

Margot Gayle

An Oral History Interview
Conducted for the GVSHP Preservation Archives
by
Laura Hansen

New York, New York

July 23, 1996

ABSTRACT

In the 1950s and 1960s, Margot Gayle (born 1908) led the grassroots effort to save the landmark Jefferson Market Courthouse building in Greenwich Village and transform it into a library. Gayle begins this interview by discussing the origins of that effort—the formation of the Village Neighborhood Committee and its activities in the late 1950s to reactivate the courthouse’s clock.

That successful effort was prompted by rumors that the city was planning to sell the 1877 courthouse, a move which likely would have led to its demolition. Gayle describes the Village Neighborhood Committee’s strategy to save the building by first lobbying the City and raising funds to restart the highly visible and long-frozen clock in the building’s prominent Gothic-inspired tower. With the clock operating, the focus of the committee’s activities then shifted to lobbying for the preservation of the courthouse building itself. Gayle speaks about the work behind this effort, describing typical meetings of the committee to save the courthouse. She discusses the development of strategies to reach local media outlets and raise public awareness of the preservation campaign. In addition, she talks about key influences, such as Alan Burnham (then with the Municipal Art Society) and Harold Birns (then Housing Commissioner in New York City). Other individuals mentioned in this part of the interview include Ruth and Philip Wittenberg, Stanley Tankel, Robert Weinberg, and Anthony Dapolito.

With the courthouse saved from demolition by the mid 1960s, the committee turned its attention to identifying an appropriate use for the structure. In this section of the interview, Gayle talks about Philip Wittenberg’s inspiration to transform the courthouse into a library, and the selection of architect Giorgio Cavaglieri to restore and convert the building. She also details the role of New York City Mayor Robert Wagner in coercing a reluctant New York Public Library into accepting the courthouse building as a branch facility.

Gayle concludes this interview by discussing various background matters such as her initial move to Greenwich Village, her early work in local radio and involvement in local politics, as well as the origins of her love of clocks. In addition, she discusses her other preservation activities, including her role with the passage of the 1965 New York City Landmarks Law and the formation of the Victorian Society. Gayle also talks about her current work (at the time of the interview) involving the restoration of the Jefferson Market Courthouse Library’s bell. She also opines on the importance of participation in local politics and the role of women in the preservation movement.

INTERVIEWEE: Margot Gayle
INTERVIEWER: Laura Hansen
LOCATION: New York, New York
DATE: 23 July 1996
TRANSCRIBER: Penelope Bareau

HANSEN: This is Laura Hansen interviewing Margot Gayle on Tuesday, July 23, 1996 in her home, and we're going to be talking about the Jefferson Market Courthouse and the effort to preserve it in the 1960s. This is recorded for the Greenwich Village Society Preservation Archive and Oral History project....

GAYLE: After living for 30 years in Greenwich Village I, through no fault of my own, really had to move up to Yorkville. I had to really hunt for a place very, very fast. I wish I were in the Village, I wish I were in the area of the Jefferson Market Courthouse, but here we are, Laura and I....

HANSEN: First, I want to start, Margot, by talking about the context of your experience with the Jefferson Market Courthouse.... In the 1950s I know that the Villagers led a fight against Robert Moses and his plans to take Fifth Avenue through Washington Square Park. When you got involved, how much influence did that battle have over you and over other people who were just starting think about preservation?

GAYLE: Well, I can only speak for myself, and I didn't get involved in that particular fight, which did include Jane Jacobs and Mary Nichols. I admired very much what they did, but I had my own agenda and it never occurred to me that I was going to get into this rescuing of buildings and locations and historic areas.... I honestly don't have any recollection of that at all. I was so involved with my own private life and my two girls, and I was working. I just know that I had been taught by Alan Burnham of the Landmarks Commission—as of yet he was not

associated with it—but he was with the Municipal Art Society, which had an historic buildings committee. He was very active on it. He really educated Margot Gayle as to the value of that building [the Courthouse]. And where the general attitude of Villagers and people in general was that it was a tired, uninteresting building, Alan showed me the architectural value and told me the historical value. I got pretty excited when I learned that the bank on Sixth Avenue, it was called the West Side Savings Bank, was interested in the site where the building [the Courthouse] was. It had already made a plan for an apartment house on that site if they could purchase the building, destroy it and have access to that triangular site.

HANSEN: When did you meet Allan Burnham? Did you know him before the Jefferson Market Courthouse became an issue?

GAYLE: Yes, I did, and I knew him before there was a landmarks law. I was on the historic buildings committee, I think it was called, of the Municipal Art Society almost from the time I joined, which was about 1956 or '7, I think.

HANSEN: And did you join the Municipal Art Society because you were just interested?

GAYLE: Yes, just interested in doing good deeds in general.

[Pause in recording]

HANSEN: Okay, Margot. You said that during the 1950s and the Moses' battle [over Washington Square Park] you had your own agenda and personal life. At what point did you think to join the Municipal Art Society and start thinking about historic buildings?

GAYLE: Well, my guess is that it was about 1956 or '7. I had been working at the New York City Planning Department, which does orient you very much toward thinking about city matters. Alan Burnham was really quite inspirational to me. I will tell you a funny thing: I was on this committee, which was made up of all men members, and I said, "That's the only committee I want to be on." They said, "Well, Margot, I hate to tell you, but you probably can't come to our meetings because we meet at the Century Club for lunch and they don't allow women under a circumstance like this." So they went to lunch and they had the meetings, and then I'd read the minutes. [Laughs] Looking back, you'd think I should be annoyed, but I was just glad to be involved.

HANSEN: Well, when I was talking with Ruth Sprute about this, she told me that the Village was changing a lot, a lot of high rise apartments were going up and things were being torn down, and that really was part of her motivation for getting involved. I'm curious if you felt like other people were starting to notice that and to be concerned about it during the late fifties and early sixties.

GAYLE: I just don't have any recollection in connection with that. But, of course, south of Washington Square we did have a lot of urban renewal, as you know. The big I.M. Pei buildings went up and the Washington Square Village was constructed. I don't think that really made much of a dent on my consciousness. Part of it was that I lived so close to the Jefferson Market. It just was like a neighbor.

HANSEN: You were involved in local politics at the time.

GAYLE: Yes, I was.

HANSEN: Very local, grassroots stuff. I'm wondering about the political climate of the late fifties because I know that Carmine DeSapio came out against Moses and you had mentioned in your interview with Tony [Wood] that the Democrat Reform Party was being formed. What was the political climate? Since you were at City Planning, you must have had a feeling for—?

GAYLE: Well, I did have a lot of feeling for local politics and city politics. As a matter of fact, I ran for City Council in, I think, '53. I always felt that if you want to be in a movement that involves city actions, it's a very useful background to have been an active participant in politics. It put me on a first-name basis with ever so many people, right up to the mayor himself. I know that I ding-donged Mayor Wagner, and I shouldn't have. I don't think it was appropriate the way I did it, but I did have reason for being near him, and I would say, "What can we do about the Jefferson Market Courthouse? I hope you'll help me." And he would look at me as [if] to say, "Don't talk to me now, I've got to make a speech," or welcome this dignitary. I was kind of naive on that score, I think, and not very sensitive. I should have kept my mouth shut. Nonetheless, it gave me access to the chairman of the Planning Commission, the members of the City Council, congressional people. I would see them at political dinners and chitchat at the tables. I urge anybody who wanted to be a do-gooder in the city or the state to get involved in politics. It does give you access and puts you in a friendly light with people you can't get to on the telephone. Well, anyway, they knew my name.

HANSEN: So you met Alan Burnham and he inspired you about the Jefferson Market Courthouse.

GAYLE: Yes, he did.

HANSEN: You told Tony [Wood] you were at a Christmas party in 1959 and Harold Birns, who was the Housing Commissioner, was there with you, and you and he started talking it up, to try to figure out what to do. Who was he and how did you know him?

GAYLE: Well, I knew him because I was in politics. He also was a neighbor, he lived on Fifth Avenue, and Bob Ratner and his wife had been members of, I think we called it, New Guild Democrats. I think probably Harold had, too, but he was an experienced person in city government; he was City Housing Commissioner. Naturally, he could guide us. The rest of the group that was at that party certainly participated [in our conversation], but they didn't really get down to the nitty-gritty and work with the committee that was set up in my front room—that Ruth Sprute was at, that Jane Jacobs was at, and some of my neighbors who lived close, very close to the building. I felt that having the folks who were as near as possible [to the building] was getting the people who had to be won over to think that it was worth working for and saving, and then who would then take time and participate....

We had to raise funds to get the clock going, and Harold Birns certainly helped us. We had a lease on the tower...for a dollar a month and somebody managed to get us some insurance. I cannot think how that happened. Thank God they did. What if one of those hands had fallen off and pitched to the ground? But there were so many of us politically sensitized right at that time that it gave fertile ground to draw people in who might not have otherwise.

HANSEN: Now, Ruth Sprute, when I talked to her, said she thought of herself as kind of a rank-and-file volunteer. Were there a lot of people like her who were the people who could pass out the petitions and run the bake sales? Did you all do that kind of thing?

GAYLE: Well, you know, there are a few stem-winders. That's the way it often is. And you rally folks to work for special occasions if you need manpower. We used to keep a table on the steps of this derelict empty building and got petitions signed. On other occasions we sold Christmas cards, a local artist did a card for us. We really had to raise about three thousand dollars, as I recall. So we were getting it with nickels and dimes, we just didn't have big donors. We had a letterhead...that showed the people in the neighborhood who were on the committee. I probably showed that to Tony earlier.

HANSEN: I have a copy of it. I wanted to ask you about some of the people. For example, one of the things you told him [Tony Wood] was that when Philip Wittenberg was your co-chair, and I know that Stanley Tankel was your co-chair also at one time, you said that you all would ask the men to put their names on it and then all the women did all the work. [Gayle laughs.] Was that really true? Did the men come to the meetings and did they ever work at the bake sales?

GAYLE: I think the answer is no. We weren't an all-girl organization, but the very fact that I was doing it and it was in my house and often in daytime hours, we'd have people get together. We didn't have big, public meetings very often. I know that we had one meeting down at Greenwich House: Alan talked, Philip talked. But at first we just wanted to get the clock going, and we honestly didn't know what would be the use of that building were it saved. Philip, who was a copyright lawyer, he was very interested in literary matters, and he said that it should be a library, a new library. Because there was one, you know, by Richard Morris Hunt over on, I think, Abingdon Square. The building's still there. So he gave us the impetus to say, "Yes, we do have a real purpose, Mr. Mayor. We want it made into a library."

So there were actually two committees. The first was a committee of neighbors to get the clock at Jefferson Market Courthouse started and that was the first thing we did, and that's the one that was organized, as I said, in my front room. Well, when we had gotten the clock going, or even before that, we had a lot of neighborhood interest and awareness. I'm not saying that everybody in the Village was hopped up about this, that certainly was not the case, but we had enough people to express ourselves to the public officials that we were making a dent. We had pulled the Courthouse back from being auctioned with the help of the Borough President, Ed Dudley, and believe me, that was a stroke of good fortune. The building really came so close to being auctioned off. I'm sure the bank there was very distressed when we succeeded in having it pulled back. The person we have to thank was Judge (he became a judge later but at that time was Borough President) Edward Dudley. Here again, political contacts paid off, and with the help of Hal Birns and Ed Dudley, who were my friends but they also knew one another, this particular good thing happened to the Courthouse.

HANSEN: Okay. So when you started with the clock, you said you weren't really sure that it was going to lead to anything. I know you love clocks. Was it really just about getting the clock back, or did you have some kind of feeling that it would help you save the building later?

GAYLE: Oh, definitely. See, we had to do something that would appeal to people in that neighborhood who said, "Why do you want to save that old pile?" And so we set our minds—and here we did have this little committee—but I myself really just said, "Let's find something as a common denominator here. We all miss the big four-face clock. The kids going to P.S. 41 miss it, the people going down into the tubes to New Jersey miss it, the people trying to catch a bus miss it, the people who take the subway at the Washington Square stop—we all need that clock." And that

was the uniting appeal that brought a lot of people into our circle who probably could not have cared less about this old, empty, deserted-looking Victorian building. I guess that really indicates kind of my way of doing things: what will really bring people together? And then what people will together and how do you reach them? So you reach out to these folks and some you get and some you don't, to participate.

HANSEN: There were a lot of little strategies like that, like the Christmas cards and the campaign in *The Villager* where people would pay a dollar.

GAYLE: Oh, I'd forgotten about that....

HANSEN: I'm wondering, were you thinking about all of these little things as part of a bigger strategy or were they just ideas that came to you?

GAYLE: Listen, we did it step by step, day by day, and all these ideas were not necessarily mine. After all, we had a group of really bright people, and if somebody came up with a great idea we'd say, "Sure, let's do it that way."

HANSEN: Was there ever dissension among you about the strategies to use? Were there ever disagreements about how to approach one thing or another?

GAYLE: I haven't the remotest recollection. We were all busy people and nobody got paid, there was no executive secretary who was guiding all of us and kept all the addresses and the telephone numbers. I really am not surprised, because we did almost the same sort of thing with the Victorian Society—we got people together and no one there was involved really, no person who took responsibility as a paid secretary. I think that happens all over town right now, these little ad hoc groups

get together and function, and I think the spirit is very high when you have a group like that.

HANSEN: One of the things you told Tony, one of the lessons that you took away was that you weren't going to be reactive next time; you were going to be proactive and you were going to concentrate on educating people rather than responding to a crisis. I'm curious if there was ever a feeling that this was a crisis. Was that the mentality behind what you were doing?

GAYLE: No question about it. It was "act soon or lose it." There was no precedent for what we were doing, and there was very little community feeling about saving old buildings, so we couldn't really use that. We just used every tool at hand and worked fast to keep the building from being auctioned off, really. I really am amazed to think how close that building came to being gone.

HANSEN: The role of women in this is very interesting, not only that you said they were in the background, like you couldn't go to the meetings. I know that was a product of the times, but do you think perhaps some of the women who didn't have a career, would it have been harder if it had been in a different era when people were, as they are now, so busy? Have you thought about that before?

GAYLE: I don't know, but what little I do know of the history of the preservation movement, it was the women, early on, who did the saving of Mt. Vernon. It can be read in the National Trust records. You know the little old ladies in tennis shoes you've heard about? Now we're all in tennis shoes. The women, I think maybe it was because they had the time, maybe it was because they had a sense of history. I don't know. I know that I have said more than once, "We need a man to head up this committee, but I will do the nitty gritty work. I will be the whatever." It was

an attitude that was still functioning, that you had to have a man for your front guy, and best of all if it was a big, good-looking guy who could preside at a meeting and be impressive and be articulate the way Phillip Wittenberg was. That's all he ever did for us.

HANSEN: You said you could pick up the phone and call politicians, you had access to people. As a woman do you feel you were ever denied certain things in that world that maybe your men colleagues were not?

GAYLE: I just don't know. I sure didn't think in those terms. I just thought in terms of reaching the goal. We sure had a lot of men helping us, there's no doubt about it. It wasn't an all-girl team. I do think somebody like Ruth Sprute was very valuable to us. She lived nearby, she lived on 8th Street. She was reliable, she was an experienced businesswoman, and she was our treasurer. Without her, it would have been harder. I just think that gal was great. She's still around, she's helping in the effort to get the clock and the bell connected up in the tower.

HANSEN: She told me that what she remembers about it was that it was fun and that it was very social and that it was a great way to meet people. She thought of it as a social activity as much as a sort of an activist activity.... Do you think that was ever consciously part of the strategy, to make it fun for people?

GAYLE: I really don't think so.

HANSEN: Did you have a lot of parties?

GAYLE: Well, we tried to do the things that people would enjoy, that's very true, but I would say, in dead earnest, I didn't look at any of it as fun. We just had to

keep going and succeed. I'm glad that people like Ruth did find it fun, and stayed with us.

HANSEN: It lasted about six years, the whole effort? I think that's right.

GAYLE: Yes.

HANSEN: She also told me she had some home movies of when you used to climb the tower at Christmas time to light the clock, which I would love to see.

GAYLE: Well, Ruth actually does have a tape, a movie. See, originally the clock was not electrically run; it was hand-wound. She shows [in the film] that George Spinner, who was the man who ran a little antique shop on 10th Street, how he would climb up and wind and wind. I think it took him 20 minutes to wind up the weights that have to be lifted. Then they, for about a week, they would keep descending and descending and descending, and would operate the hands of the clock. So she has that tape and she is going to have it transferred to videotape, and she, I think will give it to the Greenwich Village committee. If they ask for it....

HANSEN: Well, let's talk a little bit more about some of the people. I'll read some names and you just tell me what their role was. We talked about Alan Burnham and Harold Birns. What about Stanley Tankel?

GAYLE: Stanley was an architect and a planner, as I recall. Stanley did encourage us, and I think that he probably was among those who wanted to have the opportunity to convert the building into a library. But he was very faithful to us. So was another architect in the neighborhood who would have liked to have that

opportunity. It ended up in the hands of Georgio Cavaglieri, as we know. But they were very supportive of the whole effort.

HANSEN: How was Mr. Cavaglieri chosen?

GAYLE: Well, I think he was chosen by the Department of Buildings, and he was already identified with historic buildings. He had taken the old Astor Library on Lafayette Place and turned it into what is now known as the Public Theater. He did have a track record, and possibly not many architects did at that time, of transforming historic buildings into current, functioning, modern buildings. At any rate, he probably did his own politicking. He was at one point president of the Municipal Art Society, at one point president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and so he came with quite a bit of backing, I'm sure. But the decision was made at the Department of Buildings.... Another point is that he was born in Venice and this is Venetian Gothic, and he really just felt that he related to it with great sympathy. Maybe he transmitted that feeling to the people who were making the decision. He grew up by the canal in Venice.

HANSEN: During this time, you were a member of the [Historic Buildings] Committee at the Municipal Art Society. Did you use that committee to help you as well?

GAYLE: They helped me every step of the way.

HANSEN: Who were some of the people who were on the committee?

GAYLE: Well, I'd really have to look at the names. I can see some of them in my mind's eye but I cannot recall the names. But they were well-known figures, these guys. Most of them were architects.

HANSEN: Well, here are some names. [Shows document to Gayle.] This is for the library.

GAYLE: The Municipal Art Society's committee on historic buildings had in its membership some leading architects and very well positioned guys. If one were to read the—what's the history of the Municipal Art Society? Well, one could find the names of these people in Gregory Gilmartin's 100th anniversary book about the centennial of the Municipal Art Society.¹ They would all be listed in that, and I think this venture with the Jefferson Market Courthouse figures in his book. I remember coming to the Municipal Art Society's board meetings and saying, "I need help, I need letters right away," and sure enough, people around that table, very well-positioned people would get letters into the mail or make phone calls to important people and help us out.

There were pitfalls along the way, it didn't all go too too smoothly. There were times when too much time was elapsing. We had to get action. It helped Giorgio, too, that the committee would do the politicking with the community for him so he didn't have to do it when he needed to have the right to do certain things to that building. It was a complicated job for him.

HANSEN: I guess Whitney North Seymour was involved?

GAYLE: Yes, Whitney North Seymour, Sr., was very interested in this project, and he was a man of national significance, president of the National Bar Association at

¹ Gilmartin's book is *Shaping the City: New York and the Municipal Art Society* (1995).

one point and so on. Whitney, which I had the privilege of calling him though I really stood in awe of him, lived on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 11th Street, I think, in an apartment. He could look out his back window and see the clock and he would call me up every now and then and say, “You got the clock started but it’s not lighted tonight.” [Laughs] He had a good relationship with the library. Remember, we had to convince the library at 42nd Street that this was the step to take. He was just a wonderful help to us. I’m glad you mentioned Whitney North Seymour, Sr.

HANSEN: Why do you think he was so interested? Did he see this as important to a larger movement outside of the Village or did he just love the building, too?

GAYLE: I think his feeling in this case was local. I don’t have insight.

HANSEN: Well, I know you had support from Lewis Mumford, too. Was he on the committee?

GAYLE: The reason we got support from him was because Wittenberg knew him. He was living outside the city. Let’s look at this group. [Begins reviewing names on document.] Robert C. Weinberg was an architect of consequence. He lived on Washington Square North where he owned one of those big houses. He was dedicated to the idea of preservation—not just this building, but preserving the Square, preserving the houses around the Square.

HANSEN: I think he was the one who went to examine it [the Courthouse building]. I have a letter that was written to the Community Board where he and Mr. Tankel would get it and suggested a community police station there early on.

GAYLE: Oh, interesting! We were groping around for a use. Believe me, we didn't have it at the beginning. All we had was the clock and we said, "We can't have the clock if there's not a building to hold it up."

[Continues to review names on document.] Tony Dapolito was active in the community, in the Italian community particularly. He has a bakery, he's functioning to this day and he is on the Planning Board, or closely allied with it.² Tony Dapolito was a great strength. Sidney Dean, I can see him in my mind's eye. I think he was a planner. Edith Lyons, Peter Canevari, Jane Jacobs, William J. Howard—it's hard for me to recall who these people were, the roles they played. But then we all did our best to get well-known folks to be on our so-called organizing committee. Owen Grundy was with *The Villager*. He was, I think, the editor. Mrs. J.G. Phelps-Stokes, the daughter-in-law was, I think, of I.N.P. Stokes. She lived in a small historic house on one of the local squares, I can't remember exactly. But she was so good to us and so supportive.

I would say that the Wittenbergs probably got Edward Hopper, who had his studio on the north side of Washington Square. Maurice Evans lived across from the Wittenbergs. Harold Edelman was that other architect who would liked to have done the job. He's still around. He was so supportive all through it. Morris Ernst would have been the Wittenbergs'. They really knew people of consequence. They had been in the Village in the twenties when it was a bohemian area and they accounted for us having e.e. cummings, I think, he's on this list, and some of these other people. Ann Shearman was my own personal doctor. [Chuckles] She's on here and she served as our treasurer at one point. Carol Greitzer wasn't yet the Councilwoman, I think, but she was active. She came in with the New Deal Democrats. Nathan Klein, Arnold Bergier. Bill Honan, he was with *The Villager*, as I recall. There are people who could really fill you in on lots of folks on this list. Barbara Bancroft had a house down on Charlton Street, a Federal House, and was

² Dapolito died in July of 2003.

very, very interested in older buildings. Barbara Reach was an assistant in the mayor's office and she was a very, very capable woman. She was a member of the Women's City Club and helped that group do things. I think we had support from them for this effort.

Honorable Stanley Isaacs, Councilman, Mr. Republican on the City Council, representing the silk stocking district on the Upper East Side. Bill Passanante was our Assemblyman from down there for years and years. He had a foot in both camps, the old-line Democrats and the new. I don't know how Bill managed to do it but he survived for years and years as our assemblyman. Ephraim London—who's he? He was a well-known lawyer, as I recall. C. Leo Callarco. See, we were very proud that we did get a lot of support from the Italian community. Here's [John] Crosby, he was the theater critic. Florence Kelly, she was a well-known judge. Lewis Mumford. Portia Willis Fitzgerald lived in the house where the Greenwich Village Society now has its offices. She had grown up in that house. She had marched in suffragette parades, so she was a woman who went way back, but she also carried a lot of weight and admiration. Honorable Thomas Camiro Chimera was from the Italian community. He was a judge. Thyra Samter Winslow, isn't she a well-known writer? Phylles Hoffzimer, there we have a woman who's a friend of ours right now, and she was living someplace in the Village. She was an architect, and she is now retired as an architect and she is doing photographic work for the preservation organizations, almost gratis. Have you met her? e.e. cummings—his name is all lower-case letters—at the very end. Well, that's interesting to see.

HANSEN: Quite a list.

GAYLE: It is quite a list, but we have to say that the Wittenbergs had a lot to do with that list.

HANSEN: Another thing Ruth Sprute said to me was that it was easy to get people organized in the Village because it has a history of people who are educated and really concerned about politics. Did that influence your strategies at all, about how to reach people?

GAYLE: I didn't think in theoretical terms, and I just honestly don't know, but if you knew somebody famous and you could get them to be on the list and align themselves publicly with us, that was good business. It was after we drew the Wittenbergs in that we were able to expand our list to include a lot of those nationally recognized names, there's no doubt about it. We were doing pretty well on the clock committee. That list [just read] is of the Library [Committee]. We were the ones who put the base under the effort. We built a base for it of local, friendly types, not famous on the whole. It was the Wittenberg's who brought e.e. cummings, Maurice Evans and all in. But we built a solid base on which then to take it a step further. I must say, I go down there now and I just feel like I'm seeing an old friend when I stand there on 9th Street and look down there. When I think of the interior of that building with pigeon dung all over it, dead birds lying on the floor, electrical cords dangling from the ceiling, partitions left over from its being used for the census. Everybody had walked away from it and left it in worse repair. It's a very picturesque thought in my mind.

HANSEN: When it was clear that the building was safe I know, for example, that Ruth Wittenberg became very involved with Community Board politics and I think a few other things. What did you do next? Were you ever involved with the Community Board?

GAYLE: Not really. Ruth [Wittenberg] came in after we got her husband in, so she joined in the effort. She had never really been involved before, but boy, she turned

out to be a powerhouse in her own right and had a lot to do with tearing down the House of Detention where the garden is now. She was an articulate force on the Planning Board, and toward the end of her life she'd get around in a wheelchair with somebody pushing her. She was a presence. She was a difficult woman, there's no doubt about it, contentious, but I think she's done a lot for the area. She was not in with us on the clock. She came in when her husband came in with the library committee.

HANSEN: You were involved with a lot of public presentations and that kind of thing, right? I think you probably also had a strong presence. Did you think of yourself that way?

GAYLE: No, I don't think of myself as a public figure.

HANSEN: I have a picture here, I don't know where this is, but it's you and Alan Burnham. [Shows picture to Gayle.]

GAYLE: It doesn't say here where we were?

HANSEN: Let's see, a GVA [Greenwich Village Association] rally, April 4, 1961.

GAYLE: I think this must have been taken at Greenwich House when we had a public meeting. Phillip presided, Alan came and talked about the history. I got that picture [of Jefferson Market Courthouse] made, blown up and mounted, so we had a big visual. Some people really have a sense of visual things, and I'm pretty good at that. To get a big picture that could be seen from several rows away in the audience was very important to us. I wonder where it is now? I think the picture

was taken by the photographer for the Historic American Buildings Survey. Can't think of the photographer's name.

HANSEN: And this is a picture of one of your Christmas cards. [Shows photocopy of card to Gayle.]

GAYLE: Oh, gee. Wasn't that pretty? Have you ever seen the card, the real card?

HANSEN: I think they have it at the Greenwich Village Society [for Historic Preservation]. That's where I copied it.

GAYLE: Well, I turned over a lot of stuff. I don't have much any more because I didn't see any reason for it to be in my tin file. His name was Howard, his last name was Howard, the artist who did this. I don't know where he is now. I think it was E. Howard. And then we had another thing done for us, and at some point I made up a little folder, have you seen this folder? Let me just show you this. Have you seen this folder? [Shows folder to Hansen.]

HANSEN: No.

GAYLE: This is a Xerox copy. I date this 1965. This artist did a really darling thing for us. Can't think of his name, he lives in Rochester. Sam Funk, something like that. So this was done in, I think, something like black ink.

HANSEN: What was this used for?

GAYLE: Well, it's '65, that's the date that I have put on it, so what would it be used for?

HANSEN: Let's see, by '65 the library was probably being converted at that point.

GAYLE: We were the clock committee that published the card. We were still in existence. There's my home address. [Reads from letterhead] "Co-chairmen Margot and Harold Birns." By that time we were putting me first, he honestly wanted as little use of his name as possible. Ernie Walton, he was our lawyer, treasurer my doctor Ann Sherman, Ruth Sprute, secretary, assistant treasurer Florence Adams, she lived on 8th Street. And Paul Freeman. Oh, he was the guy who wound the clock, Paul Freeman.... Anyway, at some point he wound the clock and he's called "clock keeper." "Contributions are tax deductible. Make checks payable to Village Neighborhood Committee Inc." That was what we were incorporated as. I don't know who did the work to make us a 501C3 but somebody did, and Tony Dapolito got his friend the Congressman—I can't think who—to ask the IRS to move us from the bottom of the pile to the top of the pile, so they could get it considered....

HANSEN: I want to go through some of the things I found in the archives of the Greenwich Village Society and just talk about them. This is the 1836 site [of the Jefferson Market Courthouse], and this was the fire tower that existed previously. [Shows image.]

GAYLE: That fire tower burned down.

HANSEN: Now when Alan Burnham would talk, for example, at the big public meeting you had, how much history did he go into?

GAYLE: Well, he had limited time. I really don't know, but he was well-versed in the history and he would communicate as much as he could pretty fast. He probably wrote the designation report when the thing was finally designated.

HANSEN: Then we have the Withers & Vaux complex, which had the jail. [Shows image.]

GAYLE: That is an engraving—isn't it an interesting picture?—this was built in 1878, more or less

HANSEN: Was that the elevated?

GAYLE: Yes. The tower had been up since '76 [1876] and the use of it as a fire tower was very limited, as you know.... It really served the purpose, which led to it being so tall and, from our point of view, handsome. To replace that fire tower, that was part of the deal in tearing down the old market and tearing down the fire tower, that they would replace the fire tower for the protection of the community. There were just two or three years in there when it was useful for that, and just think, that big, tall, thousand-pound bell was put up there. Must have been a hell of a thing to get up there. And I'm quite sure it was the bell that was in the previous tower. We couldn't really ascertain that. It's hard to prove. One way of proving it is that there is a date cast into the bell—that was before this [the courthouse] was built.

HANSEN: Let's talk about your campaign now to have the bell reactivated.

GAYLE: [Points to photograph.] You see this little old building here, which still stands? We have Jack Felt, who was chairman of the Planning Board at the time,

to thank for that. He almost single-handedly reduced the zoning on that block so that we'd have a view of that tower in both directions. Wasn't that great of him? He was a big-time real estate man. The Felt Forum and all comes from his family. But Jack, had a real feeling for this, Jack Felt did, and he was chairman of the Planning Board at the time. He really quietly and in his own way, 'cause he had power, helped save this building. And I think credit should be given to Mayor Robert Wagner, Jr., because he's the man—I should have said this before—who said to the [New York Public] library, "Capital budget funds for a new library, which I do think the Village needs, will be provided only if those funds are applied to rehabilitating this historic building." And the library *hated* it, and they did everything they could to squirm out from under that.

HANSEN: Do you think they've been good caretakers, though?

GAYLE: I think they've been good caretakers, and I think that they have appreciated their building. And it has brought them fame. It's a whole turnaround of ideas.

HANSEN: So you're working now to get the bell ringing again?

GAYLE: It's interesting. This little pamphlet that I wrote in 1965 I said, at the very end, "Should the community so desire, it might embark on raising funds to install mechanisms for sounding the bell, one of the largest in New York, to mark the daytime hours." I said that 30 years ago! I wasn't aware that I had really set that out as a goal. So when I come down to the Planning Board on Thursday—which they've asked me to do, because there's someone in the neighborhood who's raising Cain about having the noise of a bell; very intrusive, she says, it wakes her baby, and I don't know what—I am going to say I have held this conviction for 30

years, and I first enunciated it in 1965 in writing, in this little pamphlet. So now it is our hope—and there is a good, active group in the Village, headed by Marilyn Dorato and Cynthia Craine, to raise the necessary funds and also some maintenance money, an endowment, which will take care of looking after the clock and the bell.

I don't think the bell should need very much maintenance; the mechanism for that's going to be pretty simple. But the poor old clock, it just has its troubles. I know that from time to time one face says one time and another face says a different time. I know that the lighting is just, from my point of view, unacceptable. It's my hope that they will find a way—and Mr. Elderhorst is going to do the work, I gather—to use glass fiber optics, the most modern way to do it for wiring the tower up there. That really much reduces the possibility of fire from shorts with copper wires. A good new system of lighting the four faces will be devised. I don't know whether I've said it in something else that you have, but when we first went up there, and I've climbed that tower many times, we were amazed to see that the clock had been illuminated with gas. Around the rim—we're talking about the interior, now, behind the big four faces, brass faces, of the clock—here was a ring of gas jets around the circular rim of each of the four dials. Just how they set it off—did someone have to go up there with a cigarette lighter or whatever they had in those days and light the gas?—I don't know. But they wanted it lighted, and they achieved it in the early days.

After we had the clock repaired, by I.T. Verdin and Co. in Cincinnati, they installed fluorescent lighting, and they had a triangle of large fluorescent bulbs behind each of the four faces. One of the problems was that the library would not relamp. They wouldn't send somebody up there to—and it was hard to do—replace one of those fluorescent bulbs when it burned out. They wanted to wait until several of them had conked out before they would buy the bulbs and get the guy, whoever maintains the building, to climb up there and do that kind of thankless job.

But believe me, that clock deserves to be a big yellow moon up in the Village sky, all four faces telling exactly the right time and just warm. No shadows in the faces. The lighting should be such that it's just four big yellow moons. The Cooper Union clock is very similar to this one. If you look at it from the south, let us say, from 7th Street or 6th Street, you look back—it is a great yellow moon up there. Ours should be, too.

HANSEN: Did you love public clocks before this?

GAYLE: When I first came to New York I wrote a radio show for CBS—not the national, it was a local CBS radio station—and I was always looking for interesting things around town. I got interested in clocks at that time. Particularly was I enchanted with the old clock in St. Peter's Church.

[End of Tape, Side 1]

HANSEN: We were talking about your interest in public clocks.

GAYLE: Well, I think my first engagement with a clock was the clock on St. Peter's Church [in Chelsea]. I wrote it into the radio show. There was an elderly woman there who was concerned with it. She was trying to raise funds to get the clock repaired so it could be running again. I put it into the show. The show I wrote was called *The Margaret Allen Show*, and it was a talk show between a man and a woman. I wrote the scripts. Margaret got interested, so from time to time we mentioned the clock on St. Peter's, and we succeeded in getting quite a few donations sent from the listeners to look after that clock. And then I discovered other clocks, like the one in City Hall, and I found a lot of interesting clocks, and a

lot of them had problems. As you know, some of them were just allowed to stand still.

HANSEN: When people sent in donations, I guess that was an early lesson for you.

GAYLE: That's right. I hadn't thought of it that way. So I was learning the way to look after public problems.

HANSEN: [Shows another picture] This is the House of Detention for Women. You mentioned that Ruth Wittenberg was critical to getting this [demolished].

GAYLE: Well, she did. I didn't engage in that effort because I was very ambivalent. I'm glad it's gone but I felt here is a resource, a great big strong fairly modern building—built, I think, in 1925, something like that—and I just can't see pulling it down, throwing it away. Maybe I was not very farsighted. There were a lot of prostitutes in that building, and I remember seeing a man standing on the east side of Sixth Avenue and holding a baby up in his arms for the baby's mother to see up in the—

I was connected with a group who went into that building and dealt somewhat with the women in the jail. That group was run by a friend of mine who later became a district leader. I was a district leader in the Democratic Party. My district really was a district that included Chelsea and Gramercy Park. So this woman, Beth Robertson—she had another last name, her husband's last name, I can't think of his name—she and I got acquainted when she got me to be interested in the women in the House of Detention.

HANSEN: That was before your involvement in preservation?

GAYLE: Yes, I was in politics first. One of the best things that happened to me out of the preservation activity was to be involved in trying to get the law passed for landmarks. That put me in touch with a man named James Van Derpool, who became the executive director for the Landmarks Commission. He encouraged me and he gave me his backing to have a scholarship and go to England to Addingham Park Summer School, which was put on for Americans by the British National Trust.

HANSEN: And that's where you met Sir Nicholas Pevsner?

GAYLE: That's where I met Sir Nicholas Pevsner, and out of that grew my launching of the Victorian Society out of my apartment at 44 West 9th Street.

HANSEN: Well, I've wondered before if part of your motivation in starting that was that your first experience [with preservation] was with a Victorian building, and whether there was any connection.

GAYLE: Well, my first experience with preservation was when I got married and went to Savannah on our honeymoon. Bill [my husband] wanted to go to the beach and Margot wanted to go and look at the old buildings. [Chuckles] So I had some kind of predilection. But I would say one thing led to another and it came to be a very strong motivation, a very intense interest, which I guess is pushing me this very day, doing what we're doing.

HANSEN: But with the Victorian Society, did you have a particular interest in that period?

GAYLE: I think I must confess that probably it was my involvement with a Victorian building. Then Alan Burnham's education helped. Really, the Victorian age was not appreciated at that point in America and not at all in England. It took them longer to get to appreciate it. The British were very much for throwing away any of those old buildings.

HANSEN: Didn't you tell me a story about how Sir Nicholas was invited to speak and he said, "I'll only come if I can talk ..." Tell me that story again.

GAYLE: Well, that was in England. He talked to the people from Addingham Park when our group took one of his tours which carried us up into Scotland. We were in Glasgow. Sir George Trevelyan ran the summer school at Addingham, which was housed in Addingham Park, a great big mansion with a whole estate around it. He wanted Nicholas Pevsner, the leading architectural historian in Britain, who was writing *The Counties of England*, to talk to the group. Apparently, Nicholas said, "I will talk only if you let me talk on the 19th century." Sir George was committed to the 18th century, he was absolutely involved with it. He reluctantly agreed so as to have the great man be a speaker to his class.

So we were in Glasgow and Sir Nicholas—our paths crossed with Sir Nicholas, he for some reason had reason to be up there. He took a few of us Americans aside and—I'm sure he asked Sir George, "Point out some of the people in your group that you think might go home and help me start a branch of the Victorian Society in America." And so Sir George apparently fingered four of us. Sir Nicholas really wanted people from the New York area because he was going to be in New York at some point, and so I was one. Another was Stewart Johnson, who was at the Newark Museum. Another was Christa Meyer [sp?], who was with the Cooper Museum, which is in Peter Cooper's foundation building, which was the

basis of the Cooper Union museum uptown [Cooper Hewitt?]. And the other was Caroline Karpinski, because she was associated with the Metropolitan Museum.

So, anyway, to the four of us he said, "Meet me in the pub after our lecture." So we had a lecture from him and then he met us in the pub. This was in a small, modest Glasgow hotel, I can't remember which one. So he said, "If you Americans don't save your 19th century things, you don't have all that much to safeguard. You don't have Roman ruins, you don't have Gothic cathedrals." We looked at each other and nodded and we were all very overawed to be in the presence of the great man. So he convinced us to think it over. We said, "We don't know whether we want to try to organize a Victorian Society," and then when we got back we decided to meet and we met in my apartment on West 9th Street. We decided to make the effort, just take the step, announce that we were organizing a society, we appointed ourselves as temporary officers. Here, again, we got three women and a man, we turned to the man and said, "You be the president and you look good," and he did, he was a tall, good-looking fellow, "and you can be chair of the meeting," and so on. And I remember very well saying, "And I'll be the secretary because the secretaries are the workers." I remember saying that. And we asked Tom Hoving, who was then head of the Met, if Caroline, who was on his staff, would to be our treasurer could we tell people who wanted to join to send their money to her as treasurer care of the Metropolitan Museum. That gave us that eclat, that status. And he agreed. Everything worked that way. And we found that it was an idea whose time had come. That organization took off. That was 30 years ago.

HANSEN: So that was one of your next big efforts, right? Following your work on the Jefferson Market Courthouse, that was pretty soon after that? You said you were involved in the landmarks law?

GAYLE: Yes, that was adopted in 1965, wasn't it?

HANSEN: Yes.

GAYLE: I was very much involved with it.

HANSEN: Tell me about that. What was your role, what did you do?

GAYLE: I was working for the City Planning Department. In a sense, this was related to city planning. I got permission from the City Planning Department to work in any way I saw to be useful, so I did a lot of lobbying with the City Council members, not to mention the mayor. I tried to help Van Derpool—James Van Derpool—who was setting up a temporary commission even before they had a law (Geoffrey Platt was the chairman) to do whatever I could think of to do that was politically effective or just plain useful to them. The chairman of City Planning allowed me to do that. I think it was William Ballard at that time. So I was kind of useful in any way I could be. I know that Van Derpool came to feel that I was a very pushy woman, because I was all for getting publicity and he was very genteel. He thought that they should not really seek publicity; they should simply achieve their goals and get it going. I think that I was more hip than he, and I felt the more public awareness that developed in advance would help council members to support the idea of this law, and so on. I was thinking politically.

HANSEN: Here's an example of that. [Shows telegram to Gayle.] This is one of your "night letters." This one was to Ed Dudley when he was Borough President. I'm looking at the people who signed it, and there are six news organizations on here, which seems to me a very astute approach.

GAYLE: What's the date?

HANSEN: February, 1961. We have *Grove Press, the Village Voice, Chelsea/Clinton News, Greenwich Village News, The Villager*, the Educational Television Association.

GAYLE: Wow, look at that. Sidney D. Ness.

HANSEN: Now, I can't help but think that was intentional—

GAYLE: Yes, I think so, to get these communications organizations aware and involved. Oh, isn't that interesting?

HANSEN: And I would think it would have an effect on the recipient as well, to see all of these groups involved.

GAYLE: You are so right. And the Village Committee for a Library. Isn't that an interesting thing? I'm so glad that got saved.

HANSEN: And you did a lot of "night letters," I remember reading.

GAYLE: Did I really? That means we would send them as telegrams, which could be very verbose and seem urgent.

HANSEN: Yes, this was also at the Greenwich Village Society.

GAYLE: They've got a good collection.

HANSEN: This is also from their office. [Shows Gayle document.] This is the Committee of Neighbors to get the Clock at Jefferson Market Courthouse started. This is announcing the meeting when you were going to plan the library committee. It says, "At this meeting we are going to plan our overtures to Village and Chelsea organizations." Another place I read that you had 10,000 signatures on petitions and you had 65 civic groups behind you. And so it looks to me from this that it was a very conscious effort to get these other organizations involved. Do you remember what kinds of organizations they were? And that you reached out to Chelsea as well as the Village?

GAYLE: No, I don't. [Reads from the notice:] "Community for the Library will be held Thursday at the home of the Wittenbergs." They had a charming early rowhouse, about 1830, on 10th Street. Did you ever see it?

HANSEN: No.

GAYLE: Why don't you take a look at it some time? 35 West 10th Street. They very generously let us use it. I really don't remember this. [Continues to read:] "A new crisis has developed that may be in jeopardy due to unexpected developments." This is '61. I know that we formed this committee at that Christmas cocktail party at the Ratner's in 1959, so this is a year—

HANSEN: This is when you were ready to go forward with the library committee.

GAYLE: Oh, I see. We were launching the library committee.

HANSEN: And you were talking about how to get other organizations behind you. So that's what I was wondering—what happened at your meetings? This is an

example, I guess, of a meeting you had where you talked about strategies to get other groups involved and probably what other groups to get involved.

GAYLE: You are thinking very, very well, but my memory doesn't fill in the facts.

HANSEN: What was a typical meeting like?

GAYLE: Their house was small and we probably couldn't accommodate more than 20 people here at the most. I'm sure that Stanley and I would have talked, but pretty soon we would have brought in Mr. Wittenberg, because he loved to talk, and it was his house. He could also inspire people. So we probably had him actually running this meeting. This may have been the point at which we were reaching out to assure that the building was taken off the list of potential buildings for auction. You see, as I understood it, with a building that was vacant and available, the City at that time would circulate for three years [a notice saying], "Here's a space available for public purpose. Can your city department make use of it?" If it stayed vacant for three years and no city department could find any use for it, the city wasn't going to go maintaining it any longer. That's how they came to say, "Well, we'll just auction it off and then it's somebody else's decision what to do with this building for which we have no public use." And so I do think some of that was in our thinking—that it's a critical moment for some reason.

HANSEN: I like this one. This is another meeting announcement. [Shows announcement to Gayle.]

GAYLE: Did Ruth turn over some of these?

HANSEN: I'm not sure where they [Greenwich Village Society] got them.

GAYLE: No, because I don't think I kept all those. Isn't that cute, those things.

HANSEN: Drawing attention to the clock with no hands. This is asking for a contribution for the electrification of the clock.

GAYLE: [Chuckles] Who did that, can you read that?

HANSEN: Yes, it says Rick Howard.

GAYLE: Rick Howard, he's the one who did the Christmas card, Richard Howard.... I wrote the copy, I remember somehow.

HANSEN: It just seems to me you had some kind of flyer or telegram or mailing or something constantly.

GAYLE: Well, we must have done quite a bit of that. This isn't dated, is it?

HANSEN: No, it's not. Well, here's a date, saying that installation should be completed in September 1962, so it must have been a few months before that, or maybe in 1961.

GAYLE: Why don't you put on the back, "Estimated date with Margot Gayle thought to be early '62, 1962."

HANSEN: And then this is one of many newspapers articles that they have on file there. [Shows article.] I like this one where they talk about the name of your committee and spell out each of the initials. And it says, "When others say you can't

fight City Hall, Villagers say, ‘Let’s form a committee.’” To me that implies that the Village had a really strong sense of place. Maybe they didn’t care more about where they lived but they knew more about where they lived.

GAYLE: Well, I think you’re right.

HANSEN: When you first came to the Village, was that something that you knew about it or that you sensed about it?

GAYLE: Well, remember, I came to the Village from Washington D.C. We lived down on King Street. I lived at 50 King Street in a house that was built by John Jacob Astor on land that was part of Richmond Hill, home of one of the Vice Presidents. Anyway, the estate had been divided up into lots, and this house that I lived in had been built about 1830 on this lot that had been part of the historic estate of Richmond Hill....

I wanted to be in New York; my husband and I had a deal that when he got back from the army and World War II, we would try to be in New York. I had come to New York one summer to take the NYU summer radio workshop—there was no television. I, and my husband also, New York and I wanted to be in Big Time Radio. I had been a volunteer and been on the Atlanta radio station. My program once a week talked about the scrap drive [for World War II]—saving old rubber tires, saving tin cans—I’m doing it to this day! [Laughs] You know, our recycling program....

I ended up in the Village just because I had to find a place to live. It was very hard. The war was on, space was very limited, and I found a sublet on the second floor of this little house. It was furnished, so I had to put my furniture into storage. I had two little girls. We had made the trip up by automobile all packed with our

stuff. I nearly fell asleep at the wheel, I will never forget it. I pulled into a rest stop and just went to sleep at the wheel. Locked all the doors.

HANSEN: Just you and your daughters? Your husband—

GAYLE: He was overseas.

HANSEN: This was in 1944?

GAYLE: Must be about 1944. When was the war over? '45. Yeah, he was still in France. I remember I had a kind of a nanny with me. But she went to sleep the minute we left Washington. And to me it was a long, scary trip, I can tell you.

HANSEN: I think that's awfully brave.

GAYLE: Well, I had really little kids, so they were asleep. So anyway, I landed up—I don't know how I came to know about this sublet—on the steps of this pretty little building, a little Federal house. It had a horse walk at one side, and that meant you could take your horse through and keep him there in the back. I don't know where you kept your carriage. So there I was in the Village. The reason I was in the Village, I realize now, [was that] I came to the NYU summer radio workshop; Paul McGee was in charge, and there was an executive from CBS, Robert Landry. He was the guy with the status, who was the head of the workshop. Paul McGee was a staffer, a professor at NYU. They must have encouraged me. I think that man from CBS, I think he almost said to me, "If you can get here, I'll get you a job at CBS." And so Paul McGee—my experience had been to be in the Village and Paul probably helped me locate a place. I don't remember.

HANSEN: How much longer after you were here did you get involved in the local politics? Was that pretty soon?

GAYLE: No, I don't think so. I got involved in local politics in the early fifties. I was part of what they called "The Fair Deal Democrats." This just brings to mind that we helped with the election of Harry Truman, re-election, I guess. He came to one of our meetings, which was a *great* thing for this group of young, aspiring lawyers and people who really believed politics should be better, cleaner, and more intellectual. And so we decided—I was the only woman on the board—and we decided that we would give Mr. Truman an award. What we gave him, I don't know, but I was the one who was elected to give Mr. Truman the award. I realize I'm tall, I was taller then, I had to stoop over and give him a kiss. And he gave me a kiss. It's such a memorable scene. When I see this little book, have you seen *Late Bloomers* by Brendan Gill? When I see his picture there, it brings it back....

HANSEN: You told me a story the other day about how both your daughters were born, one at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, one at the end. You and your husband had friends who were in the Communist Party and you were politically, at least aware, in Atlanta.

GAYLE: My awareness really centered not on the left wing politics so much but achieving repeal of the poll tax for voting. It was a passion. I was introduced to it by Josephine Wilkins, a gently bred woman from Athens, Georgia, where she grew up in an old-style mansion. And she was Georgia State president of the League of Women Voters. She imbued me with a feeling that nothing could be more un-American, more unfair, more undemocratic than requiring that a tax be paid before one could vote.

HANSEN: So that was the beginning.

GAYLE: *That* was the beginning.

HANSEN: At what point after all this happened did you start to think about what the larger implications were? I know you went on to work for the landmarks law, maybe that was the time you started to think about it....

GAYLE: Well, I just move kind of pragmatically from one thing to another, and I don't philosophize about it.

HANSEN: Even later?

GAYLE: Even later. But I think that I learned that being politically experienced and knowledgeable was a great boon to anybody who wanted to function in any aspect of life that had to do with city government. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me that I could combine those things. I also had a conviction that one person can be an initiator and have an unusual effect on the world around him. I think I was a person like that.

I remember in connection with the cast iron buildings—I had not even *known* about cast iron buildings until I went to a 1968 Victorian Society program where professor James Fitch, aided by a student named John Waite, and Henry Hope Reed was there, too, talked about how New York had these historic buildings that weren't appreciated, were unprotected. I got so agitated sitting in the audience. "This is just *awful*," I thought. "I wonder what I can do about that." The upshot of that is that I organized the Friends of Cast Iron Architecture.

If one person really puts his mind to something and can inspire a whole group around him, it's amazing in this complicated world what can be achieved. How do you like that?

HANSEN: I like that. That's a nice ending. So why don't we stop there for today.

GAYLE: Let's do.

HANSEN: So we're ending Margot's interview for today at four o'clock on Tuesday, July 23, 1996 in her front room at 235 East 87th Street, Apartment 6C in New York City.

[End of Interview]