite the fact I grew up in the city of Baltimore, by the time I remember anything, we were living in a very small '50s housing development but in the exurbs of Baltimore. Literally a few blocks away, the countryside started.

It was a little housing development, but it was way before regional shopping centers really developed. So everything that we did was either in downtown Baltimore or in the county seat of Baltimore County, Towson, which was a very small city. But my father's parents lived in a very historic town, Cumberland, Maryland. It was about twenty-five thousand people at that time. And my other grandparents lived in an absolutely small village of two hundred people in the Blue Ridge.

So I was exposed to big city, small city, tiny village, countryside and suburban development. I think within that, I was most interested in the historic cities because they were more interesting, although I loved the countryside. Beyond that, when I went through elementary school, it was back in the days when there was still a lot of local history taught. I just couldn't get enough of it. I loved history in elementary school.

Then when I went to college, which was in Madison, Wisconsin at the University of Wisconsin, I was a history major. But about halfway through my schooling, I had a light bulb experience that half of why I loved traveling was looking at the architecture and I knew nothing about it. I took a two-year break in my undergraduate schooling and when I went back, I took every single

architectural history course that I could possibly take.

Q: Any remarkable teachers or lessons from that time that stuck with you?

Shockley: In my college?

Q: Yes, or architectural history specifically?

Shockley: Yes, there was a professor at the University of Wisconsin named Narciso [G.] Menocal who was a Cuban-American. He was very stern and at first, it took getting adjusted to his personality. But he was so, so good that I took every single course that he had. He was very, very strong on something that was perfect for living in the Midwest at that time. He was very strong on Louis [Henry] Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, the Prairie School. And the nine years that I lived in Madison—you could only go touring for about a half a year because the winters are so long and so severe, but I saw every single building in town that had Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan buildings, and the regional Prairie School, which is astounding architecture. So I really seeped that up in my years there.

Q: So what brought you to Columbia [University] next?

Shockley: Well, when I graduated with my history degree—this would have been 1976—it was virtually impossible to find a job. Madison was basically the state capital and a university town, but it was one of those towns that everybody that graduated wanted to stay at. In the years I was

there, it was known as the [University of California] Berkeley of the Midwest. Everything was going on. So I actually couldn't find a job for almost a year. Then when I finally found a decent job, which was unionized, I was working as a high school custodian. That was my best application to my history degree.

So, after doing that for about a year and a half, I started thinking, "Well, maybe I should do something else with my life." And at that time, there really were very few historic preservation program graduate degrees. Boston was one option. Charlottesville, Virginia was one option. Columbia obviously is the first one and the most prestigious at that point. Having lived in a city of about 170,000, Madison at that time, I really didn't want to go smaller. I really at that point had absolutely no desire to move to New York. But one of my neighbors at the time actually was from Boston and they said, you really don't want to move to Boston. If you think Madison's a college town, Boston's that times fifteen. So I applied to Columbia and that's what brought me to New York.

Q: So you knew that preservation is how you wanted to bring your love of history and architecture together.

Shockley: It is. I can't really quite pinpoint it, but between my love of history and my love of travel and my connection with Maryland and a lot of place-based things, I was seeing the loss of some really incredible buildings. In particular, in my grandparents' hometown of Cumberland, there was a nationally famous B&O [Baltimore and Ohio] railroad station/hotel. The National Trust for Historic Preservation led a national campaign to try to save it and it ultimately wasn't,

because a lot of people just wrote it off as a depressed and depressing Appalachian town that had lost its former glory.

That made an enormous impact on me. Between that and again, I really can't quite pin it down but after discovering my love of architecture and architectural history, that just seemed like the next logical thing.

Q: So tell me about arriving in New York, a place you had never really wanted to live.

Shockley: [Laughter] Well, it was not a good start. I was so naïve. I came and thought all I had to do was go up to Columbia and they would help me find an apartment. I quickly found out that was not going to happen. When I arrived, it was the middle or the end of August and it was 104 degrees, in a heat wave, and the *New York Times* was on strike. I found out the *Village Voice* had listings for apartments, but it took me a while to figure out that you apparently had to know that they were dropped off the night before in certain boxes. Then I went through the thing that probably millions of people have gone through, that even if an apartment was listed, sometimes it was fake and you'd have to do deposits that you didn't get back. It just ended up being an absolute nightmare.

So I ended up finding a roommate service that basically set me on the path of at least finding a place to live. In the meantime, I was really, really, really lucky that a good friend of mine in Madison had a friend who had a place on the Bowery and didn't really live there, used it as an artist's studio. So my actual introduction for the first two months was living on the Bowery next

to CBGB's. When I would come home at night, no lie, this was back in 1978; I would have to step over bodies to get into my doorway. [Laughs]

Q: Living ones? Alive bodies?

Shockley: Yes, they were just drugged out or drunk or whatever else, but it was a nightly occurrence when I would come back from Columbia. And talking about preservation, one of my first memories when school actually started, was hearing and getting woken up by dozens and dozens of fire trucks. St. Mark's in the Bowery Church [Church-in-the-Bowery] had caught on fire, which was just a few blocks away from where I was staying at that point.

Q: Did you see the fire?

Shockley: I did afterwards, yes.

Q: Wow, wow. So with all this going on, how were your studies at first?

Shockley: Well, the studies were fine. I was actually very happy that [laughs]—certain people shouldn't hear this, but I was very happy that I was not living up at Columbia at that point. I really got to know the [Greenwich] Village, East Village, and when I eventually found my apartment, which was my first two-year apartment, it was on East Eighth Street between Green and Mercer, right near NYU [New York University].

I immediately fell in love with the Village and East Village. Even though sometimes it was a burden to commute all the way up to Columbia and back late at night, depending what was going on in class, there really wasn't that much going on in Morningside Heights back in the late '70s. There were two or three restaurants at most, that kind of thing. The other thing was that the Village in terms of history and architecture is so much closer to brick row houses in Baltimore and so on and so forth. It's low-rise by and large. It's a much more natural fit than big apartment buildings up in Morningside Heights.

Q: I imagine social life was more interesting or activism going on at the time—

Shockley: Oh, very much, absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Tell me a little bit about that.

Shockley: Well, obviously, late '70s, a gay man who's lived in a college town coming to the big city, there was an awful lot going on. Dot, dot, dot. [Laughs]

Q: Fair enough. In terms of activism, though, organizing, anything like that?

Shockley: I can't remember. Obviously, it was very shortly after I moved to New York that AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] hit New York. That's my strongest memory of activism happening. I mean, I attended lots of things that—I don't know that they would be strictly activism, but I attended as much gay-oriented activities and so on and so forth. Just one

for instance, Vito Russo who later became quite famous for writing *The Celluloid Closet* [*Homosexuality in the Movies*], which was the first ever look at the way that gay people were depicted in Hollywood films. I went to a really early lecture that he was doing, when it was still sort of a slide show way prior to his publishing the book. So I was clearly seeking out that kind of thing and anything that was history-related with the gay community.

Q: You were thinking more like education and stuff like that.

Shockley: Yes, on various activities. Gay film festivals that have always existed since the year I moved here. Just actively participating in the gay community in the Village.

Q: Yes. So, just in parallel, tell me a little bit about school. Same question as undergrad, were there any particular professors or classes that changed or shaped your point of view?

Shockley: One thing that I was really, really, really, really lucky about was the fact that James Marston Fitch who founded the Columbia [Historic Preservation Program] program in 1965 and became a preservation legend internationally, he had officially stepped down as the head of the program, I think, two years before I arrived. But he was still around. Each semester, he taught a course that basically was himself sort of ruminating or discussing preservation and so on.

He just was an amazing person. He was from Tennessee. He was an old-fashioned Southern storyteller. He had these catchphrases and a very pithy sense of humor. He revered the stereotypical "blue-haired ladies in tennis shoes." He'd always refer to "those fat-ass developers"

and things like that. But I truly do not think that to this day and after thirty-five-and-a-half professional years of preservation, I have ever heard anybody as eloquent and as articulate on the way that historic preservation does, can and should work within the American life of towns and cities. He was just amazing that way.

I know that not all of my fellow students at the time thought the same thing and I hope they've reevaluated it. There were a few people that I think just dismissed him as some old fool or whatever. But I really think he was amazing. So I was really, really lucky that the two years I was there, he was around.

The other thing that I was extremely fortunate about, there had been—I'm not sure actually looking back who exactly it was, but an individual left a lot of travel money for the preservation program. It was quite unusual because my class—again, this would have been the class of '78–'80. The class before us—the program from '65–'78 was only three semesters. We were the first class that was four semesters in the program. And when they left, midway of my first year, we were allowed to use the travel money that year and the following year. Everybody else had been only able to use it for one year.

My class was approximately fifty people. A lot of people just by family obligations or lack of desire to travel didn't go on them, but we went on each year at least twelve trips. Fitch and the other administrators of the program arranged that every place that we went to we would meet the most famous names in preservation that were behind-the-scenes people. That actually was bar none the most valuable thing in my entire two years of the program. We actually did a week-long

trip with two cars traveling throughout the South from Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Savannah, Charleston and Williamsburg. And each place, we met the biggest legends still living in those places that were involved in preservation. We got totally behind-the-scenes tours and looks. That was truly amazing.

Q: Can you give me an example of a place in particular or person in particular that stands out in your mind?

Shockley: Actually, that wasn't even on the trip. I am not remembering any the names right at the moment, but each place that we went to, Pittsburgh, Williamsburg, Winston-Salem, Charleston, Savannah, there are people that are now legendary because they really were in the forefront of preservation in those places.

Another thing that sort of paralleled, that was really eye-opening, and I honestly can't remember if we met her when we went down to Williamsburg, but Fitch was also personal friends with Lila Acheson Wallace, who was the heir to the *Reader's Digest* fortune. And she endowed a course on landscape history. It was a tiny class. There were only five or six students. The course teacher was Bruce [R.] Kelly, who's most famous for designing Strawberry Fields for Yoko Ono in Central Park, and then tragically died of AIDS.

I'm totally blanking out her name, but there was this woman that was one of the head landscape architects for Colonial Williamsburg and I will never forget her lecture, which was just riveting. It was about the struggle in preservation between trying to show the real side of how life in

Williamsburg would have been, versus accommodating tourists and bringing in visitors, because they were competing with amusement parks nearby and all that kind of thing.

Just from a historical landscape perspective, not even the buildings per se, it would have been vegetable gardens instead of flower gardens, because there were horses, what the streets would have had on them, all that kind of thing. It was just incredibly interesting to see that preservation isn't all about just the right thing for the buildings or whatever. If you are a not-for-profit and you have to bring in visitors, it's very difficult to meet your budget and all that kind of thing, that trying to find a medium ground between historicity and tourism needs.

Q: What were your personal philosophies developing at that time about what preservation is and should be?

Shockley: It's a little hard to articulate, I suppose, but I really, truly believed, and still believe, that there is an enormous need in this country for historic preservation. That the American norm value, which is private property and you can do whatever the hell you want with your own private property, has to be balanced with the social need for keeping historic districts and individual landmarks and things that are basically essential to who we are as a people and a culture, and making viable, livable cities.

It's very easy to go around a city right now and see areas that nobody wants to go to. It's not a coincidence that the areas that people want to go to are the historic districts, are the ones that people feel comfortable, that are interesting, that have interesting businesses because the

businesses want to be in interesting neighborhoods. When you travel the rest of the country, whether it's in suburban areas or whatever else, and there's nothing left, there's no reason at all to want to go there or live there.

When I ended up working at the Landmarks [Preservation] Commission and we can go into how that happened, but it also made an enormous impact on me that the only thing that creates real preservation in this country is local landmarks commissions. National Register [of Historic Places] doesn't do anything. It's honorary. It doesn't prevent demolition. I know that's still a radical concept in a lot of this country that a government agency can tell you, no, you can't demolish your property. No, you can't alter it without our permission and so on. But it's been proven ever since the 1930s with the earliest cities that started addressing historic preservation, that it really was the way to go. And those cities are amazingly vibrant and vital.

Q: Let's do talk a little bit about the LPC [Landmarks Preservation Commission]. You began there when you were a student, or right when you graduated?

Shockley: Yes. I think it's directly related to the landscape history course that I was taking. I got very interested in historic landscapes. With Columbia, you have to do a summer internship in the summer between the two years. So I went back to Madison, Wisconsin and got a job with the statewide historic survey for the state, which was really, really an interesting job. I was traveling all around Wisconsin and coming up with National Register nomination possibilities and historic district possibilities. It ran the entire gamut from tiny rural towns to parts of Milwaukee and various significant suburbs, from one percenters' summer mansions to planned suburban

developments during the New Deal and everything between.

When I came back, I actually had sublet my apartment to one of my classmates who was professionally a landscape architect. And his summer internship was the Commission had started something called the Olmsted Project. This is the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. And the reason they did that was the [New York City] Landmarks Law was amended in 1972 to allow for the first time for the Commission to designate historic landscapes and historic districts. The original 1965 Commission could only designate historic districts and individual landmarks. I think I just misstated that, '72 was for interior landmarks and for scenic landmarks. The original Commission was for historic districts and for individual landmarks.

So he was working for the Olmsted Project, doing research on the undesignated [Frederick Law] Olmsted parks and parkways. When I came back, he said, "You know what? They're looking for another person that's a historian that would work on other aspects of the project." So I started working twenty hours a week for that project, which was an official entity of the Landmarks Commission while I was going to school full-time, which was too much to take on. But I'm very proud that besides the designations that came out of that, we put together a catalog and a museum exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. It was on "The Art of the Olmsted Landscape." Bruce Kelly was the head of that project as well.

So I already had my foot in the door and basically, I didn't graduate because I didn't complete my thesis because I was doing the travel with school, I was full-time class, and I was already at the Commission twenty hours a week. I was then hired for the survey staff and then went into the

research staff, and was there for thirty-five-and-a-half years.

Q: The rest is history. What was your thesis? What was your chosen research?

Shockley: Well, again, I didn't complete it—

Q: You didn't complete it or you didn't even begin it?

Shockley: I began the beginning stages. Directly related to working on the Olmsted, I actually wanted to do some sort of project on the historic bridges of Central Park and I didn't get too far beyond formulating the concept. [Laughs] It's really interesting. Back in those days—I should go back to see if they have statistics, but I heard at that time, only about a third of Columbia historic preservation students actually completed and got their degree based on the thesis. It really wasn't totally necessary back then, just if you attended, if you went to Columbia for two full years. The Landmarks Commission was jokingly called "Columbia South" back in those years because again, there weren't too many other programs. Occasionally, people would get hired by the Commission who were art historians out of colleges all across the country, on the East Coast. But again, I had my foot in the door and I was hired as permanent staff.

Q: So that was in 1980. You started with them in 1979 and then there's this Supreme Court [of the United States] decision in '78, which kind of solidifies the power of the LPC. Did you find it an interesting time to be there? Were there shifting attitudes?

Shockley: It very much was. Besides the Commission—let me step back. During the years I worked for the Landmarks Commission, I saw the stages that the Commission went through. Back in those days, for the first several decades of the Commission's existence, it is just amazing how brave they were. A lot of people don't remember that there was a pre-commission for two years from '63 to '65. They had no power under the law. A commission and a tiny, tiny staff was set up and they started doing prep work should they get the power to designate under the law. From what I understand, I became very good friends towards the end of her life, [Regina] Gina Kellerman was the first director of research at the Commission, in the pre-commission days.

They started drawing up draft designation reports. People laugh today when they look at the early ones, because they're sometimes only half a page and they say almost nothing. The Brooklyn Heights report is like a page-and-a-half and it says less than nothing. But they were doing the legwork and the writing and the research so that when it was empowered, then they could really just crank them out as fast as they could.

There were a number of court decisions. There were a number of challenges. It was not tested fully until the Supreme Court decision for the Grand Central [Terminal] case [*Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City*]. But just still, you look back and when the power to designate interiors, the Rockefeller family wanted to demolish Radio City Music Hall and the Commission went through and designated it against all that power.

So there were really, really courageous decisions that the Commission made, and I came in sort of in that sweep. The first big, big thing that I remember that I had no part in was when they

designated the Upper East Side, which was a very large historic district. It had a lot of opposition from shop owners on Madison Avenue. A compromise was worked out to address that. Unfortunately, it later sort of became a bad precedent. And interestingly enough, right after I started as permanent staff, Kent Barwick was the first chair that I served under. To try to address the criticism that the Commission was only addressing Manhattan and not the four outer boroughs, he rearranged the entire staff of the Commission—that instead of function-based, which was survey, research, and preservation for designated properties, he did three geographic-based staffs that were supposed to do those three functions within that area.

The staff that I was assigned to was the Bronx and Upper Manhattan. We secretly called ourselves the "bum team" because it was considered the less desirable territory. It was all of the Upper West Side, and from the east side north of Ninety-Sixth Street. It would have been all of Harlem, Upper Manhattan and the entire Bronx.

With that and still being new to New York, I was traumatized by constantly going to the Bronx and seeing it still burning down. But that was a very interesting way to start getting to know the city by having an assigned territory. And as part of that, Gene [A.] Norman when he came in, he abolished the geographic-based and went back to the functional departments, but we had already done the legwork. What's now the Central Park West/Upper West Side Historic District, which, I think, is the largest district in the city. There's dispute whether Greenwich Village is or whether that is. I personally think the Upper West Side is the largest. We had already done the survey and legwork and suggested boundaries for the historic districts up there. That came out of the geographic-based system.

Q: It’s so interesting that you were focused on that area because there was so much loss in Harlem, especially for LGBT sites.

Shockley: Right.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what you saw at that time or what you worked on.

Shockley: Well, at that point, there was no awareness or even possibility to address the LGBT history at the time. It was shocking enough to me and actually quite traumatic when I would go up to the Bronx to just see acres and acres and acres and acres of smoldering ruins, just nothing. Feral dogs all over the place. But Harlem was so heartbreaking too, because I think statistically, it was something like sixty percent of the land mass of Harlem back in the late ‘70s, early ‘80s, was owned by the City of New York for failure to pay taxes. So you had all these abandoned buildings and drug dens and on and on and on. It was quite some time later that local Harlem-based people were trying desperately to save things that were still left. I always remember that it was particularly sad that a lot of the institutions that owned the historic buildings had absolutely no interest in preservation and were the worst stewards of things that should have been considered icons and saved and treasured.

Q: Why do you think that was? Do you think it was a matter of economic survival?

Shockley: I think so. Clearly a lot of them were owned by churches and church-related

organizations and they probably were struggling with dwindling congregations. I'm sure you've talked to Ann [-Isabel] Friedman and other people that have worked for the [New York Landmarks] Conservancy's Sacred Sites Project [Program], but churches countrywide are notorious for deferred maintenance. When they find out how much it's really going to cost to fix up their roof, mostly they don't want any other governmental layers or anybody telling them what to do with their properties. It was particularly sad in cases where they had been sort of real estate speculators and bought buildings that were not in fact their churches, but they were holding on to the buildings and land for future development. I remember there were some very specific cases that happened, and the buildings were lost because they were opposing designation.

Q: Can you give me an example of a historic site or district that you worked on or looked at that wasn't saved?

Shockley: Luckily, I think virtually every historic district I worked on was ultimately designated, with the exception of—literally still coming out of that survey we did of the entire Upper West Side, I actually walked every single block between Fifty-Ninth Street and 110th Street with a woman who was a Columbia student intern. Not so coincidentally, she was from Baltimore too. So we bonded immediately. [Laughs] We developed a whole new methodology for how to rate buildings for it to make sense where historic boundaries would go. So out of that survey, there were a number of proposed one-block historic districts, I think, typically between Riverside Drive and West End Avenue.

When it came time for the hearing, I don't think they're still around, but there was this organization known as SPONY [Small Property Owners of New York Inc.]. It was the Small Property Owners of New York and they were just really vocally, adamantly against preservation. Their real agenda, as it turned out, was they wanted to have rent control thrown out. But they were using the forum of the Landmarks Commission to basically be against preservation.

So a lot of those districts weren't designated at the time. They probably were all later scooped up when the Commission decades later did a large sort of Riverside Drive, West End Avenue historic district [Riverside-West End Historic District], which I think came in phases. There actually were a few small historic districts that we proposed, since the Bronx was part of our territory, that never ended up getting designated for lack of local interest.

Back in those days, I'm sure you've heard several people talk about it, when the Landmarks Commission was first formed, the designations were not final. They had to have one other layer of approval. In the early days, it was the [New York City] Board of Estimate, which was the [New York] City Council speaker, the borough presidents, and so on, the comptroller, I believe. That was thrown out by the courts as against the one man, one vote principle because the boroughs were not equal in population. So it meant that Staten Island for instance had an outsized vote in what happened. But in all those days of the Board of Estimate, it operated as an old boys' club. So if the borough president of Staten Island was adamantly against preservation––typically, the borough presidents of the Bronx, Staten Island and Queens were just anti-preservation, just as a cardinal rule. The Commission always got bashed for, "Why aren't you designating in those boroughs?" and so on. It just couldn't happen because the borough president

was against it and then the entire Board of Estimate would just vote the way they wanted. So when that was thrown out, it then went to the City Council to have the final say-so. And they have the power to affirm, deny or modify.

So in the later years when I worked there, particularly when that system first started out, the City Council carved out chunks of certain designated historic districts. One or two of the Tribeca Historic Districts was probably the first one up for that. But again, your question is if anything happened that really didn't proceed. I was pretty fortunate enough to at least in terms of historic districts. I can tell you the story of my first designation. [Laughs]

Q: Please do. That sounds great.

Shockley: When Kent Barwick first rearranged the staff in a geographic basis and I was working on the Bronx and Upper Manhattan, we didn't have that big of a staff on that team. I was deemed to be the research historian. So there was this 1920s synagogue, Mount Neboh [Synagogue], on the north side of West Seventy-Ninth Street, pretty near the [American] Museum of Natural History and the synagogue was leaving, and they sold their building to a developer who was going to demolish it and build a high-rise apartment building.

There was enough neighborhood interest. This was way prior to Landmark West! being formed. The Commission heard it and in something that really—it has happened a few times during my years there, but since I was still new on staff, the commissioners with no advance knowledge of even the chair of the Commission, designated it on the spot. And under the law, back under the

Board of Estimate, the Commission had five days to forward the completed designation report to the Board of Estimate and all the mandated city agencies that are in the law.

That basically meant that for my first designation report, I had to learn about synagogue architecture, had to work for the first time as the director of research, work for the first time with the executive director. [Laughs] It was a unique experience, let's say. Knowing that my designation report, my very first one was going to get challenged by the courts, and they ultimately applied for hardship. As Dorothy [Marie] Miner, the eminent famous counsel of the Commission always said, that designation reports have to stand up in court. Every single word and every single thing that is in it, particularly the findings and designation for the basis on which the designation is made.

So it was a lot of pressure for that first time, dealing with all of that and knowing that my first report was going to have to go to the courts. It was going to be one of the bases on which the decision was made. Ultimately, the court made the decision that they were granted a hardship. The fact is, they had already sold the building. There was no way they could get a return on their investment by having it designated and not having the developer proceed. So that was difficult because that was my first report and I lost my building.

Q: So one of the things you said was at this time, there was no viable option for including LGBT history in the designation reports.

Shockley: Well, it's interesting because the concept hadn't even started yet. Don't forget, I

started in ‘79. We can fast forward to when I start getting involved in that.

Q: Well, yes, that’s the early ‘90s, which is ten years later. And that’s where we’re going. But just to contrast, can you sort of set up why it was so difficult or why the concept didn’t exist?

Shockley: Just looking back, back in the late ‘70s, early ‘80s, particularly when AIDS came in ‘81, the gay community nationally and in New York had so much on its plate just trying to get basic civil rights. Then the trauma of all the AIDS years where New York was ground zero, with San Francisco. So there wasn’t even any thought of it. There were obviously people that were interested in gay history, particularly gay individuals. But there was never any leap forward to make the connection between historic preservation and the gay community in New York or nationally.

Q: Then what changed in the early ‘90s when you started thinking about starting to do this?

Shockley: Well, professionally—and it’s not just me. Actually, let me step back, because I’m now remembering one of the class field trips that I did in my two years at Columbia. It must have been the fall of ’79, the National Trust for Historic Preservation conference was in San Francisco. And I had friends from a variety of places. In fact, my first professional annual conference that I went to was the National Trust, wherever it was. Two of those, I was lucky enough through Columbia that they paid us to go. But I continued going because I had a whole group of male friends that it was a good excuse just to meet annually at the conference and go to the conference and socialize. I remember having very distinct conversations, if this was 1979 or

1980 in San Francisco, about, "Should we form sort of a gay caucus of the National Trust?" And that didn't happen for several decades. It ultimately sort of happened.

But the first realization was that historic preservation has always been a gaycentric profession. Even if it isn't a gaycentric profession, there are all sorts of gay connections, whether it's the almost stereotypical thing of gay people moving into abandoned neighborhoods, fixing up the houses. That happens in small towns, big cities, et cetera. But it was a growing sense that not only historic preservation but all of the related professions—archivists, librarians, historians—there were lots and lots and lots of gay men and lesbians in the professions.

Once you realized that you are part of a huge group of people that is in the profession, ultimately you realize, well, you are dealing with everybody else's history, every other minority group's history. Why is nobody considering us as a community? What's important to us as a community, and what as a community we've contributed to American history and culture?

So for whatever reasons, it was sort of delayed until the early '90s. For me, personally, and really what got it going in New York was in '93, there was this organization known as OLGAD, which was the Organization of Lesbian and Gay Architects + Designers. It was mainly sort of a networking group, just a first attempt to have a professional way to meet other people in the design professions and the architectural field. Most of the people were either interior designers or architects. But when we started meeting, we discovered that there were about twelve or fifteen of us that were all historic preservationists.

So we did a panel discussion, which was really just grasping and formulating this whole concept of there is place-based history that deals with our community. The panel was so well-received among the group that—'94 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall [Riots]. So we very naively started out that we were going to write a book of place-based history, with a group of about a dozen people, some of whom were architects who had never done research and writing. It ended up evolving, instead of a book, to a fold-out map, which we literally now say was the first effort in the entire United States to do an LGBT place-based history project. When you folded out this very large map, one half of it was Greenwich Village. When you looked on the other side, half of it was Midtown and half of it was Harlem. And it was meant just as a sampler, really, to show the types of sites that we could do.

Again, it was quite interesting. There were a dozen of us and each of us took on a different topic. Somebody could do architecture. Somebody could do design profession. Somebody did music, somebody did theater. Their task was to come up with sites and then the group would vet what was going to fit on the map. Everything had to be still extant. This wasn't going to be a parking lot tour or something like that. That literally, in our estimation, was the formulation of the concept. It proceeds from there. [Laughter]

Q: It does. Just tell me around this time, how did you connect with OLGAD? I know they started in '91.

Shockley: I didn't remember that it was '91 specifically, but I and other people that I knew at the Commission, I had already known Andrew Dolkart because he worked at the Commission

briefly when I started and then he left to be a consultant and ultimately a professor at Columbia. I really don't remember at this point whether I knew Ken Lustbader prior to that or whether I met him through OLGAD. I honestly don't know how the call went out back in those days, prior to the internet, how I first learned about OLGAD. But basically, that team of us who became the dozen people who formulated the map started with the group from the get-go.

Q: Around that same time, was there an attempt to nominate Stonewall [Inn]? Was that a really early attempt?

Shockley: Yes.

Q: Tell me about that a little bit.

Shockley: That was directly out of us, the mapping project. She disclaims it now, but my memory is that Gale Harris, who I worked with for two decades at the Landmarks Commission and she just retired this past year, she was the lead from our group to approach the National Park Service because again, it was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall. Do you want me to tell the whole process of what happened?

Q: Yes, sure.

Shockley: What was really, really interesting, we got a maybe eight or ten page official response back from the Park Service. Every single time over the decades, this is '93–'94, for the twenty-

fifth anniversary of Stonewall, every time I read it, I read it in a radically different way. Back when we first got it, I thought it was a really nasty, homophobic response. Other times I've read it and it's an extraordinarily bureaucratic response. Then the last few times I've read it, it's really quite oddly personal. The final half of it is so oddly personal that it's very odd that it came out of a federal bureaucracy.

Among the things that they had in it was we made a mistake in directly asking that it be made a National Historic Landmark. The usual process, it's not always the process, but the usual process for the National Park Service, [United States] Department of the Interior is to place something on the state register, then the National Register of Historic Places. Then if it's super worthy, then it can move up to National Historic Landmark.

So that was a very easy bureaucratic opt-out. You've gone the wrong route. Go the other route. But clearly, they were probably shocked and a little discombobulated because nobody else in the history of the United States had ever approached the National Park Service to list a gay history site on the National Register. It had just never been done.

Then it ventured into some dangerous territory. For them, it was still just too early. Supremely, this is paraphrasing it, but in essence they said, "Is a riot really something to celebrate? If you people ever do something positive, then come back and maybe we'll consider that," which discounts the entire black civil rights struggles and so on and so forth. Then they said, "Well, there's no history of literature in the gay community," which was totally untrue. So there were lots and lots of things within the letter.

At the end result, it was impossible that it was going to happen through the National Park Service. The parallel question was, even though the National Register is one hundred percent honorary, you still need owner consent. The estate that owned the Stonewall building had no interest in it in any way, shape or form getting listed on the National Register. So for the two crucial reasons, it just couldn't proceed.

But then what was very interesting was that five years later, it did happen. What ended up happening was that by that point, this would be 1999, which was the thirtieth anniversary of Stonewall, a gay and lesbian employees group at the Department of the Interior had formed. And [President William J. "Bill"] Clinton was still in office and while he was still in office, they thought that the National Register might be more amenable. They looked and found there was a file that had us in it, that we had already done the effort five years prior.

So they contacted Andrew Dolkart and they basically required a sponsor. So the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation became the sponsoring neighborhood group. Andrew, who had years and years and years experience writing National Register nominations, was the lead author. I assisted him, so I'm the co-author. David Carter, who was still working on his definitive book, which was about ten years away from publication, did feed us some of his research. Then it got really, really interesting from there because this was the thirtieth anniversary of Stonewall but the basic criteria of the National Register, it has to be a fifty-year period of significance. To thwart that, you have to prove extraordinary significance. So that was first on the plate.

Then of course, there was still the National Park Service's response the first go-around and there was the owner consent question. But as I said, to get listed on anything, you have to be listed on the appropriate state register first. When the draft was sent to them, they came up with a very, very interesting solution that helped in two regards. They said that the rebellion that happened over six days at Stonewall was not just in the building, it was in Christopher Park across the street and all the surrounding streets. And they literally used—this is not just a story, they literally used Civil War battlefields as their National Register model. When they came up with this brilliant solution to do that, it meant that the park and the streets, which were owned by the City of New York, was fifty percent of the ownership. So you didn't need the consent of the Stonewall owner.

The very lucky thing was they determined since Stonewall was already in the listed Greenwich Village Historic District, we didn't need to discuss the building itself. Which could or couldn't be a problem because as one of the landmarks commissioners later said when the Commission designated it a city landmark, it's not going to win any beauty contests. So we didn't have to dwell on the issues of the looks or architecture of the building. But what we did still have to prove was the exceptional significance. So it's very heavy on tying the gay rights struggle as parallel to civil rights struggles and other struggles that are important to the history of the United States.

So it was listed on the state register. It luckily went under the radar because in '99, there were still [Senator] Jesse [A.] Helms who was in the [United States] Senate. There were some people

in the Senate and the [United States] House [of Representatives] that were notoriously homophobic. But it went way under the radar and was listed and then the following year, it was fast-tracked to become a National Historic Landmark.

So that was the very, very first property in the entire United States for LGBT reasons and it stayed the only property in the United States for another dozen years after that. As we speak, there are only twenty-one in the entire United States with over 93,500 properties on the National Register. Starting back from our OLGAD project to now, we say that there are probably thousands of properties that are listed on the Register that should be reinterpreted because they have gay residents or other LGBT associations with them. And the Register only a few years ago allowed an overlay to be put on preexisting nominations.

Q: Only recently.

Shockley: Yes, just about three years ago.

Q: Oh, wow. Going back a little bit to around ’93, which is when you say you first began starting to put these things in LPC reports, tell me about that specifically.

Shockley: Well, again, it was very much in our minds. Those of us who were part of the LGBT community that were on the staff of the Commission, we were starting work on the OLGAD map. Again, it was sinking in more and more and more that there were a bunch of us at the Commission. Why aren’t we doing anything? I believe the very, very first thing that happened

Commission-wise—Andrew Dolkart hadn't been there for a number of years, but he was the first author of the published guide to New York City landmarks. In his section on Greenwich Village, he was able to put in the Stonewall building and several other LGBT sites in the Village. So the door had opened a crack.

The very first designation report that included in the designation report, Gale Harris who I had mentioned again, had started the Stonewall listing effort in '93, she was assigned to do Lundy's Seafood Palace [Lundy Brothers Restaurant] out in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn. And she discovered in her research that at the end of Mr. [Irving] Lundy's life, I believe it was his chauffeur/valet/lover was absconding funds from the old man. And it only made it in a footnote that you'd really have to search for. But that was a little piece of gay history that was a totally unexpected find.

Hers was the very first report that had anything that was LGBT-related, and again, it was buried in the footnote. You'd really have to read it carefully and know what it was saying. The first report that actually was blatant per se, I was assigned to do the—it's popularly known as the Yiddish Art Theater. It was actually the [Louis N.] Jaffe Art Theater. It's at Second Avenue and Eleventh Street. It's now a multiplex movie theater. It's the sole surviving theater of the Yiddish theater circuit that used to be on Second Avenue. Only because I used to keep clippings files, I discovered that when the front portion of the building, which used to be the offices was turned into apartments, there were three legendary LGBT people who had lived in those apartments. One was the artist, David [M.] Wojnarowicz. The other was the photographer, Peter Hujar and then Jackie Curtis, who was an Andy Warhol Superstar. They had all lived there. So in the text, it

was the first use of the word gay. There were three notable gay residents. The door cracked open a little bit wider.

And then Gale and I together soon after that worked on a ten-building historic district at Irving Place and East Seventeenth Street, just off of Union Square. The corner house is a legendary residence of Elsie de Wolfe, who was the first professional interior decorator in the United States, and her partner of two decades, [Elisabeth] Bessie Marbury, who was one of the world's pioneering theatrical agents, a very, very important woman and huge in Democratic Party circles. They lived in that house together for twenty years and had famous salons, the glitterati of the 1890s would come through.

We got away with that one because we directly quoted the *New York Times*. It obviously wasn't a contemporary quote to when they were living there. They were called "a Victorian lesbian power couple." [Laughs] It was easier in the early days if we were quoting other sources and people. It wasn't just us saying things. From that point on, sometimes the particular cases got a little contentious. By that point, George Chauncey had written his *Gay New York* [*Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*] book. Since that was so widely revered, we could quote out of that a lot.

The Commission never, ever, ever did anything comprehensive or allowed us to do a survey of coming up with sites, but it just so happened that from that point, if I got assigned a project and I could work in history where appropriate, if Gale got assigned, we were the two ones that did it. We did influence some of our research department colleagues, if we were looking over their

shoulder and said, "You know that you should include this." So that's basically how it happened. I believe I'm almost certain that the New York City Landmarks Commission was the first entity in the country that incorporated gay history into its official documentation.

Q: So when you say you're sort of navigating ways to get in there, is that an issue of leadership oversight reviewing? Was it internal within the organization about not really wanting these things or wanting to be really careful about how they went in?

Shockley: I think it was partially caution. We tried to do as much as we could, but we didn't want to push the boundaries since it was new to the New York City Commission. Sometimes there was some pushing back on certain things that we tried to incorporate. But like I said, if it was new to us, we had worked on the OLGAD map that was new nationally, even the concept that we should be talking about these things. There was still the attitude, not just at the Commission, but like, what does that matter? *X* is important because they were a famous author or whatever. Why should we talk about their private lives? You had to negotiate through eventually, well, you're basically whitewashing history. You have in other people's reports that they were married and whatever else. But that takes a lot of massaging and people to get used to that whole concept because it really wasn't being discussed.

Q: Another challenge is how to talk about people's identities retroactively, what words they used to describe themselves and things like that. How did you and Gale navigate that kind of thing? Maybe this is a question for moving forward, early 2000s when it was a little easier to include—

Shockley: Well, it's still a question today. It's really interesting when from those early '90s until today, particularly now that younger people are creating whole new languages, some of which I agree with, some of which I don't understand. Particularly in the various branches of what's generally considered the LGBT community, the language has always changed. The language didn't even exist in most of the nineteenth century. Even if it existed, it wasn't used.

It's really interesting, a couple of nights ago, I just attended a panel in Brooklyn. There's an exhibition right now on basically gay history in Brooklyn. It's the first ever look at that borough. And they were talking about Walt [Walter] Whitman. There was no terminology in Walt Whitman's day. They were crediting him in this panel discussion with an amazing way in his poetry and his life of starting to express the concept that would later evolve, that people could identify, but the basic fact was that he was one of the first people in this country to identify even the concept that there were men who loved other men and were attracted to other men. Through his poetry, he started developing that concept.

In any way, you fast-forward from Walt Whitman through the development of the terminology up to trying to express it in history and make it place-based and whatever. It's a process and an ongoing discussion. But getting back specifically to your point, I've had really interesting discussions with people in state and local preservation agencies and the whole question is, "How can you call them gay?" It was the 1850s or they were married and one thing or another. Gay history is a very interesting category that there are a lot of ways that you have to look at between just the simple facts or what other people might interpret it in one way. But language and terminology is definitely part of that interesting negotiation process.

Q: What would you say your current philosophy for navigating that is?

Shockley: It's not just my personal philosophy. It's really interesting, one of the earliest guidebooks was done by Paula Martinac. She did a guidebook of place-based—her book came out, I think, a year or two after our OLGAD map. She was looking at places nationally. I think it's in the forward to that, she addresses this question head-on, that how can you call so-and-so—to use a really prominent example, [First Lady Anne] Eleanor Roosevelt. How could you possibly call her a lesbian? She was married, she had all these kids, et cetera. And Paula's response was that besides the fact there were good reasons that people had to be closeted, because they'd lose their lives, their jobs, their families. There were thousands of reasons for discrimination. Families destroyed people's correspondence, their photographs. Sometimes there's very, very little written record and archives on certain aspects of people's lives. I don't think her response was meant to be flip at all. Certain people could interpret it as that. But she says that basically because of a thousand reasons, gossip is a research tool for ferreting out gay history. And I think she means gossip in the broadest sense.

One other example is [President] Abraham Lincoln for instance. Going back decades ago, people were starting to hint that there were other aspects of Lincoln's life and sexuality, I believe it's Carl [August] Sandburg, like in the '20s, he said there were hints of lavender and whatever, which is very coded, describing that it wasn't just Mary Todd [Lincoln] and the kids, that there were other aspects of his private life.

Again, getting back to the philosophy, as she and other people pointed out, you have to look at the closest personal relationships, the circle of friends, particularly in a place like New York. Where there are so many "artistic" people. If so-and-so never got married and the only friends they had were other people that were known to be gay and lesbian and whatever else, it's much more than likely that that person was part of that community.

So again, it's based on so many factors that you have to put together. But I'm a little bit less interested in the whole language thing. For instance, again, in the 1890s, turn of the century, if you walked up to Elsie de Wolfe and asked if she was a lesbian, you may not get that answer yes, but she was in a committed wife relationship for twenty years. What else do you call that?

Q: So people could be out without necessarily using the words that we all understand today?

Shockley: Yes, yes.

Q: Another question I wanted to ask you is what is unique to LGBTQ experiences in the built environment, and maybe you can speak a little bit from your time living in the Village, but how does the built environment play a role in the way that people live, make art, advocate for themselves, gather?

Shockley: The interesting thing about the Village in particular and lots of people have tied the exact same concept to—if you ask anybody that knows anything about the Village at all what the first adjective they would describe historically, bohemian or artistic might be two of the first five

responses you'd get. And there's so many historic factors of why that occurred.

Again, at this Brooklyn panel discussion the other night, someone pointed out the fact that many places all across the country that developed as artistic and inevitably then LGBT spaces, they're sometimes off the grid. In Los Angeles, there are several communities that are on hillsides that are off the flat grid.

Greenwich Village, literally, we know is off the grid because it preexisted the overlaid grid of Manhattan that went up to it. Because of that, it's slightly quirky. It's one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. For a variety of reasons, it resisted until Sixth and Seventh Avenue plowed through for the Holland Tunnel. With the subways, it resisted the onslaught of just getting redeveloped and obliterated or whatever. Because of that, with beautiful, quirky streets and old, low brownstones and row houses, and it became sort of economically depressed in the early twentieth century for all of those reasons, the affordability. But it just was a physically desirable place. It just seems ready-made for getting rediscovered and populated with—it developed a bohemian reputation particularly in the teens.

Out of that bohemian reputation, it started little by little getting an LGBT reputation. By the '20s, it really started blooming. Then there were very famous people in the community, sometimes that aren't thought of and I don't know how they were thought of at the time, but Elisabeth Irwin, for instance, who started the Little Red School House, which is now deemed the first progressive school in the United States, she was in the Village and started there. She and her wife lived there nearby the school. I don't know if that quite answered exactly your question—

Q: No, no, that was great because I was asking about how does the built environment especially play a role—

Shockley: Yes, so within that, if you have a desirable neighborhood that a congregation of people are starting to go to and the word spreads, then there were certain buildings per se that started out being known as bohemian hangouts that then were not taken over exactly. They then became more and more known for women and men looking for women and other men. Then they started developing their institutions, obviously in things like theaters that developed, whether it was in that early phase or particularly when the whole concept of what is now known as Off-Broadway theater and Off-Off-Broadway theater was largely out of the gay community, in the Village and the East Village in the late '50s. I see that as a direct historic progression from the other period and just from Greenwich Village getting known.

George Chauncey has this wonderful quote that basically sums up that what New York is to the national imagination, as a different, weird place that's not Paducah or whatever, that the Village came within New York's imagination, that it was an other, a different place, and where other types of things could happen. It was just outside the constraints of what was considered a heterosexual, normal way of living. It was clearly outside the constraints.

It's really interesting to look at when New York really started booming in the mid-nineteenth century, that all the moral reformers and the church leaders and whatever were petrified because New York became a place that you were not being constrained by your family. You were not

being constrained by the church. That really petrified them. They started doing all sorts of measures to put constraints on people that moved here and the way they were going to behave and be allowed to behave. So that constantly impacted on the burgeoning gay community. There's evidence that it was starting to develop as early as the 1840s in New York.

Q: To touch on your personal story, you never wanted to move to New York and you're still in New York.

Shockley: [Laughs] That's a very long, difficult—

Q: Perhaps a snapshot. Why stay in New York? How did it become your home?

Shockley: Well, it basically became my home because I started working at the Landmarks Commission. That ended up being both good and bad. I loved the research that I did for the thirty-five years I was there. I had just the most incredible colleagues, virtually all of whom are still friends. It was a very difficult place to work. The Commission, probably since '65, has been notorious for having some very difficult personalities, particularly on the managerial and administrative side. There are so many difficulties because it's such a political and such a real estate-based thing that the Commission does. Many, many people have pointed out that the Commission is probably one of the smallest agencies in the city but has an outsized impact on the city but is continually underfunded and undervalued.

All of those pressures, which I understand that are on the chair of the Commission and the

commissioners and the administrative staff and whatever else, in sometimes very nasty ways, gets translated into how the staff of the Commission is treated. I saw that for the thirty-five years I was there. In my own personal story, I didn't get a raise in the last twenty-five years I was there. To live in an expensive city where you're basically saving the city and you're not getting paid and valued, that was very, very difficult. It really makes an enormous mental impact on the people who work in an agency like that.

So I didn't value any of that but the fact is, again, I liked my job. I thought I was good at it. I thought I was making a contribution. I learned so much in that job, how to do decent research. You never knew what you were going to work on. I worked on everything from eighteenth century properties to mid-twentieth century properties, on historic districts, lots and lots and lots of cultural social history. So I will never, ever, ever not value that, working at the Commission. Again, to answer your question, that's why I ended up staying in New York. The flip side of that question is when I had a little bit of money, there is no place in this country that has the cultural side of New York. I really got hooked into that.

Q: In terms of—

Shockley: Theater, music, opera, everything. I'm notorious, not every night of the week but I made a bargain with myself when I went through Columbia, I said I didn't want to come here, I really don't want to be here. But if I am going to be here, I'm going to really fully participate in the best that the city has. So I have. I've really treasured that, and I would miss it.

Q: Right. What neighborhood are you living in these days?

Shockley: I live on Eighth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. It's as I call it, the juncture of Chelsea, the West Village and the Meatpacking District, which I wrote the historic district report for.

Q: You really found a place geographically in the city that's kind of your own too. You think it's because of the aesthetics, because of the culture, because of the community?

Shockley: It's all the above. Again, it still goes back to—I mean, I'm sure Brooklyn Heights, if I could afford to live in Brooklyn Heights, it would be a similar feeling. But I was raised in a city that was all red brick row houses and the Village is that for me. Now that I've been working with an LGBT history project, you can't go half a block without stumbling into history in the Village in particular. As people used to say about the busman's holiday concept, even when I was working at the Commission, you almost have to put blinders on not to see every other building that you worked on for a designation report or something that's a preservation tragedy or somebody's trashed a building inappropriately. It's actually sort of fun just walking around and constantly passing all these iconic LGBT history spots.

Q: How does it feel to know you had a hand in the city you're living in, looking the way it does right now?

Shockley: I had a little small part in it and I'm proud of that. It's interesting, right around the time I retired, they were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Commission. I guess it was

2015, right at the time I retired. It was so weird to think that I had been there thirty-five out of fifty years of the existence of the Commission. I couldn't even comprehend that. So that was a thought. [Laughter]

Q: Well, jumping back in a little bit, let's look at the twenty-teens. I know there was this 2011 conference that you guys did in Buffalo, New York. Was that one of the first big panel presentations you had done for preservation generally?

Shockley: I believe it was the first big one that all of us—that became what ended up being our current project was. I had individually spoken at one or two things, and I was starting to talk about—I think there were one or two times that I talked about the OLGAD map project and about that we were starting to incorporate LGBT history in the Commission's reports. But I actually formulated the concept of that panel in 2011. Then it was accepted, and Ken Lustbader and Andrew Dolkart participated with me in it. Paula Martinac, who I had mentioned earlier, who had written one of the early guidebooks, she originally was supposed to participate and I believe for health reasons, just a few weeks before the panel went on in Buffalo, she cancelled.

So I really had a hard time finding somebody. Luckily, I found a lesbian pioneer activist who lived in Buffalo and had written a book on lesbian bars in Buffalo in the working-class circles. Besides the fact she had written this acclaimed book and was a real local pioneer, it was fascinating within the concept: we again were spreading the gospel that there is this concept of LGBT place-based history. I actually did a lot of legwork and found at that point in 2011, there were four cities in the United States that had designated one landmark apiece. It was Los

Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, DC and Chicago.

So New York was way behind the curve. We hadn't done anything for specific designations. And there were also one or two states that had started on a statewide basis placing historic markers in front of buildings. Pennsylvania was doing that and Ohio did it in one case.

But Madeline Davis, who was the author in Buffalo, what she said was very tragic but not atypical, which gives a whole discussion that we can have a second about—virtually every single bar that she had documented in her book, every single bar in Buffalo that was a working-class lesbian bar had been torn down. You could not go to see one site that was in her book. I think she had, I don't know, she had fifteen or twenty.

What is extraordinarily lucky about New York is the fact that it had a fairly early Commission in '65 and because for all intents and purposes, the Village was the first recognizable gay neighborhood, through the designation of the large Greenwich Village Historic District and then particularly in more recent decades, extensions of that district. Greenwich Village has, I think, has six historic districts, and a lot of gay history has been—I wouldn't say accidentally preserved, but the buildings have been preserved strictly through historic district designation. Even though they are not recognized at all for the LGBT history, other than at the very end before I retired.

I think the second Village extension, Caffe Cino was in and I made sure that the staff people working on that recognized it in the report. And then the last big extension when I was there was

the South Village, which went from Washington Square down to Houston Street. Because the cultural history was just off the rails, we convinced the administration of the Commission to allow everybody working on the report to take a different aspect, to write different essays: theater history, the coffee bar culture, all that kind of stuff.

So I got to write the LGBT essay for that, which is far and away the most specific and the most––even though it got edited and reduced down from what I wrote, that really was the most blatant thing the Commission had ever done. But it was so necessary for that neighborhood and to describe that.

Q: From a subtle little footnote to a dedicated essay in thirty-five years.

Shockley: [Laughs] Basically.

Q: Essentially no time at all. [Laughs]

Shockley: But that first footnote was in like '93. So it was only from '93 to 2015.

Q: That's fair. [Laughs] So from this presentation in 2011, you said the [New York City] LGBT Sites Project kind of began. Had you guys been thinking about it beforehand, or did conversations really start then?

Shockley: Because we became very good friends in the OLGAD Project and we were constantly

running into each other and we were all—we continued in varying degrees. We were all involved in preservation. Gale was still at the Commission, Gale Harris. Andrew Dolkart was a professor and then the head of the [Historic] Preservation Program at Columbia. Ken Lustbader did a whole slew of different jobs frequently in the not-for-profit sector, the [J.M.] Kaplan Fund. He was Sacred Sites administrator for the Conservancy and then after 9/11 [September 11], he was part of this consortium trying to keep preservation in the agenda for redevelopment of Lower Manhattan.

So we talked for years about what can we do to advance this concept. The panel in Buffalo was a key part of that because it was a public thing. It was putting it on the national agenda. And I just have to do a footnote for that. What was really gratifying about that panel discussion in particular was there was a young woman who was the head of the preservation organization for Louisville, Kentucky. She was so inspired by our presentation that she went back and Louisville designated the oldest gay bar in Louisville, Kentucky. They became the fifth city to do a local designation, again, way before New York was able to do it—not able to do it, did do it.

So we still continued to ask, "What can we do, what are we going to do?" It just didn't happen yet. But go to 2015, right around the time I was retiring, we finally had a meeting. We actually had a meeting with Jonathan Ned Katz, who wrote probably the first gay history. It was called *Gay American History Almanac* [*Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New History]* back in the '70s, an incredibly pioneering book. That was opening the door that there was even a concept of gay history by finding actual documents that were buried in archives.

We had a meeting in his apartment, and absolutely, purely, by coincidence, it was obviously meant to happen—the New York State Historic Preservation Office contacted Andrew Dolkart and said, "Did you know that there's this new funding source at the National Park Service called the Underrepresented Communities Fund [Grants]?" And Andrew gives the application to Ken and me. He then swans off to England for vacation. Ken and I look at the application. It's due in five days. Ken looks at me and says, "I hate to tell you this, but I can't write a word," which is not true.

So I basically into the wee hours of one night, I wrote the grant application, which was the first one I had ever done in my entire life. I gave the draft to Ken, who had worked for all these not-for-profits, and he brilliantly knew every single buzzword and every way to finesse what grant-giving people would be looking for. So we sent it off to the State Preservation Office because if we would ever get a grant, it had to be administered through the State Preservation Office.

They loved what we had written. Basically what we had written was that we were going to do a survey and map project, that there was such a thing as LGBT place-based history. And if it hadn't been for the meeting that we'd had at Jonathan Katz' apartment, he had this woman who had been doing a lot of place-based history in San Francisco and she showed us this English mapping program called Historypin that none of us had used, had no knowledge of, but we just stuck that in the application. We said, "We're going to use Historypin." So the state loved it. They finessed it, put in some of their stuff and they sent it off.

And the craziest thing happened, we waited months and months and months. In the meantime,

[Sarah] Sally Jewell who is the Secretary of the Interior under [President Barack H.] Obama came and announced an LGBT Heritage Initiative in front of the Stonewall in New York. I chatted with her. It just was purely accidental timing that that happened. Basically, that was a continuation of they had identified every other minority community and had an initiative for them: Native American, women, Hispanics, Pacific Asian Islanders. So LGBT, its time had come. Again, it just overlapped with our submitting our application for this project.

We then got an email from San Francisco, from the woman we had met who told us about Historypin. She was actually working on a context statement for LGBT history for the city of San Francisco. They were actively working on it. And her partner, I had been over the telephone a thesis advisor because she was working on lesbian-based sites in San Francisco. We had not met yet. They said, "Did you get the press release from the Department of the Interior?" We said, "What are you talking about?" We got the grant! We still to this day have never gotten official notification from the National Park Service. We had to hear about it from somebody in San Francisco.

So we got a $25,000 grant, which was the first ever—well, I can't say, I always call it the first ever but what was interesting, when you looked at the list of who got grants that year, I honestly forget whether it was fifteen grants all around the United States, there was one other LGBT one that was a much smaller dollar figure than ours and it was for the state of Kentucky. I immediately called up the woman from Louisville and I said, "By any chance, is that you?" And she said, "Of course it's me, and it's all because of you," meaning our set of people.

What was very interesting and amazingly gratifying was that thr following year, the National Trust conference was in Washington, DC. Again, in a total accident, they were having a reception that I really hadn't planned on going to but I was dropping off a friend in a rental car. At the exact moment that I stopped to drop them off, a cab pulled up and a friend of mine who's a lawyer at the National Trust [Tom Mayes] was getting out of the cab. So I shouted out. He twisted my arm to come into the reception. And he ended up introducing me to the woman who was the head of the grants division of the National Trust. And she said, "I can't believe this. Do you know how much we love your project?" They had gotten forty-three grant applications that year and they rated our project number one. So that was pretty nice to find out. If I had not run into her, not only would I have not known that but she also said, "Do you know, by the way, that if [United States] Congress refunds the program, then you can apply a second year?"

So we applied the second year and got another grant. But just to clarify, the Underrepresented Communities funding was specifically set up to address diversity on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Trust, for a number of years, had started recognizing that federally recognized and locally recognized landmarks and historic districts across the United States don't represent the great diversity of the population of the United States. So that was a very concrete way to try to address it. That's when the National Register started accepting cultural overlays put on previously listed properties.

Because we accepted two federal grants, under those two grants, we're responsible for coming up with seven National Register nominations, which has been an extraordinarily difficult process and really quite eye-opening in terms of how difficult it is to get any minority properties listed on

the National Register.

Q: Do you want to say more about that?

Shockley: It's basically a number of things. I tried to create a panel to discuss that exact concept at the Society of Architectural Historians conference coming up in April. The panel's not happening on that topic, but I think it still needs to be discussed. Specifically from after we started the project and the types of buildings that are listed on our website, which we now have approximately one hundred seventy up, the LGBT community probably is not dissimilar from most minority communities that the places that are important are not—as I would say, the architecture is not of the one percent. They're very vernacular buildings. They're sometimes quite ugly buildings. They are altered. They may have just been for a few years because in the case of the gay community, they would be evicted—say the most important organizations, they might be evicted or not welcomed there and have to move every few years.

In particular, what we're finding, since the National Register still needs owner consent, we've had properties all across the city, in the various boroughs, that we have desperately wanted to get on the Register. Our project has to recognize that within the LGBT community, there are so many facets: the five boroughs, the chronology, different racial groups and ethnic groups within it, different gender identifications within that.

There's still in certain parts, even in New York City, negative perceptions of anything gay-related. To give one small example, there's a house in Flushing that was the family that started

PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays], which is Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, which blossomed into a national organization, was the first ever organization in the world that was a support group for the families. Not the LGBT people themselves, but how the families could accept this. Nobody would question it, in terms of significance, that this should go on the National Register and whatever else. We vetted and vetted and vetted the owners and at the end of the day, they didn't want to be known as the gay house in Queens. This happened to a property in Harlem. We're finding it a lot. So that's very difficult.

The significance of the architectural alterations is difficult for minority communities. The State of New York requires that there's architectural integrity and interior integrity, which is virtually insurmountable to—number one, these interiors weren't documented in the period of significance. You'd be really lucky if you could find a snapshot of a meeting happening in 1967 inside this building. And then you need access today to attest that it's still the same as it looked in '67. And then there's the fifty-year threshold, that it has to be fifty years after the period of significance.

It is really almost insurmountable finding properties that can pass all that. So that's been an eye-opening experience getting seven properties listed. Now that said, we're working on our last two drafts. We already have five. As I've said much earlier, there are still only twenty-one properties out of the 93,500 on the Register that are officially listed for LGBT. And with the seven that we're doing as the project and then Stonewall, eight out of twenty-one are just in New York. So that's pretty amazing.

Q: In 2015, right around the same time you guys started, I'm not sure whether it was before or after Stonewall got landmarked by the LPC. Tell me about that.

Shockley: The interesting thing is that I'm not just patting myself on the back, but I literally was the first person publicly that was demanding that Stonewall had to be designated an individual landmark. I was invited by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation for the fortieth anniversary of Stonewall, which would have been 2009. In the course of again, basically sort of talking again about there is this concept of LGBT place-based history, I said, Stonewall really has to be made an individual landmark.

Number one, I found it personally and professionally embarrassing that five other cities had designated—I guessed that's a bit before because Louisville hadn't done it yet, but there were other jurisdictions that were designating LGBT landmarks. The Commission had never expressed any interest in that, in any way, shape or form despite the fact that the staff was incorporating this history in reports. But it wasn't the primary reason for those designations. It was not a planned or concerted effort. It was almost accidental, that it was projects as assigned, that if it was appropriate, we'd work in that history.

It was becoming more and more a concern to me because with the types of alterations that people usually request in the Village in particular but elsewhere, the Village was starting to be a place where all the older businesses were leaving: the bookstores, the antique stores, the coffee shops. High-end women's clothing stores were coming in all along Bleecker Street and Fourth Street. The example, not to pick on him in particular but he had something like seven stores in the

Village at that point, if Marc Jacobs wanted—if he bought the building or leased the building, he wasn't going to want these two little windows that were still there from the time of Stonewall in 1969. He was going to want an all-plate glass storefront to display the goods.

Even from people that should have known better at the time, they were saying, "Oh, that's ridiculous. Nothing's going to happen with Stonewall." I kept saying, I hate to tell you, the Greenwich Village Historic District report was written—it was designated in April of '69, which was several months before Stonewall. The designation report describes them as two stables buildings that were combined. There's no architectural significance, no cultural significance at all. If that was assigned to a brand-new staff person who had just moved to New York or whatever and they had no idea that it had any significance, some very bad things could happen to that building. And even though, as the commissioner said, it's not going to win a beauty contest, it's virtually intact to the period of 1969 specifically. So there's no reason—there are issues with the façade.

What was interesting also at that point, the director of research who was Mary Beth Betts at the time, the Commission was literally starting to get criticized from all over the city for being so rigid in its criteria for designation. Why weren't we doing so-called cultural landmarks and addressing these things. What was really, really, really phenomenal and quite interesting, there were about fifteen of us roughly on the research staff. She assigned each of us to come up with a list, as many categories as you wanted on your list, of if it was up to you, what would the Commission address that it's not currently addressing? This could be anything, categories of buildings, concepts, like the Commission has done very little in industrial buildings in

architecture, addressing the economic and manufacturing history of New York. They could be categories of types of people, ethnic groups, one thing or another.

Every single person came up with their list. We had an MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] graduate who was brilliant in statistics or whatever. She collated the data and it was up to her and she very cleverly, if it basically was roughly the same concept, they were grouped together. Then we got a list for how many people—it was a list numerically. It went from the most amount of people put this on the form.

So we had a staff meeting and it was basically, “Well, how do we deal with this?” Everybody looked around and said, “It’s a no brainer. We’ll take the top three.” So the top three were fascinating. It was women, African-American and LGBT.

So we set up internal staff committees and Gale Harris as previously mentioned and myself and two straight colleagues joined the LGBT committee. We actually were first up to the gate because—and it’s really pretty amazing that we were allowed to do this.

We proposed for Pride Month in June, this would have been 2012, I believe was the first one that we did, we were allowed to do an official slide show on the City’s website for the Landmarks Commission. And what we did was a reinterpretation of already-designated landmarks and why they were important to LGBT history, such things as the Angel of the Waters, Bethesda [Terrace and] Fountain in Central Park, which was done by a lesbian sculptor in the mid-nineteenth century. We had Stonewall on there and other buildings around the city. We did that for three

years in a row, each June prior to my retiring. Then I believe it was kept for at least two years after that in sort of a new format.

But getting back to Stonewall, we now had this official committee. Besides coming up with a slide show, we came up with a set of recommendations and we had a meeting with the chair of the Commission, and the administrative staff of the Commission. Stonewall was at the top of the list. As I realized when I publicly spoke in 2009 about it, if the Landmarks Commission and the city was ever going to do an individual landmark, it would have to be Stonewall first. There was just no other possibility. It just had to be the first. Unfortunately, they were one thousand percent resistant to it. They said, "No, we're not doing this. It's already in the Greenwich Village Historic District. We don't do individual landmarks after you've done it."

My personal argument and then our official committee's argument was if it is not individually designated, it's never going to be protected. It was already well-known by that point. People may dispute it. The way the Commission's regulations developed over the years, that there was more stringent regulation on individual landmarks than there were on historic district buildings. Particularly again, this was only in the designation report as altered stables buildings with no significance whatsoever. So in the worst possible scenario, as what's happening in the Village right now with vernacular buildings, warehouses, garages and so on, it's almost considered as of right you can demolish them.

I retired at the beginning of 2015. Then for reasons still not crystal clear to me, the chair and the commission changed their minds. I think the two things that were coming up was it was well-

known that a Supreme Court decision was going to come out on legalizing gay marriage. It seemed likely that the Supreme Court was going to vote in that favor. I think the Commission wanted to jump on the bandwagon and get some good publicity that way. Also, as I said, there was a lot of criticism coming in from the Greenwich Village community about the resistance, which was bordered on homophobia of the Commission to designate anything that was LGBT-related. So what was quite interesting and totally unexpected at the moment of designation, the chair of the Commission actually acknowledged me as being a significant player in getting to that point.

Q: Where were you when you heard the news? Had you been given a heads up that this was going to happen?

Shockley: I didn't know it was going to happen, but I was sitting in the audience when they designated it. So I was hoping it was going to happen.

Q: What did you do right afterwards if you remember?

Shockley: I don't remember what I did, but I probably went out and celebrated with some of the friends who were in the audience.

Q: Well, I do remember the Supreme Court ruling and the designation were back to back.

Shockley: Yes, absolutely.

Q: There were gatherings at Stonewall, sort of. It's just known that that's the place that you go.

Shockley: Yes, it's become the iconic, symbolic—whether it's a moment of tragedy or a moment of celebration or a moment of protest.

Q: I think that speaks volumes about the importance of preserving a place, that it can matter that much to a community.

Shockley: Absolutely, absolutely. I can't think of any other physical location in this city that has taken on that importance.

Q: When I do these interviews, I try to think about people fifty to one hundred years from now listening to this. Can you describe what a gathering, a spontaneous gathering outside of Stonewall is like? Can you think of one in particular that you could describe?

Shockley: Fifty years from now?

Q: No, just people may not still gather at Stonewall in unannounced ways. That experience may not be replicated. People may not know what that is, which is why I ask, can you describe it?

Shockley: Oh, no, no, it's just shocking how known Stonewall is. One of the things that our

project has ended up doing—and this again, we haven't fully discussed what the project is, but it's the New York City LGBT Historic Sites Project, again founded in 2015 from one National Park Service grant parlayed into a second one, and getting other foundation support. But we're giving lots and lots and lots of walking tours, some as thanks for getting money either from commercial or foundation support, and inevitably, they want a walking tour for free as a thank you. This being the year of Stonewall 50, we're giving lots of them for related groups for various reasons.

There is never a time that we're giving the tour, there are scores of people that are taking Uber or something that just have the driver stop. They'll hop out, snap a photograph of Stonewall and then go on. We've had some of the most amazing encounters with foreign tourists, husband and wife with little tiny kids that have brought them there to show them an aspect of international history. It's just amazing the amount of people that stop by the Stonewall in all sorts of ways.

Ken and I worked on—the National Park Service basically wanted a sort of map/brochure. There is one ranger in uniform, because it's now a national monument, that is there in the warm weather months. It's going to be years before the Park Service has the capacity to do their own literature. Under the current administration, it's not going to happen now.

So the National Parks Conservation Association, which is a not-for-profit advocacy group for the National Park Service, they're the organization that basically got Stonewall declared a national monument when Obama was still president. They hired our project to develop a map brochure that's a sampling of LGBT sites that anybody can, within forty-five minutes to an hour, make a

circle around Stonewall and find out something about the context and the history of LGBT life in Greenwich Village.

That's basically the tour these days that we most often give. So we're frequently standing in Christopher Park in front of Stonewall for anywhere between fifteen minutes to a half an hour. You really see that focus as an icon that Stonewall is. Particularly this year, it's going to be insane because it's Stonewall 50 and everybody is going to be coming to New York. It's a World Pride city.

But as part of the map, we had to sort of write a whole sidebar panel on the significance of Stonewall today. After the Pulse [nightclub] shootings, for instance, down in Orlando, a crowd just spontaneously gathered as a tribute in the morning. We're tracing back through the project that literally as far back as just a couple months after Stonewall, that it became a natural magnet as a place to protest police brutality, what occurred at Stonewall. Less than a year after Stonewall, there was another police raid at a bar that resulted in the near death of a young man, jumping out of the window at the police station that they were taken to. Way pre-cell phone, it got immediately five hundred people that came to Stonewall and marched from there over to the police station and then to Saint Vincent's [Catholic Medical Center] Hospital. So it immediately gravitated.

Then exactly a year after Stonewall to the day, the first Pride March was scheduled and it started at Stonewall and they marched up Sixth Avenue to Central Park. It immediately became a gathering point and has just stayed. Again, in a weird sort of way, you pick any aspect of—I

mean, Obama famously said it when he mentioned gay rights for the first time. He said from Selma to Seneca Falls to Stonewall. There are iconic spots historically and whatever. You go to Philadelphia and Independence Hall is, for all intents and purposes, the shrine to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution [of the United States of America]. That is what Stonewall is for New York and nationally.

Q: Were you present when people gathered after the Pulse shooting?

Shockley: I was not. I'm not sure I was in New York on that day.

Q: I'm curious about what draws people to gather in front of Stonewall, what it feels like to be there, what you gain from being in that space. Do you have a memory personally of being there among people who were also drawn to that place?

Shockley: I don't have any intense memories on being on the inside, in that aspect. But I think for the gay community, the reason that people are so drawn particularly to the outside or it's a combination of just seeing the shrine and experiencing it, we have to clarify to people, which they're probably not happy to hear, that there's not one square inch on the inside that actually is the same as it was in '69 for a variety of reasons.

The bar closed right after the six days of the rebellion and the police had trashed the interior. It just immediately closed and then reopened as a whole series of a Chinese restaurant, a bagel shop, other things, totally unrelated. People get fooled that just because there's a bar in half of

the building that's called Stonewall, that it's the same thing as it was in '69.

But it clearly, clearly, clearly is a way for people to go there, particularly now that it's a national monument. It's the first and only LGBT-related national monument, which is the highest possible federal recognition. The only way I can describe it is going way back, virtually every other minority community in the world is raised by people in that community, unless you're adopted, for instance. But most African-American children are raised within an African-American family, other ethnic groups and so on. LGBT people are by and large the only group that's raised by other types of people. So you have to find your community in other ways outside the family. Sometimes that's easy for people, sometimes it's difficult, sometimes it's impossible.

So as we've come to find out through our project, discovering that there's a history that you have, that you don't even know about, that we're trying to push in our project that goes way back. I mean, way back. There has always been this myth that gay people didn't exist in New York prior to Stonewall or that the whole concept of gay rights started at Stonewall. It's very difficult to get that misperception and that mis-history out of the way. Even if people believe that's what the reality is, they're drawn to it because it is part of themselves and part of their community and part of their history.

Q: Thank you for that. Just to kind of wind things down, I know that you authored some things in 2016, 2017, 2018, which kind of draw this history together. Can you tell me about the process of being asked to do those things and why you thought it mattered?

Shockley: Probably the first one you're referring to is the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative. As I said a while earlier, when we were still waiting to hear about whether we were getting our first grant from the National Park Service, Sally Jewell came to New York, to the Stonewall, to officially announce that the Park Service was launching an LGBTQ Heritage Initiative. And I chit-chatted with her. I was not chastising her. But somebody—she gave her remarks and there was a reporter, it may have been Andy Humm, who writes for *Gay City News*, raised his hand. She took questions and he said, "Well, typically in an initiative like this, how many properties do you come up with?" She really shouldn't have answered that question. She said something like, "Well, in a typical study, we might come up with a dozen." After the whole ceremony was over, I saw that she was standing there by herself. Her handlers had sort of stepped away. I said, "It's so nice to meet you, I'm blah, blah, blah. I worked on the Stonewall nomination." And I said, "Please, this is not a criticism, but there are probably thousands of properties already on the National Register that need to be looked at for their LGBT connections."

So we found out from that thing that they had announced that there was a scholars panel that was going to the launch of this thing. I have connections in Washington. I have connections here. I have connections in Albany. Even searching for when is this happening, who is invited, why were they invited, it was almost impossible to find out anything about it. We were shocked. What became our project, we had in '99 listed the Stonewall, which I think when they launched the initiative in 2015 or so, there were only two properties on the National Register. We had been the first. Why weren't we invited?

So from that shock that we weren't invited and finding no information about who these people

were, we later met somebody and there was in the room, there was only one historic preservationist. They were all academics. By reaching out and trying to get information, we ended up connecting with this woman, Megan Springate, who works for the National Park Service and became the editor of this whole study. She then invited us to do the New York chapter, which was absolutely necessary. So I ended up writing the chapter for that.

It was considered so successful that—I actually was purely by coincidence again—I happened to be in Washington the day before the launch of it. They were having an official ceremony at the Department of the Interior with Sally Jewell. There was a rooftop reception overlooking the [National] Mall. So I just got my hotel, stayed one more night, and went to that event, which was just incredibly moving. I'm so, so happy that I went to that. They only printed one copy of it. I don't think it was quite a foot high, but it was enormous. I think there were thirty-two or thirty-three chapters. It's now literally in the process of being published in three volumes by a university press. It hasn't been released yet.

Then one of the other documents, since our grants from the National Park Service were administered by the state, somehow unbeknownst to us, they stuck in the requirement that we had to produce a context statement for the State of New York out of our project. That was a very, very, very interesting process to negotiate with them, because we explained to them the entire gamut of gay history has never been written for New York City. It's a very, very, very big topic. What we could provide was a place-based narrative based on all the sites that we had already researched and identified.

So that's basically the way we approached it. It ended up being basically chronological and thematic, which worked in a very good way. We had enough examples per topic of that. It's in no way, shape or form the exhaustive history, either of the sites or of those topics. But I think it's still a good framework.

Again, what they wanted, New York City is one thing but there's the entire state of New York. There are gay communities in other places in New York and they at least wanted a framework and a conceptual framework for the State Preservation Office, how they would address properties in the rest of the state. So apparently based on our doing—it's not clear to me whether it's solely because we did the context statement for them and the existence of our project, last fall, we got a state preservation award from the State of New York.

Q: So what is next for the project?

Shockley: [Laughs] Next for the project is getting through Stonewall 50 with all of our presentations and tours and there's not a week that goes by that somebody is not contacting us, to interview us, to collaborate with us, that wants a tour, that wants a lecture and so on. We also got a grant from the City Council for this year that we had not actually directly applied for, which is a wonderful but daunting adjunct to our project, which is to give classroom presentations as a pilot program, to introduce LGBT history into the five boroughs, the public school system.

So we're about halfway through that process. But that's been very interesting and quite challenging, frankly. Luckily, we have bonded with a consultant who is a professional teacher.

So she's at all of the lectures and then one of us in the project is her adjunct going forward. So that's taking up a lot of time.

Our goal for Stonewall 50, which is very ambitious—again, we have maybe one hundred seventy sites listed. We're hoping to complete two hundred by the time the end of June rolls around. And then, proceeding from there, it's just more fundraising, more spreading the word of the project. We have at least three hundred fifty sites left in our database, which between the research, the writing, the editing, the vetting, gathering, archival images and everything for our website, it takes a lot of time.

We have just started venturing into advocating for specific preservation of these sites. A lot of the sites are not protected in historic districts. We're undoubtedly very soon going to lose a really crucially iconic site. It's a building at the northeast corner of Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. In the '60s, it was known as Alt-U or Alternate U. It was a free countercultural school that was the birthplace of the first gay rights organization a month after Stonewall. It was the Gay Liberation Front. And coincidentally to our project, we also found out that there were a lot of dance studios in it. It was Merce [Mercier Philip] Cunningham's first dance studio before he moved to Westbeth.

For those two reasons, it's quite iconic. Unfortunately, a developer just bought the building. It's going to demolish it, which is very sad in the year of Stonewall 50. Our LGBT committee at the Landmarks Commission tried back in 2015 to get the Commission to designate it and there was no interest at all.

Q: Would you like to reflect at all on how the world has changed between Stonewall 50 and Stonewall 25?

Shockley: [Laughs] It's very, very, very, very amazing. Besides the fact that all across the country—I'm finding new projects all across the country that are dealing with—in fact, this past weekend, I was visiting a friend in Philadelphia and he showed me there's now a Facebook mapping project for site-based history in Philadelphia. And I just read the introduction in it; it says it came out of being inspired by the Park Service's LGBTQ Heritage Initiative.

So it's really wonderful to see all these branching history projects and preservation projects all across the country. Obviously twenty-five years ago, nobody believed that in their lifetime gay marriage was going to exist. Nobody would have believed the horror of all the things that people are trying to roll back, all the advances that the LGBT community has had that's going on in our country right now. But who would have ever conceived as per yesterday that a lesbian would be elected mayor of Chicago, an African-American lesbian?

It's amazing on every level. The advances have happened, but the teaching of you can't take it for granted, you always have to fight for your rights and your history and your culture and your place as an American. The most directly related, as I just expressed, is for somebody who's been doing this for twenty-five years, as a place-based, just getting the concept out there, it's just amazingly wonderful that it's happening nationally.

Just a few days from now, on Saturday, Andrew Dolkart who is one of the project co-directors, who's still at Columbia, he's having an all-day seminar on LGBT preservation issues. One panel that I'm moderating is on house museums. That's still in a transitional phase. There are very few house museums in the United States that interpret properly the history of their own creators or inhabitants. Then there's a second one that's on national issues in preservation and then there's an international panel. So I'm really looking forward to that. One of the panelists that's going to be in my session for house museums, she's working on a statewide initiative for LGBTQ history in the state of Maryland.

In the aftermath of the Heritage Initiative of the National Park Service, the word's gone out that state by state or municipalities are being required to come up with context statements or ways to approach this and recognize this history. I could not have conceived of any of that back in 1999, 1993 when we started.

Q: One last question. Do you have a plan for preserving your records, your research, or even the records related to this project specifically?

Shockley: That's an excellent question. I'll have to discuss that with my colleagues. The one thing that we have discussed and we have not done, it turns out that Ken Lustbader and I both have some documentation of the OLGAD mapping project from '93. I think that would be quite valuable to save since we think we were the first. I would love NYPAP [New York Preservation Archive Project] to come up with some advice on that.

Q: Yes, we at least like planting the seed in most cases.

Shockley: Actually, we did in fact have a fledging discussion with the brand-new archivist at the LGBTQ Center [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center] in Greenwich Village, which probably would be a good place for that to go. Thank you for reminding me that we need to follow up on that.

Q: Thank you for thinking about it. Is there anything else that you would like me to ask you about any topic that we missed? I know there's things we must have missed. But anything you'd like particularly to put on the record here today.

Shockley: Do you want to turn it off for a second?

Q: Sure.

[BREAK]

Q: So we talked about this off the record but the recorder's now back on. Tell me what is the future of preserving LGBT sites, and what kind of advice do you have for people who care about this and are trying to get started in it now?

Shockley: I guess the base starting out—and I'll address New York and then sort of broader than that. One of the biggest benefits of what our project is doing is providing a context for sites.

Because when I was at the Commission for thirty-five years, at the end, after I had explained that we have this little LGBT history committee that was trying to get some designations and raise the issue internally. The Commission—and for legitimate reasons, we would get the response back, "Well, how do we know how to evaluate this? Where does this fit in in the entire history of the gay community in New York? If it's an organizational building, did they meet elsewhere? Is this their most important? Is this their first?" Without having any sort of context, it's very, very difficult to place it.

So in the broader issue, if other people in other cities or communities or whatever are considering it, they really have to consider doing some sort of context statement with the sites that you know and provide some sort of a framework. The issues very specifically in New York, which are going to be interesting and difficult to develop while the Landmarks Commission has its current way of thinking and methodology, which is that it's difficult or impossible to designate and regulate buildings that are not pretty and architecturally distinctive and so on. This is a very, very, very difficult problem, other than the fact that I've tried to point out, both when I was still working there and to this day, that you don't need to reinvent the wheel.

When preservation came in nationally in the mid-'60s through the Department of the Interior, they created the Standards of the Department of the Interior, which basically boiled down to if the building still has integrity from its period of significance, what's the question? It's still intact, you regulate it according to that.

I'll just swing back to a very early analogy to that—that was eye-opening when I first started at

the Commission. It may have been about my third designation report. I worked on the Apollo Theater. I would say maybe it was 1982; it was really early in my career. It was really in the first five designation reports. I think it was three. But the commissioners at that point very nearly did not designate the Apollo Theater because they looked at the building, which was an early vaudeville theater from the nineteen-teens. It didn't become the Apollo Theater as we know it, as the international center for African-American culture. That started in the '30s.

But they looked at the building and said, "Well, it's a nothing building." Even though it's a perfectly nice building, it's a neighborhood vaudeville theater from the teens. It's one hundred percent intact on the outside and the inside.

So I tried to get the argument even then that, well, if you're going to use that argument, Ford's Theatre where Lincoln was assassinated in Washington, DC is not the Paris Opera House. But it's a classic theater of the mid-nineteenth century in Washington, DC and it's where he was assassinated. So going back to the Apollo, they very nearly said, "Well, this isn't significant at all 'architecturally.'" We could just put a plaque on it, recognizing it, whatever. But that wouldn't protect it. It wouldn't really recognize it.

At the end of the day, the staff, through me and my colleagues, we were able to convince them, of course this is worthy. This is an iconic African-American landmark. It's one of the most important surviving landmarks in all of Harlem and all of Manhattan.

My whole point is that that argument existed about architectural significance back in the early

‘80s and it still exists to this day. But in New York City, the Landmarks Law is very broad. It talks about economics, culture, history, all sorts of criteria aside from architecture. As I’ve said many times in the course of this interview, if you only represent the architecture of the one percent or the elite of the elite in New York, you’re leaving out ninety-nine percent of the rest of the population and its history and all the minority communities and every single other aspect of New York history. We have to get the Landmarks Commission out of that mindset, which is not going to be easy to do but it has to be done. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior’s Standards set a model for that.

Q: All right. I think that’s a good note to leave it on. Thank you so much for your time. This is a wonderful interview and I look forward to being in touch as we get it ready for public viewing. Thank you again.

[END OF SESSION]