

ORAL HISTORY OF

Hyman Myers

Interviewed by Bruce Lavery

Session #1: June 26, 2015

Session #2: August 8, 2015

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Keystones Oral History Collection

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PREFACE & SUMMARY

On June 26, 2015 and August 7, 2015 Bruce Lavery interviewed Hyman Myers at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Myers, who retired from practice in 2009, was a preservation architect at VITETTA. Lavery was the Gladys Brooks Curator of Architecture at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Kevin Block transcribed this interview in 2025. The transcription process was funded by a Historical and Archival Records Care (HARC) Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). Nan Gutterman of VITETTA reviewed the transcript for accuracy in 2025.

In the interview, Myers recounts his career journey, including his education at the University of Pennsylvania, his entry into the architecture profession, and the emergence of his successful historic preservation practice in the 1970s. In the first sitting, Myers discusses his work on the restoration of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Ryer's Museum, and the Academy of Music, as well as his role in the redevelopment of the Reading Terminal Market as part of the Convention Center project. In the second sitting, he discusses his work on Philadelphia City Hall, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and various historic estates and buildings in the Greater Philadelphia region. Myers also discusses his personal passion for collecting architectural books and drawings.

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Either copied from Philadelphia Architects & Buildings or copied into PAB)

Hyman “Hy” Myers (1941-2022) was a Philadelphia-based architect, preservationist, and educator whose four-decade career made him one of the region’s leading advocates for historic architecture. A principal at VITETTA Architects & Engineers and a longtime lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, he specialized in the restoration and adaptive reuse of significant buildings, contributing to more than 350 projects nationwide, including major Philadelphia landmarks such as City Hall, the Academy of Music, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. A passionate expert on Victorian architecture--especially the work of Frank Furness--Myers was known for his commitment to preserving historic fabric while returning buildings to active use, and he played a key role in advancing preservation practice through teaching, public advocacy, and professional leadership.

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ORAL HISTORY OF HYMAN MYERS

Bruce Laverty
[00:00:00]

Would you like to state your name for the record?

Hyman Myers
[00:00:04]

My name is Hyman Myers.

Bruce Laverty
[00:00:08]

And my name is Bruce Laverty. Hy, you and I have worked together for a long time on these oral histories and just for the record, I'll say that I'm delighted to have you in front of the camera. So, tell me a little bit about your childhood and your parents and your early schooling.

Hyman Myers
[00:00:35]

My childhood was in Philadelphia, in the western part, West Oak Lane.

Bruce Laverty
[00:00:46]

What street did you live on?

Hyman Myers
[00:00:50]

Mohican Street, 1816 Mohican Street. My father was in the tire business, wholesale. And my mother was a housewife, a typical housewife. I went to Penny Packer Elementary School and I graduated from there to Wagner Junior High School and then Wagner to Central. And it was a very common, normal childhood.

Bruce Laverty
[00:01:34]

Do you have siblings?

Hyman Myers
[00:01:35]

I have a sister, Sheila, and she was older by one year. Well, that's all.

Bruce Laverty
[00:01:51]

And so, like a number of the architects that we've interviewed, you're a graduate of Central High School, anything you'd like to say about your Central days?

Hyman Myers
[00:02:03]

Well, I must say that Central was very good, and I had no idea of how good, until many years later, but it was very good and very transforming to me. In fact, I feel very close to many of the Central High School classmates of mine and we're having our 50th reunion. Well, we had our 50th reunion and we had a large attendance. We now have regular meetings which I haven't gone to, but we stay pretty close together.

Bruce Laverty
[00:02:52]

So, Central was one of the schools that offered a Bachelor of Arts degree, and what did you do?

- Hyman Myers
[00:03:01] That was amazing, a Bachelor of Arts degree, which I did receive, and that was an interesting and very good time for me.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:03:14] So when you were a boy or when you were in high school, did you have any interest in architecture? What was your first sort of interest in architecture, or did it develop when you were a child at all?
- Hyman Myers
[00:03:32] I think that my very first interest was like Frank Lloyd Wright's. I was playing with blocks and everybody said, "Oh, that's very good, you should be an architect," and I enjoyed playing with blocks and then I got a Lincoln Log set and I enjoyed playing with that. So I assume that from early--let's say, seven years old--one could say that I was headed in that path. In high school, I was heading in that path too. And I applied in high school to University of Pennsylvania. And I was accepted. I was the last undergraduate to be accepted, so I came to...
- Bruce Laverty
[00:04:36] Because they changed the program?
- Hyman Myers
[00:04:37] Yeah, to graduate programs.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:04:43] So how was that program set up then, was it four [years] plus two [years]?
- Hyman Myers
[00:04:48] It was five years of architectural engineering, which was my degree and one year later I stayed and got a Bachelor of Architecture. But since I went through the entire program with the graduates, they awarded me the Masters of Architecture because it was the same program that the graduate students took that I was able to take.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:05:24] So you started at Penn in 1959 when you graduated. So talk a little bit about the atmosphere at Penn, about some of your professors [and] challenges that you had.
- Hyman Myers
[00:05:41] The interesting thing was I didn't know that Penn was going to be a graduate school. And when I started there, it was good in that Central prepared me very well for school, except... I said academically, I should say, except that I had no idea that I would be amongst graduates. And everybody in the class, it was amazing, seemed so much older and so much brighter. And I was very jealous of these students who could do all kinds of drawings and all kinds of things and had experiences which I lacked. They had worked for the summer for architects, and came to school, and they had abilities which are beyond what I had. And I was very jealous of that. And they had, in fact, some had wives. And it was very difficult for me to compete. And it was a tough struggle.

Bruce Laverty
[00:07:05]

Did you live on campus or did you commute?

Hyman Myers
[00:07:07]

I commuted, which made it even worse. The situation was amazing in that these students, when we had charrettes, would bring their wives and help them do the drawings, which was amazing to me. And I looked around--everybody had somebody helping them and there I was, not having anybody to help me. But I got through. There were three of us in the class who were incoming freshmen in the graduate program.

Bruce Laverty
[00:07:55]

Who were the other two? Do you remember?

Hyman Myers
[00:07:57]

The others were a man named Kimball and a man named Dietrich. The two of them, they didn't, they just didn't graduate simultaneously with me. But I persevered and was able to get through. The teachers were very, very good. It was a very positive school years for me.

Bruce Laverty
[00:08:39]

Now, who among them? Name names and talk about specific influences, you know, in terms of your lesson?

Hyman Myers
[00:08:48]

Well, right away for basic design, which was our first course, we had a teacher named Mrs. [Stanislawa or "Siasia"] Nowicki. And she was a very big influence. In fact, she was very helpful and also very tough. She was an interesting person and European and she's still alive, by the way, which is amazing. She must have been very young when we had her but I didn't notice. She really was a very high influence. She made us look at our work and then she would destroy it. And she would say that I couldn't do that, but she could. She could destroy the things, because we worked on it so hard. And she was a major influence. I had [Robert] Geddes and Halls and Weissman and, oh, it was really a terrific setup. Teachers, [Romaldo] Guirgola, and oh, who else did I have?

Bruce Laverty
[00:10:16]

Did you study with Lou Kahn?

Hyman Myers
[00:10:20]

I didn't study with him, but I attended all of his lectures. I had [Robert B.] Ennis, a terrific friend of The Athenaeum.

Bruce Laverty
[00:10:32]

Was he a teacher of yours?

Hyman Myers
[00:10:35]

Yes, he was a student teacher and he taught various courses but in art history. And that was a very big influence on me. He was able to talk about and teach art history a number of times a week and I would go to all of his lectures. I would just sit in and hear them sometimes repeated, sometimes

they were new. It was an amazing thing to be with Ennis who was terrific. He was inspiring and he was articulate. He was an amazing professor.

Bruce Laverty
[00:11:27]

We were recently given, Paul Hirshorn at Drexel, gave us a set of notes that Bob Ennis took in 1955 when he was taking history of British architecture at Penn. And it's just amazing. For student notes, the thoroughness, the detail, and his own mind, drawings illustrating what was being taught in the class. It says so much about him. I've never had the privilege to hear him lecture. I've met him on many occasions, but I've never heard anybody who wasn't just sort of bowled over by him.

Hyman Myers
[00:12:10]

That was me too, and I would go and he would say, "You're not supposed to be in this class, are you Mr. Myers?" And I would say, "No." But I enjoyed it so much that I would go two or three times a week.

Bruce Laverty
[00:12:26]

Getting back to Louis Kahn, you said that you would not audit it, but...

Hyman Myers
[00:12:35]

I would audit his classes. I would go to his lectures, I'd go to the studios, and he was also a very inspiring teacher. His words, his language, his ability to really expand the mind was what I had thought college would be, typically. And he was just mind-expanding. He was wonderful. I'd go to his classes as well. He was extraordinary. He could make you think and you would be really wonderfully inspired by him.

Bruce Laverty
[00:13:22]

So I noticed from your portfolio, I was reviewing it this morning, that Robert Venturi was also one of your professors.

Hyman Myers
[00:13:31]

Another inspiring architect. It's amazing. Robert Venturi taught, let's see, history I think of design and it was mind-boggling again. That was just a wonderful experience, Venturi to be so...terrific in the way he would think about architecture and the way it was wonderful that I had him for these courses. I don't think I had him for a studio design, I don't think so. But he was really mind-opening. He was able to take concepts and historical aspects of design and he would just bring it right up to modern times. It was wonderful. I used to have him in the afternoons and I would immediately have to run over to Ennis courses and it was again the same thing and that's what I thought college would be.

Bruce Laverty
[00:14:51]

So, you were getting your money's worth then?

Hyman Myers
[00:14:53]

Oh, I was! Indeed. Oh, it was terrific.

Bruce Laverty
[00:15:00]

Before we leave that particular time, I just wanted to mention and ask you your memories or thoughts. In 1964, the Philadelphia Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians was founded, and you were a founding member of the chapter. Do you have any memories or thoughts about those early days of SAH, which in fact had its inaugural meeting in this building?

Hyman Myers
[00:15:29]

I didn't know I was the oldest founding member until we had an anniversary party, the 50th, here. I think it's because they must have lost records of who else was before me.

Bruce Laverty
[00:15:45]

Well, it may be that there are no other members who are current and active members.

Hyman Myers
[00:15:51]

I don't know about that, but that was an interesting aspect of my career and of my interest in history. This was the Architectural Historian's Philadelphia chapter.

Bruce Laverty
[00:16:10]

But the national headquarters was here too.

Hyman Myers
[00:16:13]

National headquarters were here and I remember Mrs. Barry who was the head of the organization at that time and it was on Walnut Street and I remember going up there to talk to her many times. But the point that I was so amazed [by] was that I was a founding member and maybe I was even president, first president, I don't even remember, the first president of the chapter. And I said, "Well, you know, I would like to be president, but I don't know if I can do it. Why don't I share that responsibility with someone else? And we'll go half and half," and I said that, and we agreed, and the co-president then was George Thomas. So that was interesting.

Bruce Laverty
[00:17:09]

Your path would cross in multiple ways.

Hyman Myers
[00:17:09]

Oh, yes. I met him, interestingly enough, in Freeman's Auction basement. And we went to the same auction at the same time because we were interested in what was being sold. And what was being sold is Price's, William Price's collection, which was, I don't know, housed in a moving company, I think. Nobody had paid the freight, and so I was there to pick up whatever I could of Price's collections. And the first collection, I was told there wouldn't be much interest, I could buy it for nothing. And then the first collection came up and it said, "We have Price's drawings and what do we do about them" and he says, "All right, I'll bid a dollar." And I said, "Oh a dollar, all right. I'll bid a dollar." And as soon as I bid a dollar, somebody else bid two dollars. And I said, "Three dollars!" And it was four dollars. And I said, "Five!" And I was amazed that five dollars--this was high at the time--five dollars and then it went to six. I said I'm not

going to get on that so it went to this other person, and George Thomas was the other person. And it happened a number of times and I then went over to him in the middle of the auction and I said, "Why are you buying this?" And he said, "Well, I'm writing a book on Will Price and I'd like to have as much material as I can." I said, "Oh great, that saves me a big problem and it saves me the storage right of all this material." I said, "Very well, you can have the collection. You'll have no competition." And then the prices were a dollar, a dollar fifty. You know, nothing prices. He got most of the material. So I was delighted to meet him then and to find safety in Will Price's collection.

Bruce Laverty
[00:19:43]

So talk a little bit more about how you became interested in architectural history and in preservation.

Hyman Myers
[00:19:51]

Well, architectural history...

Bruce Laverty
[00:19:54]

When you finished at Penn, you didn't start out as a preservation architect.

Hyman Myers
[00:19:59]

No, I didn't, but the fact is that I was thrown into that quickly and I thought that could be a great career. There was no architectural preservation course at that time and I went to...My first job--I didn't even graduate yet--was my first summer job was through Joe Jordan. Joe Jordan, the architect, at this small firm [is where I] had the first job. I was the only employee. It was an amazing job because I had to do everything in the office and that was interesting because you even wrote your own paycheck, which was amazing. That was an interesting time. But his job, his first job was the renovation of a historic building on Lombard Street.

Bruce Laverty
[00:21:17]

So would this have been before 1966, before the National Historic Preservation Act?

Hyman Myers
[00:21:22]

Oh yes.

Bruce Laverty
[00:21:23]

So was it historic in terms of being on the city's list of historic buildings [i.e. the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places], or was it just historic in the lower case "h"?

Hyman Myers
[00:21:34]

Lower-case "h." And we made a great design for it and went ahead with the developer and it was fun to do that. And after Joe Jordan, I went back to school and I studied and the next job I had was with Weissman/Spohn. One of my teachers, Weissman. And he had a partnership, again, a small partnership with Spohn who, I think that Weissman was the main designer and Spohn was the businessman and contract man. He in fact led the office, but Weissman was there too. And that was interesting because,

again, it was a small office. I really didn't know anything about architectural offices. I was interested in this and after working there for a year, a little townhouse office, that was an interesting experience because we did small commercial, small residential. Again, I was dealing with historic buildings. And this was before the preservation act, before anything historic. Philadelphia had an historic commission, but it was very minor.

That was an interesting period. It was a period before I was interested in preservation for old buildings. I read a lot and I went through wonderful times. I was introduced at that time to the Library Company. And the Library [Company] was very good for me because every Tuesday night, I was able to go there. It was open until, I think, 9 o'clock. And I was able to really get involved in old buildings. I looked at every single photograph in their historical collection. And I was interested in Furness. And I was taken to their photographic collections, and I was given box after box of photographs of Philadelphia, and I could really see Furness in these photographs. I began to list them and know which is Furness and which wasn't Furness. I was introduced to many people who had a similar, but not quite Furness interest, and I met them and I was able to get a new view on life in Philadelphia in the 19th century. That was very good. I think that time period was an amazing period.

Bruce Laverty
[00:25:31]

There's something about the ability to browse in a great collection, whether it's a collection of books or a collection of photographs, and to allow yourself that luxury of looking at things that you might not be looking for, but stumble across and making those connections.

Hyman Myers
[00:25:51]

That was a wonderful time. George Thomas would be there every now and then and we became friends. We had a similar interest and that was an interesting time.

Bruce Laverty
[00:26:09]

So, you had mentioned that you've worked for a number of small offices, but you also work for a very big one, perhaps the biggest. How did that come to be?

Hyman Myers
[00:26:18]

Well, not the biggest. The next firm I worked for was Day & Zimmermann. And Day and Zimmermann was an engineering firm with a little bit of architecture. And that was run by Frank Vitetta and that was a very good choice for me because that really developed into a long-time commitment. But Day & Zimmerman was at 17th and Sansom. Diagonally across from the Architect's Building and I went to work there and I was interested in money. I was interested in getting paid a good salary for the work that I did and I thought, "Boy that's interesting. I'll work for that."

Bruce Laverty
[00:27:12]

Did you make money?

Hyman Myers
[00:27:16]

Yeah, I did make money! And that was a good time too, and that happened in 1970. The things that I've left out, I should mention, was I worked for Vincent Kling.

Bruce Laverty
[00:27:45]

That's what I was thinking of as a big firm.

Hyman Myers
[00:27:46]

Yes, it was a big firm. And we worked, at that time I was in the studio of Dan Kopple. And Dan Kopple's studio was in the building at Broad and Arch. The United Engineers building. And we worked, the project that we were given was the airport. And that was a good project. The airport was going to be gigantic. And we had to run the roads and run the buildings and do all the work and design for that. And I was put on the roads, the road work from Philadelphia to there. And we designed all the roads, the emplaning road, the deplaning road, the surface transportation, the subway line, and all the roads that went to the airport. And the project was so big that we had a big team. Ignatius Wong, the architect, was there and we became friends and we became partners on the road projects, the M-planing road and the D-planing road, and we had to memorize which elevation there would be at which terminal and we had all this in our heads it was it was very good and finally that project was getting along so well that we had to get more people. We had about 30 people and we then took the office and we moved it from the giant office of Kling, which was very successful, to north of Arch. So we did that and they moved there and we were all on them by ourselves. This seemed like the right thing for an architect. For the period when I was at Kling's, the first period when we didn't move, you'd hear all the loudspeakers saying you know so and so come to the second floor for a meeting and you hear all the names and all the people who were involved. Florinda DiNada. And then Doelp.

Bruce Laverty
[00:30:53]

Right, her husband to be.

Hyman Myers
[00:30:55]

Yeah, her husband to be. And they were all there and John Bowers was there, Vincent Kling, and everybody. And it was just so big and you'd hear all these names all day long. And it's wonderful to be in a separate office. So we were finishing the airport in this separate office And I thought now I should look for something for money. And then I went to Day & Zimmermann. And I thought this would be good, this would be outside the box, an engineering office. It might be interesting. And in 1970, I moved to Day & Zimmermann.

Bruce Laverty
[00:31:44]

Was Frank Vitetta more of an engineer than an architect?

Hyman Myers
[00:31:47]

No, he was an architect. He was an architect. He was a true architect. And his division, Day & Zimmermann Associates, was separated from engineering. And we did architecture. So that was good in 1970 to develop that field, that architectural field within a big "E", engineering [practice]. And he was thinking of developing a separate practice from that architecture. Because with so many engineers, the number, the amount of architecture and the importance of architecture would be minor and he felt that as well. So he developed the architectural engineering of Day & Zimmermann Associates and that was an important development because I stayed at Day & Zimmermann and Day & Zimmermann Associates, and VITETTA, for the next 40 years.

Bruce Laverty [00:33:12]

So when did VITETTA separate from Day and Zimmermann? When did the break occur and did you go from the beginning?

Hyman Myers
[00:33:24]

Yes, I went from the beginning. I was one of the associates, and Day & Zimmermann bought out the firm and went to Frank Vitetta, with Frank Vitetta, around 1980, somewhere around there. That was an interesting time because we were graduate architects. Frank was a graduate architectural engineer, the only other one I ever met, and so I felt a loyalty to him, and we started architectural practice, and VITETTA, which became the name of the firm, had offices in New Jersey and Delaware, and it had them all over. A development which I hadn't played an important part in but I got my start in historic preservation there in 1970 and with other architects, Mark Lombardini, Sheldon Neubauer, Joe Sorrentino. These are names which have been part of me for a long time. The work was interesting. It was unusual work, in that it was still engineering because we had taken the jobs with us from the beginning of the firm in Day & Zimmermann, but that was a good time. The work at Day & Zimmermann was interesting and it was exciting.

We did lots of programs which were based on studies. I remember doing one in which there was an enormous book, a booklet. And that booklet would have, if you did this to buildings, if you did the stairway in the center, if you did a stairway on the side, a thousand iterations on what was, what could be. And that was led by Sheldon Neubauer. That was a gigantic project, but it was only a study. But page after page and drawings after drawings of the same building with different configurations. We did buildings, was it called? The Valley Forge National Park and that was a good project and so I was taught really by Sheldon Neubauer historic buildings. I can't think of who else was on that team. But that's what happened in the beginning. And then I guess the major buildings that we did.

Bruce Laverty
[00:37:31]

Which was the first of the buildings that you did in terms of preservation, you know, the first major?

Hyman Myers
[00:37:40]

I think Day & Zimmermann's house was the first. That was at Day & Zimmermann and that was in Valley Forge National Park. We worked on that. Next came, I think, the first big building was the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, which is the first building I included in this submission. It was to restore the building and to make it a new venue for the old Academy of Fine Arts.

Bruce Laverty
[00:38:38]

Let me interrupt you just for a moment in terms of the timing. In 1973, the Philadelphia Museum of Art had the Frank Furness exhibition and the catalog which you contributed to with George Thomas and Jim O'Gorman. Well, he was involved in that, right? Do you want to talk a little bit about the revival of Furness's reputation and perhaps what it meant to that architectural project which followed up on it?

Hyman Myers
[00:39:14]

Well I believe that was 1973 and the development of an exhibition on Frank Furness was an extraordinary thing in that he was forgotten almost completely and he was so unknown that you wouldn't think anybody would have an interest in that. And the Philadelphia Museum put on an exhibition, agreed to put on exhibition of his work. George was the major portion in that. George Thomas really developed Frank Furness's career. Well, I had already done an index, three-by-five card index on all the Furness buildings I found at the Library Company. And I had 200 buildings. And George Thomas said, "I think we'll do an exhibition on Frank Furness. You might want to be involved." I said, "Oh, that'd be great. I'd like to be involved. And I'll give you my background and information on Frank Furness and we'll put it together and we will have enough to do an exhibition." So we did. And we developed a list, 400 buildings of Frank Furness, some of which I had never heard of, some which George had never heard of. And we really combined. And George was really the key. He made that happen.

Bruce Laverty
[00:41:11]

Do you think that the restoration of PAFA would have happened if there hadn't been that revival of interest?

Hyman Myers
[00:41:21]

No, absolutely not.

Bruce Laverty
[00:41:23]

Because it was not an attractive looking building in terms of just the dirt on the facade.

Hyman Myers
[00:41:32]

Yeah, I'm sure it wouldn't have happened without development of interest in Frank Furness. Anyway, the exhibition did occur and the catalog was produced and it was very successful. In order to do the catalog, and that's what O'Gorman was...he wrote the essay. And O'Gorman knew about Frank Furness, but he didn't have any major, major knowledge of what

buildings he did and the hundreds of buildings that he did do. So George and I gave him all of the research we had done, and then he was the major essayist. The work in the catalog was put under O'Gorman's name because he wrote the catalog and we did all this research and we were just the catalogers. Anyway, that was completed in 1975 and it was very successful. In 1973, also the Academy was started. But it was at the same time as the Furness exhibit and so nobody at the Academy knew anything about Furness. They just didn't know. And even the board members didn't know.

Bruce Laverty
[00:43:31]

I'm not, I haven't been old enough to visit the Academy before your restoration. But other than seeing it on the outside, could you describe the interiors before you got them? And did the administration there essentially ask you to make it pop or were they just as surprised?

Hyman Myers
[00:43:58]

They were surprised. They didn't know about Furness and they didn't know what he did but, again, seeing this exhibit they thought it could be really a great building and it was essentially a white interior. All of the painted services were overpainted and the decorations were boxed in with drywall. And only the main space, although painted over, was an indication of what was there. It was a lost building on the inside. And they said, "Well, let's do a study to begin with." And then we did this study, and we said what it could be. And they thought, "Maybe we should do that?" And they did it.

Bruce Laverty
[00:45:03]

Now, what was your role in the restoration? Were you the lead architect?

Hyman Myers
[00:45:09]

I thought I was the lead architect. We got the job, and it was an unknown really what was going to be and I had just very little experience but I was really set on making this a great building. And with the exhibition, well, this was terrific. This was what we had to do and my research--it was fabulous. I had all materials on the Pennsylvania Academy and there are only two great buildings, the Academy and the University of Pennsylvania Library, which I had intimate knowledge of because the School of Fine Arts got that library as their school. So I had intimate knowledge and I was there at the time and I knew about Furness and I knew about the Academy and I really was the prime person and they saw that and they hired us. I still have the proposal we wrote for that. Yeah, I'd say I was the lead and the logical person. So we decided we took that commission and we developed it from 1973 to 1976. That was, it took a whole lot of time, it was done essentially as a piecemeal job. That is, we'll do this first and this second and this third and little by little, it got done. It was amazing that it could get done. It was \$5 million worth of work. Not much these days.

Bruce Laverty
[00:47:29]

Not by today's standards.

Hyman Myers
[00:47:30]

It would have been a \$50 million project today, or a \$100 million project. But that's what it was at that time, and we had to go funding and taking people around and introducing the board to Frank Furness, and that was tough. And then you took away all these coverings and they showed glorious things and that's what happened to that building. We didn't get done a couple of things because of budget. We didn't get done two ventilators on top of the front pavilions, but that was nothing terrible. But everything else got done. They're doing it now, again, 40 or 50 years later. So it's time. Anyway, we worked on that building and I had no idea of the importance compared to other buildings that would be given to that. That really made a reputation on me, specifically. That opened the doors for everything I was going to do.

Bruce Laverty
[00:49:05]

And so what was your next major commission then after that?

Hyman Myers
[00:49:11]

Yeah, I took a small commission to do the Ryerss Museum.

Bruce Laverty
[00:49:14]

Oh, Burnholme [Park]? Well, that's just around the corner from where I live. I just walked past [there] yesterday morning.

Hyman Myers
[00:49:24]

That was the next job and that was a very good job and I said to myself, "If I take this commission and do a good job, that'll cement my reputation." So without thinking of it, without thinking it is as important, I said, "Okay, I'll do that next." So I took that job and I wanted to do a job which didn't have a reputation, didn't have an importance.

Bruce Laverty
[00:49:56]

It's an out-of-the-way place.

Hyman Myers
[00:49:58]

Hardly anybody gets to [it]. So we did that job next and that was a job which took a year to do and that was the successful job too. The main mansion and a little bit of outside buildings. The project was completed again very successfully. And that was done with the Fairmount Park Commission. And that it was the only library that I had worked on, the library inside that, a public library. That library building was the only public library which was outside the purview of the Philadelphia Library system and that was really successful. We were able to renovate and restore that building to a large degree and that has been very successful.

Bruce Laverty
[00:51:16]

Well at least from the outside it's holding up very well, I think it does.

Hyman Myers
[00:51:20]

Well, again, it needs things today. In that building, the Philadelphia Museum of Art played a part in that it helped the Ryerrs with its exhibits. In all of the exhibits the...

Bruce Laverty
[00:51:41]

So, there was a museum wing that had been built on in the early 20th century?

Hyman Myers
[00:51:45]

And they did that. I laid out the casework, etc., and they laid out the exhibit, which was very good. And it made that place really shine. That was successful. Again, I lost the value of the projects that... That were so great. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts was a great project and I didn't know it was a great project. I just thought it was successful project and that was it. But it won a National Trust Award for the year. I didn't submit it. And we didn't even get any other awards for it. I didn't think of that at all. I was thinking of the project. And that was a major mistake of mine because you could have gotten a lot of jobs based on that. But no, no, I went along and did this building myself on the Ryerss. That was interesting. And then, based on those two... That set the stage for my career.

Bruce Laverty
[00:53:10]

So, looking towards your next project, is it something that you worked on by yourself or did you start to assemble a team? A preservation team?

Hyman Myers
[00:53:24]

I assembled a preservation team and one of the key persons on that preservation team was Joe Sorrentino and Joe Sorrentino has remained with me all these years and he was excellent. He's an excellent architect, a Drexel graduate and he really was a key person. I didn't have a professional preservationist agenda in my mind to hire preservationists. In the 1970s, it just wasn't there.

Bruce Laverty
[00:54:09]

Where would you get it from?

Hyman Myers
[00:54:10]

Yeah. But he was a good architect, an excellent architect, and could detail and draw beautifully. And so by the 1980s we were doing big work and we were doing the Capitol at Pennsylvania. So he was involved in all that work and became a major preservationist. I hired Nan Gutterman. Nan Gutterman was a young architect who had a preservation background. Well, I thought, "We should get her" and she said, "I may come for a year. I'll have a year in Philadelphia." And she's still at VITETTA. Incredibly, that was wonderful. But she was the only person I would trust with doing important preservation work. And we got the Academy of Music job and five years later, maybe eight years later we had her come to VITETTA and I would trust her with doing the preservation work. This was eight years after I was in charge of preservation work and I was really involved in all the work of the Academy. But I was getting so much work that we decided that I'd have to hand over the job and the day-to-day activities to Nan. The only person I can trust is Nan.

Bruce Laverty
[00:55:56]

Talk a little bit, I've always thought of the two academies, you know, at Cherry Street and at Locust Street as your wonderful book ends. Gifts to

the city. Talk a bit about the Academy of Music and how that job came to be, and what you did and what some of the challenges were there.

Hyman Myers
[00:56:19]

I was interested in historical buildings along Broad Street because there were lots of photographs of those and lots of pictorial information. I thought that would be great. So I decided to study them myself, and I studied the Academy.

One day I walked by the Academy and there was scaffolding going up on the inside. I thought, "What is that?" And I went and found out who the architect was. And I got permission to go in and look at it. And I thought, "Oh, heaven, I've never seen so much scaffolding. This was the entire interior of the scaffolding in the auditorium. And I went and had dinner with that architect at his house, Erling [H.] Pedersen. And I talked to him, I said, "Boy, this is a great building," and he was very, very--he was a preservation architect without the title. So, he talked to me about the building, told me about how it developed and what to look for. It was very good. We were at his home until, I don't know, two o'clock in the morning. And I thanked him, and I went away.

Now, he died maybe six months later. And they were looking for the architect to finish work. And I was the architect they chose because he mentioned me, and I knew about the building. It was a very close relationship, the buildings and the knowledge about the buildings. And that's how I got involved. I was hired for a year to do the work. And then they hired me again the next year. And the next and I was there for 25 years, or 30 years, the in-house architect for the Academy of Music.

Bruce Laverty
[00:58:48]

So, do you want to talk a little bit about the work that was done there, not just architecturally but in terms of the finishes and how that spun out in terms of your supervision?

Hyman Myers
[00:59:06]

It was a lot of work. We would work year by year, and we only could do enough work in that year to be completed, because you couldn't work through the [performance] season. And we would open up the Academy again every year with a great concert and a ball, and then we would plan future work on the same basis, only doing the work that could be done, could be completed in time for the opening.

I remember the first job we did. We had to, I did a whole survey of the building, I thought that was a good thing to do. And the first project was, on the amphitheater level, there were balls on the top of the seats. And we had to put them back, because about 20% were missing. And what I saw was that that was easy to do, because people wanted souvenirs. And they would take off these during the concert and take them home and put them in their pocket. And nobody believed me.

Bruce Laverty
[01:00:33]

Very American thing to do.

Hyman Myers
[01:00:37]

So I showed them how somebody would come and I would take a seat at a concert and during a concert I would take one off and I'd put it in my pocket there. Anyway, we had to stop that from happening. So I came up with an idea of the first year to put those balls on the top of the seats and put them in with irreversible screws, that you couldn't turn back their security screws, and no screwdriver would fit. And we did, we changed them all and I had balls cast in brass to put where they were missing and that was great. Well, none were missing the next year and none were therefore ever missing. So that was great to have those. And every year we would do a small project. We would do a balcony, on the balcony level, we would do plaster walls. On the main floor, we'd do new carpeting and marble repairs. And every so often, I'd look back, and after 10 years, a significant change had occurred.

One time we put carpeting down the stairs, and in all of the balcony amphitheater level, family circle level, and we had a carpet printed for us and woven for us. And I remember we sent a young person to copy exactly the colors of the carpet and the pattern in the Brooklyn Museum of Art. And that was a huge project, because she took a piece of mylar and we outlined every single pattern. It was a full pattern, every single leaf. The carpet would have a color and she was very good on color. She was the best person on color that we had. And she would match different colors to each particular area of the carpet and that was carefully done and brought it back and we had this carpet so we sent it to the carpet mill and we had that color made and woven and dyed to those specific colors and we made it carpet. And we put the carpet down. Well, that was an extraordinary thing, because the people at the Academy had never seen a carpet like this. And to have a huge corridor of that carpet was mind-blowing. And that went in. I remember [J.] Liddon Pennock, who was the President of the Academy, came and said, "My gosh, is that really correct, Hy? I said, "Yes, this is what they do." Well, they were very pleased.

And we had draperies done and valences done, and then the main curtain had to be done. Had an old curtain, this is the main stage curtain, and that was a significant element and that was done very similarly to what was there originally. They had a big opening for that.

Bruce Laverty
[01:04:54]

One of the other people that we interviewed here, Nick Giannopoulos of Keast and Hood told the story about the problem with the roof during performance. What are your memories of that?

Hyman Myers
[01:05:08]

Well, that's an interesting story because that was very important. We were finishing up the work on the Bellevue Stratford Hotel.¹ And we got a call that said, "Oh, you've got to come right away. The roof is going to fall." And we went over and we found...The concert was going on, Friday afternoon concert, and we were there, and what happened was one of the structural engineers went up and was doing some investigation for an elevator, or put in a new elevator, and this was the first elevator in the Academy of Music. Very important project. So we had located the elevator on Locust Street and we walked up to the attic and at the very top where the rafters come down--she was investigating the connection for steel beams which would go in there--and she found that the end of the truss cracked. So she went down and she said, "You know, this is really going to be a problem. I better call the office." So she calls the office and she has Nick Giannopoulos come out and take a look he says, "Oh my God. This is really critical. The roof could fall at any time." So in order to be certain that nobody was hurt in the intermission to the concert he went out and said, "We have to empty [the building]." And everybody was very quiet and didn't panic and they ended the concert midway and this had never happened before. And we found out that a wind shear effect coming down and lifting the roof of the Academy had occurred. And had cracked that truss and other trusses.

Bruce Laverty
[01:07:32]

So wind from the outside swept up, pulled it up, and then dropped it down again. I had never heard that that was the problem. Is it possible that that wind shear was caused by the Academy House building?

Hyman Myers
[01:07:50]

We can't say that. There are tall buildings all around it and the fact is that the wind came down and lifted up the roof and then dropped it, which cracked all the trusses over the Academy. So they had to close the Academy of Music for I think three or four weeks and put in steel to clamp together these trusses. And that was only a temporary repair. So they'd run around and get all the other venues available for the concerts because they had major events and they did that and then they opened up and they agreed to do the repairs and that was a big deal because they had to get new trusses inside of this Academy. Replacement trusses. So that was the next year's work, the first two [trusses], and then the next year they had to get the rest of them. And that means taking the seats out, clearing the floor of the academy, structuring the temporary supports. That was a big job, and only could be done off-season. So that was the major work, the cutting of the ceiling to let these steel towers go through to support those beams. Oh, that was a terrific, terrific thing. But that was done and done on time and that was really good. But the major work was done by...

Bruce Laverty

Keast and Hood?

¹ Nan Gutterman believes it was the opening of the Bellevue.

[01:10:01]

Hyman Myers
[01:10:01]

No, the construction. Oh, that was done by a metals firm. The metal trusses and the supports was done by...

Bruce Laverty
[01:10:21]

Turner?

Hyman Myers
[01:10:21]

No.

Bruce Laverty
[01:10:21]

Driscoll?

Hyman Myers
[01:10:21]

I can't remember the name of it. It's a very big firm. They had helped me on other projects and I would constantly use them. They were excellent. I'll think of them in a minute.²

Bruce Laverty
[01:10:48]

So, let's talk a little bit about Reading Terminal.

Hyman Myers
[01:10:50]

That was another big project.

Bruce Laverty
[01:10:50]

You seem to be fond of those big projects.

Hyman Myers
[01:10:57]

Yes, the Reading Terminal was a project that was done in the '80s.

Bruce Laverty
[01:11:07]

And we almost lost the head house there too. I mean after the commuter tunnel was opened in the early 1980s, there was some talk that the Reading [Terminal's] Head House might come down.

Hyman Myers
[01:11:21]

But that was all supposed to be destroyed. It was a white elephant in the worst sense. There was no use for that. And when the Convention Center came along, we decided that was useful. We'll make that the entrance to the Convention Center.

Bruce Laverty
[01:11:46]

Now, was there a competition for the Convention Center? How was it that VITETTA got the [job]?

Hyman Myers
[01:11:53]

Oh, it's interesting. We had studied the Convention Center. No, we had studied the use of the building for the Reading Railroad. The Reading owned that property and they said, "We'll see what we can do with that

² Gutterman believes that Myers was trying to remember Cyma Buildings and Construction Managers and that the steel company was Samuel Grossi & Sons, Inc.

property.” And then we did a study for Reading, for that property, and then the Convention Center came along. We didn't think it was terrific. It would be a big ballroom. That's what we thought. That would be the best use. But the Reading wasn't doing very well, and that was forgotten. Anyway, the next thing that came along was the Convention Center. And would the Convention center be a good fit for being downtown? So we did a study for the Convention Center which said it could be located there in the Reading Terminal train shed or across the street on the Lit Brothers site. [Or the] Snellenberg's site. Or in a number of locations around the city and we found that they liked the idea of a Convention Center location on the Reading Terminal site. Well, that involved the destruction of historic buildings on Arch Street, and we began there. That was the key factor. But there were only three historic buildings of significance on Arch street. And we looked at all of them and there was a group of buildings, which was one of the three, which was done by Cope & Stewardson, I think. And that had to be reckoned with.

Bruce Laverty
[01:13:58]

Was that Harrison Building?

Hyman Myers
[01:14:00]

It was the Harrison Building and a number of others. All done by Cope & Stewardson. And that was a problem. Well, that problem was taken care of by a fire. And there was a question.

Bruce Laverty
[01:14:20]

Not that you had anything to do with that!

Hyman Myers
[01:14:20]

That was the question! How did that fire occur and what happened? Because we thought that was a historic building.

Bruce Laverty
[01:14:29]

It was a major fire. I worked here at the time. You could smell the smoke and see the smoke from our balcony. And I seem to recall that if one more alarm had been tripped, it would have been called a fire storm. And I remember them hosing down the shed roof to keep that from going up. That was a big fire.

Hyman Myers
[01:14:52]

That was big fire, and then there was a question about how did it occur and what happened. Well, they found out that it was an electrical problem. But that was a significant development, which was able to clear that site. And that was one historic building that was major block of buildings, but that was a major impediment. And I'm not sure that it would have been allowed to go there. In fact, when we did a study for that building, I went in that building and it was the last major building to house a hat-making facility in Philadelphia. And that was a significant building. But the Historical Commission felt that that use, that hattery, was significant. So we did a filming of the making of a hat, because we were thinking of the

future, and there was a lot of effort made to document the hat business. But every use of that building, that was the only significant use of the building that was left. But there were businesses that were there 80, 100 years and the hat was the largest. That was interesting.

Bruce Laverty
[01:16:47]

So the Harrison Building was gone and the ground was ready. What were some of the challenges with the train shed? Were you responsible with the head house as well?

Hyman Myers
[01:16:59]

I wasn't responsible. That was a different [firm]. That was still Day & Zimmermann Associates and VITETTA, but the new construction was handled by somebody else.³ Fran McKibbin was the architect. In fact, he just died. The Convention Center was really a combination of two firms, VITETTA and TVS&A [Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback, and Associates].

Bruce Laverty
[01:17:30]

TVS&A?

Hyman Myers
[01:17:33]

TVS&A was a firm in Atlanta, I believe, yes, Atlanta, who was known for convention centers. And they were responsible for the design. We were responsible for the construction documents.

Bruce Laverty
[01:18:39]

Were there difficulties in terms of the market and the assurances and the accommodations that had to be made for the Terminal Market during restoration?

Hyman Myers
[01:19:12]

Yes, I think that's one of the unsung stories of the whole Convention Center. The market vendors were asked to leave while they renovated their space and they didn't want to leave. Harry [M.] Perks was in charge of the Convention Center. So he worked out a deal. They could stay but they would each move around the market and be continually there. The original marketeers in 1893, I think, wanted to stay in their market space too, and Reading said, "Well, all right, you can stay, and we'll build around it." Well, they built the giant building all around them, which was fine, and that was the key to us doing the same thing.

Bruce Laverty
[01:20:37]

And they never missed a day of business, like the Wanamaker building when it was built in 1909-11. It replaced a building that was already there, and John Wanamaker insisted that they never close.

Hyman Myers
[01:20:55]

Well, it's the same thing and they were so insistent that it was amazing. I thought, "Boy, oh boy. If I were making the final decision, I would tell them to get out." I couldn't believe it because it was expensive.

Bruce Laverty

Right. And the liability issues too.

³ Gutterman believes it was just a collaboration between two firms, VITETTA and TVS&A.

[01:21:10]

Hyman Myers
[01:21:14]

Oh there was the market and there was a wooden roof over it and then there was a space and then the trains were above that. Well, the wooden roof contained all kinds of terrible, terrible... Environmentally, it was a nightmare. The trains would drip from their engines. Material would fall down on the roof, and it would leak through, and it had to be covered with plastic in order to keep it operational. The work was enormous, but they did it. On the portions of the—roof were covered with plastic and huge sheets of plastic to cover and they were controlled and all the work was done. And the lead on the columns had to be taken off, lead paint, and re-coated and they couldn't drill through and they couldn't attach because the lead paint was a problem. But it was all good. It was an amazing job.

Bruce Laverty
[01:22:42]

I would absolutely agree that it's one of the unsung, you know, success stories in Philadelphia and American preservation. And as a Philadelphian, when I have first-time visitors from out of town, the market and then the shed are always on my first stops. Because I think it's such a quintessentially Philadelphian place. And when the development of the Convention Center was announced and as it progressed, I really had great fear that the market would be sanitized and sort of homogenized. While it is cleaner than it's ever been, it didn't lose its grip or its feel.

Hyman Myers
[01:23:40]

I said in one of the meetings, I said, "You can get the market to look like Boston's market, Faneuil Hall, which does not have the feeling of continually being there, and that was a real problem. We had to overcome that problem, and that was the hard thing to do, but we assigned different architects to different vendors and therefore it wasn't all homogenized. It wasn't all white tile, it was all complete and we kept the flooring which would give the feel of them."⁴

Bruce Laverty
[01:24:23]

Without the sawdust.

Hyman Myers
[01:24:28]

Right, without the sawdust. That was great. It's really one of the stories, and I blame the marketeers, the vendors, that they gave no credit for that. And it was really, you go in there and you know it's clean and new, but it still has a feeling of the market.

Bruce Laverty
[01:24:51]

Exactly. And better than ever. I mean, with the revival of Center City as a residential area, more people use it than ever had, and it's a great public space. One of the young women who worked at VITETTA and had done some research here, because The Athenaeum has over 500 drawings for the train shed, which you and your colleagues have been looking at for... for

⁴ Friday Architects/Planners and Kelly/Maiello Architects were two of the firms involved in the renovation of the Reading Terminal.

the entire length of the project. Joanne Sweet, she, right before the project was finished, she invited me to come over for a hard hat tour of the train shed. And she was one of the first women ever to make me feel very old. Because as we were looking through the train shed on that platform there, that great space where the tracks were, she said, "Did you ever ride a train into this building?" And I said, "Yes, more than once!" And I felt like I was about 110 years old. But we were probably only about 10 or 12 years out from trains actually coming into that space.

RECORDING BREAK

**SESSION #2:
AUGUST 7, 2015**

Bruce Laverty
[00:00:00]

When we last met, we had finished up talking about some of your early large projects, the Academy of Fine Arts, the Academy of Music, and the Reading Terminal and Convention Center. I thought that we might start out talking about what may be the biggest project, Philadelphia City Hall.

Hyman Myers
[00:00:33]

The City Hall project was the largest because of the size of the building, but it was not really the largest. The largest was the Convention Center. That was a lot of new construction and the train shed. But the City Hall was in fact one of the longest projects I worked on. It started in the 1990s with a master plan for City Hall. I worked with two people, Mike Holleman and Jim Bryan on that project. That was an interesting project because it involved such a large building and we had to see if, in fact, it would be useful as a city hall. So we studied that building to see if it could be used for, for example, a hotel. And it could, it would be a very nice hotel. And it wouldn't be hard to change that building into a hotel in that it was a series of rooms or cells on each side of a corridor.

Bruce Laverty
[00:02:21]

Was the city considering that, moving the offices out of there? It was on the table?

Hyman Myers
[00:02:30]

Yeah. But the other thing is that the city just felt and it proved to be a good location for a city hall and a fair layout. So they decided to keep City Hall there. They really liked the city hall there because they wouldn't have to move all the offices and cause that disruption to the city. And it worked out that by doing it in place, you could free up an area and move the city hall from one area to another. It would take longer, but it was a fair thing to do.

Bruce Laverty
[00:03:27]

With a project that complex and a building that large that was still in use every day by both the staff and the public, how did you and the members of VITETTA determine where to begin?

Hyman Myers
[00:03:48]

It was pretty easy and straightforward because there was space available then that was going to be free, open. And we looked at all of the areas of the city and all the lease spaces outside of City Hall and we could find a way to move all that lease space back into City Hall and into an organization that really proved to be workable. That was an interesting thing. It was only at that time, at that moment, when City Hall could be easily, and I mean easily, reused. The fitting of the space that was outside of City Hall, into City Hall, was exactly right. And it would be very hard to move it now. But then it was very easy. And the idea to keep city hall in City Hall was really a terrific idea.

Bruce Laverty

I had never realized that that was a consideration at the time

[00:05:06]

Hyman Myers
[00:05:11]

Absolutely. That was a big one.

Bruce Laverty
[00:05:12]

But it makes perfect sense. So in terms of preservation, what were the priorities that VITETTA identified in terms of where they started first?

Hyman Myers
[00:05:27]

Well, that was the area of the City Hall that was available, and would be easily available, is the northeast corner. And the northeast corner was the entrance, and that was to be the change. And with the northeast corner, we could move the mayor and the other facilities easily to the other areas of the building that were available and it was perfect.

Bruce Laverty
[00:06:07]

Now, what would you say were some of the most serious condition issues that you came across both inside and outside?

Hyman Myers
[00:06:21]

That's interesting. The most difficult.

Bruce Laverty
[00:06:28]

Or challenging, I guess. That's the softer word.

Hyman Myers
[00:06:33]

I don't think there were any. It's just everything fit perfectly and there was no major challenge and we started on the exterior and we did all the exterior first.⁵ I don't think there was a major challenge in the whole thing. It was the right time, the right spaces. Everything fit in perfectly.

Bruce Laverty
[00:07:09]

Well, I think you surprised, or the work surprised a lot of people, myself included, as they saw the building revealed slowly as the cleaning took place on the exterior, because as a native of Philadelphia, I would say most of my colleagues had never seen it clean and didn't realize what a bright and beautiful building it was underneath that century or more of grime and pigeon droppings. Even previous generations as well, even though the building I would assume, had been cleaned multiple times since 1901. Nobody had ever really seen it completely done.

Hyman Myers
[00:08:03]

That's true. The building was cleaned in the '50s and it never looked so beautiful as when we cleaned it in the 2000s.

Bruce Laverty
[00:08:22]

Now, did you have a special subcontractor who did the cleaning or?

Hyman Myers
[00:08:29]

Yeah. It was a... It wasn't a special cleaning contractor, it was a special cleaning.

⁵ Gutterman confirms that the project did not include major interior work. Myers had worked on the restoration of Conversation Hall earlier in the 1980s.

Bruce Laverty
[00:08:42]

Oh, a special format.

Hyman Myers
[00:08:45]

And we tried several methods. In charge of that portion of the work was Nan Gutterman. And she would go daily to the building, survey it, and decide on what should be cleaned and how, and what should we repair, and how to. This was a very specific job. And the methods that we looked at to clean the building were laser cleaning, which is a very slow operation, chemical cleaning, and water, or combinations of those three. So the cleaning was specific. And that was done. And that was a fairly simple, straightforward method. The method was, I guess, most difficult in the beginning, but it proved to be right along the building, all over the building. The thing that was worked out so beautifully was that the iron work, the whole top of the building is iron, was to be part of the cleaning. And that was an economic decision because the building went up to the cresting on the roof and then if that wasn't done at that time, the cost for the scaffolding outside would be repeated.⁶

Bruce Laverty
[00:10:47]

Exactly.

Hyman Myers
[00:10:48]

So, it was agreed to do that at the same time.

Bruce Laverty
[00:10:54]

Was there a lot of iron work that had to be replaced?

Hyman Myers
[00:11:02]

No. It's a wonder of that building. I didn't expect it in the beginning, but the ironwork was very--very little was damaged. And the cost to replace it was certainly reasonable. And it proved to be done at the same time as the cleaning. And it was really terrific.

Bruce Laverty
[00:11:28]

It seems that starting in the early 1990s, which were very tough financial times for the city, it seemed that there was very little political pushback against spending the money for the restoration of the building. Again, as a Philadelphian, it's very surprising that there wasn't an outcry about an extravagance of restoration. Any ideas on how it flew through relatively [easily]? Unless you saw a political pushback that...

Hyman Myers
[00:12:12]

Well no, there wasn't really a pushback. There was always questions about what was to be done, but we did the exterior wall surfaces and that roofing, cresting, the ironwork, and the roofs themselves at the same time.

Bruce Laverty

It was a maintenance project as well.

⁶ Gutterman has explained that the cleaning was accomplished with micro-abrasive water misting. VITETTA, Marianna Thomas Architects (MTA), and Kelly/Maiello Architects all worked on the City Hall project.

[00:12:34]

Hyman Myers
[00:12:37]

Yes, it was, but it was done around the building counter-clockwise and the reason that it went through so quickly is because the roof leaked and the repairs, reasonably simple to do, were done as part of this restoration. Now, if the restoration wasn't done, large portions of the building would have to be let go because of the seepage. So it was approved. I was amazed myself that it was approved in such big chunks. I never thought that the City would be able to afford it. This gigantic project.

Bruce Laverty
[00:13:41]

And how many years did it take from start to finish?

Hyman Myers
[00:13:45]

Well, on the exterior only, it was 12 years. That was a long time. But every year it was looked at and put into operation. It was a surprise to me. Every year I thought it would be let go and skip a year or so.

Bruce Laverty
[00:14:10]

It's a little bit like eating an elephant. One bite at a time. But considering the building took 30 years to build in the first place, I guess that's not a bad record.

Was VITETTA consulted at all concerning the lighting that would take place afterwards to sort of show off the nighttime lighting of the building from the exterior?

Hyman Myers
[00:14:40]

Yes. Lighting was a major project, and the gates...

Bruce Laverty
[00:14:48]

And I understand a new gate is going up very soon. The North portal. Nan was here last week mentioning that.

Hyman Myers
[00:14:56]

So we decided to look at the lighting, because it would be a showpiece, and we came up with a scheme, and we did a mock-up of the lighting during the cleaning. And that really turned out to be quite nice. They thought that the lighting would be expensive, and it was put off for a short time. And the same for the gates. The gates were a million dollars a gate. A portal.

Bruce Laverty
[00:15:40]

Really?

Hyman Myers
[00:15:42]

That was a lot.

Bruce Laverty
[00:15:42]

They didn't mention that yet.

Hyman Myers

But the gates were bid this time and they were less than a million.

[00:15:47]

Bruce Laverty
[00:15:58]

Who's the manufacturer?

Hyman Myers
[00:16:00]

Of the gates? Boy, I can't remember. In Alexander City [Alabama] they are located.

Bruce Laverty
[00:16:11]

So they're American.

Hyman Myers
[00:16:12]

American. American, yes. Oh, I can't think of their name [Robinson Iron]. But that project is coming along now. We found the original drawing for the gates and we are supposedly doing close to that, the original drawing that MacArthur had, and that should be quite good.

Bruce Laverty
[00:16:43]

Let's see. In your work on City Hall, I'm sure that you remember that many, many years ago in the courtyard there was a brass compass that was inlaid into the pavement that showed the geographical center of Philadelphia. And sometime, I think in the 1970s, that disappeared. Any clue as to what happened to that? I walked through the courtyard yesterday morning and I see that they're actually painting it onto the pavement, in somewhat larger size. But any clue as to what happened to the original? Or was that not in your contract? It's just a curiosity for me.

Hyman Myers
[00:17:32]

It wasn't in our contract, but there were leaks in the courtyard from the surface to the subway below. And in order to repair that, I think that that was removed and not put back because they thought, well, we'll wait for the restoration.

Bruce Laverty
[00:17:51]

And they couldn't find it.

Hyman Myers
[00:17:52]

Yeah, it's true.

Bruce Laverty
[00:17:54]

Which has happened in other cases. So, moving outside of Philadelphia, obviously your firm was involved in some fairly major projects out of the city as well. And did you want to talk about any of those in particular that you're proud of?

Hyman Myers
[00:18:15]

The biggest was the work on the National Gallery of Art, which was done in pieces. We worked for 25 years on that project and they liked our work and they continued to use us. And we were hired for the first job. There are four projects involved in that.

Bruce Laverty
[00:18:46]

So did you work initially on the Pope building, the John Russell Pope building?

Hyman Myers
[00:18:50]

Yes, we started with the Pope building and we ended with a Pope building and I.M. Pei's building. And interestingly enough, the work on the Pope building was small and the completion of that work was very reasonable. The work on that building started, the Pope building, minor work, but significant. The first project was the renovation of a gymnasium into galleries.

Bruce Laverty
[00:19:44]

There was a gymnasium?

Hyman Myers
[00:19:45]

The reason that there was a gymnasium in the building was the fact that during the war, the guards were educated in the building and they used the gymnasium. The gymnasium was a basketball court. And it was the last part of the building that was not done. It was to be done, but it wasn't. And we were charged with that project. And the nineteenth-century galleries, which is the name of the project, was the first project that we did. There was in this gymnasium a three-story building that was built inside the building, and it was used for the designs and...oh, I can't remember...

Bruce Laverty
[00:20:58]

Engineering?

Hyman Myers
[00:21:00]

No. The design offices for the gallery. The design department would be the people who selected the objects to be shown and designed the layout for them. And this was the first project that we did. And the second project was the revision to the Renaissance galleries, and there were six galleries that were included and we just renovated the six galleries.

Then there was the Oculus, which was a major intrusion into the galleries. This was a floor on the main floor in which we cut a hole and put a railing in so you could look over and down into the space below. That was an interesting project because we had to build a model about as big as this table. And we took photographs of the model and we showed that this was the... The best idea. And we did four schemes for that. And it would have slide-in platforms in which you could see the differences. We did a triangle and a circle and a square. Something else in which platforms would move out and in and Linda Brenner did the model for us.

Bruce Laverty
[00:22:54]

A local model maker.

Hyman Myers
[00:22:57]

There was a beautiful model, just beautiful, we had it taken down to the [National] Gallery and they had a big showing of it and the trustees had a

vote on should it be done or not and they voted for it. Although the staff, the people in charge of the project were against it. That didn't count.

Bruce Lavery
[00:23:33]

Lucky for you! Right. Well, that's what the trustees are hired for.

Hyman Myers
[00:23:35]

For us. Yeah, so that was really good. But then it was decided to clean the building. Hadn't been cleaned ever. And we did a project, we showed a sample of it, a whole wall, and it was decided to go ahead and clean the building. They also decided to do every single gallery in the building to restore and renovate every single galley. That was an enormous task. There are hundreds of galleries. And the reason that they decided to do that was it was almost 50 years old, but the fact is that they wanted to replace the skylights. And each skylight over a gallery, they would have to close the gallery anyway. This is the time it was done. They said, well, we'll close this gallery when we do this skylight and that gallery and for that skylight. And all of a sudden you got the whole building to be done.

Bruce Lavery
[00:24:59]

So, did VITETTA have a Washington office?

Hyman Myers
[00:25:03]

No.

Bruce Lavery
[00:25:03]

So the work was done from Philadelphia?

Hyman Myers
[00:25:05]

Yeah, the work was done from Philadelphia, but we did start a Washington office in the middle of this work when it proved to be a reasonable thing to do. And we got work in Washington as well.

Bruce Lavery
[00:25:27]

Talk a little bit about the East Gallery, the Pei building.

Hyman Myers
[00:25:35]

Well, that proved to be a real problem. We did some work on the building in a minor way, there were some cracks and what-have-you, but the major problem with that building was the East Building had no emergency exit.

Bruce Lavery
[00:26:00]

How was that possible?

Hyman Myers
[00:26:01]

Yeah, how was that possible?! And no emergency stairs from the upper floors. It just never got done and our job was to find emergency exits from that building and we did the project and we found that we could install, with some difficulties, but install, put in stairways, emergency stairways and exit from the building. The project was a difficult one and we had to add

stairways to the building without changing the feeling of the primary building. It's interesting that it hasn't been done yet either because they had other priorities.

We looked at the exterior of the building first and we found that the exterior stonework was getting to be a major problem. The exterior stonework was attached to the building in a certain way. And that allowed the building to--it was found that the original connections were failing. And so the building facade, stonework, had to come off. And we said the whole thing would have to come off. And it was difficult because both the new building, the East building, and the original Pope building were put on so that the original stones were graded from top to bottom. So if you look, there's a subtle change in the color of the stones. They even had a special man on the original Pope building who was only in charge of colored stones. So they would match. And the original building, that was a key. The original building, and when Pei found out that was true of the original building he wanted the same on the new building, the East building. So he had colorists, a special person, select the stones for the facades of that building. But the method of attachment was not the same. All the stones on the East building were changed because they had to all come off. But on the West building, none had to come off. That was a perfect building.

Bruce Laverty
[00:29:27]

So were the stones replaced or did the same stones go back with new attachments?

Hyman Myers
[00:29:36]

They went back with new attachments, except for a few which were in very bad condition. But then that made it difficult because they had to do it carefully and color matched. So that was a difficult thing.

Bruce Laverty
[00:29:50]

One of the questions that I always have, particularly when there's restoration of a modern building, such as the East Gallery, is does the restoration firm work closely or at all with the original architectural office? So were you consulting with I.M. Pei and his office or working primarily from his drawings and the things that are in the archives at the National Gallery?

Hyman Myers
[00:30:24]

It was working with Pei, who was still alive, and it was difficult, but that work with Pei is something I asked for. But it was turned down. He wasn't to be consulted. That was interesting. I'm still not sure why. But the fact was that there was no consulting with the firm. We just used the documents.

Bruce Laverty
[00:30:59]

Have you or VITETTA ever been in a situation where there were other architects that were either restoring or altering a building that you had originally designed or worked on and then you were consulted for that? So on the other shoe or the shoe on the foot so to speak?

Hyman Myers
[00:31:22]

Never. They never consulted us. Although it would seem like a logical thing. Never. Yeah, I often think about it myself. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts is one of the more notable jobs that's being done now, right now, and never consulted with us.

Bruce Laverty
[00:31:50]

I think that's very telling. On a lot of difficult levels and I imagine we can find justifications, but it is telling. I often think that if you could have asked Frank Furness what he had in mind when you were restoring this building, how much easier it would have been.

I'm not sure if you were still on the Historical Commission Designation Committee, but when they designated the United Fund Building on the Parkway, which was a Mitchell-Giurgola project, at the designation meeting, John Lawson, who had worked at MGA, came and testified about the design process. And I found that incredibly refreshing to be able to talk to the creator at the same time you're identifying an historic structure.

Hyman Myers
[00:32:43]

Exactly. And it would have been wonderful if we had Furness around, even if Furness was old. He must have some memory of the building. And yet it wasn't done. And isn't being done now. Incredible.

Bruce Laverty
[00:33:04]

Are there other buildings outside of the city that you are particularly proud of?

Hyman Myers
[00:33:11]

In Washington, we restored the station, the only Amtrak station besides the main one outside of the building. That was the station in Alexandria, Virginia, where our office was located. We did a very nice restoration of that station. It was falling apart and the job was to restore the station and make the station work. That was a very interesting project. It was adjacent to the metro which goes out to Alexandria and then you could go to the Alexandria railroad station, the original, and take a train from there. And we restored that building and it was both interior and exterior restoration and it really became a great site.

Bruce Laverty
[00:34:25]

Isn't that at the foot of the hill, that's got the Masonic temple on the top? And a very imposing sight.

Hyman Myers
[00:34:33]

Yeah, it's a very imposing sight.

Bruce Laverty
[00:34:36]

So, well let's shift gears a little bit and I'd like to talk to you about your collecting. You have a magnificent collection of historical materials, primarily books, but certainly not exclusively books. And I just wanted you to talk a little bit about how you got the collecting bug, how you started with that, how you continued with that and what really got and gets your juices flowing.

Hyman Myers [00:35:16]	That's interesting, the collecting bug is something I don't know where it comes from. It's a strange thing.
Bruce Laverty [00:35:26]	Were your parents collectors at all?
Hyman Myers [00:35:28]	No. The fact is that my house is filled with books and drawings and other collections all relating to architecture. Even my wife got the collecting bug for horticulture. It's interesting.
Bruce Laverty [00:35:50]	And she [Sandra Myers] had been one of the librarians at the Horticultural Society.
Hyman Myers [00:35:55]	Yeah, but also at the Academy. She [worked at] the Fine Arts Library. In fact, we met there at the Fine Arts Library.
Bruce Laverty [00:36:11]	In the stacks?
Hyman Myers [00:36:15]	And that was an interesting story. But anyway, it's difficult to define why we do these things. But the collection was all-encompassing to me.
Bruce Laverty [00:36:32]	Do you remember the first thing you bought?
Hyman Myers [00:36:34]	Oh yes. I was in Europe. And there was this little rare book, that big, on fortifications, and that was the first book I bought.
Bruce Laverty [00:36:50]	Was it from a dealer or other?
Hyman Myers [00:36:54]	A dealer. I went into a shop and happened to see it, and I thought, my goodness, this is really interesting, maybe I should buy it. And I thought all right, I'll buy it! That was the very first architectural book I bought. Not counting textbooks.
Bruce Laverty [00:37:14]	Right. So, do you still have it?
Hyman Myers [00:37:16]	Oh, yes. I tended to collect books, but I never sold any.
Bruce Laverty [00:37:26]	And your house shows it!
Hyman Myers [00:37:27]	Yes, my house does show it, but The Athenaeum will be the beneficiary.

Bruce Laverty
[00:37:35]

And already has been.

Hyman Myers
[00:37:38]

The collecting began around 1970 and continued even today and it went into other areas, which is interesting. But anyway. I tended to use these books for my work. We were doing an 1854 building. I bring an 1854 house pattern book in.

Bruce Laverty
[00:38:10]

And I mentioned in the early '70s Victorian pattern books were a lot cheaper than they are today.

Hyman Myers
[00:38:14]

Oh, yes, they are today. That's amazing. There was a difference in that point. Collecting today is very different. There are no bookshops. Very few. But every time I went out of town on a project, I would always go to a bookshop.

Bruce Laverty
[00:38:42]

In the Philadelphia area, or even beyond, were there certain book shops or dealers that you worked with closely and that you had a relationship with where you could say, "If ever you see anything on X, get it for me and let me know." And if so, could you give me an example?

Hyman Myers
[00:39:02]

The first book I bought in Philadelphia was King's Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians. This was a book, which was not in great condition, it wasn't pristine, but it was a book that really interested me and I bought that from Clarence Wolfe's father's shop.

Bruce Laverty
[00:39:29]

At the MacManus? Over on Irving Street?

Hyman Myers
[00:39:30]

And he said, "Oh, I have a book you would like. I'm sure you'll like it. Come see it. So I came over there, I used to go regularly to that bookshop, and there he showed me Kings' Notable. Not a great copy, but a copy that was good enough for me. I wanted to just look at it, compare the pictures, and look for Furness buildings.

Bruce Laverty
[00:39:58]

So the fact that it's so rare to have a clean copy of that is a testimony to the popularity of the book. I've heard librarians talk about the McGuffey Reader, which was the most popular grade school primer in the 19th century, and it's almost impossible to find a clean copy because every copy was used and worn out. And Moses King is a great example of that. Everybody, you know, all the copies were being used extensively and were battered to pieces.

Hyman Myers
[00:40:35]

I did find later on three copies that were in pristine condition, but it was unusual. And I got those out of town.

Bruce Laverty

Oh, because they wouldn't have been interested in Philadelphia.

[00:40:48]

Hyman Myers
[00:40:53]

That's right. But that was another early look in architecture. I think that my collecting really came from the study of Frank Furness. I began studying that, oh, when I was in school in the '60s, because I was interested in Frank Furness. That continued and I started to buy Frank Furness things and I guess that's what it was. That's the beginning.

Bruce Laverty
[00:41:28]

Now there's a story that I've heard, and you've repeated it a lot, but I'd like to get it recorded concerning a sale at Freeman's of Will Price material.

Hyman Myers
[00:41:40]

Oh that's an interesting story. This was in the '60s and I was going to Freeman's regularly. My office was around the corner and I thought I'd go there and look and I went into the basement and there was Will Price's collection. It was in storage for a long time. Finally, no one paid these storage fees, and the company decided to sell the material. The work of going through these boxes of material was daunting to me, and so they put it in the basement for sale. And I went there and the day of the sale I started to bid because I was told that the work wouldn't sell for much. A few [dollars], maybe two dollars a box. It was sold by the box and the first bidding went and started and it was 25 cents. And I thought, "All right, I'll bid 25 cents." And then somebody bid 50 cents. And then I said, "75 cents." You know, are you really going to get this cheap? "A dollar." It went for a dollar, and then \$1.25. You're like, "Oh my god, somebody is crazy. Why would they want this?" And it went for \$2. And I didn't get it. That's like, wow, why are they doing that?

So the next lot I went "25 cents" and somebody said, "50 cents!" and I thought, "75 cents!" and it went for \$1.50. I didn't get it. The third time, I thought, I would go see who was bidding. So it started at 25 cents, 50 cents, 75 cents, and I went over and I said to the man who was bidding, "Why are you bidding on this material?" I said, "Nobody knows this architect." He says, "Oh, I know this architect. I'm studying this architect." And it happened to be George Thomas. And George Thomas and I met on the auction floor and I said, "Oh well, you saved me a great deal of trouble. I will let you have all the [stuff]. I'll get out of the bid." So we got--and I didn't have to store the stuff anymore, and I'm sure my wife was too elated. But it went to George Thomas, and he got all this material from Will Price. What he didn't know was there was more material, and the next week there was material. And I looked for him, and didn't see him, so I bought that. No competition.

Bruce Laverty
[00:45:18]

So, and of course, you and George would collaborate later on.

- Hyman Myers
[00:45:22] Oh yeah, in the Furness material. On a lot of things. But our beginning was in the auction house at Freeman's.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:45:31] And of course it helped that so few people were interested in the nineteenth century in terms of architecture.
- Hyman Myers
[00:45:38] That's true, that's true. There were very few people who would be buying, let alone interested in, the nineteenth century, but that was to our advantage.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:45:59] The collecting bug, I'll just ask you to comment briefly about its effect on your marriage because there have been others who have mentioned that.
- Hyman Myers
[00:46:16] That's interesting. It worked out very well for us. We would go together and we would go to the shops and I would be buying architectural things, interested in architecture. Then it worked out, I was interested in furniture. And my wife was absolutely terrific. She liked things that I liked. And she was interested in the horticultural aspect, and we really stayed very close together on that.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:46:51] So, a great match then, because that has been a divider in a lot of relationships.
- Hyman Myers
[00:46:58] Absolutely, great! It worked out perfectly, yes.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:47:03] There's one story that I will share. You may have known Ben Lightfoot, the grandson of the 19th-century architect. He had a cache of close to 200 original drawings from the grandfather, those beautiful pen and ink sketches. And he lived out in Bala Cynwyd and was quite aged and suffering from emphysema. And he wanted to catalog them all himself before he transferred them to us. And every time he would go into the hospital, Mrs. Linfoot would say, who would call me up and say, "Come out and get another batch, he's not here." And then he'd call me and he'd say, "Did my wife give you permission?" And I'd say, "Well, as a matter of fact, yes." And this went on four or five times. And then ultimately, we got pretty much the entire collection from him. But obviously, it was a source of irritation between a lot of couples. And so you are the exception, you and Sandra, the exception to the rule.
- Hyman Myers
[00:48:14] She was very good about that and she questioned my spending money on some of the things sometimes but very rarely and she said, "No more furniture, finally." I retired in 2009. And I stopped. I didn't buy any architecture. I didn't buy any furniture. I thought, "What the hell am I going to do with all this stuff?" So that's when it stopped. But just this year, I bought furniture. And I bought an architectural book. And it looks

like I'm beginning again. I can't believe it. But if that happens we have to stop sometimes and the fact is that we have started deaccessioning.

Bruce Laverty
[00:49:21]

You have been very generous to The Athenaeum, and I trust you will continue to be, in terms of donations of books, architectural drawings, photographs, documentation of the work that you and the VITETTA group have done over the years, the historic structures reports, all of which are tremendous assets for the research community and will be for long time to come. Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with The Athenaeum, how you first encountered The Athenaeum and then how that solidified?

Hyman Myers
[00:50:08]

Well, the fact is that The Athenaeum has been a resource for me, because every time a project came up that I thought would be interesting, I would see if The Athenaeum had anything. And of course it did. Even work that I had for the office. On the Philadelphia City Hall. I have a number of very beautiful items on the City Hall, and I had great collections, but I always would call you and say, "Do you have anything on, let's say, City Hall?" And you did, and that was very helpful to me. So I thought that the collections I had on City Hall should go to The Athenaeum. And it was that relationship which brought me to the Athenaeum.

Bruce Laverty
[00:51:11]

And when did you come on the Board of the Athenaeum? I suppose I could look it up, but you've been on the Board for many, many years here.

Hyman Myers
[00:51:20]

Yes, and my use of the building, my use of the facilities, were certainly very good for a board member because they were very specific to the use of collections. And I understood what we would need, and what people would need and how they would be met. That was very good, for being a board member, so I decided to join the board.

Bruce Laverty
[00:51:51]

And you've also served on the Superintendence Committee.

Hyman Myers
[00:51:55]

Oh, that was very helpful.

Bruce Laverty
[00:51:56]

And I don't know whether you want to talk a little bit about that or...

Hyman Myers
[00:52:00]

Well, in the Superintendence Committee, I began to really work on that once The Athenaeum had an accident on their front steps. Yes, they had an automobile accident in which the front of the building, the main façade, was harmed by a traffic accident [gasoline spill]. So I worked on that. I guess for a summer. The director had just gone away for vacation and I was asked to step in and help on that and I did and throughout the summer they mitigated the damage and so it was finished in the fall and the

director came back. The director was then Roger Moss. And I worked on that till it was complete and it was satisfactory. And it really was the beginning of my work on the building. And this was again a major 19th-century building and this was, fit right in.

Bruce Laverty
[00:53:26]

That was such a, Mrs. G and Eileen and I were just reviewing some of the archival files about the building and that there's a thick file on that accident and in terms of cascading issues from one stupid action, a criminal action where someone stole a motorcycle and the motorcycle dispensed its gasoline all over our building, but how much terrible, how much more terrible it might have been since the gasoline seeped into the ground and set off the fire alarm system, the sprinklers didn't dump, thank goodness, but then the incredible complexity of having to deal with that mitigation and then even before we could repair the building. So, you know, just on a personal note, it was very reassuring for the staff to have an expert such as yourself on the Board and on the Superintendence Committee to make sure that things got done in a proper way. So it was a very complex issue.

Hyman Myers
[00:54:40]

But the fact is that that was the beginning of my involvement here. And then when Roger left and the new director came, Sandra, this was the time when we did an inventory of the building, and we found things had to be done, and I was ready to do them.

Bruce Laverty
[00:55:04]

And so from working from a building as large and as complicated as City Hall to one as small and as complicated [as The Athenaeum]--even small buildings have their challenges as I'm sure you know. Well, this has been pretty good. I'll finish up the interview with the questions that you always ask, the subjects. First, what is your favorite building or architect? And, well, I'll ask you that question first before I have a follow-up.

Hyman Myers
[00:55:46]

Well, it really is Frank Furness. I studied him as an architect, from an historical perspective, before I was professionally involved with him, and Frank Furness is certainly the most interesting architect. One could say, architects of his period. But really, if you had to pick one, it would be Frank Furness. It might be Mr. Hale, but I think Frank Furness would win out.

Bruce Laverty
[00:56:24]

We're still looking for that cache of Hale drawings, so perhaps someday we'll look for them.

Hyman Myers
[00:56:30]

I am looking too.

Bruce Laverty
[00:56:31]

Yes, yes. And I know you'll let us know when you find them.

- Hyman Myers
[00:56:35] I will. But Frank Furness was really the key. Now, there was no cache of Frank Furness drawings anywhere. They were found individually. But it's been wonderful seeking and finding those drawings.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:56:57] And I'm sure you'll agree that one of the things that I see, even after 30 years in this business at this institution, just when you're jaded enough to think, "Oh well, all of the historic things that have survived, we know where they are, they've come in." Then the phone rings, and you find out that it's not over, and that's one of the great things about getting up in the morning is that there's always new, old stuff out there.
- Hyman Myers
[00:57:29] And places where you think that there are not going to be anything, it just comes out of the woodwork.
- So, my favorite building?
- Bruce Laverty
[00:57:40] Your favorite building, yes.
- Hyman Myers
[00:57:41] It's Frank Furness' Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. City Hall comes a very close second, but it really is Frank Furness again.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:57:56] Well, in terms of innovation, City Hall was a very large derivative building based on the Second Empire, but the Academy of Fine Arts just sort of blew things out of the water.
- Hyman Myers
[00:58:13] Yeah, I was very lucky to get that commission, but I think it was because I had so much knowledge of Frank Furness in the original concept. But I've done a lot of Frank Furness buildings. Baldwin School, I worked on. The railroad station at Gravers Lane. And these were significant buildings.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:58:45] So, what would you say your proudest accomplishment is in terms of your career? If you had a one word, or a one line...
- Hyman Myers
[00:58:58] Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, you would say that. But I've really gone and done a lot of work at the State Capitol.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:59:07] Oh, yes, and we haven't even mentioned that. That was a somewhat complex project.
- Hyman Myers
[00:59:13] That was 28 years! So that was a good project.
- Bruce Laverty
[00:59:19] And you didn't go to jail. No. Unlike one of your predecessors. Yeah. Do you want to talk about that in office? I know that you have a somewhat different take than the common take on the Huston issue [Joseph Miller

Huston was the architect of the Pennsylvania State Capitol and was convicted of graft in 1910].

Hyman Myers
[00:59:36]

I'll just mention that that issue of going to jail came up and we decided to review it. And we got the information and we knew about the jail portion and we decided that we would test with the lawyer for the Capitol and see if really he was guilty and how it would be looked upon today.

Bruce Laverty
[01:00:09]

And so what did you test?

Hyman Myers
[01:00:12]

We looked at all the facts and we laid them out and we tested the case with this lawyer. And he said that all of it was absolutely circumstantial and there wasn't any proof of his guilt, and he said he would be acquitted today.

Bruce Laverty
[01:00:38]

Well, some of the other people in political office today who stand accused might take hope in that.

Hyman Myers
[01:00:47]

Well, that was interesting. I was surprised at the outcome, but that's what he decided.

Bruce Laverty
[01:00:54]

Do you think there is a particular motivation in the...

Hyman Myers
[01:00:58]

I don't know. I don't know. But I felt that it was not fair, the trial. I may be prejudiced, but it really turned out to be a great building.

Bruce Laverty
[01:01:21]

Absolutely magnificent building, yes.

Hyman Myers
[01:01:23]

And the fact is that he was found guilty, circumstantial or not.

Bruce Laverty
[01:01:33]

Well, is there anything else you want to add? Well, I hate to end on a sour note about people going to jail.

Hyman Myers
[01:01:43]

And the other project that was very interesting was the building adjacent to the Capitol, what's now known as the Ryan Building. That was totally restored and renovated, and that was a major project too. The relationship of capitols... The California State Capitol was a project which I was involved in and it never got built. We were doing a security system for the Capitol grounds. That was an interesting project by itself because I studied that project and found that there was originally a wall around a portion of the building, which I followed up and found it was torn down and given away to different locations. I found one location which was still using the stone. So I went over to that location and I found that the stones were there. And I measured them and looked at them and I thought, boy, it

would be nice to have those back. And the project got stopped for some reason. Shortly thereafter, the project started again, and a truck decided to, the driver decided to run that truck up the Capitol front, the main stair, and start a fire, a big truck up the Capitol steps right to the front, and of course our project would have stopped it. But it never got built. It's interesting. It caused significant damage to the building, but didn't destroy it. And our project would have stopped that truck way in the back, way before it hit the building.

Bruce Laverty
[01:04:09]

So the unbuilt is significant as well.

Hyman Myers
[01:04:12]

That's right. And we did other projects. We did the Dulles Airport. I was a historian and a historic architect on that. And that was an amazing thing.

Bruce Laverty
[01:04:27]

And again, an icon of the Modern movement, and you're treating it historically as you should.

Hyman Myers
[01:04:37]

And that was an interesting thing in that we decided that they wanted to expand that building and they didn't know how to do that and we did the historical study and I found when I found the drawings for that that it was supposed to be twice as big. The swooping design for the original building was supposed to be twice as long. This would be terrific. It was a real find. The drawings were really difficult to find, but they were found and, lo and behold, the building was doubled. They didn't expect this at all, that's the way it worked out and I was able to show that this was the way that it was supposed to be.

Bruce Laverty
[01:05:54]

So you completed Saarinen's design? There's got to be some real pride in that!

Hyman Myers
[01:06:01]

Oh, yeah. This is a significant element. But the architect was Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, Washington office. But that I felt was a major factor. I remember going to the opening and seeing these rods. That big [gesture], reinforcing rods for that swooping pile. And that was amazing. They gave them out as gifts. Memorabilia for the building. That was interesting.

The other things we worked on were Rough Point, the home of Doris Duke, and it was a restoration of that building, but not the entire building. That was the restoration of the rear wing and the creation of a museum in that rear wing. And so we designed this restoration and renovation of that building and galleries. The galleries were dedicated, when he died, to Carter Brown, the member of the National Gallery, the director. And I didn't even know that he was on the board. But he recommended us for this job, and I later found out that he did and that these galleries were to be memorialized for him in the Doris Duke House. That was interesting. That was a

long-term job, which led to us being hired for the Duke mansion [Duke Farms], which is in New Jersey.

Bruce Laverty
[01:08:21]

Somerville?

Bruce Laverty
[01:08:23]

Somerville. Yes, and that was a difficult job. The Duke Farms. It was a beautiful estate, a big, big estate surrounded by a cyclopean stone wall. And I had gone by this cyclopean stone wall not knowing what's behind it for a long time. But then I got the job and I said, "Oh my god, that's what it is." This had greenhouses and major buildings, a barn, a farm barn.

Bruce Laverty
[01:09:05]

Was that a Trumbauer?

Hyman Myers
[01:09:08]

Horace Trumbauer. Yeah, he, Duke-- what was his first name?

Bruce Laverty
[01:09:21]

JB. I don't know.

Hyman Myers
[01:09:23]

James B. Duke.

Bruce Laverty
[01:09:24]

I knew it was J.B.

Hyman Myers
[01:09:27]

J.B. Duke. He bought this place and had a plan for the building of a mansion. And the whole foundation is there. And he put up the steel for it and then World War I broke out. And so he stopped the work. And he gave the steel for the war effort, so they took down the steel for this gigantic mansion. And that's what was there.

We had to come up with a reason to keep the building and make it really a point of interest. And Doris Duke, the daughter, Doris Duke's main interest was sustainability. So we looked at all the buildings, and she had the flowers and the garden pavilions and what have you, the greenhouses that were major, and that was something that was interesting. So, we decided that our project should be the restoration of the houses and gardens and farm buildings that were there with a sustainable idea involved. That would be the reason to maintain this building. And so we came up with a sustainable idea and sold it to the board and the board agreed to go ahead with it. The fact that that sustainable idea was really key and so we did it to begin with. We did the farm building, which was a major dairy barn, and that was restored and renovated to offices. And a center for sustainability. It proved so successful that we anticipated five years it would be a half a million visitors. It is already, in only two years, it's been so successful that

there's a million visitors and growing. So that project, we're still there. Five years later we're still doing the second one, the Coach Barn.

Bruce Laverty
[01:12:48]

So there may be another 25 years for someone.

Hyman Myers
[01:12:54]

And Nan's working on that. So it just goes on and on. While we were in Washington, we did Glen Echo Park. That was a good building. Glen Echo Park was an amusement park. And that had to be restored. The buildings were really falling down. And that was a major project. It had several buildings. The ballroom was one of the biggest buildings. And it was a ballroom. And that's what it still is.⁷ We also worked at the Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport. That was a giant project but again it was done in pieces that were significant pieces but it's what they could afford to do and that lasted 15 years.

Bruce Laverty
[01:14:04]

And that was originally the Newport Casino? McKim, Mead & White?

Hyman Myers
[01:14:10]

That was the first building McKim, Mead & White did. And the most significant feature that we added was an elevator. And the question is, how would you put an elevator in that building without really hurting it? And we came up with an idea and it worked out well. But that took years, years and years, 20 years. And that was done. And Rockwood is another project we did which was done again in pieces and that was significant. And we even did work in Wilmington on Winterthur.

Bruce Laverty
[01:15:00]

Oh really? Yeah. I didn't realize you had done anything for Winterthur.

Hyman Myers
[01:15:04]

That was interesting because we started with the newest building. The one that DuPont lived in and was living in when we decided to take on that job. And we studied that building first. And that building has since been renovated and houses the gift shop. That was a major, major work. It was, we had an incredible lot of things that we did. We started on that project at the DuPont Hotel in the Green Room. And they had no idea why that was called the Green Room. But we did a study of that and the Green Room was green, the ceiling was green. And they restored that and we found all kinds interesting things on that.

The Trenton War Memorial was another building. It was designed originally by another architect and it was way over budget and our job was to restore that building, do the same things that were to be done originally, but scale down the price. And we did. That was another project that was very successful. It was an amazing amount of work. We worked on Ryerrs

⁷ Michael Holleman worked on Glen Echo Park, as well as the master plan for Duke Farms.

Mansion. That was a major work. On Penn Station, the one in Baltimore. And then Greenbelt was another project we worked on, the Greenbelt School in Greenbelt, Maryland. That was interesting because that was modern. Done in the '30s. And that was a significant project. And there were other projects that we did, mostly long term, like the Capitol. That was a long-term project, 28 years. So we did a lot of work for the same owners and completed the work over a period of time.

Bruce Laverty
[01:17:46]

Well, it's a testimony to your talent that they would keep coming back and that you and the firm were not one in, one out, taking money and running.

Hyman Myers
[01:18:00]

Yes, I think it was because they were pleased with the previous projects, they thought, "Why change horses?" We continued for years.

Bruce Laverty
[01:18:14]

And since one of the basic principles of preservation is a long-term commitment, you don't preserve a building once and forever, it's something that has to go on. And very few places can get an entire project done in one campaign.

Hyman Myers
[01:18:38]

And that's really what happened with our clients. We worked with them over long periods. And sometimes that long period was long enough to do it again, but they didn't do it with us again. Times have changed.

Hyman Myers
[01:19:02]

Well, thank you very much. This has been terrific.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY & RELATED ATHENAEUM HOLDINGS

Relevant holdings at The Athenaeum

- Hyman Myers Collection (B),
https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/co_display.cfm/872014
- Hyman Myers Scrapbook of Projects, **Local Call:** 191-V-001,
https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ho_display.cfm/1128062
- Vitetta Collection, Identifier: LAC-238-x

Relevant holdings at other institutions

National Gallery of Art

- Myers, Hyman - interview by Anne G. Ritchie, 11 June 2009
- https://archives.nga.gov/repositories/2/archival_objects/32505

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- Myers, Hyman, "The ethics of preservation--a personal view." April 7, 1986. College of Architecture and Planning Guest Lecture Series Collection, Ball State University Libraries.
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