

**Kathleen McAreavey Interview**

**April 16, 2008**

**Interviewer: Josh Tobias**

**Location: Providence, RI**

J: This is Josh Tobias I am interviewing Kathleen McAreavey for the Brown Fox Point Oral History Project. The date is April 16, 2008 the time is 2:30 and we are at the Old Brick School House at 24 Meeting Street in Providence, Rhode Island. Good afternoon

K: Good afternoon Josh

J: How are you doing?

K: Very well thank you, how are you?

J: I'm good. So, I'm going to ask you a series of questions if at any time you want me to pause the recording please let me know and we will proceed from there.

K: Okay

J: So can you tell me a little bit about how you became involved with historic preservation in Providence?

K: I've been interested in historic preservation I think my whole life. I was a docent at the John Brown House when I was in graduate school, I think I may have done that for 4 or 5 years and I really enjoyed it. And I've been someone who regularly visits house museums. And when I was looking for a job PPS [Providence Preservation Society] was one of the places that I was hoping I would find employment at. And I've known about the building that we're housed in is called Shakespeare's Head, it's the John Carter House. And I've known about that and been to the garden before, as a youth, as a young girl. So I think its just part of my person that I, even though I am working in it I would still always have the interest and have always had the interest.

J: So what is your current position at the Providence Preservation Society?

K: I am the Education Coordinator

J: So what is part of your job at the Preservation Society?

K: We administer the Children Heritage Ed Tours which focus on elementary school tours but they could be adapted to any age group. I administer the marker program which are those white plaques that see on houses throughout the city and I take care of the research library. We are involved with offering realtor training annually in the fall. The PPS guidebook, which was a collaboration with the American Institute for Architects is something that I am in charge of promoting or selling. I go to symposiums or just any place where we can promote our education or advocacy program. I'm usually the person

who sets up the table and “woman’s” the table. And the newsletter, I am in charge of the newsletter. And I think I may be forgetting something but it will come to me.

J: That’s okay. So Providence Preservation Society is it focused on one specific neighborhood or one many different neighborhoods in Providence?

K: It’s citywide, there are twenty-five neighborhoods in the city. While it started in 1956 saving North Benefit street which is a section of College Hill, the focus, and we’re housed very close to North Benefit Street, the focus is really citywide and we’re consciously trying to get into all of the neighborhoods.

J: So I’m going to take a step back now and ask you some questions about your life history. Maybe talk a little bit about where you were born and what it was like growing up in Providence.

K: Well I was born in Providence.

J: Yeah

K: My father grew up in the North End, which is off of North Main Street. So I lived there for the first two years of my life. And actually because of urban renewal the house and the street that my dad grew up on was being bulldozed basically. And we lived in a two family home and the Grays who lived next door lived in, apparently a beautiful Victorian mansion and that was bulldozed as well. My dad always said that our house was a little shabby it just needed some work but he said it was a real shame to lose the beautiful Gray house next door. And we have a wonderful family history or wonderful family stories about the house because my grandparents were Irish immigrants. They, I think, came over first in the 1910s maybe. I think they were both born around the 1880s and then their parents, well actually my father’s father parents eventually came over and his whole family came over. I’m not sure about, oh actually I do know. My grandmother’s parents dated in County Roscommon, Ireland and the two youngest children of nine stayed there to take care of them. And then all the other siblings came over and they settled in either Providence or in Boston. But my grandparents house on Livingston street was one of the houses that anybody coming over always stayed in for a short period of time and it was usually on the top floor and my dad’s family stayed on the bottom floor. So it was my grandparents and my dad and my auntie. So because he was so tied to that neighborhood when I was growing up, I grew up in North Providence, there was almost like there was no real line of demarcation between the two because I got to know Providence and that section of Providence, the East Side, and Fox Point pretty well because we would go all over the city.

J: What are some of your grandparent’s house in the North End?

K: Very minimal because I was two when my parents moved to North Providence. The saying was that people that had a little bit of money were able to move to the suburbs and

those that weren't had to go to Chad Brown. And apparently Chad Brown when it first opened wasn't all that bad and then in the 60s and 70s it became really bad.

J: Where is Chad Brown?

K: Chad Brown is not far from Providence College actually. It's in between Branch Avenue and Douglass Avenue. Actually now its kind of being refinished and it's not so bad but it is still kind of bad.

J: Is that by Smith Hill?

K: Kind of. Yeah. It's in that funky section between the merge of [Rt.]146 and [I-]95. But I do remember when I was very little and I think my parents were moving out of my grandparents house and they had two couches, one was for my father's house and one was from my mother's house that they had put together. And my brothers and I were playing and I remember looking up and seeing my parents looking down on us and smiling. And I just remember that my mom's hair was in a kerchief and she had a broom or something in her hand and they were just checking on us making sure we were ok. So I don't have too many recollections my memory can be jogged a little bit when I see family photos. Because it was one of those great old houses with high ceilings and big windows and I think also the real big window sills that when you are little kid you can sit. Maybe when you are an adult you can sit there too.

J: What was North Providence like growing up?

K: It was interesting. We kind of were, it was predominantly settled by Italian immigrants so being Irish we didn't really fit in. And a lot of the Irish were in Fruit Hill and close to Marigold (?) but it didn't really have a name. And when my parents first moved there it was all farmland there were apple orchards and there had been a pig farm and it was this new development. So they brought the house brand new and they thought they were moving into the country. And even though growing up it was still fairly rustic like very soon after all of a sudden, like all of the apple orchards were knocked down and more houses were being built. So it wasn't as countrified as they originally hoped. But it was a great place to grow up, we walked everywhere, and it is so different now than what it was when I was a kid. I mean I'm not really that old! But during the 1980s people were building houses on like every little piece of land that you could find and it was really a big boom in North Providence. I think there were zoning issues or something.

J: Where were people coming from moving to North Providence?

K: I'm not actually sure. I think that it must have been, it has always been considered a bedroom community to Providence. My mom worked downtown at the telephone company. And she always renewed her license but she never drove because when I was like four years old she got into a car accident and I hit my head and she thought she was going to, she thought she killed me or something. So she was terrified of driving. So either she would take the bus which in our section of town there was very limited busing

so my dad would usually drop her off and pick her up. And then when I was in college, I mean in high school I went to school in East Providence. When I was a junior and senior I took the RIPTA bus and there was an exchange at Kennedy Plaza and I'd either go straight home or meet my home and go home with her. I don't know, it was nice, we hung out mostly with kids on our street. We lucked out that there were a good number of kids that were our age, and all were like around the same age as my parents or a little bit younger and they had kids of comparable ages. You know it was nice. It was a good place to grow up. I think it probably still is. The public schools were decent, but we found out my brothers and I went to private school for high school. We found out that they probably weren't as good as you would hope because the bar was definitely set higher in private school. And Lincoln, R.I is close by and that, there was Lincoln Mall was there but it was also very country (motorcycle roars) the motorcycle. So yeah, it was a great place to grow up. My dad was somebody who would always take us on road trips at least around Rhode Island, but all over New England. So I never felt that North Providence was just my home, I always felt that the whole state was. So for me to drive down to Newport was no big deal but for somebody it's like "oh my god all the way to Newport." Or even Cranston, like its just the next town over but for some people it's such a huge trek. And I don't have that mindset, so I think if I ever had to move to Kansas I'd probably be ok.

J: Growing up did you ever go to Fox Point? Was that every a destination that your family would go to?

K: I don't know if was actually considered a destination, but Wickenden street was definitely someplace that I frequented. There used to be competing Indian restaurants on Wickenden. And I think there is still one, if like the Point Street Bridge is behind you there is still one on the left side but the one the right side is gone and it is something else but it was two brothers. I never knew why, you know, I think there was some sort of rift in the family and that is why there were two, like basically right across the street from each other. But I always liked the one on the right so I am disappointed that that one is gone. I've been going to the Coffee Connection when I drank coffee.

J: Coffee Exchange?

K: Oh, I am sorry. Where is Coffee Connection. There is something. Oh yeah Coffee Exchange probably since high school. Maybe more frequently in college. The antique co-op that is one Wickenden has been there for awhile. Oh there's a store on Ives Street that has a lot of African stuff, I can't think of what its called. I bought my first Panamanian Mola there. And I was in grad school, and I was studying there. It is a wonderful textile from the Sandblast archipelago which is this wonderful grouping of islands off the southeast coast, I guess, of Panama. And I was so excited because I was studying it but when I went into the store I actually saw them up close and personal. So that was kind of cool. So yeah I can't pinpoint anything, any reason I would have to consider Fox Point a destination stop. It's just another very interesting neighborhood in the city.

J: Did you go for the shopping or for the art galleries?

K: A lot, yeah mostly for that. I think more time spent on Wickenden. I don't know that I had any friends or family that lived in that neighborhood to be honest with you. I'm trying to think, I think maybe in college I had some friends that had apartments and we must have gone to parties and stuff.

J: Did you think of Fox Point as like a separate entity from College Hill and like Brown, or was it kind of seen as like part of the same. I'm trying to get an idea, of what people, of how people situated Fox Point?

K: Well, I guess technically there is that line of demarcation but I think it goes back to my whole philosophy on the state that there is really no boundaries so in my mind it really blends together as part of city. But I think that there probably are people that are like "oh one street is Fox Point, one street over is College Hill, gggrrrr." But I just, for me it all kind of blends together. I am actually learning now what are the official streets. Is it the Providence Foundation or the Providence Plan has that wonderful website where you can tell the actual streets in the neighborhood. And for research for my job I need to start learning that stuff.

J: How did they, if you remember, how did they demarcate, where Fox Point is on a map?

K: For like that website

J: Yeah

K: I'm trying to think if, Williams Street might be Fox Point and that might be the most northerly street. And I'm trying to think maybe Brook, because I don't think they went all the way over to Benefit. Which technically I think you're supposed to. It's a whole bunch of side streets all the way over to, could it be Gano or Governor, must be the one right next to the highway on-ramps. That's Gano

J: Gano, yeah that's Gano

K: So I think Williams, all the way over to Gano. And maybe Brook is like the east. But it is a considerable number of streets. But it's a nice, it seemed to me like it's a nice compact neighborhood.

J: Yeah

K: Officially (laughs)

J: I think one of the issues is like, how do you, like, what is a neighborhood and how do you figure out, like, how where one begins and one ends. I wanted to ask you about maybe the history of the Preservation Society, and especially since Benefit Street is

where it started. Then talk a little bit about how the Preservation Society got started and why.

K: Well in the 1950s, I'm sorry I know you are a Brown student this might be hard for you to take. But Brown was looking to expand its campus and there was a huge controversy. I can't remember the streets but, oh dear, I want to say Congdon but I might be wrong. Apparently there were two exquisite mansions, like huge humungous beautiful examples of Victorian architecture that had been donated to Brown. And they had been knocked down to either build new buildings, it must have been to build new buildings. And there was huge uproar in the community that you know, they weren't moved. And there was nothing in place at the time to really, you know, confront Brown. And so a number of people in the community, Antoinette Downing being the major voice but it was Betty Chase, Antoinette Downing, John Nicholas Brown, there might have been, there definitely were two more people and I'm sorry I can't remember what their names are. They got together and Mrs. Chase and Mrs. Dowling started, Mrs. Chase in particular, started convincing her children's friends to buy up the houses, the dilapidated houses on North Benefit Street. Because by that time, it might have been like after World War II up until the well, it might have been even longer than that. For twenty or so years, North Benefit Street, actually all of Benefit Street was pretty shabby. And, so there was just one of those unwritten rules that that is just not one of the neighborhoods you drive through. And you could see the housing stock, there were good bones there. And I think a lot of the buildings had asbestos shingles which thankfully have been removed and replaced with wood shingles. But the whole issue is that Brown was looking to expand its campus even further and recognizing the good housing stock there these people got together and decided to argue against that. And then they officially, in 1956, officially formed the Providence Preservation Society.

And there are these great stories about Mrs. Downing, I'm not sure if it was Mrs. Dowling it probably was, giving, I don't know if you what a station wagon is like a long station wagon. Like the top of, her sitting on the back and giving like tours of the neighborhood and talking about preservation and talking about the architecture and I think we have a wonderful photo of her doing that. People kind of walking behind her. And she really got to know a lot of really good carpenters and artisans and woodworkers. And you know we still hear stories about some of them, like just sitting down and talking to her about a building and doing it the right way. Once the movement started people would just call up somebody at the Preservation Society and people would just walk over to their house and say this is the right thing to do, this is not the right thing, this is the person you need to call. And there was like, oh what's it called? Not that contractors bureau but a, like a group of ladies that educated themselves about buildings. And were at you know people's disposal to help them restore their houses properly. So it was a very grass roots organization and now 52 years later it is one of the most well respected preservation organizations nationally. And we're one of the first preservation partners for the National Trust. So people do look to us to set standards and to set, you know, to do things with integrity basically.

JT: What was the standards that they set when they restored the buildings? Like, are they going for a specific historical period or just like when it was built or how it looked at a specific time?

K: Generally for my understanding is that you let the building tell its story. So a lot of times if there is something that has been added and its been there for thirty to fifty years or even longer it's considered adding to the history of the piece, of the building. And that's not only true with architecture it is also true with... I can only speak specifically to textile conservation. But there are times when even though something has been there for thirty years it is still not historically accurate and if there is a way to, if it's a front stoop that is concrete now and has been there for fifty years and the house is from 1840 there would not have been a concrete stoop. So if it is feasible the recommendation is to have the appropriate wooden stop placed, replacing the concrete. So it is advocating for the true nature of the building if that makes any sense. And it's not saying that additions can't be respect and included, but it really is trying to figure out what, what will best represent the building. And you know there's ways of looking at buildings, and you, like I am still learning and training my eye and I've been interested in buildings, I think now in hindsight like my whole life. That I still like weighing, Tristler downstairs he could look at wood and tell you how old it is. He does like these things to it, and he looks at it and feels it and touches it, you know he is a specialist. He knows exactly how to read a building. And so it's getting those people together to figure out what the best way to preserve a building would be and what was the great story that it had to tell. Because that's what is so exciting about the Gaudy files and the Gaudy research is that there is every single building has these great, either people that lived there or owned it or rented or, you know, we just did research on a house on Hope street that actually technically I think is in Fox Point. And there was an abolitionist, a very well known and active abolitionist living in the house and we didn't know that until we did the research on it.

JT: What was the time frame, when this, sort of, process took place? What would you say is kind of the beginning or the end of, or is there no end do you think its still going on now, of Benefit Street in particular. The historic preservation of Benefit Street.

K: I guess technically it started in the early 1950s and I'm not sure how soon, I mean well PPS was started in 1956 I think it was like, you know, they must have a had few years of doing grassroots stuff before they formalized as a non-profit. But I think that Benefit Street really, I think around the bicentennial because I think not only was that approximately twenty years but also people were starting to revisit our nation's history and trying to do things, you know, spiff everything up. I would say probably around '75, '76. But I do know, there are still buildings on South Benefit street that need work. There are two in particular that I can tell you right now they're two family houses and they have great bones but they are in, they are just in terribly shabby condition because the owners just rent them out to college students. And they, you know, as long as the roof is there and there's doors they are fine. I mean they have so much potential. There is also a house on North Benefit Street that still has asbestos shingling. And that is the same situation they just rent it out to college students. They are not willing to put the investment into it.

J: Are most of those houses rented out to students or do, or are families living in those houses?

K: On North Benefit Street it is mostly condos and it's deceiving because when you like at the building, they look like they are still like single family or like side by side duplexes. But there is an awful lot of condos. And the only reason we know that is that we do, North, well, Benefit Street holiday festival and when we try to approach homeowners so that we can have the houses open for tours it is well, it can't be the whole house now this one family is four condos or six condos. So, yeah I think mostly it is privately owned. It is still a very, the rentals for students are rare. There are maybe four or five max among Benefit Street. I think actually a lot of them are in Fox Point if I'm not mistaken.

J: Like rentals for students

K: Yeah, I think or your, I don't know, are you on campus for Brown specifically don't you have to be on campus for freshman and sophomore years.

J: For three years

K: Oh

J: So today with the preservation society is the focus still on Benefit Street or is it sort of expanded out more to other areas?

K: We consider it to be city-wide for the past two years there has been a focus on the West Side which is mostly the Armory district and Broadway and Elmwood. Primarily because of the work that the revolving fund downstairs is doing because they are actually in there doing the hands on work that PPS was doing when it first started. We hit more of the advocacy realm and less hands on. And education is really a huge focus. We are collaborating with a number of neighborhood groups and organizations on the Trinity Gateway which is the merging of Broad Street and Elmwood Ave. It is where Trinity Methodist Church is, and that's actually where Trinity Square started producing plays. And it is where the State Preservation Conference was held on Saturday, this past Saturday. So that's one project, we've been very supportive of greater Elmwood neighborhood services who has almost completed their renovation of Parkis Ave which is this wonderful gem of a street. Which is in between Broad and Elmwood and it is considered the Elmwood neighborhood. And if you've ever seen the movie "Meet me in St. Louis" with Judy Garland, it is directed by Vicente Minnelli, it is a wonderful movie, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" is one of like the famous songs from it. But it reminds, walking down Parkis Avenue reminds me of that movie because it is just the most exquisite Victorian buildings and now just fabulous. It used to be a terribly derelict street. There were a lot of drug deals, prostitution, just a dangerous street to drive down or walk down. And now there is affordable housing, the houses are beautifully restored, and it is a real gem. And a number of years ago, I guess it was 2000 there was this whole

issue with Eagle Square which is Olneyville which was a whole bunch of old buildings, I think there was 17 in all. And most of them were, it was manufacturing, light manufacturing and then artist space. And then Shaws supermarket came in and they wanted to buy the whole complex and demolish most of it and build their market. And there was a huge neighborhood effort to save the buildings, PPS was intrinsically involved in that. Unfortunately I think only 3 or 4 buildings were saved. And sadly Shaws was there for a long time and just last year they moved out, and now there is a Price Rite there.

There are issues of gentrification and affordable housing and new building design that PPS is actively seeking having a voice in. And also because we're playing with our mission in the sense that we're kind of re-evaluating where we are now and where we want to go in the future. And there were some wonderful inspiring things said at the State Preservation conference on Saturday. And recently there have been some huge losses in the cities. Downtown now has four huge gaps where buildings used to be. And we just lost the Produce Terminal on Harris Avenue, we lost the Police and Fire Station on, what was that, Mountain Street or Empire Street I think. So you know it's, we are still trying to figure out, ourselves out. We still have a voice and people respect what we have to say. We just hope that we can keep saving the buildings. And not for the sake of saving them, for rehabbing them and using and have people work in them or live in them. And breath life into the buildings. Because we, I mean I can't speak for the whole organization, but we do basically understand that it is not about the building as a building it is the story that the building tells and the building's future. And so it's always coming down to it really being about people and quality of life. And not just, Antoinette Downing building was not just save the building but save streetscapes, save neighborhoods, and keep the neighborhoods whole.

One other thing that is going on now is the whole, along the in Federal Hill along the corridor that abuts the highway there is this plan to build some high rises. And it will, I think now it is 25 floors, but that is part of the city zoning, re-zoning says that that's ok, but this would change the makeup of a neighborhood. And So we're one of the voices that is trying to be the voice of reason. I mean you know compromise is fine, but it can't just be lets knock something down and build something new that is lesser quality and will only last thirty years when you've got a great building that just needs some work and it has already been there for a hundred years. You know that kind of stuff.

J: Can you talk a little bit about the changes in Fox Point from like 1930s and 40s to today. And maybe how things like I-195 impacted the character of that neighborhood.

K: Well that, I can tell you what little I know. I think the people that lived there like Lou Costa and local historians that really know the neighborhood far better than I can really answer that better. But from what I understand what normally happens is when a highway is built it has to, in essence it is the path of most resistance. Because it has to cut through someplace and usually it is not just open land it's cities and neighborhoods. And so from what I understand when the highway went through Fox Point it really cut the neighborhood. It took like a quarter of the neighborhood away. And now with the I-way being built it will open up a lot of land. But by cutting through that neighborhood or that section of the neighborhood you lost buildings, you lost residential and commercial

buildings, and you lost a certain flavor of life from that period in time that you won't be able to get back. So there is three plans now, or three sections of the waterfront one of which is India Point Park that once the I-way is completed and the old I-95 comes down it will open up space. So there is a great group of people that is headed up by Aria Biladou, I can't remember if its called like the Waterfront Alliance Group or something like that, that is really making sure that their voice is heard and that there is thoughtful, a great deal of thought put into what will happen with this open space and there is a great fear that a lot of people are going to say lets do high rises and condos. And everyone knows that the condo market is not, I think state-wide it is not doing well but in Providence in particular I mean it's doing very poorly. And there is still buildings that I think are still under construction there is no promise of selling those condos so they probably will become rentals. I'm not even sure about that, that is probably out of my realm. So for that India point section of the waterfront, my understanding—because I attended this public meeting last Monday, or two Mondays ago, where want to make it open space for public use. And from everything from you know story hours for children to open festival and concerts, and you know Tai Chi classes—add to the quality of life of residents and neighbors in Fox Point and for the city of Providence and for the whole state. So I think that's a great thing. My understanding of that section of the India Point Park section is that it's called India Point because that's where John Brown's ships were docked. And his house on Power Street is situated in such a way so that from the top of the hill where the house was he could look down to see ships.

J: Where is his house on Power Street?

K: His house is very close to Benefit Street. There is a wonderful like open space that is part now a parking lot and side lawn. And then the front of the house faces the side of the Nightingale John Nicholas Brown Center which is the Nightingale-Brown house. And then it is also diagonally across from the President of Brown's house which is where Ruth Simmons is now. So it's kind of cool. Actually there is a rendering of it on the wall.

J: You're going to have to describe it for the transcript.

K: Okay (laughter) That's right this isn't video. It's a wonderful sketch. It's two chimneys Georgian style. Official it's called Georgian inter-transition, in transition into Federal Style house. But when I was docent we just kept saying it was Georgian so that's what I say. They got a great deal of scholarship going on there now to really get to the root of the history of that house.

So Indian Point is where he his wharf where all of his ships were. And he was a great fan of George Washington so he had a "George Washington" and then when he became general it became the "General Washington" and then it was "President" there was a "President Washington." But I think it was three different ships because you never rename a ship, that's bad luck. And then there were warehouses down at India Point, I think, it must have started around the time, like late 1700s, and it was similar to the way like South Water Street with all of the, what do you call them? Just the big warehouses, I think that's the word I used. The ships would dock at the wharfs and they would have

these great planks that would either just, they would walk the stuff over to the warehouses and then there were these great big openings on the side where the doors would open—pulleys—and then other pulleys would carry the stuff up to whatever floor the stuff that was being traded needed to be stored at. And then some got fairly close but it's never a good idea to have a building that close to the water because with the tides. So actually I have to research that a little bit more. But that's the basic process that they would come off the docks and go right into the warehouses and whatever was going you know to Boston or wherever would then come out of the warehouses or if it was being traded the original market was Market House which is technically North Main Street but it feels like South Main—it's right at College and North Main. And that was the market trading and that's where they auctioned off slaves. There is an amazing history to that building and a lot of is very difficult history to look at, but you have to look at it. But they did that from the 17, is it the 1760s up to like 1916. Market House was where all the trading went, happened. And then in like 1916ish maybe it was 1914 they built the produce terminal on Harris Ave which unfortunately just got demolished a couple of weeks ago. And there's this great commerce and economic feel that started at the harbors one of which is India Point. And then I'm not sure what happened after, I mean I know in the 1980s it was open space and shooters, and you know a nightclub was there. But from the time of the warehouses, there must have been some sort of shipping, other than the shipping of goods there must have been some other types of fish shipping that happened as well but I just don't know too much.

J: You're talking about India Point?

K: India Point, yeah. Because you can still see it, it's a ceremonial dock at India Point. So the Tall Ships dock there and I'm not sure but I understand it's very deep water. It's deceiving and it looks like it's not that deep. Oh, did the Mayflower come to Providence? I think it did that's probably where it docked a couple of summers ago, I think the Mayflower came to Providence.

J: Has PPS been involved with some of the plans for after the removal of the highway, sort of what the neighborhoods will look like?

K: Actually we started a number of waterfront forums back in the Fall of 2005. So that there was in the Fall of 2005 and there was another one in March of 2006. And then there was a series of them over the summer at different locations, at like the architectural building at RISD a couple of times and one time at the AAA office in Providence, I think on Washington Street. And now PPS is at point where it needs to formulate a position and make that public.

J: Do you work with homeowners with the Fox Point area? Because I know that there is a lot of very historic buildings in Fox Point? Sort of to make sure that the houses are being maintained and the integrity of those houses?

K: We're not a regulatory agency.

J: Yeah

K: So we can't, you know, police the homeowners. But you know we will periodically get phone calls from neighbors that are complaining, not specific to Fox Point just in general within the city, about you know "so and so is doing something to their house that I don't think is kosher, we need you to do something about it." And so if, you know, it is something that we can educate the homeowner about we will. But basically our marker program is how we try to not only educate the homeowner but also educate the public about proper preservation of buildings and also about the history of the area. A lot of times in anticipation of someone getting a marker they'll contact PPS and we'll try to work with them to appropriately rehab the house so that they're all set so then they can apply for their marker. Because all of the exterior work and landscaping needs to be completed before someone submits an application. But in the meantime we're happy to help give them advice or refer them to contractors. And we've also done that after people have gotten their marker. In one instance a gentleman was having, oh shoot, you'd probably know the terms. It's when you have an upper floor and you've got like spindles and knobs and stuff. I can't think of it. But he wanted to make sure that what he was replacing the original mahogany wood with was acceptable. And as it turns out we recommended that he get mahogany again. He wanted to do this, this new material that it was a little too obviously not real wood.

J: Yeah

K. Yeah. So we couldn't do anything. He was in a historic district and we knew that eventually the historic commission would actually fine him if it was done improperly. But we recommended the proper way to do it and as far as I know he did it.

J: I know that you said you've done some educational programs in Fox Point. Maybe you could talk about some of the educational programs and maybe why you decided to do it about Fox Point in particular.

K: Well we always had the Children Heritage Ed tour based on Avi's book "Something Upstairs" which talks about Fox Point—it is based on 15 Sheldon Street where Avi lived at one point. And it really talks about the fringes of Fox Point and then goes along South Water and then ends further up College Hill. And then we just added another by Avi called "The Man Who Was Poe" which really is set mostly in Fox Point and then goes all the way up to North Benefit Street. So that tour starts at the corner of I think, Ann and I'm not sure but I can see the building--very close to George M. Cohan Boulevard near Tockwotton. And then goes down Wickenden over to Brook and then we put the kids back on the bus and drive them over to St. Johns because there is a whole discussion of Poe when he was courting Sarah Whitman, who lived on North Benefit Street. So because the book is excellent but it's scary and it's very complicated we decided to follow the actual flow of the book so nobody is confused, whether it's the docent giving the tour or the children participating in the tour. And then as a result of one of our docents who grew up in Fox Point, and who has been collecting photographs for many years, we wanted to try to help him catalogue his collection. And we are very hopeful

that it will eventually be catalogued, used in some manner with your class, and then donated over to the Portuguese Collection at Rhode Island College.

J: You're talking about Lou Costa?

K: Lou Costa, yep. And then he has very graciously offered us any copies of photos that we could use in our research library. Because oddly enough we are very photo-shy in our research library. And I'm very confused by that, but that's another story. So that has been a great opportunity for us and we're still working on cataloguing that. And we're hoping that there's some way that we can involve the students at Vartan Gregorian school which originally was called the Fox Point elementary school and involve the students in some way in the research of histories of houses in Fox Point or I'm not sure, we actually have to have meetings about that. And we're kind of on the fringes of helping your Oral History class. Fox Point is just a great neighborhood it has so much history to it and it was so important to the development of the city that it, you don't want any of the neighborhoods to be neglected but it has such a wonderful unique history that we want to help promote that.

J: What about the history specifically?

K: Well from what I understand the Portuguese were part of that neighborhood from the very beginning when people settled Providence. Well actually, let me backtrack, when Roger Williams came to Providence as part of the European settlement of the city he landed at Fox Point. So that's really important. And then my...told me, I think it was, that who he was friends with, you know, "What Cheer Netop" which means "Hey dude how are you doing?" said well "the best place for you to live is the most neutral place" which also happened to be where there was a freshwater spring which is where the Roger Williams National Memorial is located in between North Main Street and Canal Street. And that alone, just Roger Williams landing there, very important. Secondly the Portuguese explorers and fishermen who eventually, you know, settled more en masse I guess were here very soon after Providence became a destination for fishing, for the fishing industry. I mean the Portuguese had been here you know, I don't know how many hundred years before Roger Williams got here or what time period--probably 1400s I guess. Because they were great sailors. But their presence in Fox Point is significant because the presence is still there. And there's been other nationalities, Irish being one of them. I think also a lot of Jewish people in that neighborhood.

J: In Fox Point?

K: I think so, I'm not positive but I think so. So there's, you know, other cultures that come and go and just add to the feel of the neighborhood. But I think it's a wonderful thing that there's been such a consistent Portuguese presence there. And I think that it's something that shouldn't be ignored. And that's part of the reason why Lou is so interested in archiving because he's Portuguese and he has you know all these wonderful stories to tell from the people he grew up with and he could also find people, you know for you guys to talk to, to get a fuller understanding of the neighborhood.

J: So what are specific buildings in Fox Point that are particularly important or have some kind of need for historic preservation or well-preserved already?

K: Well I guess being the education person at PPS I would have to say that 15 Sheldon Street is extremely important because that's where in the story Kenny lived. So for us that's a very important building. That's going to take a little bit of thought. Well I would also say, also it's the house where the Biladous live, it's on the corner, is it Power and Hope? I think it's an Italianate building across the street from the Rhode Island Historical Society Library it's exquisite and it's been beautifully restored. It's either three or four floors. So I don't know the official marker name but it's such a beautiful, beautiful building. But along John Street there is all wonderful smaller single family homes that have great quality to them. I'm trying to think, I wish I knew the names, like the historical names of them. But there is on John Street there is these two lovely little houses that face each other, I mean I want to say it must have been two sister that marry two guys and they would have coffee together. And then someone told me about another, it might on John Street, it might those two, there's a canopy over the doorways of two houses so that kind of connects them. And that might be on John Street.

J: Where on John Street?

K: If you're facing east it's on the left side. And then personally, my grandp—either my grand—I think its my great grandparents were married in St. Joseph's Church on Hope Street. My brother Billy was married there. When I was a kid Big Alice's was a great ice cream place to go. And then across the street which is now; is it the New School or is the French American School?

J: I think it was, are you talking about like School One?

K: School One yeah, is it still School One.

J: I think it's the French American School now

K: Well before that I'm not sure it might have been School One and they rented out their basement to Short Attention Span Theater which is now Second Story Theater which is in Warren. But I've been going there since I was in college and that's just one of my happy experiences—personally. So let's see.

J: Is it a specific type of theater

K: Well what's exciting is that it's really good theater but it's, you know, as short as 20 minutes or as long as like an hour. It's nice like the two hours oh my butt is killing me type of theater. But they do that run usually in the summer sometimes and now that they are in Warren they do like full you know the two hour shows. And they just did Tennessee William's "Orpheus Descending" and it was fabulous. And it's a great group of people. Ed Shay was affiliated with Trinity Rep for many years and he went off on his

own. And he's a really nice guy and he said he would rather work with nice people that have potential than work with the most phenomenal pains in the neck. So it has a nice atmosphere to it and it's a nice theater. I have to do some research I have to look in the Gaudy because I can't off of the top my head say "these five buildings are the gems" but I know there's gems.

J: How about Holy Rosary Church?

K: Oh yes, oh god, it's gorgeous. I think that's Romanesque isn't it? It's beautiful, it's really stunning. I don't know have you ever been inside?

J: No, because we were going to but then it was locked.

K: Oh.

J: Lou was going to give us a tour

K: Well he definitely is the best person to give a tour because he still acts as an alter boy during funerals because he is still well, very connected to his neighborhood. And actually there is a benefit for the Boys Club next Friday it's a macaroni dinner—a spaghetti dinner is a very Rhode Island thing—and so it's in the basement of the church next Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> and Lou's giving a presentation, I'm going to go. And you should definitely check it out for two reasons: because A. Lou is giving the presentation, oh B. you get to go in the church probably, but C the priest is in Washington DC right now visiting with the pope he's actually going to see mass with him at St. Patrick's sometime this week and you get to find out what that experience is like. I'm going to grill him next Friday when I go. And I guess Adler's hardware because that's been in business since at least the early 1900s but prior to that the building itself had a different commercial life.

J: It was across the street right?

K: Yes, the hardware store was across the street and that was an Army Navy Store or something, that building. Yeah, you remember your stuff from Lou I think (laughter)

J: And also the class. And the bathhouse that they recently restored

K: Yes I'm sorry yeah, excellent. They did a wonderful job and it's now the library for Vartan Gregorian School and there's this wonderful connector to the elementary school.

J: Is PPS involved with that at all, like consultations?

K: Well it was on our most endangered list for a number of years so we helped to advocate for saving it and helped, you know we supported it in any way that preservation was going to happen. And we were invited to the official opening I guess it was in January, Lou was there with some images, some really great images that he found. So we were considered a collaborator and a supporter but again we weren't the hands on. But it was

one of those instances where we helped raise awareness for the building that was endangered and then it was saved. And that's actually what we were supposed to be doing. So that's a win.

J: Besides Lou Costa who are some of the local community people who are working to help preserve the neighborhood?

L: Well Sarah Gleason who lives on John Street is a volunteer and she is very much involved in I guess the Fox Point Association, I don't know what its officially, there's another word in there

J: Fox Point Neighborhood Association

K: I think so. Aria Biladou and Harry Biladou who live on, I guess facing Hope Street. Aria is on our board and I think Harry or both of them are recipients or members of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Hall of Fame. But they're very active and Aria's really one of the point people for the waterfront, she ran the waterfront forum. Claude Goldstein who is doing a lot of work, he's now a Fox Point resident, he has a number of buildings, he's rehabbing the old Gabe's, I think, and turning it into Abe's—Oh Babes it being renamed Abe's and rehabbed. And he's got this great, which I'm chomping at the bit, it's barbeque takeout on Ives Street. And actually Ives Street just to kind of go back to your previous question is stunningly gorgeous now, there's amazing eateries and the whole flavor of that street has changed for the better in such a short period of time and that used to be one of the kind of scary street. You know it was ok but you had to be a little careful. And now I think it has really come around.

J: In the last couple of years

K: I think even less than that to be honest with you, maybe say two years.

J: What do you think spurred the restoration?

K: I don't know, because all of a sudden it just happened. I think commercial investment and I think people, there is this wonderful sense at least I can tell in Providence and I think it must be in other places, where people really want to have that neighborhood feel. And I don't know if it's that a lot of people are transplants from communities where that was present or if they grew up in the suburbs and they had that, but it wasn't, it was that community feel but minus the commercial proximity because of the suburbs it is like you know all residential and then you kind of have to drive or take a bus to the commercial. So there is this wonderful, you feel it in the Armory district and that I think is part of the reason why it is so special; you can see on Broadway—beautifully on Broadway. And I get that sense on Ives Street, especially that Eddy's dinner it's just lovely, not been around for very long but it has been beautifully rehabbed, the food is really good, it's across the street now from a gallery, just down the street you got the Ooplet, and then you've got this noodle place that I haven't tried and then you'll have the barbeque. I guess good food and they will come. Find good food. I'm not actually sure but I think

that's a really good question. There was that article in East Side Monthly recently about Ives Street and it's resurgence and think, you know there's good feeling about it.

J: So you think that Fox Point, is Fox Point better now than it was before or just different?

K: I think it's just different because I never thought that it was actually bad. But I guess you really have to ask somebody who lived there to really know. Because you can have a decent neighborhood and just one scary street—that's not out of the question. And why is it scary? Is it just because it's one of those streets that you know if you have the opportunity to take street that's well lit and a street that's kind of scary and darkly lit, you take the well lit street you know you're not going to be stupid. So who knows? I'm not really sure how to answer that question.

J: Well I guess, because Lou and some other have people have been talking about how there was this neighborhood in Fox Point, Portuguese ethnic neighborhood. And now it's more gentrified in a way, you have a lot more college students living there and people who maybe don't have, didn't grow up in the neighborhood.

K: Gentrification is a dirty word. And it's, it's a very very very difficult thing to handle well. And it's hard especially because when Lou having grown up in the neighborhood, he grew up in a time where people regularly used the bathhouse because they didn't have running water.