HISTORIC CHARLESTON FOUNDATION

Interviewee: The Honorable J. Palmer Gaillard
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Interviewers: Jonathan Poston and Kitty Robinson
Videographer: Carroll Ann Bowers (HF)
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BEGIN INTERVIEW

[Interview begins mid sentence.]

Jonathan Poston: …June 24, 2003 at Missroon House, the Historic Charleston Foundation's headquarters at 40 East Bay Street in Charleston. I'm Jonathan Poston, Director of Museums and Preservation for the Foundation. I'm with Kitty Robinson, the Historic Charleston Foundation's Executive Director. And we are talking at this point today with Palmer Gaillard, the Honorable Palmer Gaillard, former Mayor of Charleston and a former trustee of the Historic Charleston Foundation, who has held all sorts of political and community offices over the years. And a little bit about his memories of Charleston, about the Historic Charleston Foundation in his period as Mayor of Charleston during a very important point in the city's history as well as in a very important point in this preservation story. Palmer, to start out, we'd like you to tell us just a little bit from your memory and your own knowledge of your family and your childhood in Charleston and the low country.

J. Palmer Gaillard: Well, I grew up—I was born in 1920, Easter Sunday 1920, right over here on Weims Court. If I was a bird, I could fly straight there and be there in about two seconds. My son lives in Charleston, and my father and brother and I was born in Charleston. In a lot of ways, believe it or not, Charleston in some areas has not changed at all. It looks a lot better, but it's the same buildings, and everything is the same.

However, if you were here then, like I was, and you walked down the street, first, there were a lot of pedestrians and very few automobiles, a lot of horses and wagons and hucksters selling goods on the street and little boys playing in the street a lot. But as time evolved and we got a little bit better, the houses became repaired, and they're so much better-looking now. However, having gone through the '20s and growing up very young, I didn't stray too far from Weims Court.

But by ten years old, our territory was from East Bay back to the Carolina Yacht Club right next door from our base of operations. And that's where we learned to swim. That's where

we did a lot of sailing. And from Bliss Street, East Bay on the east, Broad on the north, and then west about to [00:02:56 unintelligible] Street, that was probably my roaming area until after ten years of age.

Then when the Crash came in '29—nobody had anything before the Crash, but we really didn't have anything then. And, of course, as a young child, I didn't know too much about it except what I could have. So-and-so lost his job, and this fella's out of work. And you could see the desperation on some people's face and in their lives. They had to leave. I had one friend, Waring Simmons. His family was just wiped out, he had nothing. And they left and went down to the [00:03:35 unintelligible] area. And he stayed there 'til he died, right down.

Then we got through the Depression, and things began to come up a little bit better. And then in about 1934, I went to high school. And we were poor, but we didn't know it. Everybody had a good time. We had no money, but somebody'd get an automobile. Sometimes, we'd steal a little gas from somebody, God knows, but we didn't hurt them. And then we got to sailing, and I used to keep my boat right over there at the Carolina Yacht Club. And we grew up, and all through high school, I guess they were wonderful years. We had a lot of fun, always doing something morning, noon, and night, especially in the summer.

And then when I got through high school, that was the end of my education. I went to work. But most of my friends, of course, went off to college. But then, bam, at 2:00 P.M. Charleston time on December the 7th of 1941, we were at war. And my generation's lives were just completely turned upside down. We went—and this is my description of it, I don't know how accurate it is, but it's pretty accurate. We went from boys at two o'clock Charleston time on December 7, '49, to men by five o'clock that afternoon because it was obvious we were all going to be in the service. And we were timed perfectly to get into that time and place.

And by then, Charleston was coming out of it pretty well, and there was a lot of work because of the war buildup. The war buildup started around '38 when Hitler was starting his foolishness in Europe. And then when he marched into Poland, I believe in September of '39, this country did begin to build up. The navy yard was building ships, and they were building barracks and all that, a lot of work. So things began to change a lot.

And then I left Charleston, like all of my friends at that age, for four years. I left. I joined the navy on Tuesday following the bombing, and I came back almost exactly four years later. So I was gone at that time. Then when I came back, it was a whole new life for me. Then I was married then and had no children but, shortly after the war, began to have children. And so my boyish days were gone.

And I often think back on them, and I guess the biggest fun we had as boys was sailing right in this harbor. And I've got a lot of good memories, a lot of good pictures. And the unfortunate [00:06:36 unintelligible]. I can’t change that. But we sure had a lot of fun. Now, if you want me to continue on in that era, but that sort of took you in my boyhood.

But getting back to the buildings, I think since [00:07:00 unintelligible] a lot of them. This building we're in right here, we used to play in this building. [00:07:09 Unintelligible] on

the third floor was the dance floor. And we'd go up there. And they had folding chairs. And we'd run up and skid on them like skis, except we would stop, and then we were in trouble.

POSTON: [laughs]

JPG: And the Shriners would have big balls up there, and they'd have parties. And over here behind you where the low building is, that was tennis courts. And—

POSTON: Oh, wow.

JPG: Oh, yes, sir. There were big tennis courts out there. And then, between the tennis courts and the seawall on this side was where we played football. East Bay Playground didn't exist right then, and I should have mentioned that. East Bay Playground, which is just the next piece of property—

POSTON: Right. Right.

JPG: —had an enormous warehouse on it. And railroad tracks came right down across East Bay, just at East Bay Playground.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And then, during the Maybank administration, he bought the property. The City got it somehow and tore down the warehouse. Wouldn't let them do it now, but they tore it down, and that started East Bay Playground. I'm guessing that the year was probably about '32. Maybank came in as mayor in '31, and that happened about '32 or '33.

POSTON: Right. Right.

JPG: Right after the Depression.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And the railroad tracks crossed East Bay Street, and there was another set of warehouses that went down along the two lanes and right up to the first house that used to be Miss [00:08:45 unintelligible]. And those were torn down after World War II.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And the houses all the way around on the west side of the street have all been built since World War II. The Vanderhorst Row, the first house on the other side of the playground, when we were children, it was at one time an office. And it was loaded with papers. We used to go up there and look for stamps. Why we didn't catch it on fire, I'll never know. It was barricaded. All the windows were sealed. And, of course, we found a way to get in, and we'd go in there with candles. And it's a miracle we didn't burn it down.

And then it wasn't—I don't think it was—well, I'm sure it was after World War II that that got repaired into condos, I guess, yeah. But Rainbow Row during the '30s was all black. And the village was there but in terrible shape. And then they started into that, and somebody came up with the idea of painting them different colors, and the name, Rainbow Row, sort of stuck.

POSTON: Mm-hmm.

JPG: Of course, Walt Evans was there up front. He'd have been there since before the Civil War. Elliott Street was totally black, but when you crossed Church and went Michael's Alley, that was white. And if you ride down or rode down Church Street then and now, everything is the same, except they're better looking. They've been repaired. And, of course, after Hugo, a lot of roofs were replaced. But the painting is what made [00:10:22 unintelligible].

I mean a few have been torn down. First Baptist Church, no change there, of course. But really all downtown, particularly south of the track from East Bay right on over to, well, Lenwood, there isn't a lot of change. But now, let me emphasize it's a lot better-looking now. But I mean it's like anything else. You can have a muddy fence that looks like the dickens, but you paint it and it looks good. And there have been some changes, of course, and some new buildings. Every now and again, a new one slips in.

POSTON: Well, Peter, I guess, and when you were talking to him, sort of emphasized how some houses, like, The Battery, for instance were much better-kept than others. And the people who clearly had some money, like Mrs. Roebling…

JPG: No question about it, yeah.

POSTON: Yeah. That was really the best part of Charleston, that you had a mix of people who had money, people who didn't—

JPG: Right.

POSTON: —people who were black and people who were white.

JPG: Haven't you ever heard the expression "too poor [00:11:26 unintelligible]"? Well, I lived through those days.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: So that's—yes.

POSTON: Yeah, that's important, that it really was like that. And most people didn't have the money to paint their houses back then.

JPG: They had the house, and it's all they could do to pay the taxes and live in it. An example, and I believe it's 21—I'm sure it's 21 King Street, recently, Mr. [00:11:50 unintelligible] spent a lot of money in it. And, unfortunately, he got killed in a motorcycle accident.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: That house, for years and years and years, was just an empty house. And somebody owned it. I have no idea who owned it, but it was always locked up. And it was so big. Then when you get down to South Battery between King and Meeting, all of those houses were occupied but only a few people living in them. Of course, they all had servants, which they don't have now. But they were in terrible state of repair. The house itself was solid, had a good roof.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: There were no signs of—and the windows were not broken out. But inside and all the trimming needed paint so bad. And then at Church and South Battery was Mr. Julian Mitchell. Now, he had the wherewithal to do it. And across the street from him was the Villa Margherita, where Ms. Wilson now lives. And it was a hotel when I was a child.

Also the—well, as far back as I can remember—Miss Leise Dawson ran the Villa Margherita, which was an exclusive hotel, seasonal, in the winter. And the very—the ultra-rich would come down. I suppose now they would come down in private jets, but in those days, they would come down by railroad, and their chauffeurs would drive their limousines down. And the chauffeurs all stayed at Francis Marion Hotel, and the cars were left at what was called the Auto Livery. J.M. Connelley, a mortician—

POSTON: Mm-hmm.

JPG: He—Mr. Connelley was quite a man in Charleston, and one of his subsidiaries, I guess you could say—he had Auto Livery. And it was a livery originally, I presume, with horses. And then when the automobile came in, he added the name, Auto Livery. And that's what he called it. And it was right behind—

POSTON: In that big, brick warehouse?

JPG: In that big, brick—right behind. You can go down Burns Lane and down through there. And he would store automobiles there. And he would rent automobiles. And so these ultra-wealthy people would come down and live there, and their chauffeurs went to Francis Marion. But every morning, that automobile—that limousine was in front of Villa Margherita in case the owner wanted to go somewhere. And Miss Liese Dawson, she was a spinster lady. She was the aunt of Mr. Stuart and Louis Dawson, old Stuart and Louis. They're both deceased now. She's, of course, dead. And my sister used to work for her as a clerk at the desk. And she met a lot of these people. It was a lot of fun. But then the Fort Sumter Hotel was always there.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And the ultra-rich didn't go there, but if they couldn't get in the Villa, they would go there. They wanted to be downtown. And all the corners had grocery stores on them. At King

and Tradd there was Grapes. At Meeting and Tradd there was Pete Cosanto. Up here on East Bay by Elliott there was Balzano. And during the '30s, there was an A&P at Atlantic and Church.

Now, can you imagine a grocery store being there today? And after it closed, Gilly Dotterer, Gaillard Dotterer, who was a construction man, actually, and a very good one, he bought it. And he and his wife, Leslie, lived there for years. And he converted it from a store to a residence. And that was about as far south as stores went on Church Street. And then there were several stores up on Church Street between Tradd and Broad, a number of stores there. And then, of course, the Automatic. My mom used to call it Her Camps. And the Automatic was run by the [00:16:07 unintelligible] family. It was at King and Broad on the southeast corner.

And then, across the street was an A&P at one time also. And then that's where you all had the furniture store. That at one time was an A&P, and at one time, there was also a barbershop there. And then, going west, there were several corner stores, New and Tradd and Savage and Tradd, and a big Piggly Wiggly down there. The first Piggly Wiggly I ever saw was on Tradd Street just north of—just east of Rutledge. Then the [00:16:49 unintelligible] family, they had a grocery store at Council and Tradd, right opposite where you enter—

POSTON: Right. Right.

JPG: And there were stores everywhere. Mr. Witt had a big meat market on New Street just about, oh, I guess, three or four doors from Tradd. And as I walk through in my mind, I can remember. And the ladies didn't drive then. My mother never drove a car, and not many ladies drove. I'll tell you one that did drive, though, that you all know of. You didn't know her, of course. Miss Susan Frost.

Miss Susan Frost lived—well, you know where she lived, and we used to call it the Pringle House. It's the big house there at King in front of Ladson Street. And she was quite an enterprising lady. And I knew Miss Frost because I lived in Weims Court. It was just a block and a half. And she had some, not to sound an alarm, Japanese palm trees. Do you know what they are?

POSTON: Mm-hmm.

JPG: Well, when we were boys, this time of year, well, really in the spring, we'd jump in her yard and get a few. And, of course, without her knowledge. And nuts and things like that, and we could take a lot of them. Sometimes we'd get figs out of somebody's yard and then go ring the doorbell and sell them to them. And I'd done that a lot of times.

POSTON: That's great.

JPG: But…

Kitty Robinson: One thing about going to the—where did your mother—did she order her groceries? Or what do you remember about that?

JPG: Well, mother, no. My mother, for all I can remember—almost see it right now—they would shop on Saturday afternoon, go to the groceries. And when I was a small boy, I'd go with them. That was a big deal. You'd get in the car and go to the grocery store. And a long time, they'd shop right at Atlantic and Church A&P. And then Olan's. Oh, I forgot. I left out Olan's, good heavens, at Water and Meeting. And finally after Olan's closed, he had a warehouse in the back, and I was offered it one day, I heard it was for sale, and I bought it and didn't know what to do with it.

So I played with it, had some fun, and sold it. But they would buy from the Automatic, as I called it. She called it Her Camps, King and Broad, southeast corner. And that was about it. We'd go. And, of course, I went along; mostly, when I got home, helped bring the groceries in. And you would not believe the groceries that you could by in 1930 and '31 for $10. Unbelievable. And now you can put it in your pocket.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: But Olan's, I'm glad you mentioned that. He served all of downtown. And he had wagons. It was all, but most of the ladies—I'm not going to say most. A lot of the ladies would order by phone, and Olan's would deliver it. And he had a whole fleet of wagons and horses and kept them right there on Meeting Street. In the back on Water Street, if you go there now and you look at a house that hasn't got a square angle in it, it's leaning. And the horses were right behind that. That's the place I bought. And it had a big freight elevator in it. And when I sold it, I wanted the freight elevator, because I was in the lumber business and I thought I had a use for it. So I sold it with the understanding that I'd get the elevator. A fella took it out and brought it to me. And I moved that thing around so many times, I'm ashamed because I never did get it working. But I had it. Great, big, old wheel bigger than this table. And it would pull a rope, an endless rope. All of the big warehouses had them. But…

POSTON: We've still got one in our warehouse, believe it or not.

JPG: Probably, yeah.

POSTON: That's way up off of Meeting Street.

JPG: Well, keep it.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: And it's an endless rope.

POSTON: Right, [00:21:01 unintelligible].

JPG: Rope with a big wheel. Wheels were five feet and got big swaths of rope all jumbled up. And it worked good too.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: For freight.

POSTON: We're scared to get on it as passengers.

JPG: Oh, I imagine.

KR: I want to ask you about something that I know you're so good at, and that is building and your hobby of furniture building. How did that come about?

JPG: Oh, that's interesting. Lucy had been after me to build furniture as long as I can remember. I'll tell you, my first shot at it was I was in the navy. I was a naval aviator. And when the weather was bad, we couldn't fly. And young aviators, not married, you know where they ended up. They usually went to the bar.

I'd always go to the carpenter shop. And I was a commissioned officer, and so nobody said anything to me. And I could go in there, and the next thing I knew, I was using all kind of things. And [00:22:05 unintelligible]. And I guess I was taking advantage, although I didn't mean to. And the chief or an enlisted man would come over. "Can I help you, sir?" And I learned an awful lot from them, but I never did have enough skill to do it, and I was too busy making a living and getting in politics and God knows what else.

But years later when Emmie, my granddaughter whom I believe you know, was a little girl, she says, "I want a dollhouse." So I made her a dollhouse. Well, she would call me every day. "Is the dollhouse finished? Is the dollhouse finished?" So finally, I speeded up and gave her the dollhouse, but I wasn't happy with it. So then I took my time and built what I thought was a real nice house, and it was a nice house.

And finally, after about eight months, I woke up one morning and realized I had a beautiful, little house, but what was I going to do with it? About that time, some folks' church was having a bazaar. So I gave it to them. They made a lot of money on it too. And I've built at least four for some fella at the church. I built one for the Preservation Society, Gibbes Art Gallery, and a lot more. And I gave them away.

And then Lucy was after me to build furniture. So finally, I said, "I'm going to build some furniture." And then when I got into that, it's—you can get addicted to that. It's absolutely unbelievable, how interesting it can come. And it's good for you. I just block out the world. I get down in my workshop, and nothing comes in my ears or goes out. I'm just captivated with what I'm doing.

The only problem I find with furniture-building is you hit boring periods. You'll go along fine and, "Man, I can't wait to get back to it." Sometimes, you'll be an hour late eating your dinner because you want to finish. Then you hit a boring part, and you don't want to go back to it. Inlay is boring, boring. But with without it, it's not the piece of furniture you want. And that's how I got in it.

I'm building a sideboard. And when I got through with it, I was very pleased with it. I thought it looked pretty good, but Emma said, "What am I going to do with it?" And I'm going back to my granddaughter again, Emmie. Emmie's about to—now she's getting married. So I said, "Here. Here's an engagement gift." And so I gave it to her, and I think you've seen it, Kitty.

KR: It's just beautiful.

JPG: So I've built seven or eight of those things and I don't know how many coffee tables and chests and things like that. But it's a lot of fun. The other thing tough about it is materials. It's getting awful hard to get them, and you would not believe how expensive it is. We're making this table. Somebody looks at this table 50, 100 years from now, they will think what I'm paying for mahogany lumber now is cheap in 2003.

God only knows what it'll be then. But, as an example, I bought a board recently. It was a wide board. It was 19 inches wide and 12 feet long, and that board cost me almost $400. So it's pretty expensive now. But to those who look at it later, they'll probably laugh at those prices. And it wasn't too long ago that you could by a lot of mahogany for that. But, again, it's getting harder and harder to get and harder and harder to find places that have it.

But that's how I got into the dollhouse building and the furniture. And right now—I don't know if I should reveal this. I'm writing a book now. I've been totally consumed with this darn book for the last year, and I can't wait to slam the pages shut, write “the end,” and go back to my workshop. I've got about six things that family members want me to build. I don't know who's going to be the lucky one to get the first one.

KR: Well, in your book, are you talking about your days in politics?

JPG: Well, yes. Oh, of course. That is part of my life.

KR: Would you talk to us about that and how you got into politics in the beginning?

JPG: Well, certainly, it's no secret how I got into politics. I ran for alderman in 1951. In those days—that expression, "in those days," sounds like you're talking back to the Dark Ages, although it was over 50 years ago now. Each ward had two aldermen. An at-large alderman that was elected for everybody in the city, he had to live in the ward. And the ward alderman, who also had to live in the ward, but he was only elected for the ward. And Charleston had 12 wards. I was serving in ward six.

I had just bought my house in 1951, and there was a mayor's election coming up. And Mr. Allen Moore and Mr. Gerald Carter were the two aldermen. Mr. Moore moved out of the ward. Mr. Carter was the ward alderman, so he was running as at-large. And I was asked by the administration to run for alderman, which I did and was elected and served another term. And then in the second term, the mayor and I began to part company. And I'm not going into any details on that, but, obviously—well, we didn't get along. We got along fine. I just didn't agree with what he was doing.

POSTON: Was this Mayor Morrison?

JPG: Yes. Yes. Yes. I was elected with him on his second term. And I served with him in his second and third term, and I just disagreed with him on a lot of things. And it began to get more provocative. And then, in 1959, when he decided he was going to run for his fourth term, I had an awful lot of people—and my book will address all this, so I'm not going into it too much. But I had a lot of people that suggested I run.

And so I got in the—and that's I got in the mayor position. And it was a tough race, but we won. And then I stayed there for four terms. I was elected four times and enjoyed every minute of it and did my best to run Charleston properly. But it's not an easy thing. But one thing that I did do that I'm very proud of, and that was extend the boundaries of our city.

Charleston, the last time it had expanded its boundaries was in 1849. That's 111 years to 1960, when I got in and crossed Ashley River. And every year I was mayor, for 16 years, we added to the city. And now the present administration has added more. And yet Charleston's stayed after World War II just didn't do a thing. And I don't want to tell you what was happening. People were leaving the City, and it was drying up.

And within six months after taking office, we had crossed the river and, as I say, the first time in 111 years. But we lost some valuable time right after World War II because people were leaving us. We didn't have the use of their thinking, their money, any of it. It was hard, coming in every morning and work, leave us with all the trash and traffic, and go back home. But the good people knew that they were doing that, and they knew it was Charleston, but nobody gave them the opportunity to join. And it was no easy times either.

And the laws, incidentally, of our state, which we had to follow, were very archaic. And they were much harder than they are now. And I'm not saying it's easy now, because it's not easy to expand the boundaries, but it was so much harder then. And through the Municipal Association, of which Charleston is a member and I later became president, I jumped on that right away with [00:30:39 unintelligible]. So I got help from every town and the city plus the administration.

And we worked on the general assembly, and we did get the annexation laws of our state greatly relaxed. And today, which is over 50 years since we first did it, they're so much easier now. But I emphasize again it's still not easy to do, but it was a tough one. And then when we got through, of course, we were tied up in the courts, and we couldn't do anything that we wanted to do, such as give them service and sewer and water. And then when we won the court case, they took us to the Supreme Court.

So all that delayed us for six months to give the people what they really wanted and why they joined the City. But it had to be done, because I wasn't about to go over and start spending money—big money to put in sewers, water lines, and you name it and then have the Court come and say that belongs to somebody else. I would've been a joke then. But that was the biggest thing that I was concerned about when I ran for mayor, plus the financials.

Now, there were a number of other things, but Johnson was just sitting and letting the world go by us without bringing the people back. Every state in America was doing it after World War II. And before that time, it was not too much interest in expanding boundaries. But after World War II, the suburbs took over. And I think that's a model right there in Charleston.

JPG: Palmer, you were a preservation mayor of Charleston. I would certainly count you in that realm. But when you started in your time with the city, it was a period—of course, Charleston had a preservation ordinance, but it was old by then, 1931. But it was, I guess, in that period Mayor Morrison—I know that the Orphan House was torn down and the chapel, and some of those losses occurred. How would you say that the city changed from that period into the '60s in its approach to preservation and building?

JPG: Well, first, let me give credit where credit is due on the preservation, and that goes back to Mayor Stoney.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: He served the City from '23 to '31. And he was a rabid preservationist, and he was a dynamic man. And you didn't cross Stoney without expecting to get hit over the head.

POSTON: His law partner did once, didn’t he?

JPG: Yeah. Well, he was a great man, and I was a great admirer of his. But anyhow, he introduced into the world, into the United States, a preservation ordinance. And he set aside the oldest parts of the city. And he put—let's use the word "teeth" in it for that day. And, of course, those teeth now are nothing but rubber gums compared to what we need now.

POSTON: Sure.

JPG: But he did a lot. He got it started. And then we for a long time, a long time went through a situation—in fact, we're still going through it. That's where you people have done so much good. When somebody wanted to do something, "well, we wanted it located right here." Well, there's a building, which don’t we knock it down?

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: And today, you know that. You have to fight them all the time.

POSTON: Still.

JPG: And a lot of buildings have shut down in shambles. A lot of them, I agree what should have gone. And, well, I think they brought back better, really—or better use of them. But in the case of the Orphan House and things like that, you had commercial come in. See, we had not extended the boundaries then. And all the people were out there, and all the shopping centers were coming.

So here comes along Sears Roebuck. Well, that got City Hall's attention pretty fast. You people weren't active. And I'm not ridiculing you, but you all were not active. In fact, I don't know if the Historic Foundation was even in existence then.

POSTON: It was five years old.

JPG: Okay, five years old. And in that same we all knew, they had bought the property, and the deals were cut and burned. [00:35:01 Unintelligible]. And we got that thing. We got it there now. And so that's how it happened.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: Then, we had—each one of those would create a big ruckus.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: And you know that.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And a big ruckus.

POSTON: And that put the end to the period, to do that.

JPG: Yes, exactly. That's putting it small on the ruckus.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: But they didn't win. And then the Historic Charleston Foundation and the preservation and then just general opinion. You know, you've heard the expression of "that's an idea before its time." And that's true. People had good ideas, but the world's not ready to accept them. And now preservation is a thing. Good God, when I was mayor, I was invited all over the country to go and tell them what we're doing in Charleston. And we weren't doing all that much, but we had the law that they had read about.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And that intrigued them. But it's just been a process of growing with you people doing an awful lot. That was your job. And I'm going to probably get myself in trouble right now. I don't agree with you all on everything you do, and I hope that nobody ever gets so high and mighty that everybody agrees with everything they do. But you all have done a great job, and you have saved a lot of things. You improved a lot of buildings.

And I think sometimes you were wrong, but it wasn't for me to say. The powers that be overruled. But preservation and building construction is now, I guess, universal now. And every city in the country is doing what we were doing years and years ago. But we weren't doing it as

powerful as you do now. But we were doing it strong enough to make a model and saved a lot of houses. We lost a lot but saved a lot too.

POSTON: Sure. Well, that might be a good point at which to mention that it would have been while you were mayor that Historic Charleston embarked on the Ansonborough Project.

JPG: Very definitely.

POSTON: And that was really ending while you were mayor. I think it was pretty much ending as you were ending your time as mayor. So maybe you could talk about that a little bit, about what that meant maybe.

JPG: Have we still got time? Ansonborough. I think it's one of the best things that you people did. You did two big things that I think the Historic Foundation has done, and the preservation movement, but that this group now protected—was Ansonborough and making people aware. You know, let's take 100 people, and you would start preservation talk. There would be ten, maybe, listening. And ten isn't a majority of 100. I think we all know that.

But you all have now gotten so that, instead of ten listening, it's 60 listening. It's enough to tip the scales. And you get support. I'm sure you have recognized this or realized you get support sometimes when you have no idea where it was coming from. And sometimes you get opposition where you didn't expect to get it. But you're getting support now from people that 25 years ago were ready to tell you to go jump in the lake. But now they're realizing the importance of it.

You people had the vision and had the wherewithal and the good judgment and the knowledge to impart that vision into other people. And it's gotten to be now—it's not only a legal requirement, but it's become pride, and people want to do it. People now realize, why in the world tear the building down when we can take the building and rejuvenate it? And I think some of the new things they're building are atrocious myself. But what's that thing? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So the—

POSTON: [00:39:19 Unintelligible].

JPG: Yeah. But it's hard when you have buildings that were built for the horse-and-buggy days and then try to adapt them to Charleston days. But one of the things that has upset me and it's coming back right now—it's coming quick—the hospital. Now, nobody wants to see the hospital go to North Charleston, MUSC. But they build these big, enormous, massive buildings. And then, either the architects don't do it or you people [00:39:54 unintelligible] but don't want a service area to it.

And you can't build a 12-story building covering a half a city block and expect to service it from the street. You're blocking up the street. That's no different from you. If you want to build a house, you build the house on the lot that you bought. You don't expect to put your swimming pool in the street. And those are the things that I find—

POSTON: Right.

JPG: —that they are just ruining the quality of life in Charleston.

POSTON: Talking about blocking the street…

JPG: Putting too much building on the lot.

POSTON: Right. Right.

JPG: I read the other day, in this Jewish building they built by the College of Charleston.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And then people jumped on the architect and said, "It's awful-looking. They used up all the lot." His answer was, "Well, what they wanted, I had to use all the lot." I wonder if it ever occurred to him that they were trying to put too much building on the lot. And he should've been an architect. He should've said, "You can't put that building on this lot. Either buy some more property, or move the site." But they don't do that.

POSTON: Right. Right.

JPG: And that's a criticism that I bring up.

POSTON: Yeah. We agree.

JPG: Well, they're putting these massive, big public buildings and then expect to service them from the street. It's ridiculous. And all it does is ruin the quality of life. You go up Ashley Avenue, and you've got a big tractor-trailer stopped up there blocking the whole line of traffic and one backing in, and you've got to wait. It might only be five or ten minutes, but you've got ice cream in the back or a crying child. That upsets you pretty much. It's all so unnecessary.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: Well, I'm getting away from you.

POSTON: No. I agree with you. I got blocked by a beer truck in front of the hotel about an hour ago—

[00:41:38 crosstalk]

POSTON: Well, it's all right, but I was a wreck, trying to get around it.

JPG: Yeah.

POSTON: I was trying to get around it.

JPG: But it's the truth.

POSTON: But it's the truth. Well, could you tell us a little bit—we sort of asked Peter to describe what he remembered about Ansonborough as it was before and his perceptions of it and then what the Ansonborough Project did. Could you sort of tell us from your perspective a little bit about that?

JPG: Ansonborough is a case that I described earlier. Those buildings were just like they are now, less the ones that have been taken down. And there haven't been many, but they were in terrible condition. And the reason they were in terrible condition, because the fella that lived in it, and may or may not have owned it, didn't have the money to repair it. And when the door would lean, he'd prop it up.

And it's awful easy to laugh about it and criticize it, but, by golly, when you don't have any money, you're dead in the water. I found that out running the City. That's how I got to be mayor. We were wondering where all the money was going. Nobody stole it. They were just spending money they didn't have. And you can't run the City with no money. You can't run anything without money.

And it comes down to the personal level, and that's what Ansonborough was. It's very much like it was then, like it is now with the exception it cleaned up a blighted area. Now, there will be people who'll tell you, "Oh, it wasn't all that blighted." Well, it was pretty [00:43:14 unintelligible]. We had some very small houses on 30-foot lots and 20-foot lots on Anson Street backing into the property. And they were working people that lived there and, as I say, just didn't have the resources to fix them up like they wanted.

Now, after you people got involved and money began to come into it—and I think what you did was a genius way you did it—you fixed up the outside with good taste and [00:43:46 unintelligible]. And I've got to get this dig in. Now, not that you're always right, but you're a lot more right than most people. And you fixed it up in good taste. And you told everybody to do what you wanted inside. And you got started at a time when Charlestonians could go in there and finish it.

POSTON: Mm-hmm.

JPG: And it's so expensive now. And I don't know really—I haven't followed this thing yet, but it seems to me that every time something good comes up, there's somebody circling from New York or Boston, or somebody comes in and grabs it up.

POSTON: Exactly.

JPG: And that's worrying me.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: But not because they own it, but because they're going to do it in such a way, they're going the other way. They make immediate repairs, and you fix it up normally to agree with one fellow. Then suddenly you get some fellow there. He wants to put everything in it and fix it up and gaudy it up, and he's going the other way. And we're getting—

POSTON: That's not right.

JPG: But I hate to see the local people being pushed out. Ansonborough was a good case of cleaning up the bad areas, the local people getting in—not all, of course. And then the auditorium came in about that time. And the northern end was the bad end. When I say "bad," they were good people. They didn't have the money, and they were a mixture of everything there.

And, of course, Calhoun Street was all commercial with ratty, little stores and all. And so with the combination of you all starting and us coming in there—and then I, personally, was concerned about George Street, and I said, "We've got to push George Street through to East Bay." And the planners disagreed with me on that. I said, "Listen. You're building a building that's going to hold 3,000 people. How in the world when coming down from Burgess]—how in the world are they going to get in there?"

And they finally agreed. I don't think they were very happy about it, but we broadened—and we widened Anson Street. We had to do it. I mean you can't—getting back to what I was just saying about the big buildings and the service of them, you can't build a big building that's going to collect people and not provide for their ingress and egress and servicing it.

POSTON: Right.

KR: Did Frances Edmunds work with you a lot during the Ansonborough time?

JPG: Yes. Kitty, to be honest with you, Frances and Historic did what they wanted in Ansonborough. When I say "what they wanted," they didn't ask for input from us. The only thing they asked were permission to do it. And if we didn't give them permission, then we'd just stuck our neck in a buzz saw. And they did a good job. I can't say that the city takes any credit for that. I think that was totally the Foundation—we agreeing, of course, to make some improvements both in the street, also into giving permits.

Now, when it came to the auditorium, again, we were separate. The auditorium at—I think it was in my second term, we had been talking about an auditorium, to my personal knowledge, for 30 years. And I finally permitted it. I said, "We're just going to do this thing, honey, or we're not going to do it." And they came up. It was a good, powerful committee and they came up with the belief that we needed it, that it needed to be about 3,000 seats, and it needed to be very close to King and Calhoun.

Well, we knew we couldn't put it on Marion Square, and we knew we couldn't bind those things there. So that sent us down there. And I don't mind telling you I was very, very worried that we had not picked a good location. And the longer I live, the better I think the location is. It

was just a freak that we got a good place. But we went down there because it needed rehabilitation. It was really a—I hate to use the word "slum," but it was run down.

And that was a big block. And you had Wall Street coming in there going to Laurens Street and Alexander Street going to there. And we closed both of those streets. And they're cul-de-sacs now from Laurens. And the building is over part of Wall Street, and Alexander's going to be used for ingress and egress. And when we had selected the site, we got Frances's attention. But she was very cooperative. But it was at Frances's insistence that we saved two buildings.

One is still there on Calhoun Street. It ran into the Chamber for a long time, a little arch building. And it had an interesting history, which we won't go into. We used to always laugh about it. And then, the other one was—It was a three-story brick building on the east side of Anson Street exactly opposite George. If you ran down George Street and didn't stop, you would jump into the house. So it, obviously, had to go.

Well, Frances said, "That house is not going." So we cut out a deal. I said, "Well, the street's coming through. You may as well make up that mind." So we bought down Laurens Street. And, believe it or not, that big, three-story house, we rolled south. But when it got south—and this was by design, no accident—it became a two-story house. They took the bottom story out, which was really not a full story. You've seen some houses that have seven-foot ceilings or something? So they dropped the house about four feet.

And it's there today, a red brick house. And I told Chipwood what I said, "Do you think you can move that brick house without collapsing it?" He said, "You give me the money, and I'll move it." And he did. And then we opened George Street—or just extended George and then put a bend in it, right? And so it entered East Bay Street. It merged with Inspection Street. I think it was Inspection Street. I know it was. Inspection Street was east of East Bay and west of East Bay, and Alexander ran into it, and so did Wall.

And they also went down to Laurens Street. Anyhow, we moved that house, and Frances was adamant on that, and the little arch house that we saved. And I'm certainly not trying to take anything from Frances. That's the only one—she didn't seem to have any trouble with the location. I don't recall her having trouble. See, after all, most of your all's work was south of Laurens.

KR: Mm-hmm.

JPG: There might have been one or two houses north, but I don't think so. I think most of them were south of Laurens. And they recognized—I mean that Calhoun Street, it was bad. It was a rough area. And it was a few whites up there. It was mixed but very few whites. But the commercial part. And today, well, it would be—Well, I don't know what it would be today, but it wasn't real pleasant at the time.

Anyhow, I don't recall any argument or any problem with the Historic Foundation and, in particular, Frances, except over that house. And I agreed. I said, "Frances, I have no desire to take that house down." And when Chipwood told me he could move it, the die was cast, and we

did it. And then we repaired the house. And the Chamber rented it for a while. I don't even know what—is anything in it now? I hope so.

KR: The Civic Design Center.

JPG: Is that what—yeah.

KR: Is in there now.

JPG: Well, it's a nice, little building.

KR: It is.

JPG: And I thought they fixed it up really nice.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: And, of course, when they got through, you know, it was nothing but a shell, just like this room. And the only thing left were the four walls. Then they put a new roof on, and they put [00:51:43 unintelligible].

KR: Mm-hmm.

POSTON: Well, I'm so glad you told us this because there's always been a legend—I've been at Historic Charleston for 21 years now, and there's always been a legend that you and Frances had some summit over the location of the auditorium. And she said, "You leave this part of Ansonborough alone, and you can do this." So that sort of tells us exactly what happened, and that's good to have.

JPG: Well, I'm not saying we didn't, but I honestly do not remember any such meeting or such a statement. No, let me tell you, we picked the site.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And we didn't argue. It's a matter of record who's on the committee.

POSTON: Sure.

JPG: Clarence Legerton was the chairman of the committee.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And I can't—but we're citizens and [00:52:24 unintelligible]. And I was on the committee.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And we originally right away said, "It's got to be there at King and Calhoun." And we started doing this way because that was the area that needed the cleaning up. The College was about that time flexing its muscles, and so we figured the College would handle that area, and the medical college beyond that. So, "We understand that. Let's go this way."

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And I don't recall any problems with Frances. I'm sure that she was advised of it, but it came out in the paper one day where the site was going to be. And then that seemed to be accepted. And we started buying it, and we did get some assistance from the federal government. And this helped the occupants tremendously because most of the money, believe it or not, went to relocating them, especially the ratty, little businesses that were along Calhoun Street.

There's a building right now—you can go up and look at it today at the southwest corner of Rutledge Avenue and Spring Street, called the Wilson Building. That fella had a store about the size of this room, maybe less. And when he got through being paid for that store and that alleged equipment, he built that building. Now, you ride and look at it today. That building today would cost you close to a million dollars to build, I believe.

Now, he bought it some time ago, but that was the value in getting the federal money that relocated them. And anybody that tells you that they were hurt to own a business in that thing is just not telling you the truth. They all came out of it smelling like a rose. And there's the best example I can give you. I'm talking about D. Ward Wilson. And he was—

POSTON: I knew Mr. Wilson.

JPG: Yeah, very prominent fellow.

POSTON: Yeah.

JPG: And he didn't like leaving. But when he found out what he got, I don't think he had any trouble. But Frances was looking over our shoulders. I'm not taking anything from her, but I don't think that there was any arguments. I think she recognized that, as I've said, that northern area was pretty ratty.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: You would not go up there by yourself, I can promise you that. And I doubt if he would either.

KR: Well, we're going to run out of time in just a few minutes, but we talked about the Ansonborough lot, and surely that's one of the Foundation's greatest achievements. Are there other things that you remember doing or recall during your tenure on the Foundation board as a trustee that stand out in any way to you?

JPG: You know, I'm embarrassed to say I don't remember anything. I was a trustee for what? Three times or two times, something like that?

KR: Three times. I think it was three times.

JPG: I don't remember anything unusual. We had the usual going on, but I don't remember anything like that. The Foundation, its big thrust and the greatness of it, I think, is what it's done to make people aware of what's going on. Until you all started all of this—"well, you're knocking down another building." "Well, so what? We'll get a better one." That was sort of the attitude, but that's not the attitude anymore.

And I bet you, you could get on the telephone, and in 20 minutes have 200 or 300 people going to our meeting to protest if it was a real rough thing of what shouldn't happen. And that's been the value of you all. I don't recall when I was on the board, any big thing. I remember wasn't that about the time we bought Mulberry?

POSTON: Exactly.

JPG: At that time, it was Mulberry Plantation. I know that took a lot of talking because it was 30 miles up the road. And that took some—then we got into Old Brass. Isn't that what it's called now?

POSTON: The Eastwood Homes.

KR: [00:56:47 Unintelligible].

JPG: God, yeah, but…

POSTON: Got a little far afield.

JPG: Yeah, we did. I recall that.

POSTON: Haven't gone that far afield again. But good—

JPG: Get us all out in the woods.

POSTON: Yeah, it really was.

JPG: But I don't remember any problems we had that caused any big ruckus.

KR: Well, I'm so glad to hear you say "we" because I think you added so much to our organization because you were—

JPG: Well, I don't know about that.

KR: —a preservationist. And I know Jon has another question to ask you.

POSTON: Well, I want to ask about your time. We just sort of mentioned Mulberry. I know that you and I had some conversations at one point because your family had a plantation some generations back called The Rocks, which was up in the Santee Cooper area.

JPG: Mm-hmm, on the water.

POSTON: And it, unfortunately, burned. But do you have memories of that area? Did your family go up there when you were young and visit up in there? Or did you…

JPG: Jon, you've got to remember, again, going back to what I said. As a young boy, times were tough.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And during the '30s, my father left the plantation back before the turn of the last century. He was born in 1874.

POSTON: Up there.

JPG: No, he was born in Charleston.

POSTON: Born in Charleston.

JPG: Yeah, but his mother came down. They came to the city to have a baby. He was born right down on the corner of Tradd and Orange Street, the big house where his grandfather lived, who was also the mayor of Charleston, my great-grandfather. And I don't recall anything about that, but I do know this. And I will be able to get it if it's of interest to you all. My father during the '30s was very friendly with a Dr. Johnson. And Dr. Johnson was a big photographer.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: And he would go around. He would ask my father to take him to the plantations. And I have the pictures they had taken of the plantations. The shutters were gone, the doors open, windows out. And chickens lived in some of them. And people just didn't have the money. And we were in the depths of the Depression, and people had just left the plantations. Now, The Rocks was in the middle of Lake Marion. And the Connor family, who owned it—it was built by Captain Peter Gaillard.

POSTON: Right.

JPG: Who was the great-grandson from Joachim, who was the immigrant. And he was quite a man. We know he served in Marion's Army. And I got a letter just this week from Mobile, Alabama, trying to tie him to General Wilford. But we know he was with General Marion. Anyhow, it was a beautiful home. And the Connors lived there, and they were very prosperous,

hardworking farmers. And let me tell you who the Connors are. Do you know Billy [00:59:38 unintelligible]?

KR: Yes.

JPG: Well, Billy [00:59:40 unintelligible]'s mother was a Connor and grew up there. And when Santee Cooper came, they were all opposed to Santee Cooper. They didn't like that a bit. But if you could get the picture, this table being what was going to be Lake Marion and The Rocks was sitting right there. So Mr. Connor, he said, "No way am I going to lose my house." And he rolled that house, I think, some two, two and a half miles up to the water.

And they stayed there. And young Rut Connor took it over. Then after the war, the lake filled up. And first thing you know, they had found a new pot of gold: people coming to camp and fish. And Rut Connor took The Rocks property and put a fishing camp there. And it's there right now. Rocks Pond, he called it. And the old house sat there, and a fella named Raymond Gaillard from Mississippi, who lived in [01:00:39 unintelligible], he formed the Captain Peter Gaillard Society. And I helped him.

He did a lot of work, and I did a lot of work too, to raise money to restore the house. And Rut—I don't know if you all know Rut. He's a sort of rough and tumble fella, Olivia's first cousin. Anyhow, he wasn't too much interested. But because of my brother and I, he let us go up there. And we raised the money, and we put a new roof on it. And we were getting to the point where we were ready to start restoring it. It mysteriously burned.

KR: Oh.

JPG: And Ray—Raymond Gaillard—we call him Ray—he went to his grave very despondent over that thing. And he'd raised money, and he gave the money.

POSTON: It was such a beautiful house.

JPG: Oh, it was a beautiful house, yeah. But it burned. And it—listen—

End of recording.