



Interviewee: Richard (Dick) H. Jenrette

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BEGIN INTERVIEW

Kitty Robinson: Good afternoon this is Kitty Robinson speaking. It is Thursday, April the 7th 2005. We have the honor today of interviewing Mr. Richard Hampton Jenrette who was a trustee for Historic Charleston Foundation from 1971 to 1973. And we are going to have an afternoon of interviews and I have several questions that I would like to ask you and I will begin first with your interest in old houses and what prompted that in you.

Richard Jenrette: How did I get interested in old houses? I think I always was as a child. I use to draw pictures of old houses and I think maybe I saw "Gone With The Wind" too many times. I like houses with columns. But as a kid I would always be drawing pictures of houses. They said "Oh you'll grow up to be an architect," which didn't happen. But I think it's just sort of, I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, and I can remember when my parents were getting ready to move looking for house I had strong views on houses from about age five. Unfortunately my parents never listened to me but maybe my taste was too much for 1939 when that was. But from childhood I liked to draw houses. I liked to watch them being built. I liked to go through old houses, haunted houses. It just happened.

KR: I read with interest that you one of your favorite quotes is from Keats about a thing of "beauty is a joy forever" and it professed your interest in beauty and in all of your collecting, has beauty played a part in that?

RJ: Yes, I do remember I had-- Romantic poets, "Ode to a Grecian Urn." "A thing of beauty is a joy forever, loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness." And I think I've always liked beautiful buildings, beautiful objects, and beautiful people, beautiful philosophies, life should be beautiful.

KR: That that seems to be something that you have also espoused with your own foundation the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust and the wonderful houses that you do own, and in that regard in particular what attracted you to Charleston?

RJ: Kitty you asked "What attracted me to Charleston?" It was a bit of an accident. I was down in Hilton Head for a weekend it rained and rained and rained so I got in the car and drove up to see Charleston and was captivated by the look of the city. I had been here before but I had sort of forgotten how nice it was. I remember in college coming down to visit Martha Rivers, as a matter of fact, while she was at Vassar, I was at Harvard Business School. But I came back and this is about 1967, '66, and just drove through it and stopped the car and began to walk and I on the way also read an article about Frances Edmunds in Time Magazine about what she was doing in Charleston. To make a long story short I went back to New York and at our firm, and one of my colleagues at Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette was Charlie Pug Ravenel. And I said "gosh I really liked your hometown." Obviously I knew he was from Charleston. He said "Well we ought to go back down there" and said "we have some clients there I think you'd like to meet, Charlie and Carol Duell."

So the next thing I knew a few weekends later I was being-- Pug Ravenel and I came back down and I stayed with Charlie and Carol Duell. They were clients of our firm and had a nice room overlooking The Battery. And we went for a walk, a moonlight walk, and there was moonlight, magnolias, pittosporum was blooming. And we walked by 9 East Battery, Roper House, and I said "Who owns that house? I think it's my favorite," which wasn't very tactful because Charlie had this beautiful house at 21 East Battery. I should have said "after yours, I think that's my favorite." Anyway, I was smitten by this massive 9 East Battery, the Roper House. And the moonlight And Charlie said "Well you know it just might be for sale," and it turned out Drayton Hastie, who owned it, had told him that he was thinking of selling it. And so he put me in touch with Drayton and the next thing I knew, I was buying a house in Charleston. So that's what-- It's a little serendipity I guess. It just sort of happened. But that's how I got to Charleston. The look of the city more than anything else drew me.

KR: I read that you appreciated very much the lifestyle that Mrs. Hastie was living. Very genteel style that you enjoyed, very much. I thought that was a wonderful description of how she lived her life. Can you expound on that a little bit and how that affected you?

RJ: When I approached Drayton Hastie about buying Roper house, he said "There's one condition." That was his mother lives on the second floor of a *piano nobile* as she liked to call it. And she's getting along in years and we want her to have a life tenancy. And actually that suited me fine because I was starting a new investment firm in New York and I didn't need a house in Charleston. And so we worked out a deal so where I think I bought the house and only had to put up half the purchase price, the rest due at Mrs. Hastie's passing. Well she lived to be 91 I think. That was about another 14 years, which didn't bother me a bit because I was so preoccupied in New York and I almost had an incentive to keep-- I didn't owe the other half of the purchase price as long as she was alive, so I was delighted for her to keep going; she was a great watchdog.

So aside from the financial thing I grew quite fond of Mrs. Hastie. When I would come down on weekends she would invite me in for a drink and she put on a-- Every day at the end of the day she would dress for dinner whether she had guests or not. Put on a long velvet gown. I remember she had a navy blue one and a black one. Miriam her maid would bring her a glass of bourbon at the end of the day and she would hold court and she was since she was a native

Charlestonian, usually two or three ladies or gentlemen would drop in on them and they would all have a ritual bourbon. But if nobody came, she still got dressed anyway and would have her bourbon and perhaps go back and look at the news on television. But she stayed right on top of what was going on in the world. She read voraciously. She was up in all the latest books, magazines, latest TV news, she was very *au courant*. So just seeing how she enjoyed that made me think the Roper house would be wonderful in old age and here I am [laughs] 76 yesterday [laughs].

KR: Happy birthday.

RJ: Thank you. It is a nice house for old age.

KR: I've read and am still interested-- You said that "life is better decade after decade."

RJ: I found that-- I had one friend said who turned 50 who said "this is the last good decade." I said "I don't believe it." My mother lived to be 102 and I hoped I had some of her genes. Dad lived to be in his eighties. And then the sixties came and I thought that would be as good as the fifties, and I had a better time in the sixties, age sixties. And then the seventies have been very nice so far too. Knocking on wood. I think if you try to do nice things and not mean to people-- I don't feel like I have any enemies. I probably do and don't know. But there's nobody I hate. You try to do the right thing and life can be very beautiful. And Charleston has such a civilized way of life too. I think, didn't the city recently get an award for the most polite city in America?

KR: That's an award we keep getting year after year.

RJ: Yeah.

KR: You're absolutely right. I wanted to ask you--

[random chatter about adjusting the camera]

KR: I wanted to ask you about Harleston Village and your purchases there. I think the houses that you purchased were on Bull and Coming Streets. When was that and what was the appeal to you with Harleston Village?

RJ: You're asking why I bought the house on Bull Street, the Blacklock House specifically, and a couple of other houses related to it. Again it was an accident. I sound like I stumbled into these things without planning and literally the Blacklock House came to my attention when Tony Hail, an interior decorator from San Francisco who worked on the Mills House when we were building the Mills House, he did the interior design, he fell in love with Charleston. He said "I would like to have a house here." And he saw the Blacklock House. So I introduced him to a local realtor, Betty Hanahan, and said "Tony Hail wants to buy it." So she negotiated with the people who were living there who were elderly and maybe drinking a little bit too much and one thing or another and they finally agreed to sell, at which point Tony Hail decided he didn't want it after all. And Betty Hanahan worked so hard on it and it was a lovely Georgian House and it was 1968

and the stock market hit a new peak. I said "Well I'll buy it. I don't know what I want to do with it. I'll buy it, why not, you know, live it up."

So I really bought it not with the idea of living in it. I felt probably at that point I would then create it as a rental. It had an enormous back yard. And so I bought the house next door to it and another one around the corner that backed up to the lot. I had this image of literally buying the whole block and creating a beautiful garden in back with rental or condominiums [unintelligible]. I was going to have a model block, keeping the original buildings. So I restored the house next to Blacklock into three apartments and rented them. [Unintelligible?] around the corner at Coming Street. The Blacklock House-- About that time I think the stock market began to go down and we got the Mills House open and occupancy was low and I was having trouble acquiring other properties and at some point I just decided I was pushing out too much. Business started getting bad in New York and so-- At that time income taxes were about 70% or something or other like that so I decided to give it to the College of Charleston, as a faculty club. The great Ted Stern was at the College of Charleston then and I had gotten to know him and he thought this place needs a good faculty club and it had also a nice Gothic cottage behind it which he also moved in to later. So I gave it, I just gave the whole thing to The College of Charleston. Ted said at that time it was the largest gift in value that the college received. If you look at those buildings by today's, I think somewhat inflated real estate prices, it was a nice gift to the college, a good hunk of land. But I didn't have any desire to move to Harleston Village. If you have a house at 9 East Battery you don't want to live at Harleston Village even in a beautiful Georgian 1800 house. So the College has it and I am not quite sure what use-- It served as a faculty club for quite a while and I think that it's for special purpose meetings now. It's a beautiful house, the Blacklock House. That was the reason why I bought it. The rest were just ancillary purchases.

KR: I would love to know about your getting to know Frances Edmunds. You mentioned her in the beginning and I think her name as yours both are so equated with historic preservation and I would love to hear you talk some about Frances, your relationship, your obvious mutual respect.

RJ: Well I don't think I'm in Frances's league. She's way up there, exalted position, beyond me. But I met her-- I told you I had read an article in Time Magazine about her leadership in preservation and when I came down I asked Charlie Duell, I said "Now tell me about Frances Edmunds." He said "you can meet her." So he had a little party and invited-- Charlie and Carol Duell invited Frances Edmunds to come by and we just clicked like that. You know, it was fun. We had the ritual bourbon. We both enjoyed a drink and had a lot of laughs. She even induced me at one point to buy a little house up in Ansonborough just as an investment, and I should have kept that too. But along the way, Frances one day said "What this city needs is a Royal Orleans." I said "what do you mean?" The Royal Orleans was a hotel in the French Quarter in New Orleans that was actually a new hotel but it looked like a classical Palladian villa.

Anyway, I went down to New Orleans and, remembering Frances said "Charleston needs a Royal Orleans," I went by the Royal Orleans and indeed it was spectacular I thought, right in the heart of the French Quarter and became the focal point of tourism there. At that time Charleston really had no first class hotel. I think the Francis Marion had shut down and the Fort Sumter was closed. A few motels, nothing much. And again serendipity. About that time the Mill's House, which was then called the Saint John Hotel in Charleston, came up for sale for a

very cheap price. So Frances said "We need a hotel like The Royal Orleans as a focal point for tourism." And this hotel was very cheap. I think it was \$150,000 for the whole-- So Charlie Duell, Charlie Ravenel, and I formed a partnership to buy the hotel. Ironically we had told Dan Ravenel, the realtor, to try and get it at a good price. I had made a decision that it was too much. The prosperity of a late 60s was [unintelligible.] I had planned to call Dan. I said "Dan I just think we are not up to doing right now. Let's just drop it." I delayed-- And he called and said "Dick, congratulations you just bought a hotel." Well on Wall Street your word is your bond and you say you'll buy something, you do it. So I gulped and OK. So, we bought it. That's how I got a hotel in Charleston.

KR: And I am remembering with the Mills House-- Is that about the same time that you invited Alison Harwood to come to Charleston, is that about the same time frame?

RJ: Alison Harwood came a little later than the Mills House. Let me just finish up. The Mills House-- You know Duell and Ravenel and I bought the Saint John Hotel which used to be called the Mills house. Built in 1855 by Otis Mills and was the jewel hotel. We hoped to restore it cheaply but as we got contractors and architects looking at it, we were told it was a fire trap and was not suitable for today's occupancy. And the rooms were too small etc., etc., etc. Feasibility studies showed that there was a need for a hotel in Charleston, but that structure was beyond salvation. That was the unanimous opinion of architects. We had Simons, Lapham, Mitchell and Small, Charleston architects. We had hired Curtis and Davis from New Orleans who did the Royal Orleans Hotel to advise us. They were the principal architects. And Russcon Construction Company. Now maybe they all wanted to build a new hotel but they all persuaded us against our desire, that it should be taken down and rebuilt as a replica that would more or less look like the original. But since the old one was pretty much far gone and literally was a fire trap, we acquiesced. It was not what we set out to do. We wanted to save it but it sounds like we had to destroy the village to save it. But we did build it back-- I think it was one story taller.

The exterior looks identical to the original hotel. And we saved a lot of it [unintelligible] the wrought iron grill work. Frankly I think more could have been saved than was but we did the best we could. So instead of a restoration it became a replica. And we had one goal of getting it finished. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was going to come to Charleston for the first time in 1970 with this national convention. We got it opened just days before the convention began and it was just glorious. People loved it. Looked magnificent. Still pretty nice. So that's the story of how the Mills House came to being. One more day I would have cancelled the order to buy the hotel. And we did get-- We got a number of local investors came in too. This was not something we did single-handedly. I think they're a group of maybe nine or ten local and some not local who put some money into it.

KR: What was Frances's or Historic Charleston Foundation and Frances's involvement in the Mills House as far as the preservation recommendations or the Board of Architectural Review or advice?

RJ: Well, Frances was goading us on. I mean she was the Joan of Arc of the-- I mean, she was the inspiration for this whole project. She desperately wanted a hotel and she concurred in the idea of rebuilding it. It was-- She didn't have to be persuaded, she was persuading others that this

was a way to go. And that, and I think-- The final product was quite an asset to the town. But it was Frances's dream that Charleston needs a Royal Orleans that inspired us to do this, and it was her help all along, but she really was with us every step of the way. All the plans-- She went over everything. She was amazing. After we got the hotel built though, not too long after that, there was something called the energy crisis where the oil price shot through the roof, travel dropped, off the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to fourteen percent. The economy went into a tailspin. And here we opened this big hotel. So everybody I knew who was in journalism got an intriguing-- How would you like to come to Charleston? I tried to get journalists for travel magazines. Pamela Fiori with Travel and Leisure, we got her to come down. And Alison Harwood, that's when she came down, was one of the editors of New York Magazine. So, Frances, of course, was involved in seducing all these people coming down too-- seducing for Charleston. And somehow we muddled through you know. The hotel finally had a happy ending. We held it for about ten years before later selling it. None of us really wanted to be in the business of running a hotel. When the hotel was full everybody was calling up "Can you get Aunt Minnie a room?" Or when it wasn't full then I felt bad for different reasons.

But Alison Harwood was one of the journalists that we enticed to come down, and she liked the city so much and she was nearing retirement and she decided to move here. She had this concept of Historic Charleston Reproductions. And she had a good many contacts in the furniture business. I think she was with Vogue Magazine, I forgotten, Vogue or Town and Country or something like that. So Alison and her husband Lee moved to town. She retired, and she brought another touch of elegance and she would bring a lot of people down. So she started the Historic Charleston [Foundation] Reproductions and all lived happily ever after, although she and Frances who were originally so busy buddies-- It was a little like "Mapp" and "Lucia," if you have ever read an E.F. Benson book. Miss Mapp ran the town and Lucia comes in from elsewhere and starts doing wonderful things and begins to steal some of the luster. They kind of became a little bit of a rivalry between them [laughing]. And I-- Most of us liked both of them we loved Frances, respected her, and felt Alison was clever and amusing. But it was a little bit of a, too-- Historic Charleston [Foundation] wasn't quite big enough for the two of them [laughing]. Though I think the rivalry benefited Historic Charleston Foundation.

KR: I read again in your book that one of your business theories is not always to surround yourself with people just like yourself. Perhaps that's one of those success stories within the foundation. As I think about Alison and the Historic Charleston Reproduction Program, it reminds me, how many reproductions were in the Mills house. We just a few years ago were still retrieving Blue Canton from there. So there must have been a relationship.

RJ: There was although the Mills House-- First of all Alison had not come here at that time. So I mean Tony Hail and John Dickinson in San Francisco did the Blue Canton. And there are lots of nice objet d'art in the Mills house originally. Some of it still there.

KR: In, 1971, so this must have been just after the building of the Mills house--

RJ: Yeah we opened in 71, yeah.

KR: And that's when you were a trustee for Historic Charleston Foundation at that point. So what was your relationship with Frances during your tenure as a trustee? Were you in New York most of that time?

RJ: My tenure with the Historic Charleston Foundation was fairly brief, but it was not that I didn't like it or anything. I was flattered that they would want me, a non-Charlestonian to be on it. I was not a Yankee. I was from Raleigh, North Carolina, but I was working in New York. But anyway I went on it because by then I was so involved in Charleston, I had the hotel. I had the Blacklock house. I had the Roper House, etc., and so I came on board out of respect for Frances. But it met so often and I was in New York. I just couldn't keep popping down every few weeks for a meeting. And I finally told Frances "I think I can be more-- You don't need me on the board. I can be more helpful as a friend in court or fundraiser or things like that. It didn't work out very well for me to attend the meetings. And so I asked to be relieved of that, and as I said not because I was upset or anything like that but I just didn't have the time. And I didn't think it needed me. You know you want to go where you're needed. I felt the foundation at that time had a very strong board. Lots of power people in it. They were doing just fine without me.

KR: And what about your association with the National Trust, because you were on that board for a number of years. And you and Frances were each recipients of the Crowninshield award.

RJ: That's right. Both Frances Edmunds and I both received the Crowninshield Award. I was very honored by that. I had been a trustee of the National Trust through Gordon Gray who was the chairman of it. A North Carolinian-- When Gordon Gray was president of the University of North Carolina I was the editor of the school newspaper "The Daily Tar Heel" and got to know him. And he sort of became a mentor of sorts for me. Anyway Gordon Gray was the one who was trying to get more young people on the board of the National Trust and so I did go on the board of the National Trust for a number of years. Actually, I can't remember how many years I was on the National trust. But-- I was a little disappointed and still am in the National Trust and they don't seem more interested in owning or operating great classical architecture. While I was there, the National Trust which didn't think it-- never had enough money. I saw Frances Edmunds run Historic Charleston on a shoe string. The National trust got the idea it should just be a clearinghouse of information. They had six or seven houses that were-- I think they viewed they were stuck with them. But there was no appetite for going out and acquiring great properties. And they thought they could be a clearinghouse of information where people could learn from Charleston's experience or Annapolis or Providence or some of the cities that have done especially a good job.

And my view is this big-- The administrative staff in Washington, all they do is, somebody would call and say "We have a problem," they'd say "Call Frances Edmunds in Charleston she'll tell you how to start a revolving fund." I couldn't see they weren't really adding any value other than saying "call Frances Edmunds" or-- There were near equivalents of Frances Edmunds in other cities like Annapolis and particularly in Providence. I had forgotten the names of all of them, really great ladies who powerful figures. And The National Trust was just fiddling, I thought, while Rome was burning and so-- The meetings, the long debates-- I didn't think it was getting anywhere. I didn't leave in anger again, I just left in boredom. And because philosophically I wanted the Trust to own more properties-- [unintelligible] if you can't own

them, why not have local groups own them and the National trust would be an umbrella group that would market them. And you would apply standards of value. You don't have to own anything but-- So many house museums-- For example every-- You have the Nathaniel Russel House, could have been an affiliate of the National Trust, so the National Trust would publish its books with its own or affiliated properties. They could then do some marketing because unlike the British National Trust which does such a superb job of giving you maps of how to get there, and the description of the houses-- There's nothing here that you couldn't do, so I have entreated the National Trust for years, to implement this affiliate side. They are fiddling with it again right now. Maybe we will finally get off the ground.

The National Trust is led by a wonderful guy, Dick Moe, but Dick's passion is urban sprawl. He hates sprawl, and I do too. I agree with him, but I don't think that's necessarily the mission of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. And I wanted to get it-- Let's form a national trust to fight sprawl or something like that. Or anyway, I don't object to anything Dick Moe is doing but I just see a neglect. I can name so many great houses around. I can think of one in New Orleans right now, Berry Hill Plantation. The National Trust, if it didn't own those it should help get local groups to acquire them and fix them up-- Their heart isn't in great classical architecture. They are more interested in this Bauhaus house thing in Illinois. Nothing wrong with that, provided somebody is watching over the heritage of great classical architecture. And that's why I founded my foundation Classical American Homes since I've got seven old houses that are all kind of Palladian classical architecture. I would love it to all be a part of the National trust if I thought the National Trust would yet embrace--

And the one I have in North Carolina that Senda[?] Foundation-- has become, is part of the new affiliate program of the National Trust, and I would be very interested to see if that brings any new traffic into the place. So, I love the National Trust but I just think it's trying to do too many things. I'd rather see them get back to basic, or at least have one division that's just in charge of great properties such as the British National Trust. End of sermon on the National Trust.

KR: Let's start a new sermon on your own, what I think a virtual trust with your seven houses. It was such a wonderful thing to hear how you acquired those houses, how you continue to collect for those houses, and are you looking for others-- The mission of the Classical American Homes--

RJ: You ask about the foundation, Classical American Homes, which currently owns two of the seven houses and might eventually, if I'm dead or alive, they'll end up owning all of them. It was really set up with the idea of protecting these houses which I loved and I think should be protected. As to whether we should take on any more, I've debated that. Right now I have a Board of Trustees of young people much younger than I am, and they will do that. I think the fund will have adequate resources to take care of the seven houses I've got right now. As to taking over one in New Orleans and another one in Virginia or somewhere like that, that would involve major fundraising. I've been kind of tapping out to some of my hedge fund friends on Wall Street and to see if I can find some who would like to join me in a major way as a partner and I'm talking about someone who might put five or ten million dollars in it. You'll end up with substantial assets in it. I don't want to bring in a player unless they are really going to do that. If a

great white father appears we may go more. We may try to fill the dream of a National Trust owning classical architecture. If that doesn't happen, I think there will be plenty of money to take care of the current houses. I have been retired ten years and I'm taking care of them now. And most everything will go to the Foundation. But the mission is to take care of the houses we have right now and maybe give grants or something other like that. We may do that. Unless I'm able to attract some my other friends in a big way I don't think we are in a position to take on too many big houses. Though the spirit is willing.

KR: What about collecting for your houses and the antiques and treasures that you have amassed to go in these sites?

RJ: Well the antiques and things were a byproduct, I was first interested in architecture and I remember I bought the house up on the Hudson River, Edgewater, I bought it about the same time as Roper House in Charleston. And I usually turn to Anthony Hail in San Francisco, an interior decorator who done the Mills House and done a place for me in New York. He immediately filled it with English antiques, you know, eighteenth century, early nineteenth century British antiques. About that time, I came under the influence of great Americanists, Edward Vason Jones and Barry Tracy, curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan, and Fred Johnson, an antiques dealer up in Kingston New York. Fred said one day "Dick, you got these wonderful American houses that you got all English furniture at. If you just buy just one piece of American furniture and just try that-- of a period of a house, you would find the scale is so right. It would fit in, I think it would gradually drive out all the English Furniture." Well I tried. First thing he said, "Well if you don't like it I'll take it back." I bought a little card table with dolphin legs. But I bought several things and they did seem right at Edgewater which was built in 1823. So I was getting kind of early nineteenth century furniture and it did seem right. And next thing I know I was buying more and I was gifting, I gave some of the English furniture to Historic Charleston, as a matter of fact, to Frances Edmunds. Gave Bard College some. But I gradually gave away all the English furniture and began to buy American furniture. The other, Edward Vason Jones, who was Georgian, he was the architect of the White House which really means the interior decorator of the White House under three presidents, Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Jerry Ford. But he along with Clem Conger had redone the White House and filled it with antiques. They did the diplomatic reception rooms in the State Department.

But Edward Vason Jones is one of the great experts of classical architecture and antiques. His advice is "Dick, concentrate your collection. The best furniture of the early nineteenth century was being made in New York, not Philadelphia, not Boston, not Charleston, but New York. Duncan Phyfe, lined[?] your way: Concentrate your collection and then you can become more of an expert in it and you'll know the dealers, they won't be able to jerk you around so much." So I did that, I began to buy New York furniture from 1810 to 1840, and today forty years later between the seven houses and also our firm - Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette had a lot - I think it's probably in sheer quantity the largest collection of early nineteenth century furniture. It's not all in one place. It's spread over seven houses, and some of that what we had in our firm. I sort of like to think of it as a decentralized of the Harry DuPont Winterthur Museum. Somebody said "Dick you're no Harry DuPont." Actually I said that I'm not. But I do see these seven houses-- And the antiques by the way are worth more today than the real estate. And the real estate has gone up tremendously in value. By the way I don't understand these current values of real estate.

Things that were a hundred thousand dollars when I bought them, are now ten million dollars. It's all a product of easy money, which can come and go. But at the moment, the antiques as the well as the houses are very valuable. But once again the antiques came second. The houses came first, then the antiques, and the third phase is the landscaping, once you get these houses. It would have been sort of-- Belatedly I got interested in the grounds and classical landscaping and I think I almost got more fun out of working on the grounds now. I should have reversed it. It takes so long to grow a tree and plant things. You can get instant antiques. But anyway it's all flowed together, collecting old houses, restoring them, then the furniture. Some of the artisans I worked on restoring furniture also helped on the house marbleizing, gilding, things like that, they were almost interchangeable, plastering. But I've gotten to know some wonderful artisans who do great work. But the antiques are a key part of the collection. One of the things thing about antiques, you don't have to pay property taxes on them. The downside to all these real estate appreciation is your property taxes. I'm sure everyone in Charleston knows, they are going through the roof.

KR: One of the real bonuses for your collecting was the great benefit that you gave to Historic Charleston Foundation when you were deaccessioning, so to speak, some of your collection. We do have many of your pieces in the Missrnoon House for which we have most--

RJ: Good [laughs].

KR: I want to ask you too about, in your, I guess it's about forty year affair with Charleston, what do you see today preservation-wise in Charleston? How do you look at the city differently or how does the city look differently to you, through these forty years? Are there changes or trends that you have seen and noticed?

RJ: The nice thing about Charleston, and it has been about forty years I've been coming here, probably since about 1965 to 2005. The most salient feature to me is that it gets better every year. Better being the look of the city. I happen to think that the quality of life is better now, I've realized that many old Charlestonians probably don't share that view. And I don't get too happy with motorcycles racing by, but there are so many more restaurants and interesting people coming and going, and the city looks fabulous. To come back and see the old houses being freshly painted and gardens are wonderful. There may be a little too much rehabilitation going on right now everywhere you go because a truck or a painter or drilling. But the city looks so much better. When I came here forty years ago, South of Broad it was a vast wasteland. And a lot of South of Broad didn't look too good either. But it's been remarkable because by and large has been controlled. The city has kept the, from Calhoun Street on down, sort of in a state that is both progressive and fun and adapted to today's life but still has a look of history which distinguishes Charleston. So to me it gets better every year.

Maybe sometimes there are too many tourists, but I've found these tourists by and large are quite polite and nice. I think Charleston unlike some places gets a good quality of visitors for the most part. The people who come here are really light[?] and the city sets an example. I don't think you can come to Charleston without wanting to go back and emulate it. So, to me it gets better and more interesting and more diverse and looks better every year.

KR: For thirty of those years we've had the same mayor, Joe Riley, who will follow you after this interview, and do you attribute much of what has happened preservation-wise to the mayor and his reign over the city?

RJ: Well I give Joe Riley-- I've often said he's the best mayor in America. I think he's been terrific. You know some people pick a few little things and complain about taxes or something or other but overall I think he's been a superb mayor. We've been very lucky to have him. As to attributing it all to Joe though I think it's unfair to some of his predecessors. Palmer Gaillard, the mayor beforehand was mayor when we did the Mills House and he really was very helpful. But more than anybody I think Frances Edmunds was the Joan of Arc that really by sheer willpower pulled Charleston back from decay. Her Ansonborough project, her revolving fund, getting business people. I think I give Frances the seminal credit for getting going. And Joe, of course then picked up on it. But when Joe came in the momentum had started in the right direction. I think the low point was probably when the old Charleston Hotel was torn down. That was such a magnificent building. But from the low point we came back. In saying I think Frances Edmunds-- And Frances has her allies. I mean she had a lot of people. One of them just died. Hugh Lane who just passed away today was helpful in financing a lot of Frances's projects. But there were many people. There was a group led by Frances. She could kind of either by charm or whacking them around, get her way. Whatever Frances wanted certainly happened.

But she paved a way, but then Joe Riley came along and just supported[?] momentum. He had a very smooth way. And also what looked like kind of "whitey taking over everything," I think Joe Riley made it more of a shared thing with the black community as well as [unintelligible] gentrification. But I mean Joe has been a very enlightened mayor. He of course was this key figure in Charleston Place, I happen to think even more similar was the Mills House than Charleston Place at the time because there wasn't anything here but motels then. Charleston Place and that whole thing is terrific. By the way keeping that facade on that buildings on Meeting Street was Frances Edmunds's idea primarily. There was a lot of talk about just tearing it all down. And Charleston's been blessed with good leadership: Frances Edmunds to Joe Riley and even before. Palmer Gaillard. Financial people have been good.

And the city has also benefited by outside people coming in. I was thinking of Charles and Betty Woodward. Betty Woodward was a native Charlestonian. But there have been a lot of quote-Yankees who've done nice things and have lived here forty, fifty years. Still were considered outsiders, but did wonderful things. A new example might be Parker and Gail Gilbert coming in and rescuing Mulberry Plantation and gifts to Drayton Hall, another thing. But the city has-- Despite what use to be an image that Charleston was a closed society and didn't welcome anyone coming in, I haven't found that the case and I think people who have come here and moved in if they act nice and supportive, that people have been uniformly nice. I haven't-- But I think the city does open itself up to newcomers coming in. There's always, still always the old guard. I go back to Raleigh, there's still an old guard there. Every city has an old guard. Charleston perhaps more than others. But I think the old guard here has been on the whole rather progressive. Certainly Frances Edmunds was old guard. But the Peter Manigaults, the Charles Duells, the Frances Edmundses, Betty Woodwards, the Kitty Robinsons. The city has been blessed by attracting good leadership. It's a good-- Another thing is that it's exciting to see out is how the College of Charleston has come back. The student body was 400 students at the College

of Charleston when I came here. And a guy like Ted Stern coming in there putting it on the map-- Going from four hundred to ten thousand students has been a big lift to downtown. The Medical University has been-- Jim Edwards and others.

But over and over the city has had civic and strong leadership and in each of these things, once The College of Charleston, Medical University or-- Charleston itself is a magnet, is a place that people like to visit. They like to come. They like to live here. The first time I ever came here I thought this city couldn't miss [unintelligible] New Orleans of the East Coast. Something even better than New Orleans, more like the garden district of New Orleans. But the city has done just about everything right,. The biggest criticism that I have is-- The movement to put power lines and telephone lines underground has seemed to me to come to a halt. And a lot of those poles now are being strung with telephone lines and cable, it's appalling to me to see some of these beautiful buildings were just ugly juxtaposition of wire. Other cities, New York City you don't see anything like that. If New York can have it underground why can't Charleston? London, Paris, you go to Europe they are all underground. Why do we let cable companies string these things, especially in a hurricane prone environment where they get blown down and they put them right back up? I know Joe Riley would like to do more, but everybody screams[?] "lack of money." Clearly when a big new building is being built - there's so much construction going - the city needs to do more to get this connected. Telephones, cable, power, and put it underground. It would be better, cheaper long term, and so much more sightly. When you get a street cleaned up with these poles, then the buildings, old buildings really sing. That would be my biggest criticism. They need to be more militant with these people hanging cables. They'll pay. Other cities got them underground, why shouldn't Charleston? And I would urge Historic Charleston to make that more of a mission too.

KR: I wanted to ask you back to the 1970s that seemed to be the time when Ansonborough was coming along as another Frances Edmunds project. And two questions there. What was it about Frances's leadership that put her so head and shoulders above others? And any commentary on Ansonborough, I would be interested in hearing what your thoughts might be.

RJ: Ansonborough is a good microcosm to why Frances Edmunds was a great leader in preservation. And I think her key strength - aside from her charms and family connections and things like - her key strength was common sense, practicality. Sometimes preservationists today as we have become more affluent get very precious and you can't touch this and you've got to-- Frances, Ansonborough-- She had a hundred thousand dollar revolving fund, and literally she saved a whole big part of town with that fund. If she had gone in there and said "Let's take one house and restore it meticulously," it wouldn't have worked. She had the idea: let's get the exterior look of a whole neighborhood. So what she did, she bought up these houses very cheaply and those she couldn't but she got the people to go up. She would take off any claptrap additions. She'd put the proper window panes back in. She would paint the shutters. She made the exterior look fabulous. She wouldn't put any money in an interior. You open the front door and there would be no floor. There was a company called Jim Walter who used to make shell homes. Frances Edmunds was selling shell homes in Ansonborough. But her goal was to get a whole-- As you drive through the neighborhood, you could then visualize how charming it would be with the shutters freshly painted and the woodwork painted and she would do cosmetic preservation which would be anathema to many of today's preservationists who have to study

everything forever or they have a continual we've-got-to-protect-everything-- Frances wanted to get it back to the look of its glory days before the Civil War. And she ruthlessly stripped off additions. And it was putting money into exterior things. She knew the total look of the thing would be what would carry it. And then she didn't try to profiteer by it either. She would buy something cheaply and then somebody would find the right buyer and she would practically give it to them. And she was very far-seeing and she-- I've never seen one hundred thousand dollars accomplish so much in my life. But had she gone in and tried to do the precious restorations what we are so enamored of today, it would never would have gotten off the ground. And she took a - you would see in a business logo - "a systems approach" instead of a component of then restoring one house in Ansonborough. She had the systems [approach]: Let's gets the whole neighborhood looking like it might have been a working [unintelligible]. I thought it was very far-seeing. She would be a great executive in any corporation.

KR: I think we are almost out of time, but if there any other comments you would like to make, this would be the time. We so appreciative of you being here with us.

RJ: As I said Historic Charleston Foundation-- I think this is the time to go for mega-bucks right now. I don't know what the endowment is right now but go for the gold while you can while the values are inflated. I think they're inflated. And don't spend it all. Prepare for a rainy day because there's going to be some rainy days coming. That's a gloomy ending note, I hate to end on a gloomy note.

END OF INTERVIEW