

Interview from the preparation of

Fell's Point Out of Time



Bob Eney Interview, January 21, 2004

Kraig & Jacquie Greff, interviewers; Jacquie Greff, camera

[Bob]

Did you want... do you have someone who's talked about the road and how it came about?

[Jacquie]

Not much. We don't really have a good story about the road. We've got enough pieces that we could probably get by without it, but it would be a good story. But if there's something that you're really into, talk about that first. The order doesn't matter.

[Bob]

OK. It says here, "William Fell, Ann Fell, and the Fell Mansion." Well, William Fell never married Ann Fell.... That was [laughs]... I feel a little silly doing all this.

[Kraig]

I feel silly, too, but that's because I look silly.

[Jacquie]

[To Bob] You don't look silly.

[Bob]

So, William Fell settled in Fells Point about 1731. He got all that land, and he was involved with the Quaker Community. And the Quaker Community was quite large. It extended up into Cecil County and it was all around Baltimore and down in Anne Arundel County. And he was pretty much an avid Quaker when he first came. And he married... His brother was here. His brother had come earlier, and he had a store over in Baltimore Town and he ...

Am I jumping ahead?

[Jacquie]

The order doesn't matter because we can rearrange this.

[Bob]

OK. So his brother had an attorney who was John Bond. And John Bond had a whole gaggle of girls over in his house. And William Fell was here and he was single, and he picked up on Sarah Bond, John Bond's sister, and he married her. And they had a gang of kids. One of his kids, he

named Edward Fell, after his brother. Because that's where it all gets confusing over the two Edward Fells. The first Edward Fell was William's brother. And the second Edward Fell was William's son.

And so he grew up, and I guess there still weren't too many people because when he came to get married, he married his mother's niece, Ann Bond. So they were keeping it in the family. [Laughs]

Anyway, Edward Fell the son had inherited his father's property, William Fell's property, when William Fell died in 1741. And Edward inherited the property, and when he got it, and married with his wife Ann... They had ... and if you could picture that little town of Fells Point, it wasn't a town, it was just a farm. And Shakespeare Street seemed to be the main location for the Fell House, 'cause William Fell had built a house on that street ... it wasn't a street but it became a street. But he built a house there and several other buildings.

And Edward and his wife lived there and improved it. And they built it into a mansion. And they decided, because ... everybody that came to Baltimore Town would stop at Fells Point and dock there because the water was too shallow up in Baltimore Town and Fells Point had deep water right there at the shore line. And everybody wanted to buy a piece of his land. He wouldn't sell the land right away but he did decide They did persuade him to lay out a town there. So in 1763, Edward and his wife Ann laid out a town to be called Fells Point. And John Bond, the father-in-law, was the man who promoted all this for Edward Fell.

And ... once they started selling off the land in lots, Edward dropped dead. And so Ann Bond Fell, it was up to her. And women's rights in those days were totally different than they are now. Because women couldn't own any property, they couldn't own anything, if they were married. They had no rights to anything, only the husband.

But when the husband died, Ann became the owner of Fells Point and everything. So, she was like a big-time promoter. And she went out, and she sold Fells Point. Now, Baltimore Town, further up the harbor, Baltimore Town was still selling off lots. And Ann just went right ahead of them... And people in Baltimore Town started saying bad things about Fells Point and about Ann being crooked and not giving good titles and had bad water and all this stuff. But her father, John Bond, he advertised in the *Gazette and Daily Advertiser* that everything that Ann Bond said about Fells Point, he was staking his reputation on it because it was true, and it was good. And sure enough she sold... by 1773, in 10 years she had sold off all the land in Fells Point. Baltimore Town still had lots for sale from 1752. So she was a good promoter.

And then... in a short time, they had had a son, she had had a son by Edward. And this kid was growing up. And by the time he got to be 25 or 28, I'm not sure which, something like that, he dropped dead. And so Ann went out, and here she was a widow, and she went out and she looked for a husband. And she checked all over the Quaker Community... And they'd pretty much dropped out of the Quaker thing by that time because you know they were getting a little too rich to be Quakers. And so that was all beyond them.

[Brief Kraig comment]

So she looked all over Baltimore County, Harford County, everywhere... Cecil County. And there was one guy that stood out – Mr. Giles. And Ann went and courted him and wooed him and married him. And he was rich, because he owned several hundred thousand acres in Harford County and northern Baltimore County and what-not. So she married him. And he had a couple of kids when she married him. But she had a couple of kids, too. So she made a prenuptial arrangement, and this is all recorded, this is wonderfully recorded. She made a prenuptial agreement that any money that she took into this marriage, if it dissolved, her children would get. And he agreed to that. He said that was fine with him. He didn't make any similar thing with his children and her. But when his children did die off, Ann's children inherited all of the Giles property. So she made out like gangbusters.

And today, one of her kids had married a Johnson. And the Johnsons owned pretty much of Greenspring Valley. And so when she got Mr. Johnson, they built a house out there in Greenspring Valley, right about where the Cloisters is on Falls Road. And they called the farm Rockland. And the house that they built... they built a house in 1815 that was designed by Mills, the guy who did the Washington Monument. And the house is still there and the Fell-Johnson family lives there still. Because what they did, as they passed the house down to their children, they all had to have Fell in their name in order to collect, inherit the house. So, Mrs. Robert Fell Johnson lives in that house today. And all the Fell stuff, the paintings, the silver, everything, is in that house.

But when we were fighting the highway, old Mr. William Fell Johnson was still alive. And he was living there alone in this big house. And we went to him and asked him if he could give us any information or help or anything about the road. And he said he wasn't interested in Fells Point. He said, "The only thing I have of Fells Point is a big headache of ground rents," and he said, "It doesn't bring me enough money to worry about it," he said, "so forget it." He said, "Let them buy it under the highway." That's what he told us. And so ... he died, fortunately.

But before he died, his nephew, Dr. Robert Fell Johnson, wanted his son to get married out there at the house, because it was the family place. So he let them put up a tent and then he made them bring spot-a-pots because he didn't want anybody coming into the house, nosing around, poking at anything there. He said, "The house is not on exhibition, so nobody can come in." So that's where he had his wedding. [Laughs.]

[01:10:49;13]

[Jacquie]

Tell us about the ground rents.

[Bob]

OK. Well, the ground rents were a thing that William Fell worked out with his wife when he was planning to sell off some land. And so he informed his son, Edward Fell, how it would work. The way it worked, if somebody wanted to buy a lot, they would buy a ground rent. And the ground rent said that you had to build a house within so many years, 2 years. If you didn't build a house within 2 years, you forfeited your land. But if you had a ground rent, you could go on. And instead of paying full price for a house and land, you just paid for the house and the ground rent, you paid a minimum

fee each year. And so a lot of ground rents in Fells Point are by shillings, still today, they'll say 2 shillings uncollectible, which means that's was what it was then.

And so the Fell ground rent became a pretty standard type of thing. And today, there are a lot of ground rents. I had a ground rent on my house on Thames Street that was \$65 a year. And that \$65 a year seems to be about what most ground rents are. And you can't sell them... you can sell them, but you can't just arbitrarily sell them at any price. They have a limited price that you can sell them for. And if I'd wanted to buy my ground rent, it would have been about \$1,100. But, at the rate of interest today, it wouldn't have paid to buy it. Just pay that \$65 a year, and you'd be ahead of the game. And so ground rents are a pain in the neck.

[01:13:06;04]

[Kraig]

Task Force and development issues.

[Jacquie]

You were talking the other day about ... there's plans to build out in the harbor and stuff is the thing you were trying to work on... There's probably been a series of those things over time.

[Bob]

There's been so much dissention and so much different Task Forces and what-not. But, when I first moved to Fells Point, I was really ostracized by the old timers, because they saw me as a free-loader coming in here.

[Kraig]

What year'd you move here?

[Bob]

I moved in '67 to Fells Point. And they saw me as a free-loader coming in, buying cheap property. And they thought that I didn't want to really live there. And so, they ... everybody else that came in when I came in, we got a bad reputation because we were fighting the road as well. And to the people who lived there... That was a strange group because, they were for the most part, they weren't poor, but you wouldn't have known that they weren't poor. The Lewkowski family ... can I talk that? I don't want anybody to know about them. But the Lewkowski family was an example...

[Jacquie]

There's been people mention the Lewkowski family before in interviews...

[Bob]

OK, well Frank earned tugboater's salary, which was good money. And he was Polish. And they saved their money, and they invested it. And as his kids grew up, they all became tugboat captains and what-not. And first thing you know, Eleanor was taking their money from them, because that was the typical thing if you were a kid. You gave your money to your mother. And so, she had an awful lot of money coming in because she had 4 people who were giving her their tugboat money.

And we're talking now up into the thousands of dollars a year. But you'd never know it. She never let on that she had anything. And none of them did. But yet anybody who moved into the neighborhood from outside, and they ostracized and they said that they were rich because they were coming in, fixing up these houses. And, it created a really bad situation.

[Kraig]

So what you are saying, though, is that the poor weren't necessarily as poor as they said they were.

[Bob]

That's right. But you wouldn't have known it. Because ... every time there was a town meeting, they were talking about the ... the terrible term ... we were called "gentrifiers." That was a really bad name. And there might have been areas that gentrification was going on, but this was not a case of gentrification. Nobody was being pushed out. And houses were only sold if somebody wanted to sell their house. You didn't go and force people to sell them. But then the City did come along and the City forced people to sell for the road. Because everything was condemned for the interstate highways, for 3 interstate highways, I-95, I-83 and I-70.

[Kraig]

So that road, all 3 of those roads, literally would have wiped out all of Fells Point.

[Bob]

I would have wiped out a swath ... it did wipe out a swath out of West Baltimore, I-70 coming in, but it stopped at downtown because they didn't know how they were going to get it down to Fells Point. And I-95 was started, the Sharp-Leadenhall corridor they tore down, but they when they got up towards Federal Hill, they were blocked because Fells Point had a lawsuit against them, against the interstate highway [noise of rubbing microphone] and they wanted to

[Jacquie]

But Mrs. Lewkowski, wasn't she the one whose name was on that lawsuit?

[Bob]

That's the way it ended up. Frank died... we put his name on first. The Preservation Society had been formed by that time. And we had people from Federal Hill and Fells Point in it. And we had a hard time getting an old Fells Pointer to join it. But we got Mrs. Lewkowski... Eleanor came and Frank Lewkowski. And Frank was a young man when he died. He was only 50 years old or so. But he was a pretty bright guy. And he understood what was going on, and he understood what we wanted to do. And he agreed with us. So when Frank died, we wanted a name on the lawsuit that wasn't some Anglo-Saxon name. So we got Eleanor Lewkowski's name on the lawsuit against Secretary of Transportation Volpe et al. Anyway...

[Jacquie]

Can we stop...

[Jacquie realizes camera has been shut off. Camera captures brief discussion of what might have been missed. 01:18:43;03]

[Jacquie]

One of the things that you were talking about was how people received you and how people viewed you as newcomers.

[Bob]

Well, we were pretty much ostracized. And when you walked around the neighborhood, they sneered at you. As a matter of fact, Laura Norris who had a business here, and she had restored a house here. But, one of the priests at the church stopped her on the street and told her that he thought that she was one of Hitler's people working in this neighborhood against these poor Poles. Laura was horrified. She had never even spoken to this priest before. But that was typical of what was going on.

[Jacquie]

Was a Polish versus non-Polish thing partly?

[Bob]

Well, there were a lot of Poles here. It was almost solid Polish when I moved down here. But that was rapidly dwindling because lots of people were selling their houses. And, as they were selling their houses to the City, other people were saying, "If you're going to sell your house, sell it to me." And some people did, but for the most part, they'd rather sell it to the City for \$2,500 than sell it to somebody else for \$3,500 who wasn't the City because they knew that they were going to make money on it. And, it was a strange time. People didn't trust one another. It was very bad.

[Jacquie]

Take me through how you got on the Historic Register and what happened right after that, and the Agnew story and everything.

[Bob]

Had I talked about the need for the National Register to come about? Because that's ...

[Jacquie]

I don't know exactly what I got and what I didn't, unfortunately.

[Bob]

Well, that's an important part of it because the National Register was a thing that came along to separate the bad politicians from the good. Because good politicians wanted Eisenhower's interstate highway system built in America. And that was a good thing because we didn't have good roads between major cities. We just had like Route 66 West and something else ... But the National Register was to provide all these great highways. And it was under Eisenhower's administration. And Eisenhower had been impressed by the Autobahn System in Germany that Hitler had built. Because it was a great system of roads that connected, and you could go anywhere in Germany on great highways.

[Jacquie]

Without speed limits.

[Bob]

And Eisenhower envisioned us having a thing like that, here. And it was a successful program because it provided for every \$90,000 that a state would make to improve their highways, the government would give them a million to add to it. And so it's called 90/10 money. And once that started and really got going, and once all the crooked politicians who ran the contractors and the people in the cities, once they saw this, they then went ahead and jumped in. And they didn't ... instead of having the highways skirt around cities, or skirt cities ... and one of our first interstate highways was the ring road around Baltimore, which was good, which was what Baltimore needed. So, if somebody came down, they didn't have to drive through the City. They could go around it.

But they didn't do that, they wanted to come right through the City and take out slums and all this stuff. And so that was like ... urban renewal money was hard to get, but 90/10 money was easy to get. And so that's what they did. They were going for the big lump.

[01:23:53;11]

[Jacquie]

And you were telling us that Philadelphia'd had a really bad experience.

[Bob]

Philadelphia had a strange situation. Philadelphia was a city with more 18th century houses than London. And when the politicians in Philadelphia, crooked from the Mayor on down, they decided that they were going to get rid of all that old slummy waterfront, which was loaded with 18th century buildings, taverns, and what-not. And they did. They started demolishing everything to get that 80/10 money.

And once they did, people all over the country who knew about Philadelphia were crying "Halt." And so the government then came up this thing of the National Register. And what its purpose was, it was to stop Federal money from demolishing places like that area of Philadelphia. But Philadelphia was already devastated when it came along.

And Dr. Murtaugh who had been named keeper of the National Register that had just been created in this country, he came to Fells Point and talked to us and explained to us how we get on the National Register and what we could do, and what it could do for us. Because if we got on the National Register and the highway wanted to come through, the National Register said that you can not spend any Federal money to destroy anything listed on the National Register. And that would have been stopping the highway.

The only exception was, if the people who wanted to build that highway persisted, they'd have to go to the President's Advisory Commission on Historic Preservation. And the President's Advisory Commission, which was established for the National Register, had 8 people on it. One was from the Department of the Interior. One was from Transportation... All the different segments of the government were in it.

And so one of the things that we did here in Fells Point, we found out who the people were on the National Register and we wooed them. We brought them over here to Baltimore at night and we'd take them to Hausner's. We'd show them the Fells Point area. We'd tell them all the stuff. We really won them over.

[Jacquie]

So they were an appeal process if you made it to the Register?

[Bob]

Right.

[Jacquie]

It sounds like it was a lot of work to get on the Register. It sounds like you had to do a lot of paperwork...

[Bob]

Well, we photographed every house. And we made a sheet and we listed the house, whether it was bricks or wood or whatever, how many windows it had, and if there was any historic facts known about it.... The sheets were, they were accompanied by a photograph of the property itself. And Maryland Historical Trust had given us in Fells Point, given us photograph money. And that's the only help we really got from the State, was what Maryland Historical Trust did.

And we did manage to get on the National Register. Anne Parrish, who worked for Agnew, she took the forms that we had filled out, she took it to Agnew and he sent them over to Dr. Garvey at the Department of the Interior. And in 3 days, we were on the National Register. And the City of Baltimore went crazy.

When the Mayor saw that in the paper, he fired Romaine... Romaine Somerville was head of CHAP, which is Commission of Historic Architectural Preservation downtown. He fired Romaine because he was positive she did it. And so we all called, everybody called the Mayor and said, "Romaine had absolutely nothing to do with this." And then Maryland Historical Trust, Lenny Ridout, did call the Mayor and told the Mayor, he said "They came to us for help and we helped them. That's what our agency is for." So he reinstated Romaine back up there, because she was good.

But, the contractors were furious with Agnew. Because he was so dumb. He had no idea what he had done. He didn't know that he had put us on the National Register for a community that's blocking his highway that he wanted to build.

[Jacquie]

He was just doing payback to Anne for all of her work.

[Bob]

Yeah. Right. Because she had bagged for him for so long... She had gone out and collected all that graft money from the different businessmen. And she was still doing it, even when he was in the White House. Unbelievable, isn't it?

[01:29:47;23]

[Jacquie]

Yeah. And I know we missed the story of how you got Semmes, Bowen & Semmes and what they did ...

[Bob]

Well, we had a lawyer because ... we were going to sue the Department of Interior, the Interstate Division, the Department of Transportation.

[Jacquie]

The City was going to ignore you anyway. You actually had to file a lawsuit in order to establish...

[Bob]

That's right. But the City went ahead and condemned the property from Thames Street, the South side of Thames Street to the North side of Lancaster Street, one block wide all the way across Fells Point.

[Jacquie]

Now, did they do this after you made the Historic Register or before?

[Bob]

Just about that time. It was happening just as that happened. And so, what we had to do then was to test it. So we needed a lawyer. And so we went out and we searched all kinds of lawyers. And Lu and Tom Ward finally got Norman Ramsey from Semmes, Bowen and Semmes. And he came down and met with us at our meeting on Thames Street there. And he said he had read everything that we had. He thought it was a wonderful thing, and he's a great historian himself, and he thought that it was perfect. And he said that he would really like to do this because he said we had a good case and he said, "I know that we can win it." And he said that he would do it pro bono. And for 10 years they did all the paperwork on the road.

[Jacquie]

That's a lot of work.

[Bob]

It sure was a lot of work.

[Jacquie]

And he assigned you one of his newer attorneys that worked....

[Bob]

He had this young man, Jeff Mitchell, who had come from UVA, and Jeff worked with us... He worked with us. He joined the Preservation Society. He worked with us. He was tireless. And he went up in the firm. They took him on up in the firm. But, Jeff was a great guy and helped us tremendously.

[01:32:27;12]

[Jacquie]

And then you told us the story about the architectural association that came in and had one meeting...

[Bob]

Well, first the AIA came to Fells Point shortly after Charles Center was developed. And Charles Center wasn't anything spectacular. I mean, it was a area of about 3 blocks by 3 blocks where they had torn down everything in the heart of Baltimore and they built up a Mees Vandro building, and they built up 1 or 2 other unspectacular buildings. And they really... Once they got it done, they were trying to publicize it. And there was... Baltimore had bad public transportation.

And so they wanted to get traffic in to see that Charles Center. And they invited the AIA to have their annual meeting here. This was shortly after it was completed. Well, the AIA people came to Baltimore to see this... They were invited to check out the Inner Harbor. And they came and they gave it a big ho hum because, other cities were doing vast projects, but Baltimore was just doing this little hometown project. And ... they even questioned why you'd tear down half a city to put roads into it, because what else was it going to be. The City of course told them that Baltimore would grow faster with roads into it. But that was a lot of stuff...

Anyway, a few years ago, the AIA came back. They were invited back by Mayor Shaffer, Governor Shaffer. And when they came back, we were at the Engineers Club, and we had this luncheon. And we were going to talk to these people, Bill Pensak for Maryland Historical Trust and me for the Preservation Society. And, as we were about to talk, Shaffer said to us, he said, "Look, I know you guys are gonna crucify me up there," he said, "but," he said, "I'm not really a bad guy" and he said, "I have reformed. Let me talk first and then you just rip apart anything I say." So he got up there and he told them that he had been a bad, bad guy, was not a preservationist, and how he didn't believe it could work, and he said that "the preservationists here have convinced me that it does work, and they showed me it works. And now I know," He said. "I'm confirmed," he said, "So you can crucify me for all you want," he said, "but let these guys fill you in."

So Bill had some routes of Fells Point that he was to talk about and I had some of the other routes. And we showed them, we gave them a bus tour. We went over the different routes to show them what had happened in those different corridors. And we showed them Fells Point, how that would have been totally all wiped out, and now it was a thriving community. And wherever we went, we saw the same thing. We showed them Canton, how Canton had changed. We showed them the Sharp-Leadenhall corridor, how it had changed. We showed them Rosemont. We showed them all this.

But, it was just a good thing to have the Mayor become a different person.

[Jacquie]

That's great!

[cut; 01:36:26;15]

Which part would you like to talk about next?

[Bob]

Well, I could.... One of the things that came about once we had to adjust to the fact that we weren't fighting the highway any more. But we had Fells Point with all these vacant houses that were on the National Register. And we had had told the City, our lawyers had told the City that they were responsible for these properties. Because they were listed on the National Register and if you neglected anything on the National Register, you lost it. And so what the City then quickly did, they put up a program to dispose of the houses. And they said that what they would do is sell the houses to the highest bidder.

[Jacquie]

Now this was after you won the lawsuit?

[Bob]

Yeah, this was after the lawsuit.

[Jacquie]

Oh, wow! So they dragged their feet for 10 years before they did anything about these houses.

[Bob]

Right.

Well, no, we had gone to them at one point... and so what they did, they rented them out to people. We had a big hippie village down here because they rented them for like \$40 a month. And so the hippies in and kind of fixed them up a little bit and did whatever they wanted to do to them and ...

[Jacquie]

At least they had occupants.

[Bob]

Yeah. Somebody was there and if the roof leaked, they'd patch it and that sort of thing.

But anyway, we came to that point where we had to do something about the community. And so we formed ... I guess it was like a little community advisory board. And they'd have meetings, and they'd get people from this section of Fells Point, "What do you want to do?" From this section, "What do you want to see?"

And then, after the different improvement associations, so to speak, spoke up, then the City hired for us, it was our recommendation that we have an architect come in and tell us what ... how we could unify this community, what we could do with it.

[Jacquie]

Unify from an architectural standpoint?

[Bob]

That and how we could make it all look cohesive. And so they hired Louis Sauers Associates out of Philadelphia to come down. And Lou came down and did things like tore out all of the parking spaces in the middle of the public square and put in the plaza that you see there with the bollards around the edge and those big red granite planters around the edge to make it look cute. And all that, that was the first thing that Lou Sauer did. And he tried to do other things. And he tried to make ... one of the things he wanted to do and did, mostly successful... He took businesses out of the community. He recommended that we take businesses out of the community and put it all in one area. And in a way, that was a shame because it took away some... a private bakery, and there were little businesses that had been established throughout the community that make a community... But, that wasn't a popular thing for him and he didn't like that idea.

[Jacquie]

It'd be like in the middle of a residential block or something...

[Bob]

Right. And he said... he put a limit on it that there could be one commercial establishment per block. You know, that's kind of dumb. Because you like a corner grocery store and you like a this and a that. And anyway, that was the extent, pretty much, of whatever the community was involved in with planning, community planning. That was it.

[Jacquie]

So, what was the mechanism for doing this? Was it the Urban Renewal Plan?

[Bob]

The Urban Renewal Plan ... they came up with an Urban Renewal Plan. They established one. And the City was establishing one for City-wide. But Fells Point had its own. And ours jibed along with the City's. And the City had a good Urban Renewal Plan. The City really did have a good Urban Renewal Plan.

But when Schmoke was Mayor, he just disregarded it completely. Because... one of the things that the Urban Renewal Plan said was that they didn't want to see tall high-risers on the Harbor. They wanted to see them further back inland. And have buildings on the Harbor be at the scale of people, and walking people. Because the Urban Renewal Plan envisioned people walking around the waterfront. And they envisioned a walkway all the way around, from Fells Point to the Industrial Museum over there. But Schmoke didn't see that as essential. And so he just busted it all up and let John Paterakis build Harbor Court Hotel on the Inner Harbor, almost falling over it....

And then, of course, that led into ... the City backed off ... the City has an Architectural Review Committee, but for Fells Point, they backed off and, unless it was some major, major, major construction thing, they wanted it to be handled in the Community. So they let the Preservation Society, who had an Architectural Review Committee, they let the Preservation Society's Architectural Review Committee be the means of saying yes or no to this house or that house color or that door or this ... And that ... it's still in effect, but it's not a good system.

[Jacquie]

It's not good because it's not enforced, or it's not good because it doesn't operate very efficiently?

[Bob]

Well, the Preservation Society has a difficult time ... if somebody does do something bad, and the Preservation Society says so, the City doesn't want to help them with it. If it's some other community, the ... CHAP is assigned to be the arbiter in that case. But for Fells Point, it doesn't work.

[01:44:13;29]

[Jacquie]

So, as Fells Point was being reconstructed, were there still the old Fells Pointers, the new people, was that still going on?

[Bob]

By that time... we're talking here almost 20 years... very few of the Fells Pointers' children ever stayed in Fells Point, the old Fells Pointers'.

[Jacquie]

Why is that?

[Bob]

They just didn't want to be part of this. They wanted to be in the suburbs. They were making big money and they wanted to live out in the suburbs. They didn't like the idea of fixed up Mom's old house and living in it. So they moved out to the suburbs.

And, even the new people that came in, when they had children and babies, only 2 families, well there were 3 families, 3 families stuck it out. Arnold Capute on Shakespeare Street, he and Courtney, they have 2 children that were born on Shakespeare Street and have grown up on Shakespeare Street, and they're sent out to private schools during the day and brought back in the evening.... Arnold is an architect and his wife is a lawyer for Semmes, Bowen and Semmes, or no, for Venable Baetjer.

And Roland Read had a house on Aliceanna Street. And Roland married late in life, he's my age, and he married late in life. He married a wonderful gal who's a technician at Johns Hopkins now, and they had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – 5 kids and he stuck it out until he finally went bankrupt, and he's out.

And Tony Norris, Tony and Laura Norris, they restored a house on Ann Street and they restored a house up on Broadway, they restored several houses in the time that they've been here. And their 2 kids were born here and grew up here and still live here. So they're the only ones.

[Jacquie]

Now those are from old-time Fells Point families ... or they are from your era...

[Bob]

No, they are people that came after '60, came after '66. They came after '66 and ...

So, as for any other old timers, now... Now, there's one that came back – Andy Mazurek and Joanne. Andy was born in the house next door to Tony Norris on Ann Street. His mother had sold the house to the City. And when Andy found out that his mother had sold the house to the City, Andy was working for a construction company doing high iron work. And he said to his mother, she was dying, she was ill, and he said, "I wish you hadn't sold it, because I would like to have bought it and fixed up. I'd like to live there." So his mom told the City agent that and the City was delighted somebody wanted the house so they shifted all the rules and they let Andy buy his house. And he bought his mother's house.

And Andy then married Joanne, a Polish girl, Andy's Polish, and he married this Polish girl. And they came over to my office and they wanted to know all about the house they owned. And I helped them find the history of the house, and went through it with them, and we took orange paint, spray paint, and we marked every piece of woodwork that was 18th century. And Andy said "This house is almost complete!" ...

So then, he came back to me, he started working on that house and he came back to me and he said, "I went through the house next door..." The house next door had had the roof removed and water had run through it for a number of years... He said, "It's got more 18th century woodwork in it than my house has," his own house has. And so I went through it with him and looked and said, "You're right, Andy." He said, "I want to get this house and restore it, too." And so I helped him and he went to Maryland Historical Trust, and they came and they looked at what Andy had done on his house and they saw what he wanted to do to the house next door, so they let him restore that house. They sold him that house ... cheap. He got it very cheaply. And today, it's the most successful Bed & Breakfast in Baltimore. It's always filled and...

[Jacquie]

Which one is that?

[Bob]

On Ann Street.

[Jacquie]

Ann Street Bed & Breakfast?

[Bob]

Ann Street Bed & Breakfast. Not Ceily's. Ann Street Bed & Breakfast.

And they went to Williamsburg and they looked at houses in Williamsburg and they talked to the people that were in charge of decorating Williamsburg and all that. And then they did the same thing up at Winterthur in Delaware. They went there and they researched... They really were tireless. They did a lot. And Joanne culled out all these 18th Century recipes so that when they have people that come, if they're nice people, she'll feed them breakfast, especially on the day that they leave. And she fixes them a breakfast with everything, like soup to nuts, it's got meat, everything in it. They're really great people and they have a wonderful establishment.

[01:50:38;09]

[Jacquie]

But now I've heard from other people we've interviewed that there were some back and forths between the people that were investing in their houses and that people that didn't have such a big investment... and there was this take-over of the community association at one point by Steve Bunker's group, and there was the parking wars, and there was... the guy that owns Birds of a Feather, he had this sign "Park free or die"....

[Bob]

Oh, there always was, as the hippie group in Fells Point... they never liked the people who were restoring their houses. That was a bad thing. They saw that as a bad sign. And they called it gentrification. When you restore a house, you're gentrifying it. And the Preservation Society's take on all this was – these buildings were saved because they're historic. And guidelines were put on them if you agreed to buy the house. When you bought that house, you agreed that you would follow those guidelines to do the house.

And I have here a ... I did a book for the City. Each person who bought a house got this booklet, they got this booklet and they got a page with their house on it. And on that page, it shows exactly what has to be done on the front of that house.

[Jacquie]

You did all that work.

[Bob]

This is every house ...

[Jacquie]

I know, 'cause we found our house in there.

[Bob]

You did? Well, anyway, so nobody really had any right to complain about anything if they bought the house, because they...

[Jacquie]

You bought it with that contract.

[Bob]

You bought it with that contract – that was the reason you got it.

[Jacquie]

Now, there was a lot of houses, though, that weren't owned by the City that weren't affected by this, right?

[Bob]

Right. There was no problem there because, if you had an old house and it had anything good about it, you really wanted to fix it up. That was the thing. Now, there were a few cases where people did have houses that were not owned by the City and they wanted to...

[Discussion of camera shift]

There were some cases where people did have, own houses, and they didn't want to do anything with them, and they just didn't like the idea of living around preservationists. It bothered them, because they saw them as people who were gouging the poor. As a matter of fact, it got to the point where the old timers that were still here, what few who were still here, they really liked seeing the neighborhood change. They enjoyed it.

And we had one loud-mouthed hippy who got up and he said that "Nobody's going to tell me what I've got to do to my house." And whoever was running that meeting that time assured him that nobody ever said what he had to do to it, other than maintain it. And Julie, I can't remember Julie's last name ... she was an old-time lady here. She was about 80 years old with bleached-blond hair and curlers and all this stuff, and she was a loud-mouth, but we called her "curlers." And she got up, when this guy was talking, ranting on, she got up and she said, "Listen you." She said, "I know where you live and you don't even have a bed in the house. You sleep on the floor." And she said, "We're not that kind of people in this neighborhood. And we don't like people like that in this neighborhood." He never spoke up ever again. He never went to another meeting. He moved.

[Laughs]

[Jacquie]

Sounds like he didn't have much to move!

[01:55:34;04]

Well, what was the parking thing? What was the issue over the parking? I've only gotten real...

[Bob]

Now are you talking about the parking passes?

[Jacquie]

Yeah, I know Bob Keith worked on the parking issue. What I understand, I guess is, that people who came in and were fixing up these houses, they also tended to have 1 or 2 cars and sometimes there was parking problems, and the people who were down here before, maybe they didn't even own cars... Or something like that. But it sounds like parking was just something that tore the community apart.

[Bob]

Well, parking has always been a big, major problem in Fells Point, since almost the beginning. Parking your car ... where do you put it? And so, when the City came along and offered residential parking, each homeowner was entitled to one parking space on a street, not assigned, but they were entitled to park on the street with their permit and they were given another permit that they could keep in their house in case a guest came and the guest could use that parking permit. I've never known that to get out of hand....

[Jacquie]

OK. Maybe some people felt it more than others.
[01:57:07;23]

Let's go back... "Unique aspects of Fells Point architecture..."

[Bob]

Well, the unique things about Fells Point buildings ... are things that were caused because of Fells Point's location ... on the water.

There are no alleys behind any of the houses in Fells Point all the way up almost to Eastern Avenue, there are no alleys behind houses. Along Broadway now, there are, there are alleys behind the buildings, but on the cross-streets, they didn't have alleys. And so you had to have means to get to the back of your house, if you had a cow or a horse or whatever. And so, houses had tunnels or alleyways, whatever you want to call them, squeeze guts... it's a rounded-arch walkway that goes to the back of your property. And that was one thing that was noticeable about Baltimore houses down here.

[Jacquie]

Now was that related to what you said before, that this was the Fell family farm, I mean there was active farming going on when a lot of these people were You mentioned cows and horses and things...

[Bob]

Well, people did have cows and horses. But they kept it in their back yard, if they had a cow. Not many people had cows because you could buy milk from somebody who had a cow. A cow would supply, oh, several families.

And chickens, everybody had chickens. And the chickens ran around in the street. I've got a photograph of the Captain Steel House down on Fell Street with all chickens out in the street roaming around a box car, standing there all alone.

And most people used horses from a livery stable, but some people had a mule or a horse. And they'd have to take it in their back yard.

The back yards were horrendous. They were like mud pits full of cow dung, chicken dung, horse dung, whatever...

[Jacquie]

What time period was this?

[Bob]

I'm talking about 1800, 1810... This is an early time in Fells Point. No facilities.

Sewage didn't come along until in the 1940's, when they forced people to abandon their out-houses and put a toilet on the inside of their house. That was the 1940's.

[Jacquie]

Wow!

[Bob]

Is that pretty sad?

[Jacquie]

Yeah. Do you know where the term "sally port" came from? Everybody talks about these walkways to the back of house and they use the word "sally port"?

[Bob]

I have no idea. I've heard it, I've heard the term, and I know that in Liverpool sometimes they call them "sally ports."

[Jacquie]

So maybe it's a British thing or something. I've heard some explanations but I thought maybe you've...

[Bob]

An old sailor came down here and he called it the "squeeze gut." That's what he called it, a "squeeze gut" to get through, you gotta... [Laughs.]

[Jacquie]

This was a big sailor.

[Bob]

Yeah, some big ol' fat sailor, maybe.

[Jacquie]

'Cause ours is 24 inches wide. You wouldn't get much of a cow to go through that.

[Bob]

Well, a cow or horse could go through that... It would rub, but it could get through there.

[Bob]

The widest one that we've seen is on the Waterfront Hotel down on Thames Street. It's just about 34 inches wide. Most of them are down to 24 to 28 inches. But the one at the Waterfront's 34 inches wide.

[02:01:34;14]

[Jacquie]

Now, when you've talked before, you've talked about some houses that were owned by ship's captains and things, and these seemed to be really big houses and then it sounds like a lot of Fells Point was poorer.

[Bob]

Well there were different levels of houses in Fells Point.

Starting with the minimum house, which would be something probably 12 feet by 12 feet... 12 feet wide because that's the width of the lot. And if you had 2 houses 12 feet wide, side by side, or if you had 3 houses, one of them had to take off space for an alleyway, so one of them would lose a foot on each side of their property so they could have a 2-foot alleyway going through to get back to the back of the houses. But those houses usually had 1 room on the first floor, a room in the basement with a fireplace, and a little tiny peaked room up in the attic. That would be about it.

And then that house evolved into a 2-story house, with another room above it, 1 room deep. And there's still a number of those around in Fells Point. They're mostly brick now. There are a few wooden ones like that. And then, that house became 2 rooms deep.

And then, some of those 2-room deep, 2 1/2 story houses side by side and the owner usually was someone with a little more money than others, usually a ship captain. And what he would do is build one house, and build an adjacent one, and then offer it up for sale or rent it. And one house was usually a little more elaborate than the other.

And the best example that you can see out lookin' on the street today is across the street from Bertha's, Jennifer Etheridge. And she has a pair of them. And that's a good example. And both houses have been messed up on the inside architecturally over the years. Jennifer, her house has been put back somewhat alike, and so has the other one. But in the beginning, before anything was done to those houses, when I first saw them in the '60's, when the old tenants were there, Jennifer's

house had more elaborate mantle pieces and more interesting woodwork on the first floor than the house next door. So I would assume that Jennifer's was the house that was built by the original owner, and then he disposed of the other one.

[02:05:08;07]

[Jacquie]

Now it looked like, from what I've seen, that a lot of these houses were owned by these Polish immigrants... I was just surprised that someone coming in could actually afford brick houses like that. How did they do that?

[Bob]

Now, when you talk about the Polish immigrants, they're almost the last wave.

Because the first were the Germans and the Jews. And if you look at an early directory of Fells Point, say 1810, you'll see Bond Street is loaded with German names. And German butchers. And then, Jewish names take over, and then Broadway becomes very Jewish. And then, it went on through... there was one wave, I guess one of the last, the Lithuanians probably came right after World War II, maybe that was it, but they weren't here long.

But when the people came... In the instance of the Polish people, when they came, they into the neighborhood to get rooms to live in. And first, people would, if they had an extra room they'd rent it. But if they didn't, they'd rent them their attic. They lived in the attic. And then the next thing you know, they tore the attic off and they built an extra floor up there. And because, when they built it on up they didn't match, the brick bond didn't match, they put running bond brick up there, and then they put Victorian cornices on it because this was Victorian times. So you have that with an 18th Century first floor and a Victorian top floor. But... that was pretty common.

And then, these people, they worked ... hard workers. All the immigrants were hard workers. And there was lots of work, because there were the canneries. And the boats would come up from the Eastern shore and bring all the produce up. And they'd ring a bell over there. And the ladies would get their aprons and their knives together, and they'd go down to the cannery. And if they had a couple of little kids they couldn't leave at home, they'd take them and they'd have knives for the kids. 'Cause the kids could sit there and peel the stuff, too.

And these people worked, and they saved and worked. I mean they saved money. It didn't cost all that much money to buy a house. You could buy houses in Fells Point for several hundred dollars. So, it became a pretty easy thing for people to buy these houses. It wasn't like it was up town, or some place where houses were a grand price.

But, then houses, some houses started to get wider. If you were a sea captain, and you had good money, income, or you owned a ship or if you were one of the people who owned a ship and you had a Letter of Marque that allowed you to rob the British at sea... And you bring that ship in and you auction off all the stuff that's on that ship, and you pay off the people who own the ship their share, and then you take your share... They made lots of money doing that. Not only in Baltimore, they did that in Boston as well, Salem, Massachusetts. They had people doing the same thing.

But those houses are wider. And when you go in there, you go in the front door, it's on one side, and there's an entrance hall with a stairway that goes up... And then there are 2 rooms on the side, with a living room and a maybe a dining room or a back parlor. And then, a kitchen on the back or in the basement. And those houses are usually anywhere from 21 to 28 feet wide. And so that's a whole different category of house. And so, what they did, those houses, they kept the 1st floor front room upstairs one big room... because they were pretentious. And they called it a drawing room. That was about the extent of... Then some of those houses were not only 2 1/2 stories high, some of those houses were 3 stories high.

[Jacquie]

Well, that 1732 Thames Street, that house that Lu Fisher donated to the Preservation Society they're looking at restoring, that's got a 4th floor on it.

[Bob]

Well, that's a half story, that's 3 1/2.

And the Waterfront Hotel was a 3 1/2 story. And in 1910 when they were tearing down the Recreation Pier, tearing down the property to build the Recreation Pier, they photographed the Waterfront Hotel with its roof still on. It still had a 4th floor up there, an attic floor.

And the Captain Steel House has the same. Herb Zintak's house on Ann Street has lost its top floor, but it was a wide one with a top floor. The Captain Winning House on Bond Street, it still has its top floor. There were a number of houses that were 3 1/2 story high.

[02:11:26;02]

[Jacquie]

Now, you talk about these houses and you said Captain Winning house and this and that, and I've heard Roland Reed's house referred to as The Roland Reed House ... what determined whose name stuck on the house?

[Bob]

The person who built it.

[Jacquie]

But the Roland Reed house, that wasn't built by Roland Reed, was it?

[Bob]

No. [Laughs] How did you hear it called the Roland Reed house? Because Roland Reed lived there?

[Jacquie]

No, Ellen called it the Roland Reed House.

[Bob]

Because Roland Reed lived there.

Well that house that you called Roland Reed house, that was built by somebody named Devero first. He was there early, before 1790, and he may have built the back building, we don't know, but his name is on the deed. And the back building is an old, old building. Then **Baptis Mesick**, who was a sea captain, he bought it and he lived in it in 1800 and around that time. And then he sold it to William Furlong, who moved ... he'd had a lot of kids in a little house on Shakespeare Street, Arnold Capute's house, he had a whole house full of kids, so he moved over and he took Batis Mesick's house and they were there for a long time, the Furlongs.

[Jacquie]

And that house was... I don't know if I've got this on tape, this is one of the reasons I'm asking you, the water came right up to the front of the house at one point... And somebody was saying that at one point, when the Harbor was dug out that that was used as fill, and a lot of Fells Point was built up that way....

[Bob]

No.

Aliceanna Street stopped essentially at a roll in the ground, there was a hill that went up there. If you could look at it, before any houses were built, there was like a little hill maybe 10 feet high, like a ridge that ran up to about just beyond Eastern Avenue. When those houses, that Roland's house, there are 3 houses together. 2 of them have garages underneath, then there's Pearl's Bar on the corner. Well, the houses on Wolfe Street there were built at regular ground level. But then where this rise was, these houses, the next 3 houses, had to be built up on the rise. And then when the street was cut through, they left the front doors up there, and so they just put garages under 2.

And in Roland's building in the back, the back house is 5 bays

[brief end of tape discussion]

The back building was 5 bays wide. And centered with a door in the middle, and a dormer window on the top over all that. And it's laid in Flemish bond, which is a front thing, you don't put that on the side of a house or a back of the house. And so, that may have been the first building there. And then when Captain Mesick lived there, that front building that's on Aliceanna Street, that has a Flemish bond front on it. So that probably was built after the back building.

[Cut for new tape. 02:15:33;29]

[Bob]

I have here, when the Fell mansion was sold.

It was sold in 1793 on August 2nd, 1793. And this is a very clear description of what was there, because there are back lots that go all the way through to ... Thames Street. One of them butts up against The Horse You Came In On, and the other 2 houses run on back. But, the houses that are on Shakespeare Street are the ones that have the foundations underneath of them for a much earlier

house, and a bigger house. Because it would appear that the Fell House was 5 bays long, that would be a door and 2 windows, with fireplaces at either end. Because in the basement, there are supports for fireplaces that don't go anyplace, or don't support anything now.

[Jacquie]

And you think that's Stelio's house is the one...

[Bob]

Now wait a minute...

No, these are the 3... there's 1 little brick one and then 2 stucco ones. We know that they were part of an earlier building, those 3 houses. And then, where the pair of houses where Ed Kane lived and the one that would be between these, in that basement, of the first house of those 2, not Ed's but the one further East from Ed, we saw a matching support for a fireplace, so that down at this end and that end you would get about a 50-foot house. And then, Ed's building is all strange. Ed Kane's is all strange. It was probably some kind of a connector to the old house that William Fell had built. And so that was all strung out into one long building. And it's all for sale here as part of the mansion. And that would go on up, then, to the graveyard. That would be at the end of the house.

And across the road from it, is the kitchen building. It's a big building. It's a kitchen building for a large farm, because it's a large building and the whole first floor was one room and has an enormous fireplace that is about 8 feet wide and ... I can stand up in the opening. And it has the ash pit in the back and what-not. And the base for all that oven is in the house next door, going East again.

So, it was a collection of farm buildings around the mansion, if you can picture that.

[Jacquie]

And the mansion was sold as a single unit?

[Bob]

No. They split it all up. They're splitting it up, and they're selling it off. But it is all part of the mansion, originally.

[Jacquie]

Why is there disagreement as to where it was then?

[Bob]

Because people... there was a big house down on Thames Street, a big very elaborate house for years and years, and after this was all gone...

One of the descriptions was entering the Fell Mansion, you entered from an entrance on Lancaster Street. And if you took Bethel Street as an entrance, and took it back to the house, that would be a road going in. And if you came Bond Street from Baltimore, go around the Harbor, come down Bond Street, and then get to where Lancaster Street cuts in, you would go in there, it would be a dirt

road, and you'd cut down in the dirt road to the front of the house. It's all logical to see the way it works.

But we have no idea what other buildings were on that property, but it's possible that there were some others that they built. Over on Lancaster Street, behind Jimmy's, there's a house on Lancaster Street, just an ordinary Victorian House, but it's got on the back of it, it's got a little one-room building, that's now 2 stories. But the first floor is all laid in English bond, which is a very early bonding of brick.

And PJ's across the street from Jimmy's on the North side, his building was some kind of very early building laid in English bond. And English bond's a very strange bond to build above ground with. So that could have been some kind of early farm building as well, for the Fell house.

But the mansion is definitely here because this is a local ad of that day, 1793, and here they are selling off "all that property on Fells Point consisting of the lots on which is erected Fells Mansion House and sundry other buildings as hereinafter described, divided for the convenience of the purchaser as follows..." So I just wanted to get that straight.

And down on Thames Street, this big building that I mentioned down there, after everything was gone, people used to say the most elaborate house in Fells Point and it probably belonged to William Fell. And then later people said William Fell, it was William Fell's property. And there's no reason to believe that it's William Fell's property. As a matter of fact, the house...

[Jacquie]

Which building are you talking about?

[Bob]

It's gone. But there are photographs of it. And you'll see it standing there, and it's got a sign painted on the front, some kind of machinery company is in there and all that stuff. But, there was a guy from Belair named VanBeeber who had a big elaborate house on Thames Street, and that was probably the VanBeeber house.

[02:22:52;11]

[Jacquie]

Do you know anything about Caroline Street? The impression I have is that there was a bunch of stuff on Caroline Street, maybe some black family houses that Billie Holliday sang in, and of course there was a lot of industrial area that is now considered brownfields... And it's been reclaimed and stuff... That's not probably your forte maybe...

[Bob]

The thing about Caroline Street in my era the famous thing on Caroline Street was the counterfeiter. But there was a little building down there, it was pretty heavy industrial, because there was League Lumber and another one. League Lumber burned, and then another one burned, there were 2. EJ Codd, and then the counterfeiter's place, and a big bar, grungy...

[Jacquie]

Counterfeiter being ... a counterfeiter?

[Bob]

This man had assembled, on the 2nd floor of a building down there, a huge printing press. And he printed money like crazy. They finally tracked it down, and when they did, they raided it. And when they raided this building, they couldn't get the press out of the building because it was too big. And they couldn't figure out how he got it in there. So they tore off the roof of the building and with a crane lifted the press up and brought it out.

[Jacquie]

I heard a story that there was a house on one of the little side streets that the furniture on the 2nd floor goes from family to family because they can't get it out either.

[Bob]

Well, a lot of times, you'll see, not so much in old Fells Point, because in old Fells Point the beds all came apart, but a lot of places after that when the beds were Victorian beds, just big headboards and all that stuff. And this is more over toward Canton and North of Fells Point, on the 2nd floor, you'll see 1 window's wider than the other, on the 2nd floor, and that's the moving window. And that's called the moving window because you take that one out when you move, and everything goes up through that window, mattresses, box springs...

[Jacquie]

That's what we had to do with our house. The windows are the same size, but a lot of the stuff on the 2nd and 3rd floor has to come in the front window.

[Bob]

Well, that was a common thing up there.
[02:25:42;17]

[Jacquie]

Now, you've worked a lot with people that are restoring buildings, and you've seen buildings that are restored nicely, and some that aren't. And you probably have some strong feelings about that. If you had a message for a new homeowner coming in that is buying a building that's pretty old, as to what they should think about or what they should do with it...

[Bob]

Well, if somebody buys a house in Fells Point and they want to restore it, I'd advise them first to check with somebody at the Preservation Society to get what organizations you get the best tax credits from, before you do anything. Because, almost all the tax credits only apply if you apply before you mess it up. Because if you go ahead and mess it up, then you're not very likely to get a tax credit. But the tax credit can be a big asset to you. But, I think I would do that first.

Then I'd tell them to seek advice, either from Maryland Historical Trust or from Baltimore City CHAP, to find out what about the house is significant. If it's got good woodwork in it, or if it has certain features inside that should be retained, things like that...

[Jacquie]

Now does these organizations have information about the individual houses, or should the homeowner bring them in to look at the house?

[Bob]

The homeowner should bring them there to see the house. Right.

Not take the word of their contractor, because the contractor's going to tell you he knows it all. But if the contractor goes in and messes up the house, you don't get a tax credit. And I don't know of many contractors who really know what they're talking about. So, I'd advise them to seek advice before they tear it up.

And Maryland Historical Trust is very good about all that. And, the Preservation Society can generally find somebody qualified to go and look at your house and certify it, tell you what you should keep and what you should not mess up.

[Jacquie]

Any other thoughts?

I know I've heard you comment, when you took us around to some of the places about ... this window wouldn't have been like that, or different things....

[Bob]

That's the problem. If you just go in, and you let a contractor do it for you, if he happens to have a window in his stock that he thinks he can foist off on you, he's going to do that. And that's why you want to really know what you're doing when you go in there, rather than have somebody come back later and say you've got the wrong window in there.... I'm trying to think...

[Jacquie]

Now... is it important to restore these things to what they used to be like? And, if so, why in your mind is this true?

[Bob]

Well... If you determine, if you buy a house in Fells Point, if you buy a house that is significant, it would be better, it would be more better, it would be more advantageous for the owner, if it has significant architecture, to restore it rather than mess it up. Because, in the long run, the value will go up, up and up. But if you mess it up and just make a muddle out of it, it's not going to accrue, other than the property value for how much the ground is worth.

There are certain things that you do to old houses when you restore them. You try to put the windows in that were the original windows, because a lot of times when you see an old house with like 1 over 1 windows, it looks like somebody's just staring at you blindly. It doesn't work just to do a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I'm rambling now because I don't know now to word what I want to say.

When you restore a house, it's usually because you like that style of house. Now, if you're not interested in that style of house and you just want a house, then you just get an architect and you do whatever you want to do to it. You make up your own thing.

But in the long run, if you're in an area of old houses, 18th century houses like Fells Point is, and if you restore one, and do a good job on the restoration, make it so people who aren't knowledgeable can walk by and say, "Oh, my, look at that wonderful old house," you've got an asset for you. But if that's not your bent, then you just get an architect and do something else and you've got ...

You don't have something that blends with the neighborhood. I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to get at...

[Jacquie]

Do you want to talk a little bit more, or do you want to go on to something else?

[Bob]

We'll go to something else.

[Jacquie]

If you think of it, let's come back to it.

[02:32:47;14]

One of the other things that I have here, and I don't know if you feel like talking about this or not, but I've got a list of buildings. And most of these are some of the bigger commercial buildings... And I know you've talked about the Roland Reed House... But are there any of these buildings that you feel you can talk about?

[Bob]

Well, the London Coffee House is a tragedy.

[Jacquie]

Tell me about that.

[Bob]

The London Coffee House originally was built in 1771. And it operated as the London Coffee House up until 1805. And I saw this with my own eyes in the archives down in Annapolis. And the London Coffee House over the years, someone had built another floor onto the top of it. They tore the roof off and raised the walls up.

[Jacquie]

Was it originally one story?

[Bob]

No, it was 2 1/2.

[Jacquie]

Oh, 2 1/2. It was one of those where the 3rd floor was...

[Bob]

Added. Right.

It was a significant establishment in Fells Point because a Coffee House was like... all kinds of business would be transacted there. And all the ship people, if they had goods that they were bringing in or if they knew of some shipment or whatever, it all, it centered out of the Coffee House. That was like the big hub-ub of the neighborhood.

And, here was the opportunity in Fells Point to restore this thing. And people said oh, you couldn't restore it because it had another floor. But the Long House was exactly the same way. The Long House had another floor on the top. And they went inside and they took the bricks off, matching the line where it comes down.

In the attic of all these houses, you can go up in the attic and you can see the line coming down where the roof's been raised, you can follow the bricks right down. And that's all you do is to remove that, and then look at the beams in the roof that's on the house, because frequently what they did, when they took the rafters out, they just sistered them together and used them for the roof. And they all have Roman numerals on them and what-not, and holes through where the pegs went in... You see all of that up in there.

But Struever, the people who did the restoration on this thing... It's not a restoration... The people who worked on that building, they didn't do anything. They just sent workmen in there and told them to make an apartment in there. And that's what they've done.

Terrible. Terrible. Should be shot. That's what Tony Norris said, "The building should be shot and saved."

[Jacquie]

Yeah, I've heard criticism of how they did the brickwork, too, on the outside.

[Bob]

Oh, it's terrible. Terrible.

[Jacquie]

At least it's still there.

[Bob]

For whatever that's worth.

[Silence.]

[02:36:33;22]

The Terminal Warehouse is gone. Bond Street Wharf has taken its place, that building called Bond Street Wharf. That's built where the old Terminal Warehouse was.

The Recreation Pier is a wonderful building. Have you been up inside?

[Jacquie]

No, I've seen the shots of it. When they had that community meeting, I had a class. But Kraig got an assistant and they went up and videotaped a lot of that meeting.

[Bob]

Well, there was a ballroom on the 2nd floor that was exquisite. And when I say it was exquisite, it was as nice as the ballroom in the top of the Belvedere Hotel, if you've ever been up in that one.

And, over the years, the one in the Recreation Pier, when it was a kid's recreation center, they put plywood all around the walls and put a basketball court in there.

[Jacquie]

Where the ballroom was?

[Bob]

In the ballroom. Now, they didn't really hurt the building that much, because that's all been ripped out and now there's all ... sort of junky sets, were junky sets for Homicide. And that's pretty much ripped out now. It wouldn't take a lot to restore that ballroom back, because it's a magnificent height, just wonderful.

And the Preservation Society, to call attention to the building, we had the 1st and 2nd Harbor Ball there. Which, the Harbor Ball was an annual thing for a few years. And we had the Harbor Ball there. And it looked wonderful because at night... it was in June and with everybody with summer tuxes and the light inside, a pink and blue light and what-not, all the tables and everything, it just looked wonderful. It was a great setting. The Recreation Pier offered ... it just lent itself to that whole magical kind of thing, because people who owned boats had their boats drawn up to the Recreation Pier. And they had dinner on their boats and they had guests come and join them. And others who lived in the neighborhood had guests come to their home. Then everybody went down to the Recreation Pier for the dance part. It was good. And the music sounded wonderful in there. That's what it should really have been back in that building.

[Jacquie]

So the acoustics are nice in that ballroom?

[Bob]

Right. They're wonderful.

[Jacquie]

Do you know why the City built that building to begin with?

[Bob]

It was built as a Recreation Pier.

It was built to house several needs. First, it was built to house the tugboat companies downstairs on the 1st floor. And then, because it was such a poor neighborhood, it was built for the children to have a place to play. It had a playground on the back, on the deck out there that had sliding boards and merry-go-rounds and all that stuff on it. And then, they had dances every Saturday night for the neighborhood. They had a kitchen up there. And when the Polish people came, they would cook food up there and have suppers, and then the dance... And it went on like that, oh, all through my early days, that's what was going on up there.

[Jacquie]

Was it mainly a commercial piece for the... I just had the impression that when it was built, Fells Point was a fairly poor neighborhood and it's amazing the City put that kind of resources into it.

[Bob]

Well, the building had several things. It had a public bath in it.

There were public baths all around. There was one on Aliceanna Street still, in case you're water's ever turned off, you can go to Aliceanna Street and take a shower.

[Jacquie]

Is that the Public Comfort Station?

[Bob]

Yeah. They probably took the showers out now.

[Jacquie]

They lock it up at night, I guess, when the drunks really need it, too.

[Bob laughs. Kraig returns. Small talk. 02:42:55;02]

[Jacquie]

There apparently was some feeling, when like Belt's Wharf and Henderson's Wharf were put in... I guess, at some point they were going to be something and they turned them into condominiums... I guess that there was debate about what was appropriate there. And then some people have said that there was concern that the people that moved in there wouldn't really participate in the neighborhood because they would be...

[Bob]

That gets back to the bad publicity. There was a lot of bad publicity.

Do you know Ralph and Jennifer? They were not good publicists for the neighborhood. Ralph and Jennifer lived in one of Jennifer Etheridge's house. That was Ralph and Jennifer, they had one. But there were ... and Mary and her husband who was a priest at one point ... all these different kids who came out of the '70's that had lived in the houses, they had the opportunity to buy the house at a cheap price, but they didn't buy it. And they were all disfunctionally dissatisfied... and I don't know.... It was a strange thing.

I never paid too much attention to it, but I was always a victim because they had a newspaper [laughs] and I was Mr. History [laughs harder]. They gave me this column that they wrote for me. It wasn't mine. They gave me this column and it said "Ask Mr. History." [Laughs]

[Jacquie]

Now, did they write the answer for you?

[Bob]

Oh, yeah, this was all their thing.

[Discussion of Bob's plastic rats and PJ discussion. 02:46:01;25]

[Bob]

Well there were all kinds of intrigues in Fells Point. I mean, if you wanted to get into them... But in my case, I'm not good at intrigue, and so I just stayed away from it.

[Jacquie]

So, what do you mean by intrigue?

[Bob]

Well... Neil and Joe.... They were 2 of the Catonsville 9. Did you know them?

[Jacquie]

I've heard of the Catonsville 9, but I didn't know...

[Bob]

Well, Neil Windroth¹ and ... I can't think of his friend's name. Anyway, they lived in Fells Point and they lived in an inexpensive house and they said they were forced to buy it. Nobody forced them to buy it. And they didn't pay much for it. They paid \$4,000 for it. So I don't feel sorry for anybody like that. And they went on about the poor people of Fells Point. And the poor people of Fells Point

¹ Can't find a record of him as one of the Catonsville Nine. According to one reference, the Catonsville Nine consisted of "Phil, Dan and Tom Lewis, along with their associates David Darst, Thomas Melville, Marjorie Melville, Mary Moylan, George Mische and John Hogan" Nonviolent Activist, Jan-Feb, 2002. Philip Berrigan, 1923-2002: Reinventing Resistance, One Break-in at a Time, <http://www.warresisters.org/nva0103-5.htm>

wouldn't support them. I mean, who were they talking about? They couldn't go out and get 4 poor people to come in, that they could show when they talked about how the neighborhood was doing in all the poor people. I don't know where the poor people were. But anyway, it was one of those strange things...

[02:47:37;27]

[Jacquie]

Now, can you define "gentrification" for us, 'cause it sounded like people had used the word to apply to you and you felt it was totally inappropriate? And I've heard the word all the time...

[Bob]

Gentrification is when Goldseker, the realtor, philanthropist, whatever he is now, would go into a neighborhood and buy up properties and then put undesirable people into those properties and have people then go then to the neighbors and say, "Look, you want to sell this? I'll buy it from you," and buy it cheap." And then fix it up, and change an neighborhood that way. This was Edmonson Avenue at one point, was starting to go that way by Goldseker, but it backfired on him. Remember Edmonson Avenue?

[Kraig]

No, but I think I know where you're going. Go ahead.

[Bob]

Well, to me, gentrification is those people who turned a neighborhood over for their own profit and with no regard for the people that lived in the community.

[Kraig]

Did they used to call those "blockbusters"?

[Bob]

Blockbusters, that's one method of...

But now, gentrification is, in a sense, gentrification is sprucing an neighborhood up. But then, if you buy property in the city, it's natural you want to spruce the neighborhood up. You don't want to buy property in the city and just have it stay some kind of derelict thing...

[Jacquie]

Now, Maryland Public Television has a series on the "regentrification" of South Baltimore or East Baltimore or something, now. Have you heard the term "regentrification"?

[Bob]

No.

[Jacquie]

OK. So, according to your first definition of gentrification, it never really would have applied to Fells Point.

[Bob]

I don't think it did because we certainly, we never pushed anyone into selling their property. We begged people not to sell their property. We tried to get homeowners to go with us to City Hall to fight City Hall. But the homeowners had this old-time thing of telling us that you can't fight City Hall. You're not a good citizen if you do that. And, that was a difficult thing.

But yet, in the neighborhood that we thought we'd done them a favor getting them into those houses. We got Bob Embry to rent all the City-owned houses out. But the people, once they got into those houses, they didn't want to see anybody save these houses to restore them. That was not what they wanted them for.

And like, Ralph and Jennifer next door to Jennifer Etheridge. They bought that house on the condition that they would restore that house on the exterior, and then on the interior bring it up to code. That was all that was specified for the interior was bring it up to code. And, I mean, Jennifer Etheridge is living proof ... she bought that house and there were bedrooms upstairs where the ceilings were down, had never been put up, they had fallen down, and, I mean, it was a mess.

But yet, they went around the neighborhood sneering and making slanderous remarks. I was never involved in any of that, other than being "Mr. History." But they would go around and they would make remarks to people that we were just in it for the money. And I did make money when I sold my house in Fells Point, but I lived there for 20-some years.

[02:52:13;05]

[Jacquie]

Do you think there were people of the group that you worked with that were in it for the money or was everybody pretty much like yourself?

[Bob]

Well, if anybody was in it for the money, I think it would have been, you could have said Lu Fisher. But Lu generally liked old houses. And she wanted them. And she wanted them saved. And she went out of her way to buy houses to fix them up. So...

But Lu did, she bought up a number of early houses, which she sold to people if they said that they would restore them. And she didn't gouge them. The most expensive one Lu bought was \$7,000. That was the Captain Steel House. And she was going to sell it to me. And then I decided that I couldn't buy it because it would cost too much money to restore. This is 1969, ah, '68. It would have cost a lot of money to restore, and I didn't have that money. And so I found... Dr. Hepner wanted it. And so Lu talked to Dr. Hepner and he could afford to do it. And he bought the house, and he paid Lu \$9,000 for it. And that's not excessive.

And when the Preservation Society asked people to buy houses in the path of the expressway to show them that you don't like it, Dick Atchell bought a house on Thames Street and I bought a house on Thames Street. But I wanted to move into mine, and I thought maybe Dick was going to move into his. But Dick then came to me and said, "Bob", he said, "Do you want to buy it from me? I just bought it because they said buy a house on Thames Street. So if you want it, I'll sell it to you." He sold it to me for exactly what he paid for it.

And when Tony and Laura Norris... I'd gotten Barbara Mikulski to buy their house first, and when Barbara wanted to get rid of that, she told me what she wanted and said "Find me one and we'll swap." And they did. They found a little house up Ann Street. Barbara took that, and they swapped it.

That's not the nasty part of gentrification that, when you talk about people coming in and gentrifying. [02:55:00;26]

[Jacquie]

We're just about to run out of film...

Do you want to wrap up the interview with the story of how you got here and why you came?

[Bob]

I came to Fells Point because when I was a kid living in Baltimore, I went to art appreciation classes at the Baltimore Museum every Saturday morning. And then, one day they brought us down to Fells Point and they showed us – we were talking about early Baltimore houses – and they showed us Flemish bond brick and they showed us this ... we had to get permission from our parents to come, it was that long ago when we were kids ... They opened up a door to a house and showed us this black and white marble floor, old, dirty... But, they were telling us that these had been sea captains houses and she was showing us different balusters and things. And I was very impressed by it and it stuck in my mind.

So later, when I was working in New York, and I got an opportunity to come back to Baltimore to work, I said I wanted to do it because they gave me a good offer to move back to Baltimore. I came back and I went, I said "I'm going to go back to Fells Point and find one of those old sea captain's houses and fix it up." And I got down there and I saw Lu Fisher was already in, looking for houses down there. And so, that's how I got involved in Fells Point.

And then they said, it's all going to be destroyed for an expressway. So we've got to do something about that. So everybody got together and in February of '67, about 20 people from Federal Hill and Fells Point got together at Lu's and we formed the Preservation Society. And it was a go from there.

[Jacquie]

Neat!

[Bob]

And the thing that Norman Ramsey did when he was representing us... He told us, he said, "There are no good histories of Fells Point." He had a big library but he couldn't find any good histories of Fells Point. And he said, "What you have to do is go to the libraries and look through books and find as much as you can about Fells Point that we can put it together to make a history." He said, "Because he said the people who are going to be criticizing us, they're going to have all the assets, and they're going to know all the history, and we won't have it." So that's why Baltimore history became a big important part...

[tape ends]