

**Susan Brown**

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Aubrey Geisler

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

**Transcript – Susan Brown**

**Interviewee:** Susan Brown

**Interviewer:** Gus Nolan

**Interview Date:** December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010

**Location:** Marist College Archives and Special Collections

**Topic:** Marist College History

**Subject Headings:** Brown, Susan  
Marist College – History  
Marist College (Poughkeepsie, NY)  
Marist College – Faculty  
Marist College – Social Aspects

Summary: In Part 2 of 2, Susan Brown discusses historic preservation of buildings at Marist College. She describes the process involved in nominating and applying to be on the State and National Register of Historical Places Listing. She describes the architectural style and histories of the three stone buildings on campus, once part of the Rosenlund Estate: the Greystone Building, Saint Peter's and the Kieran Gatehouse. She describes Edward Bech's life history in tandem with the history of the buildings as well.

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

[00:10](#) **Gus Nolan:** Today is December 09<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and we're interviewing Susan Brown in the library. This is the second interview with her, and today we're going to focus on historic preservation of buildings here on the Marist campus. So. good afternoon. Susan.

[00:28](#) **Susan Brown:** Good afternoon, Gus.

[00:30](#) **GN:** Sue, can you please kind of give a short synopsis may be of the significance of the historic preservation. Why would an institution want to have this?

[00:40](#) **GN:** Well, the designation that we have for our three stone buildings is listed on both the State and the National Register of Historic Places. That listing recognizes structures as well as entire districts that may have multiple structures within it for its architectural and historical significance. So first and foremost, it's really a public recognition of the significance of the buildings. Also, in the case of the State and National Register of Historic Places listing, it brings some benefits. The primary one being that the owner of the structure is eligible for grant monies for historic preservation projects. It's something I don't believe the college has ever applied for, but it is something that is available to us. And in fact, many organizations or owners of properties seek the designation so that they can be eligible for that funding.

[01:48](#) **GN:** When you say state and federal, is that one designation or is there a separate?

[01:55](#) **SB:** It's actually two. The process that we went through was to initially apply to be listed on the State Register of Historic Places. That process is handled by the New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation through their historic preservation office. And once we achieve the approval of the state, the state then becomes, in effect, our advocate and nominates our project to the federal level. And at the federal level, it's the Department of Interior that reviews and approves listings. So one almost always sees the coupling of state and national registers. But it is two separate listings with very similar criteria. And the process is really just the two steps that you do a lot of work and have a lot of requirements to fulfill to achieve the state level. But once you do achieve that, it really usually is fairly smooth sailing to achieve the national listing.

[03:02](#) **GN:** What were you say would be the sizes of this operation on the federal? Does every state then have such an interest to declare some buildings? And they have to apply to the federal. And is the federal divided into fifty organizations?

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

[03:18](#) **SB:** No, there's one single office within the Department of Interior. The US Department of Interior handles the request. I believe that every state has some type of state historic preservation office, whether it's coupled with Parks and Recreation, as ours is here in New York State or whether it's a standalone office. But I believe every state in the union does function similarly to New York, where there is a state office with a state review process for a state-level designation.

[03:49](#) **GN:** Will you suspect could be thousands of them in New York?

[03:53](#) **SB:** There are. You can go online and look at all of the properties. You can call up by a keyword name or by a locality. All of the properties that are on the State and National Register of Historic Places. And there are hundreds. I work with some other communities and, for instance, the city of Beacon. Their main street is actually anchored by two former villages; Fishkill Landing down near the water and Matteawan further inland up by the Fishkill Creek. And in each of the ends of Main Street are entire historic districts. So and there are multiple properties; the same thing with the village of Fishkill, the old Dutch church is on the register. But then there are probably thirty buildings within a core area that are on the common national register.

[04:50](#) **GN:** Once that is achieved, then, as you said, this is possible to see to requests grants for.

[04:56](#) **SB:** There are grant monies. In part of, it is really just a beginning for a community to apply for something like this. It's really a sense of pride and keeping the community in touch with its past understanding, the historical significance of what has gone on, and the structures, as we will see as we talk about the three buildings here at Marist. The buildings that are listed bring just a wealth of historical context to a community and, in our case, to an institution.

[05:34](#) **GN:** Let's begin to focus on. Which of the three would you say is the most significant? Or is that a word that can be used?

[05:41](#) **SB:** I think that it really, in the case of our application, was quite interesting. We started off knowing we had these three stone buildings. And that they really [...] Architects like to use the phrase that buildings talk to each other, the way as what's happening on our campus. Greystone is sort of the archetypal, you know, historic structure. And so the new library, which isn't new anymore but. And, of course, the new Hancock Center. You know those buildings talk to each other in terms of architectural style and building materials. The three stone

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

buildings here at Marist, which were part of an estate called Rosenlund, were viewed when we made our application as being of equal importance. And in fact, the state, without are asking, decided to list these properties as part of the historic district because of the roughly four acres that they sit on at the time we made our application in the 1989-90 timeframe, very little had changed in terms of where the interior of roads; the main entrance, used to come in by the gatehouse and that was the main entrance for the estate, the gardener's cottage and we will talk in detail about these buildings. The big open field beside it was still and still is intact, which is where the gardens were. So a lot of the landscape was pretty much laid out the same as it was when those buildings existed. So the state had suggested that its significance really was how these buildings related to each other. You know not in any one individual. From the standpoint of architectural integrity, and this is a layman speaking, not an architect, the building that has changed the most and has probably the least architectural significance because it was altered very significantly is Greystone. The building that is probably closest to its original, and I am just making this observation again as a layman, is the former gardener's cottage at St Peter's in part because it still [...] has its slate roof. And the roof on the gatehouse, or the gate lodge as it was sometimes called, was replaced, and it is more contemporary asphalt shingles roofing. But those two buildings structurally, you know from the outside, are pretty close to what they appear to be certainly from the architectural drawings in the earliest photos that we have.

[08:33](#) **GN:** For a period of time, there was an addition put on Saint Peter's. It was kind of the office of Nilus, and the work crew work was going on here. Did that hamper the integrity of the building?

[08:49](#) **SB:** The structure that those add-ons had been removed by the time we were documenting the buildings. And of course, because we were applying for them, it was very well understood these buildings no longer were used for their original purposes. And that they had been significantly altered to accommodate a contemporary usage which was a college campus, as opposed to the purposes for which they were built. So I can either talk a little about the buildings, or I can talk about the process and then come back to the buildings.

[09:24](#) **GN:** Well, let's go to the process, and then we'll come back and say how does it actually pertain now. Whose idea was this? Was it the Board, the President, yourself? Who came up with [...]?

[09:35](#) **SB:** As has been my experience over the past twenty-some years, I really believe that it was the President

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

who was seeking ways to both recognize the historic significance of these three stone buildings. As the campus began to grow as the college began to really change, And as the generations were, you know, leaving us who had the memories of the oldest days of the college. There was an interest in trying to research and preserve and protect our past.

[10:20](#) **GN:** It's fitting that we are in the Archives Office doing this now.

[10:22](#) **SB:** Right exactly. There was also a motivation. That was driving perhaps the urgency of doing this sooner rather than later. In 1988, I believe it was the New York State Legislature passed the Bond Act. The Transportation Bond Act of '88. You may recall Governor Cuomo was in office at the time and held a rally right down here on the lawn near St Peter's, right near Route Nine and Waterworks Road Intersections. And a large chunk of that bond was going to fund the widening of Route 9. And, of course, the immediate concern for all of us was. I think it was three lanes, then one in each direction and a turning lane. If we were going from three to five lanes, which side of the road was the taking going to come from. And, of course, the Gatehouse would have been lost had the decision been made to come on the west. And there were other implications. How close to Lowell Thomas Center and Donnelly Hall? The road could have been almost on top of Donnelly, So we thought that [...] While again the state has the power to take a building probably even if it is on the national register, I don't know if that's the case, we thought that it couldn't hurt to have the listing to demonstrate to a state agency, a fellow state agency, not the DOT but Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, how important these buildings were not just for Marist but for the community and for the state and for the nation because as we could eventually we were able to document, they really did hold historical and architectural significance. Who the architect was? Who the owner of the buildings were? And the architectural style, there aren't a lot of examples of what are called Dependencies. The outbuildings, if you will. State dependencies [...] in the Late Gothic Revival Style, which is what the style of these buildings are. The steeply pitched roof. Gables and Dormers. The stone with the brick coining and surrounds around doors and windows. Dormer windows. So they're very typical but also very good to just example of that architectural style that was supporting the estate. They were support buildings for the estate. So we went about the process. We hired a researcher who helped us to research the application. I have a copy here, which is in the archives here in the

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

library. It's a fairly straightforward form where we talk about each of the buildings and what their architectural significance is if there were uses that were particularly important. For instance, I believe, I don't know if it's on the register, but there's a State Historic Marker by Troutbeck, which hosted one of the earliest meetings of what became the NAACP. So the significance could be architecture. It could be historic events that took place. It could be who; "if the proverbial George Washington slept there" rationale. But for us, it was a combination, and it was a very interesting process because first, we had to document the architectural significance, talk about each building as much as we knew about when it was built, about the owner, about the architect, about its uses. And we had to document that for each of the three buildings. When we first drafted the nomination, we did not know who the architect was. And by just an interesting circumstance, a Poughkeepsie businessman who was an amateur genealogist and was doing a lot of work in Adrian's Library Genealogy room was sitting there one day chatting with the gentleman who had come up from New York City to research his family. And he turned out to be Viggo Bech Rambusch, whose great-great (maybe) great uncle [...] was Edward Bech, the owner of the estate here where our campus is today. And so we found out that the architect was, in fact, a fellow Danish immigrant as Bech was. And a friend of Bech's was a very prominent architect named Detlef Lienau. I don't know if you want me to spell that for the sake.

[15:21](#) **GN:** I think we have it on another. The Foy research shows that too.

[15:25](#) **SB:** so Lienau was a very prominent architect in New York after he came over to the States. He was a founding member of the American Institute of Architects, which still exists today. It is a professional organization for architects, and to a great extent finding that out really just pushed us. I think a way to the head of the class in terms of our application. We also learned from this gentleman, the descendant of Bech, that all of that Detlef Lienau's drawings; a collection of eighty-some drawings which included more than a dozen drawings for the buildings. That would become known as the Rosenlund Estate. You know Bech Estate. (The Rosenlund Estate) were donated upon, I think, Detlef Lienau's son's death in the 1930s. The whole collection was donated to Columbia University's Avery Architectural Library, the School of Architecture, so I was able to go down to Avery and make copies of all of the drawings. Beautiful renderings of the three buildings that exist. And the fourth building, which sadly was never built, was a very exquisite, very elaborate main house which

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

was going to carry forth the stone in the brick trim work, which unfortunately never did get built. So we were able to amend our application, add this information about the architect, and hear back. It went back and forth.

At the time, the process was that the State Historic Preservation Commission was a committee that met quarterly to review applications, and so if you didn't make one quarter, you got on the agenda for the next, but we did go through that process and were approved with the recommendation that it'd be a district.

[17:25](#) **GN:** What is the approximate date for the drawing? What did the drawings show for the construction of those buildings?

[17:35](#) **SB:** We have dated it circa 1865. The Bechs bought the property, which we now sit on, in 1863. And at the time, it was known as Hickory Grove Farm. It's about sixty-five acres. Mr. Bech and his wife had been living on Market Street in Poughkeepsie. He'd come up to Poughkeepsie in 1851. And so they bought the farm. There was an existing wood-frame house. That was part of Hickory Grove. And I believe your generation of Marist folks knew it as the Novitiate. It was bought by the Marist Brothers in 1908.

[18:23](#) **GN:** This is all south of what we would call the old Waterworks Road.

[18:25](#) **SB:** Waterworks Road. That's correct.

[18:00](#) **GN:** The other side was another estate.

[00:00](#) **SB:** That was MacPherson, which may you know I have not gone through all the deeds, but I've seen some references. It may be that Bech actually owned more acreage then just south of Waterworks Road but, at some point, sold a portion in the 1860s. He had a financial setback. At one point, he was a principal in the Cunard Steamship Company. Also interestingly, he was the Danish Consul in New York, appointed by the King of Denmark to be the first consul here in the states. And he had some financial setbacks when the Steamship Company went bankrupt. But I believe it's possible that the MacPherson Estate at one time was part of Hickory Grove Farm, but certainly, when Marist Brothers bought the Bech Estate, it had long since only been only one on the southside Waterworks Road.

[00:32](#) **GN:** Alright. The process then kind of leads us to the buildings themselves. And maybe we can start focusing on this.

[19:42](#) **SB:** You know, just as sort of a little bit of background on the three buildings. Bech, as I said, had come



## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

to Poughkeepsie in 1851. He immigrated in 1838, I believe to New York from Denmark. And he was involved in trades, and commissions, and import-export. But he became involved in the Poughkeepsie Iron Company and bought an interest in 1854, and it was that money that he made from two sets of iron works, both Poughkeepsie, which was called Bech's Furnace, and then the Falkill iron works, which you could literally see from the lawn of Rosenlund. It was down where Dutton Lumber is now on what were the old whale docks. There was a whaling industry here in the 1830s and 40s. So he made a fortune, particularly during Civil War. Iron was in great demand. So he did move out of the city of Poughkeepsie. Bought this land in 1863 and hired Detlef Lienau to design the dependencies as well as the main house.

[21:02](#) **GN:** It's interesting even while this is going on, the Civil War is going on.

[21:04](#) **SB:** That's correct. It is always interesting to step back and see what else is happening in the world. In fact, the whole boundary between Denmark and Germany was changing with Bismarck and all of the wars between those countries. Bech was living in Hickory Grove, the old farmhouse that was probably an 1830s vintage building, and started to build these buildings. We think that we are somewhere in the neighborhood of 1865. That they were constructed, so presumably, Lienau did the drawing.

[21:47](#) **GN:** All at the same time, more or less?

[21:50](#) **SB:** I can't say for sure. But clearly, he was in residence. We have atlases that list census information, and he was definitely in residence here in the mid-1860s. And we think that they probably were built pretty much at the same time. We've got three buildings, and they were certainly the gatehouse or gate lodge which was the main entrance, the carriage house up the entrance drive from it, which was interesting. There are some wonderful drawings that are in the archives here in the library. There is a copy of this; I found this up in the New York State Library. There is a copy of a page from the 1875 New York State Architectural Sketchbook, which shows Lienau's design for the carriage house, which was actually labeled coach house and stables. What is now today Greystone was built to house the tower where the staircases are [...] I guess where the coachman lived. There were stables underneath for carriage horses. And the carriages were on the main level like, where the main entry facing the library. And then there was, what they call, a shed. In the picture, which one can view in the library but which I am showing you here without the benefit of the visuals for the taping. There was a

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

second building which was a shed for the farm wagons and for the farm horses. So we had a class system for horses back then. The carriage horses were in Greystone. And the farm horses were in the Shed. As you can see from the architectural style, this building bears very little resemblance to Greystone today. And threw our historic preservation researcher [...] threw her for a loop for a while because she knew from the materials that this building and from the research, this building was constructed pretty contemporaneously with the gatehouse and the gardener's cottage. But it looked totally different. It had the crenelated, sort of neo-Gothic kind of look to it.

[24:29](#) **GN:** It looks more like the main building rather than the carriage house.

[24:32](#) **SB:** Exactly, you know. And so what had happened was, we did find by going back it was a great research exercise. We went back through some of the journals [...] of the weekly meetings that the Brothers had. And they were in French. So Adrian Perrault, a former librarian here who was fluent in French, translated them. And we found that in 1928 there were a lot of references to money being allocated for significant renovations and changes to the structure.

[25:04](#) **GN:** There was a tower there with a cross on it. So it has been changed.

[25:07](#) **SB:** If you look at this, it really looks more [...] Greystone, and the carriage house in the 1860s looked very much like the other two buildings in terms of its architectural style. One of the interesting things is if you look at some of the drawings. If you are standing in front of the library, looking at Greystone. There used to be a big open arched doorway where the carriages could come in, and of course, that's gone, but if you look carefully to the right of the front main door to Greystone, you can see the stone is slightly different. And if you look at the ground level, my architectural terminology is lacking here. Lintels or what's above the window but whatever, with the base of the sill, I guess you can see the concrete sill that would have been below this double barn door that opened. So it really was [...] It was just a magnificent building. The way it was designed, and in some respects, it's unfortunate that it was changed from an architectural standpoint. But on the other hand, functionally, it may mean that the top floor is now the President's office, and we were sometimes fond of reminding him that he was in the hay loft. It's a more functional space certainly than it was originally.

[26:44](#) **GN:** You know the number of carriages it would hold? Outside of one.

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

[26:45](#) **SB:** No, no. It's hard to know unless you know, had family letters or something with how many they might have kept there. So you know that was. That was the carriage house. And then we moved on to the gardener's cottage, which was again designed to be a home for the gardener. But also you know to support the gardens that fed and produce the flowers that went into the home.

[27:18](#) **GN:** This is what we refer to now as Saint Peter's.

[27:20](#) **SB:** That is now known as St Peter's. And the mystery and I will solve this someday. If I can figure out a way to do so, we have never [...]. No one I have talked to has ever been able to determine exactly where the new Bech residence that was designed by Detlef Lienau but never constructed was going to go. We know that the original farmhouse that was standing that they lived in that they made their main residence was. And you correct me, Gus. You probably remember that building it was in the 60s. It was torn down. The 1960's Yeah. Was it sort of up behind the football field...?

[28:01](#) **GN:** It would be. Yes. It would be behind the football field on your way down the McCann Center. There is a knoll there to the right. I thought it was a big building. I lived in the building for two years. And interestingly enough, not only I, but sixty others lived there also. There was a dormitory on the top floor of it. And we had a rather unique fire escape. It was a pole with a fireman pole. Outside the door, outside the window. But the window was like a French window that you opened, and you stepped out and grabbed the pole. And then you slid down two floors. We went through training exercises to be able to do that. Well, our life would have been at stake because there was no way we get down the narrow passages in the building itself. So this fire escape this pole outside. And there was an old brother Henry who was in charge at the time. And he was a rather severe guy, but he would make us laugh with things he did as he slid down. He'd just stop and then blow his nose. And then continue on down to show that there's nothing to this, hang on with one arm. Just go through the process of showing this is nothing at all.

[29:29](#) **SB:** Did you ever have to use it?

[29:30](#) **GN:** Only through the drills. It's never rained, and thank God; we never had a fire. There was an interesting parallel to that. Subsequently, when we moved to the other side of the road, we also lived in a wooden building. And that was rather dangerous that we had a night patrol up all night. Just patrolling to make

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

sure no fire or to be alert if a fire were to break out.

[30:06](#) **SB:** This was St Ann's Hermitage? The old McPherson estate?

[30:08](#) **GN:** With the big wrap-around porch that it had. The towers. Yeah, but we had two or three stories up on the old wooden building with no outside fire escape. That would never be permitted nowadays. We're talking about post-Depression, right. So those are the wooden buildings, back to the real concrete and cement buildings here. You mentioned the garden. Do you know how many people lived in there? Is there?

[30:39](#) **SB:** I think it was the gardener's family, he and his family. I don't know who that was. Again there may be because we discovered the descendant of Bech. There may be family writings or letters. Edward Bech, again we're talking mid-1860s. These buildings are built. They have purchased Hickory Grove. You know the farmhouse, the main house there in 1863. It was in 1873, after several years of declining health, that Bech died. He'd gone, I believe, maybe even the year before to Stuttgart, Germany, I guess. He might have had TB. But he was being treated over there for a variety of illnesses and died in 1873. His widow, who was an American. She was an American widow when he met and married her. His widow stayed on at Rosenlund until, I believe, 1891. She sold it. I think there might have been one. At least one owner between then and 1908 when the Marist Brothers purchased it. But so they really weren't here. Well, I guess. He was only here. He died ten years after the purchase of the property. And what was fascinating. The main house, which was going to be a four-story very grand, but would have a tower with the peaks roof and dormer windows just looking very much like the original Greystone and like you know, a larger version

[32:25](#) **GN:** Where was that going to be put?

[32:26](#) **SB:** Where was that going to be. And one can speculate if the gatehouse was your main entrance. There are others. You know intact estates, Hudson River Estates. You know, up and down mostly north of here. And the main gatehouse the main (?) and they would have of Riverview. We have a painting now in our collections that were brought to our attention. It's actually not a painting. It is a copy of an original oil painting by a Hudson River school painter known by the name of Albert Insley. And the painting was made from the lawn of Rosenlund. Again I am showing Gus a color copy of that painting which is in the archives in the library. The artist's description is that it was commissioned actually after Mr. Bech died by his widow. And it shows in the

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

near distance the Falkill Ironworks, which was his big company. It was on what sort of what Lumber is now but at one time that it had been whaling docks, and it'd been the Poughkeepsie Locomotive Company where they made train engines. But that perspective is from the lawn of Rosenlund. Now, the shoreline is very different. And, of course, as happened as we know with many of the Hudson River painters, they took artistic liberty with the scenery in the background. So it's really hard to say what that means. But clearly, in that period, the importance of the river, which was a significant corridor of commerce during the 19th century. And the iron business was one of the premier economic engines for the Poughkeepsie area. One has to assume that the sighting of the new house would have been with a river view. Now, if you follow the road in the drive that used to come straight in by the gatehouse, you know remnants of the drive are still there with the gatehouse parking lot and then the main sort of sidewalk up to Greystone. You would not automatically expect that you would come right straight to a carriage house. So was the main house going to be sort of like where our new library is? Was it going to be more to the south? It's just [...] it's very hard to know. There may not have [...], but one has to assume they had a concept in mind when they designed the house.

[35:15](#) **GN:** But later on, there was a kiosk that the brothers built that was on a trail above the lumberyard area where [...] You could view the river very easily from this, and there are a number of possibilities. And that certainly would have been one if they were going to put a building.

[35:37](#) **SB:** I'm not sure how far south. Presumably, the Hickory Grove Farm ended somewhere in the vicinity of where the McCann area. Although 65 acres was fairly substantial. That's why I'm not sure whether it was part of that sixty-five was what MacPherson eventually bought or not.

[36:00](#) **GN:** Well, you see. Below the McCann center, Linus Foy eventually bought that from the railroad [...] there used to be a siding down there. Well, they had planned to put a railroad siding. And then, suddenly, they gave up on that idea. And there were like eight acres or so that he was able to buy. That is the extension of the property from the back of the McCann down to the river.

[36:32](#) **SB:** So does that encompass where the boathouse is now? Because part of that land was the city [...]

[36:35](#) **GN:** No, it was below the boathouse. I mean, it's below the McCann Center going down to the river. You're much below where the boathouse is.

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

[36:43](#) **SB:** That's Vassar's land now because Vassar bought it from Dutton. I thought

[36:49](#) **GN:** Dutton they bought it from. But before we get to [...]

[36:54](#) **SB:** Above the railroad tracks

[36:55](#) **GN:** We're above the railroad tracks. They're on the other side of the railroad tracks. One house we have not talked about was the Gatehouse. Well, what we refer to as the Gatehouse.

[37:09](#) **SB:** We know that it was designed to be the Gate Lodge which you know presumably was a residence for a gatehouse keeper who would have lived in it. And it was designed really to be the house for the gatekeeper. And you know, I really don't know any more than that except that it is very reminiscent of several existing gatehouses. There was an estate, in fact, just in, I believe in today's Poughkeepsie Journal. It was an article, one of the dateline historical articles about the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, which was on, I believe, Smith Thompson. He was a US Supreme Court Justice. It was on his estate. You know there's a gatehouse that there is stone and some brick trim not unlike ours. That was his gatehouse. If you're up [...] going along in Rhinebeck along River Road, there's a gatehouse that may have been the Astor Estate; I'm not sure. But there are several gatehouses that are similar, and they were [...]

[38:21](#) **GN:** The culinary institute has one [...]

[38:23](#) **SB:** That's correct as you go in their south entrance.

[38:26](#) **GN:** Which would have been the Jesuits, but I don't know who had it before the Jesuits.

[38:30](#) **SB:** It was an estate before that. Right so again, those would have been residences for the gatekeeper and the gardener. Whether those people had other duties as part of the estate staff or not, I don't know.

[38:49](#) **GN:** So in getting the confirmation from the state for making this a historical thing, you really didn't need much more detail other than the fact that the whole group of houses was being brought into it. We don't have plans, do we? For the gatehouse?

[39:08](#) **SB:** Yes, we do. We have the plans.

[39:13](#) **GN:** The same architect.

[39:14](#) **SB:** Yes. Lienau did all of them. The Gatehouse plans. We actually have plans that show what they call elevations which was what it was designed to look like from north, south, east, and west facades. And in the

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

case of some of the other buildings that he designed, for instance, the Greystone. We actually had those notations saying that this is where the coachman's house, carriage horses as opposed to the farm horses in the little shed building.

[39:55](#) **GN:** The living quarters upstairs

[39:59](#) **SB:** The coachman's quarters along what's now the tower. So the main house again, which was never built, we have sort of a floor plan in addition to a design of what the exterior would look like. There's a floor plan that shows the library, parlors, bedrooms, etc. Again, copies of these drawings have been secured from the Avery Library in Columbia and are now in our archives.

[40:35](#) **GN:** Alright, back to another general point now. Speak a little bit if you can about it. What are the restrictions about improvements of these buildings?

[40:45](#) **SB:** There has been a lot of confusion with designations of this nature. And I can't speak to all of the restrictions that are on the other types of designations which include local municipalities' own landmark status. New York City has a landmark commission and designates buildings. There's a national landmark program. This program, The State Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places, is primarily a public recognition of the significance of the building, architecturally and historically. Do you know who owned it? What happened there? All of the above. Some of the above. And it brings with it the opportunity to apply for matching grants for historic preservation projects if the college wanted to alter these buildings or even, heaven forbid, tear one of them down, as long as the college does not use state or public [state or federal dollars], in other words, public monies, to do that work, we have the ability to do anything we want. If we would like to make changes that are historically accurate. And we would like to apply for a grant, or we're doing it with some other source, a Congressional member item, or some other source of state or federal money. We would need to submit the proposed changes to the State Historic Preservation office. Their review committee would take a look at it and would presumably because the college has very experienced architects and engineers, we would know that we're proposing something that would certainly be in keeping with the architectural integrity of the building. There was some confusion initially when this was proposed, and we made sure we understood all of the rules and regulations before going into it. So as I say, the college owns these buildings and has total

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

control over how they are used and whatever improvements and as long as you know if we're doing. We can do anything interior because the buildings were recognized as not. We were not applying for listing on the national state national registers because of their contemporary usage. We were applying for their external architectural integrity and the significance they held as really excellent examples of late gothic revival architecture. Who the architect was. Who Beck was. And their importance to the college because even though the college didn't build them. They really sort of an architectural touchstone, if you will. Greystone is sort of the emblem. You know the architectural emblem for the college and has really been selected as the architectural materials and palette for many of the buildings. Externally significant buildings. So even though, you know, they're not tied to history. Their origins aren't with the origins of the college. The buildings have carried on a historical thread from their construction to today.

[44:43](#) **GN:** Are you visited, or are we visited? Or have we been by inspectors or investigators or personnel from these offices? To verify our paperwork.

[44:54](#) **SB:** Only during the course they were. Obviously, there was a site visit by State Historic Preservation office staff during the application or nomination, as they call it, process. I'm not aware of anybody coming to look at them since I would be very surprised when you've got hundreds, if not thousands, just in New York State. When you talk about a district that's got dozens of buildings, you know, like a core, I think right here in Poughkeepsie, I believe Union Street is a historic district and which was you know down in the sort of [...]

[45:35](#) **GN:** Do we have any external signs on these buildings?

[45:38](#) **SB:** Yes, there are once you're listed. You can. We were able to purchase bronze plaques which have a sort of design template that we're supposed to follow that indicates that this building is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. You know. And then I think that says circa 1865. The President right now [...] I'm working with the President and John Ansley from the College Archives and Special Collections, and Justin Butwell from Physical Plant on a grant-funded project to create interpretive signage for the Waterfront. On themes related to the Waterfront, you know Henry Hudson coming by and the historic rowing, the intercollegiate Rowing associations, the Poughkeepsie Regatta, and another one on the Poughkeepsie Waterfront in the mid-1800s which is why I've been doing a lot of research on Bech and his iron industry but



## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

also the Vassar brewery which was the largest in the nation at the time. Matthew Vassar was running it at the time and built it, and it was right down on the Waterfront, and you know so [...] It was a major, busy, teeming industrial port during the 1800s. But when I finish this project, the president has indicated that he wants to create an interpretive sign. These would be what they call low profile sign types you might see in a state or national park to do one that interprets the three stone estate buildings at Rosenlund and Bech. And we've got some marvelous graphics, and you know, including some of these wonderful oil paintings are copies of them that show [...]

[47:28](#) **GN:** I think the walkway has some of these markings up there showing [...]

[47:32](#) **SB:** And again, the walkway now, of course, is a state park. You know it would make sense. We're going to get some long-overdue information that will be easily accessible things not just to the campus community but to any of our visitors, and of course, we have thousands and thousands of visitors every year coming walking through the campus.

[47:55](#) **GN:** One last point is the Way (?) Estate subject to a nomination?

[48:03](#) **SB:** Dr. Way? Yes. That property I had [...] I don't have files anymore not being employed by the college, But. I did research, and I'm sure there is a history of that property. That was a large carriage house that was converted into a private home, I believe. And I don't know. I don't recall whose estate. It would really depend on again the criteria we look at with Bech. You know who was the owner? What was the estate? Who was the architect? You know, is this an outstanding example of the architectural style that it represents?

[48:58](#) **GN:** But surely it has been modified greatly since its original construction.

[49:03](#) **SB:** Yes, and I don't recall whether it's been added onto or whether the entire [...] because it's fairly [...] I mean, what we're talking four-five thousand square feet probably it's I mean it's bigger than a small three-bedroom home. But whether or not, I don't know.

[49:19](#) **GN:** Now it's just a point of curiosity. And I think that pretty much summarizes it. I don't have another question here, and I think that we're pretty much through it. My last one was on the other buildings. But I think we've achieved [...]

[49:33](#) **SB:** There's one of the buildings on the Marist campus that might be worth taking a look at. Again, I'm

**Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

not an expert in this. But the chapel being a round building, I have heard people say that might be of architectural significance. Sufficient architectural significance to warrant taking a look at [...]

[50:00](#) GN: When you consider its original day of construction and the laborers who did it, That by itself

[50:05](#) SB: Well. But then again, that is part of what paints a richer and more complete picture of the nomination is. Besides the fact, its architectural significance. You know. There are other stories that you know that might be told that could enhance that.

[50:29](#) GN: You've seen the picture of the Marist Brothers in their cassocks with the wheelbarrow and the builders of the college?

[50:36](#) SB: That's right. There are some marvelous pictures. And, of course, I always loved going to the Founders' Day events. Partially in the early years that I was here back in the mid-late 80s when a lot of the builders of the college for were hitting their twenty years. And the stories and the pictures of carrying I-beams across Route 9 and having the traffic stop when I guess Donnelly was being built. There was also one story by one of the former Brothers who then became a faculty member here, and I'm trying to remember who was very tall. Because he was the tallest one, he got elected to be held by his ankles down into Fontaine Hall because they'd forgotten to put some of the electrical units in, and the concrete was setting, and they couldn't walk down or climb down.

[51:28](#) GN: I'm home early that day. I don't know where it was. But those are interesting days. I remember also insisting that we were probably the only crew in the world that waited to see a hearse come because we had bought an old hearse, and it brought the refreshments so to see this little old vehicle coming along. And knowing, although it used to be for death, for us, it was for life.

[51:57](#) SB: I don't know if this is of any interest, but there was a commemorative booklet put together for a memorial service when Mr. Bech died and 1873. And I found this particularly fascinating. I think in part because of the mission of the Brothers and their sense of community. The author of this, somebody who was reading the tribute about Bech, talked about that, "He was a gentleman of much dignity and reserved of manners. Yet, he was most accessible to everyone and unrestrained in his intercourse with those with whom he was brought in contact. He was incapable of treating anyone, whatever his conditions or relations in the world,

## **Susan Brown (part 2 of 2)**

within inattention or disrespect. As the following incident attests in 1859, and mind you, let's think 1859, this is pre-Civil War. And a time when the prejudice against Negroes was very strong. Mr. Bech entertained as a guest at his house, a Haitian diplomat, a man, a gentleman of color but of much cultivation educated in France, and a prominent man in his native land. He treated him with the same courtesy and attention that he would have extended to a white man under like circumstances both publicly and privately and never forgot for a moment that the obligations of a gentleman are of universal application." And I thought that was a very interesting sideline. You know, this was a wealthy man who came here, made a lot of money, built ironworks on the river that, if the truth is known, totally polluted the air and the river. And the old blast furnace belched all night. You know, kept everybody awake on the south side of Poughkeepsie. But you know he brought an interesting sensitivity to his common man and despite being a very wealthy person he obviously [...]

[53:50](#) **GN:** He brought prosperity to the area, and they were not quite aware of the environmental impacts of some of the things they were doing

[54:00](#) **SB:** That's right. But he invested significantly in the City of Poughkeepsie and played a major role in the city's prosperity for several decades.

[54:09](#) **GN:** That's a good point, an excellent point that we will end on. Thank you very much, Susan.

[54:13](#) **SB:** You're welcome.