Interviewee: **William J. Murtagh**

Place of interview: Historic Charleston Foundation (40 East Bay Street)

Date of Interview: November 8, 2005

Interviewer: **Jonathan Poston**

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Date of transcription: 2017-18

BEGIN INTERVIEW

Jonathan Poston: Tell us a little bit about your nativity and where you grew up and about how you came to become a preservationist?

William J. Murtagh: Well, I am a native of Philadelphia. I think that I am the first person since 1747 in my family not to live in Philadelphia so my pictures turned to the wall of course in Philadelphia. And I started in medicine and soon found out that was not my field and then switched to architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. I also am one of the first men at the graduate level that went to Bryn Mawr after the second world war and that was an interesting experience, but for another day. At that time the Bauhaus had not hit design issues in architecture schools. And I had one semester working on the ___ called the Beaux Arts system which was the traditional system by which architects had been trained and I came back and suddenly that was all thrown out and we got a new dean from Harvard and the Bauhaus had hit that design ethic, the attempt to find a design basis based on the 20th century era of machinery that had initiated in what became eastern Germany between the first and second world wars. And of course most of those people fled when Hitler came into power and came to the United States. And so suddenly architectural training was totally different all over the country from what it had been. And I thought that I was going to spend my life designing new contemporary architecture. And I then took my first trip abroad and I went to Rome, and I remind you that one of the definitions they give you of architecture, or did at least when I was there, was that architecture is the art of defining space and you have to think of space as a positive commodity in design. And the basic training is to look at the jumble of lines on a two dimensional surface and think three dimensionally. Well I went into one building in Rome and it changed my life and that was the Pantheon. If any of you have been there you know it's a circular building with no windows, one space escapes in one spot up in the center of the roof in an oculus, a large oculus. And space is so concrete in that building that one feels like they can almost take a whole handful of it. And I must have stood there the better part of the day repeating to myself mentally, "You can't call this a bad building. There's something wrong with the last five years of my life." And so I came back and I decided to take a master's degree in Architectural History at the University of Pennsylvania because I felt, and I still feel this way, that a master's degree in architecture is a sixth year of a fifth year design thesis, architecture usually being a five year course of study. And at that point there was no place in the United States where you could take training in preservation. I wasn't necessarily interested in preservation but I heard that there was a summer program that I could participate in the soon-to-be-developed Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia around Independence Hall and all of the buildings dealing with the Independence movement in Philadelphia in

the eighteenth century. And so I went to work for Charles Peterson in the summer HABS team, Historical American Building Survey team, and he was the founder of this, just died two years ago at almost a 100, left the largest preservation archive in the United States which is now being processed at the University of Maryland's Special Collections. I worked there for a summer, then I went back to school and then I came back for another summer and worked for Pete [Peterson] then for a whole year. And as I said to his niece when I was asked to speak at his memorial service in Christ Church, when she said, "Say something funny about him" and I said, "He wasn't a funny man. You can't say anything funny about him." He was a very serious man but he was the person who trained people in my generation in preservation and people like Russell Keune who has been active here, people like Ernest Connally, who may or may not have been down here but is now deceased. We all went through this training because there was no place in the academic field that you could get training. And then I got myself a Fulbright. I went and studied in German universities at the University of Bonn and Freiburg in Breisgau, studying the barn form that the Mennonites had brought to the Pennsylvania Colony in the eighteen century backward through Europe to the Yamantau in Switzerland in the fourteenth century. I came back to Philadelphia and prior to departing for Germany, Charles Peterson had given a lecture at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, founded by Moravians in the 1740s, Moravians from central Europe, and he had asked me to operate his projector to show his slides. And we met a man from the Bethlehem Steel Corporation who took us through all the buildings. I came back after a year. I got a call from this man. He said that he represented the board of a non-existent museum, the collection of which was in the Bethlehem Steel Company warehouses that had been set up by a woman who had died and wanted to set up a museum so that future generations could learn from the past in the Lehigh Valley. So I became the director of a non-existent museum and I might say I had a lot of chutzpah accepting that position because I really didn't know that much about museums. The city was then embarking upon urban renewal. I couldn't raise money for the museum corporation. They formed a second non-profit corporation with no assets for which I could raise money called the Historic Bethlehem Incorporated and that worked with the city, the chamber of commerce, the Bethlehem Steel Company, Lehigh University, Moravian College, etc., in massive land swaps, exchanges of buildings, etc. to get this urban renewal program off the ground which was right at the edge of the eighteenth century group of buildings, the largest collection of non-Anglo buildings built by Germans in the United States which still stand. And I was there for two years. We got a thousand members in a two-week campaign. And I organized a summer tour of the Society of Architectural Historians to which the then president of the National Trust came, Dr. Richard Halland, with Helen Bullock who worked at Williamsburg, wrote *the Williamsburg Art of Cookery*. And to make a long story short, I ultimately went down to Washington as assistant to the president of the National Trust. The trust then had one property. It had two thousand members. But it had just had an article in *Reader's Digest* that ended with, "If you need help write or call the National Trust," and this little fledgling organization was absolutely inundated with requests. And I came as assistant to the president of the National Trust and every time we had a reorganization naturally I got a different title. I was director of education. I was director of programming at one point. I was actually acting executive director after Bob Garvey left and Congress had passed the National Historic Preservation Act, and then I became the Keeper of the National Register. Very long answer to a short question!

[Brief off-camera directions to interviewee from the videographer.]

JP: How did you first come to know Charleston?

WM: Well, I came down to Charleston, I came to Washington in about 1957, the fifth staff member, and I think it was Helen Bullock who insisted that I come down to Charleston. Now I was born and raised in Philadelphia and I hadn't been any further south other than south Philadelphia, let alone Wilmington,

Delaware or any place of that nature, so this was my first foray into a whole new section of the country. And I remember little of it except that one thing does sick out in my mind, and I believe I was met by, but at least I was taken around by, Sam Stoney in his car and one thing that sticks out in my mind was we were driving past Rainbow Row and he said " Oh we recently had a murder there. One person killed another person with a silver candelabra." And I said, "Oh that's very interesting," and thought to myself, "How chic! They do everything with a great style down here, don't they," you know. But that was my first impression actually you know and I remember a lot of excellent buildings in unrestored unrehabilitated condition on most of the streets. And of course all of the activity had been concentrated down in The Battery. And of course you have such a large collection of superb buildings here. I will say in conjunction with that, I never really quite understood Charleston and Charleston's architecture and why it is so different from say the Capitol which is just a couple of hours away, architecturally and aesthetically speaking, until I guess it was the 1970s when most of those islands down the Caribbean were getting sovereignty and the Trust arranged for a study tour on a cruise ship and there were about 85 members that went on this small ship and there was a nucleus of five of us who met with the new heads of state. I have never met with more presidents, premiers, and lord high commissioners in all my life. But we went from island to island and the drill was that somebody would come on board the night before from the island to which we were going to go and give us an orientation and then we would arrive at the island the next day. And I remember going to Basse-Terre, and there were all these side gallery buildings and suddenly I thought, "That's it! Communication was water-oriented in the eighteenth century. Charleston is a Caribbean city!" And suddenly it all became very clear to me and very understandable why this unique architecture exists today. And I think that's the total answer, because of all the trade.

JP: Tell us a little bit about what the preservation movement was movement was like in this period that you first saw Charleston and when were first at the National Trust? How would you characterize the movement and the people in it?

WM: Well I would contrast it by using a National Trust annual meeting. When I first came to Washington a National Trust meeting would get maybe two hundred people and it would be mostly-- I don't know whether your audience will understand Helen Hokinson-type women but these are rather ample women who were either members of the Colonial Dame or the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] and when they were meeting in Washington usually with ample cascades of orchids, and they would have their curators and historians in tow and they would discuss who had been most successful in talking Mr. Scalamandre out of how many yards of damask for their favorite historic house museum. It was totally a house museum-oriented movement, almost to exclusion. Now you are already moving in a different direction here in Charleston but that wasn't generally known yet around the United States. You go to a meeting now and you hear somebody say, "Did you hear that PDQ asked DOI [Department of Interior] whether [Section] 106 is applicable," is applicable. In other words, that is reflective of all the building blocks we have put in place legally in the public sector since 1966. And while the house museum person is still part of the constituency of the National Trust, it's a relatively smaller constituency now since you know a national meeting can draw as many as 2,000 to 3,000 people. And because we changed the tax laws and made it economically attractive for developers to retain and rehabilitate the existing building stock, rather than hunt and destroy and replace, you get all sorts of people. You get planners, you get developers, you get lawyers, etcetera. So it's a totally different kettle of fish.

JP: Mrs. [Frances R.] Edmunds [long-time executive director of Historic Charleston Foundation] told me about going to her first National Trust meetings. She said that the elevator opened and she got on and

she said “Hello, I am Frances Edmunds from Charleston.” And these people stared at her and really didn’t even speak with her because she was a newcomer and it’s a very much closed society, the National Trust.

WM: Now when would this have been?

JP: I think it would have been the 1950s.

WM: In the 50s? Well that could have been. I don’t know whether I should put this on tape, but I usually refer to it as the "Our Crowd" set. You know it became one of *the things* to be involved in rather than religion and health for the set with deep pockets and a lot of disposable income, to be involved in. I remember that David Finley was the Chairman of the Board of the National Trust when I arrived. David Finley was from South Carolina and he had married a woman whose forebear had been a Vice President of the United States. He had been Andrew Mellon’s "man-Friday" and confidante and he became the first director of the National Gallery. He became the first Chairman of the Board of the National Trust. There were two vice chairmen. One was, let’s see if I can remember the names, one was Helen Burgess, Mrs. W. Randolph Burgesss. I've forgotten what deep pockets she brought with her. And the other one had controlling interest in the New York Central Railroad. And these people were in the same super-moneyed, socioeconomic milieu. They all knew each other basically. It wasn’t the mixed board that it is today. And of course it was basically a house museum movement. If anybody talked about an historic district, you know the only one anyone knew about was Charleston first of all, even though Alexandria, Virginia, followed shortly thereafter, as did the Vieux Carré [Louisiana]. But you were very much on the cutting edge if you were thinking in those terms and not house museum terms, although the philosophical difference had still not seeped into the consciousness of most people involved. I mean, one is an educational process and the other is a planning process.

JP: When the National Preservation Act was adopted in 1966, and you became the first Keeper of the National Register, tell us about that Act and the aftermath of its passage and about your becoming the Keeper, how you thought of the title and how the title came to be and what your duties were.

WM: Well I wish I could say I thought about the title but I didn’t. When the then director of the National Park Service, George Hartzog, saw this coming down the pipeline to the Congress, he convened an advisory committee of three people: Ernest Connally the then professor of the University of Illinois; J.O. Brule(?) who was the director of, the name of it escapes me, at Harvard; and the third person was Ronald F. Lee, who was the Chief Historian of the United States. And when it came to the question of how they were going to handle this if the Congress passed it and acted on it and it landed in his lap through the Secretary of the Interior, the other two pointed their fingers at Ernest Connally. And so Ernest Connally trained as an architect and architectural historian, as am I, left the University of Illinois and became the director of a new office called the office of archaeology in historic preservation, which no longer exists. We opened an office in Rosslyn [Virginia] which was totally undeveloped then, which Russell Keune, who was the acting Keeper while the keeping Keeper kept at the National Trust who then became the assistant Keeper when the keeping Keeper went over and became a Park Service employee, always called it “Los Angeles on the Potomac” because it was nothing but a bunch of empty lots and everything was undeveloped. The first thing I wanted to do was to, well first of all we had to tell people in United States what this new legislation could do for them. The only thing that had happened before I left the Trust was the Secretary of the Interior I believe it was wrote a letter to each of the governors of the fifty states and six territories and the Trust specific territories saying "I've got this responsibility from the Congress and I want you to appoint somebody in your jurisdiction to carry this out in my

name." This is how we got this network of what we call now as SHPOs, State Historic Preservation Officers, and whether they function well or not in the respective states they are in existence and there are "mini French monument services," and I think that our country and what we are interested in is better for it because it created a network that creates a solid building block for people to act at the state and local level. You will be amused at how I got my job, of course, George Hartzog represented the Secretary of the Interior on the board of National Trust and so I knew him very well and I had intimations that thing was coming down the pipeline naturally. And Ernest Connally had talked to me about it. George really hadn't talked to me too much about it but I was in St. Louis organizing the National Trust national meeting which as turned out was the last thing I did for them, the first time I worked for them for almost ten years. I ultimately worked for them for three years later on. And George Hartzog was out there dedicating the Anheuser-Busch Brewery as a National Historic Landmark, which is a separate, internal system and program of the Park Service, and even now there are less than three thousand of those in the country. The same PR agent who was handling my visit was handing George's visit. I got out there and she told me he was there. I didn't even know he was there. She said, "Would you like to see him? They are going to get out the Clydesdale horses," and all this business, "and it is going to be a big parade" and so forth. So I said "sure," and we went down and along comes George standing by himself in this big flatbed truck pulled by these big draft horses and he looks at me and he says, "Blank, blank Murtagh. What the blank are you doing here?" And reaches down to shake my hand and pulls me up on the wagon, and that's the last of I saw of that PR agent during the day. And we literally were in one of August Busch's big nineteenth century copper beer vats when George strong-armed me and said, "All right, I want you to leave that organization called the National Trust. Come work for a real organization." That's how I got my job! I don't know how I got my job. I never applied for it and for literally months after I was in employment as the Keeper of the National Register, which that committee had designed as a title. It's an English title for curator. And I would get these things from Personnel, "Dear…" and somebody would have typed in "Doctor," not "Mister Murtagh." And the thing would say "We are very sorry to inform you that you are not eligible for the position because…" And somebody would have typed in "lack of education and experience" after calling me Doctor and not Mister. And one of my regrets in life is that I never kept one. I always put them in a circular file. [Laughs.]

JP: And those came to you as Keeper.

WM: They came to me as Keeper. I was in the job you know and I don't know how I got the job. I wasn't a political appointee. I mean I was regular GSA etcetera and nothing was in place except that the one letter had gone out and so the first thing was to get somebody to design the forms that the country was going to use. And I had IBM design the forms and we had a freeze on outside contracts at that time and it took me three months and nineteen signatures to spend $1,900 to get a form. My initial vision of the form was a simple thing that you opened and you circled things so that anybody could do it. Now you have an instruction book about that thick [gestures] and doing the form can cost what $10,000 to $20,000? Something like that. Things change.

JP: In your years as Keeper or at the beginning at your tenure as Keeper, I think something came up involving Charleston. Can you tell us about that?

WM: You mean this is about the proposed bridge? [This is probably a reference to a proposed bridge that would connect James Island and downtown Charleston, now called the James Island Connector.]

JP: Yes.

WM: Yes, it was one of the earliest 106 sections. I should say that when Bob Garvey left and he was the Executive Director of the National Trust there was no president at that time. He was followed by Jimmy Biddle and they reinstituted the term "president." But Garvey, who came from Winston, Salem, was the Executive Director. He left, when the Congress passed the legislation, to become the Director of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation set up to referee the differences of opinion when a federally funded or licensed program would have an effect, direct or environmental, on something in the National Register. The Secretary of the Interior delegated his authority through me through the Director of the Park Service to be the guy who signed these forms saying this needs to be considered part of the National Register of Historic Places. And these could be of national, state or local in significance. Everything else in the system that was set up like a review board at the state level, a state staff that included architects, archaeologists, historians, etcetera. That was all purely administrative decision-making on my part, looking ahead at the differences of opinion and lawsuits, of which there were plenty. So you had to get yourself in a defensible position in order to demonstrate that this wasn't a capricious decision of one mindless bureaucrat sitting or faceless bureaucrat sitting in Washington calling the shots for people locally. And I got in a habit of-- I had a full staff of architects, historians, architectural historians, archaeologists, etcetera, forty to sixty when we really got going, and I would take all their biographies, I would take my biography, I made the states all submit the biographies of the review board and their staff, and I would take all of these into the court of law and when the prosecuting attorney would ask, "Who says this is a piece of cultural property?" inferring it's not, I would say to the judge, "These are the biographies," and they would be a stack this big [gestures], "of everybody at the state and national level who agree this needs to be considered a cultural property." And so that's the way we defended our position and for years we won cases. Did I answer your question? Or not?

JP: How did the Charleston bridge… [undecipherable, both speaking at the same time]

WM: The Charleston Bridge was one of the early controversies we got involved in, that and the proposed elevated expressway along the Vieux Carre waterfront. And as Keeper, of course, I would come down, the Advisory Council would come down, the representatives of the Federal Agency that was going to provide the dollars to the state and local level would come down. And I clearly remember getting a call one day from a man in the Coast Guard. Now I was totally unaware of the fact that at the time that to build a bridge over a navigable waterway you had to get a permit from the Coast Guard. And he said, "I read in the daily Congressional Record," that is published that is every employee's responsibility to read, at least somebody in the office has to read it and tell everybody else what the new responsibilities are. He said, "I read somewhere we had new responsibilities relative to historic things in the United States." And I said, "You sure do!" And so they got involved and we all came down, and as you know the proposed impact would have gone right through The Battery and destroyed dozens of houses that had been restored and rehabilitated, and the sum total response to the controversy is what usually is, it is a design issue usually. And simply by placing the thing up the peninsula, it actually improved The Battery because it made it much more finite visually the northern boundary of The Battery. So it made a discrete and easily identifiable neighborhood that it hadn't had before because it just drifted off into other neighborhoods. So in essence that particular project I think was a great asset to the preservation movement. And as I say most of them are design issues. We had one in Georgetown University for instance and they intended to move into Georgetown, an historic district that's a National Historic Landmark. Fortunately, the Honorable Gordon Gray from Salem who was the chairman of the Board of the National Trust who lived in Georgetown, got that local group to buy one building on each of the four sides of the block that they knew Georgetown University wanted saying, "You are never going to get your hands on this block." Well it went to a 106 situation. We all went out

and they wanted a new heating system, they needed a new heating system. We found a heating system site on the other side of the campus that was perfectly acceptable with the heating engineers. And so incursions were not made into the rehabilitated Historic District. The adjacent institution of higher learning got its need satisfied and everybody was happy. Another design issue!

JP: Could we get Bill to repeat what he was saying? [Jet flew overhead. Off-record recap about what had been said.]

WM: So, there was this proposed bridge. You don't want me to repeat the business about the Coast Guard. OK, so as a result, Section 106 was triggered because this was on the National Register of Historic Places and it probably was already a landmark, I just don't remember when it was created a landmark. And so the Advisory Council director came down, that was Bob Garvey who'd been the Director of the Trust. I came down as Keeper of the National Register. The Coast Guard sent representatives. Charles Lee came, the state historic preservation officer appointed by the governor in this state [South Carolina]. And maybe even Christie Fant, for all I know. Anyway, we all convened. We all looked at the proposed site of the bridge, saw all the damage it was going to do in the Battery, and then began walking around and moving up the peninsula etcetera, and finally got to the place where the bridge went through, and the through-way to satisfy the development of the burgeoning suburbs. And so as I said earlier, it's a design issue basically in most of these things, whether it be this bridge here or whether it be the heating plant in Georgetown or wherever it may be. So as a result, when I signed the National Register nominations, I signed in the name of the Secretary of the Interior and they became legal documents. That's the reason I got embroiled in so many lawsuits. The first one almost put me in bed because it was over an urban renewal program in Troy, New York. And there was a man who owned an excessively fine, I mean not just average, but an excessively fine Classic Revival building on the edge of the taking area. And he was using it as a nursing home. He wanted the money that HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] was going to give him for a new building, of course. The staff of the SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] in New York constructed a nomination, sent it to us, and of course by the time I got it, all this had come to my ears and it went into my inbox, and I admit it sat in the bottom of my inbox for a little while while I was trying to figure out what tack I was going to take on this because we would be on an immediate lawsuit situation. And I finally said to myself, "Murtagh you're not in business here to make it easy for other people. The Secretary has delegated to you the authority and presumably has enough faith in you to say you 'this is cultural property. You have take it into account in the process of change.'" So I signed it. Well, this subpoena appeared and it said, "Paich[?] versus Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary of the Interior, State Historic Preservation Officer, and Dr. William J. Murtagh, Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places." I picked up and called my legal counsel and I said, "Bernie, I'm being sued. What am I going to do?" And I was absolutely beside myself. He said, "Calm down. They're not suing you. They're only suing your post." I have to say that I never got used to being grilled on the witness stand and it is the one thing I could do in life that would be the most lucrative which I consistently refused to do because it was the one part of the job that I hated the most. And no job is a hundred percent satisfactory, and that was the large part of the dissatisfaction of my job, personally. But that's a personal problem for me because I'm a right-brained esthete. But I learned a lot from lawyers. I learned so much from them and if I had it to do over again, I would study law because law in my considered opinion trains you to teach more clearly than any other discipline that I know, and as a result of all those fractious incursions in my life, I've become very sensitive to the specificity of the definition of words. And that's important in life I think.

JP: In the James Island Bridge controversy and others you doubtless became acquainted with Frances Edmunds and maybe you could tell us a little bit about your first impressions of Frances.

WM: Well, frankly, I had known Frances so long, I don't remember my first impressions at all. Frances was a well-established, not a well-established name when I came to the Trust, but in short order she came to signify Charleston at the National Trust meetings and those annual meetings were part of my responsibility from the beginning and so I got to know all the representatives of various programs around the country pretty well. And Frances became not only a valued professional confrere but a personal friend because we both liked martinis among other things and so we got along very well. But there is one visit down here that I shall never forget as well as the famous murder but I lived in Alexandria, Virginia, for a number of years and that was an early historic district and it had never gotten nearly as far, and still is not nearly as far, as you guys have gotten down here in Charleston. And the man who heads up the local foundation is a physician and someone that I knew and I said to him, "I'll arrange a meeting with the director of Historic Charleston Foundation and the people in Savannah if you want to take your time to come down." And I was trying to push him into beginning to hire a staff. It was still volunteer after years! And they had never said "no" to the city council and that's a very important thing to do because that signifies to the public sector that you mean business. You can't say "yes" to them all the time. And we came down and Frances was very receptive and so forth and I'll never forget we were sitting across her desk from her and her desk was covered with papers and I noticed that these papers on her left had a lot of figures on them and so forth and so I thought "I bet that's the budget." Anyway we talked about what it was like and how many staff and some of the problems here and some of the successes and all this business and finally there was a break in the conversation and I said, "Well Frances, what's your budget?" And her arm went over like this on the desk [gestures] and she said, "Oh Bill, the board handles that. I don't have anything to do with that." And that was the end of the conversation. I knew she was pulling my leg but I couldn't say anything further to her in front of somebody else. But we joked about it afterwards.

JP: Frances had a wonderful ability to be a very strong individual but sometimes to pretend she didn't [Murtagh interrupts]...

WM: Definitely! She took advantage of being a woman to the nth degree! She played that role when it was to her advantage absolutely magnificently but she had the other side and she played that role just as well. You know a very unusual person. This city is so lucky to have [unintelligible] that woman to get her involved initially. It's what is needed in every community. And I might here put a word in that I like to put in in these types of things. If it weren't for women there would be no preservation movement in this country you know. And if it weren't for strong-willed and strong-minded women you know. And every successful local program like this usually has a woman -- not necessarily a man involved in. Take Sinclair Wright in Annapolis as another good example. Sinclair Wright thought nothing about calling me at 11:30 at night Sunday night at home where I'd be lying in bed looking at the evening news and the telephone would ring and I'd think it was a member of the family and I'd pick up and say "Hello I'm looking at the news" and she'd say "this is Sinclair Wright" and I'd go "Oh" because I knew I was in for an hour-long discussion.

JP: Bill, you were involved in the first official survey of Charleston, and by official I mean it was the first survey that was adopted by the city and is still largely law in the city, and that was the historic inventory that was done at the beginning of the 1970s, or at least it was adopted in 1971-72. And we locally call that the Feiss-Wright survey although they were not the only people who were part of the survey team. Can you tell us a little bit about your memories of that?

WM: Well you know Russell Wright, he was a friend and a confrere and Carl Feiss who served on the board of the National Trust. There is a man who needs a master degree thesis written on him somewhere along the line. And then there was Russell Keune, the acting Keeper while the keeping Keeper kept at one time, and myself. And I don't remember. Were Carl and Russell in business together at that time? I don't remember who it was but they had made these big books and they had photographed every building and every block in the city that we were going to look at. And you would open them like this [gestures] and you would see the left side of the block and you would see the right side of the block. And we had a microbus with smoke glass and we would go at a snail pace down every block. And we did it on the point system as you know and so a building that have might have been a three in descending order from one in importance, in Block A could be a category one building in Block B depending on its environmental context because as you know when you are dealing with neighborhoods you are dealing on how buildings relate to each other across a central space called a street and a sidewalk. And you are dealing in a planning process and who slept there, etc. doesn't enter into it all. You are simply dealing on visual impact on the human consciousness as you walk down the street or drive down the street. And so that's the way we did this survey and we couldn't have done it if they hadn't prepared all of these immense books. I don't know whether you guys have them or not but they are great big books as I remember. And they had photographed every building. And the one thing that I do remember is we got up, I guess it was Ansonborough or I don't know where it was, somewhere that was still essentially a black neighborhood. And we were stopped at a street corner and this elderly black women came up and knocked on the window and the driver turned the window down and she says, "Gentlemen's is you lost?" And we said, "No! We are just looking at your fine buildings." And she said, "Oh! That's nice" and walked away. But it was a thoroughly enjoyable experience and it was an experience that was well orchestrated before we ever came down you know. We could have wasted a lot of time if they hadn't organized as the way they did. I mean I have done surveys in Savannah and I did surveys in New Orleans and a number of other cities and I don't remember any that were as well organized as that was. And I am glad to know that it's useful.

JP: It's still useful. We constantly try to argue to the city that they need to update it because in the 1970s some Victorian buildings were not as prized or certain early 20th century buildings were not as prized and we've not been successful at updating the area below Calhoun Street.

WM: Well you know, if I may use an analogy, when I moved from Georgetown to Alexandria, Virginia, in 1961, Alexandria, Virginia, was tearing down all the great buildings on Washington Street which leads to Mount Vernon. And the reason why they did it, they had passed their local legislation which incidentally they called the "Charleston Ordinance" for years, and I don't remember the date, in 1949 I think was when they did it, but they made no provision for moving it forward and so all of these buildings missed the fifty year rule by about one year and they all disappeared and Alexandria was really impoverished by that. And a bunch of really bad buildings had been put up in their space. And, it's important to update things because a city is not static. The essence of the life of the city is change and this is the reason why I am so turned on by this "cultural corridor" concept that I am going talk about tonight at the lecture because that weaves the voice of preservation into large chunks of American soil and I think that is important. And its predecessor is that sort of thing in urban historic districts. It's abundantly important that they be looked at constantly because the city constantly changes and you have to know where you are. It's like doing a budget in the fiscal world. Same thing! Unless you know where you are going to go and where you have been you can't really know where you want to go.

JP: You have been such a part of the preservation movement since its inception and you have seen different trends come and go. How do you feel about where the preservation movement in America is now and where do you think it's going or where it should go?

WM: Well I re-wrote the epilogue in this third edition of *Keeping Time,* this basic book I wrote in the 1980s which has just been published, and it took me a couple of years to get all the stats up to date and I have added new chapters and all this business. But I re-wrote the epilogue totally and I feel so strongly about these "cultural corridor" areas. I have said in that book that I think it's the most cutting edge concept to come across my vision since Charleston identified the Battery as a "old and historic district" in 1931! I mean that changed the course of preservation in the United States, totally! And I think this will eventually, I won't live to see it-- It's interesting there are about 26 or 28 of them at the present time, there are a couple of them that include Charleston already, but they are relatively unknown west of the Mississippi. Although the first one was west of the Mississippi, most of them are all east of the Mississippi. And they take in vast areas of land. Well there are a number of things that have happened. First of all is the impact of the Rome center in Italy and that was set p by UNESCO some years ago and it combines architectural training with the training of scientists and it does it with an eye cocked to the capabilities of the scientific conservator who works for museums. And when you think objectively, the conservator deals with the same material (wood, glass, plaster, paint etc.) that the architectural restorationist deals with. The only difference is that the conservator in the museum gallery space has the luxury of keeping his objects in a controlled atmospheric space, which the architect and the preservationist doesn't have. And so taking that combination, this training course that was instituted in Rome years ago, I don't know how many there are now but there were about the last time I looked at this maybe it was 15-20 years ago, there were about a hundred of these people who graduated from that training school. They have injected into the preservation field an in-depth knowledge on how to treat the illness of building materials scientifically in addition to dealing with what you should and should not do to an old building based on the Secretary of Interior Standards. For example, prior to that time you would get a restoration architect and he would simply cut out pieces that were diseased pieces of wood and put new material in. Now you inject them with polymers, you stabilize them, you try to keep as much of the original material as possible. And you know and that's based on the William Morris concept of "leave it alone" as opposed to the Violette-le-Duc continental concept of "restore it to a state of excellence that never really existed." Carcassonne, for instance, is late nineteenth century. The front of Notre Dame in Paris is 1870s. And everybody takes those from America on face value that they are looking at something at something from the middle ages, but they are not. They are looking at Violette-le-Duc from late nineteenth century. And so we have adopted this let-it-alone attitude and I think that's important. Also there has been an increasing understanding and sympathy toward the several hundred sovereign nations that we have within our nation which most white people don't even know exist and we are talking about the Native American Indian. I became conscious of by this living for a decade in Hawaii and working in Micronesia, and these are all oral cultural societies like the Native American Indian. They have a weddedness to the land that we *haoles*, the Hawaiian name for white people, do not have! Or we wouldn't be having sprawl. Now some of the Indian tribes are being infected by our culture, with these gambling casinos, etcetera. But you have to look at that also from their point of view you know. Now I don't know how many of you all have been on Indian reservations, but some of them are abysmally poor. Everything that is bad about society is rampant, mainly drunkenness, and there is no incentive to do anything except escape. Well I mean that's true with any minor group. It's true of the blacks which we have an abundance on the east coast and in the south especially. But having lived in Hawaii, when somebody says minority to me I don't think black anymore. I think Asian. I think Chicano. I think broad spectrum. And I wish I had had my experience in Hawaii before I was Keeper of the National Register. I would have understood a lot better all the nominations of the cultures of Native American peoples, coming primarily then coming from the states in the west and the southwest, that I didn't really understand then. I contend even now that most of the Park Service people don't understand it all. And their yardstick of what is important to them in their culture is totally different from ours. We are product-oriented and they are process-oriented. They are only interested in the

unseen things in their culture, their mores, their customs, their dances, their songs, etc. We have that in our culture but we call it folklore and it's a very small percentage of our culture. It's one hundred percent of their culture. You can't go a Chief in Micronesia and say with your book in hand, "Mow I want to take an oral history from you." Well that's tantamount to telling the man to commit suicide because his manna, his strength, is his knowledge which he carries here [gestures]. And if he is lucky and doesn't keel over from a heart attack, he passes it on to someone before he dies. If he doesn't it's all lost. But customs and mores change and come into fashion and go out of fashion all the time, etc. Most white people (a) they're not interested and(b) they don't understand it at all! But to run, for instance, a mining operation in some land sacred to a Native American tribe, etc., is catastrophic for them because these grounds are scared to them. And I think there is an increasing understanding of that but it is still in kindergarten as far as I am concerned. I mean it's more understood in certain parts of the country than elsewhere, not very understood in the east. I always think of it as the salamander in the illuminated manuscript's first letter, entwined in the letter with its tail in its mouth consuming itself. You know we are linear. The older we can take back the date the better we like it. They go this way all the time. It's a big difference. I don't what it means to anybody else but it means a lot to me.

JP: You think that the heritage corridor concept will [undecipherable, both speaking at same time]

WM: Right, and the third thing that I wanted to say is that this heritage corridor concept. Now I don't know how well this is administered locally. The interesting thing that I am going to trace a little bit tonight if I have time, how it all came into being, and it's interesting how it came into being on the west coast primarily and yet the west coast hasn't really seen fit to even get it yet. But what it does, it weaves the voice of the preservationist into land use at a scale that far exceeds the weaving of the voice of the preservationist into land use in the urban district. It's the same concept and it's the answer to creating protected areas but not stopping development, accepting development for what it is. It is based pretty basically on the British Park Service System where they have towns and bridges and railroads and god knows what in their National Parks. We want to keep our national park absolutely pristine. It's a different attitude. And I see this as something that the preservationist of the future, if they want to take rise to the occasion and take the bull by the horns, can play a major part in the development of land use in this country based on identifiable areas that have certain specifics like the Gullah Geeche area that has just been designated here. You know you don't find that any place else than the United States! It's what makes this part of the United States very specific. You guys all live with it, you know it, you know it's unusual, etc. but you live with it. And that's the problem. It's the reason why historic districts are usually started by the people from "away" as we call it in Maine, not local people. It's usually somebody who moves in from someplace else who sees the potential and wants to do something about it. I'm not saying that that is necessarily true here in Charleston but it has been true in many areas of the country. And one other further comment is that it has usually been women who have a young family and have gone through a divorce. Or gays. And these are the two groups that have been willing to move into questionable neighborhoods in the past and be willing to be pioneers in gentrification. The big failure of the whole thing is that we have never until recently began to look at displacement, what happens to the people that you are pushing out economically. I have done six houses in four states, seven houses in five states, I don't know which. The first one was in Society Hill in Philadelphia in the 1950s. I will never forget the impassioned speech made by a woman in Society Hill of Polish descent whose mother cleaned offices at night and had put her through nursing school. And this was a committee meeting of new owners in the Society Hill area which was a Grade A slum at the time. She stood up and said, "I was born and raised in this neighborhood. This is my home! You've all come in and started to do marvelous things to my home but you are on a totally different economic level than I am. What's going to happen to my mother and me? What are your answers to

that?" And of course, everybody sat in stony silence. They didn't have any answers and I don't know that I have really found any really good answers. There are some answers that, I think Pittsburgh is probably the best place to look. They have done a marvelous job there in turning home rental black neighborhoods into home owner neighborhoods successfully. And has made that segment of society in Pittsburgh very proud of not only where they live but their houses. Lee tried it in Savannah also but he used mostly the government Band-Aid systems and I don't think it was as successful there. But Pittsburgh for some reason or the other doesn't want to let anybody know what it's doing or why it's there. They like it the way it is.

JP: Well thank you.

WM: Thank you for the opportunity. This has been a great privilege.

END OF INTERVIEW