



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Anne Brockett

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

HANNOLD: Hello, this is Beth Hannold and I'm interviewing Anne Brockett for the Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. It's June 10th, 2009 and we're meeting at the DC Historic Preservation Office, 2000 14th Street NW. Anne, I wonder if you could tell us a little about what you do here at the DC Office of Preservation?

BROCKETT: I am an architectural historian and I do both local reviews in various neighborhoods as well as federal and District agency reviews.

HANNOLD: What are some of the other neighborhoods that you—

BROCKETT: I have, at the moment, I have Foxhall Village, Kalorama Triangle, Washington Heights, Takoma Park, Cleveland Park, and I'm the former Capitol Hill reviewer.

HANNOLD: Former?

BROCKETT: Yeah.

HANNOLD: I didn't realize that.

BROCKETT: We have, since I started working here, we've had some staffing changes and one of our newer staff people now handles Capitol Hill.

HANNOLD: And who is that?

BROCKETT: That's Amanda Molson.

HANNOLD: But this happened very recently, this change?

BROCKETT: It's probably been about a year, so I've been taking over newer cases and I've been handling my older cases.

HANNOLD: So you have been the sole reviewer for the Eastern Market?

BROCKETT: That's correct.

HANNOLD: And how did you initially get assigned to Capitol Hill?

BROCKETT: Again, it was when there were staffing changes, we lost the previous Capitol Hill reviewer. She moved out of state and so I took on Capitol Hill reviews when she departed.

HANNOLD: Were you familiar with Eastern Market before the fire?

BROCKETT: The market was already being renovated when the fire occurred. It had already been reviewed by our office for several months before the fire occurred and, of course, I knew the market before that as well as a patron. So I guess I was familiar with it but the fire was, sort of, I really got to know the building after the fire.

HANNOLD: I should think so.

BROCKETT: Yeah.

HANNOLD: So what was your initial reaction? Did you hear that morning or—

BROCKETT: You know, I was trying to remember. I think I heard about it on the news. I know I had been sick and I was at home and I think I heard it on the news or saw it on the news on TV. I don't think I was at work when I heard about it, so it was, I couldn't believe it. In fact, I couldn't believe they were talking about the Eastern Market when I heard. I thought they were talking about some other building, you know, it can't be our Eastern Market. So, yeah, it was very much of a shock.

HANNOLD: Of course it wasn't the only building, prominent building that burned that morning so I bet the office was filled with—

BROCKETT: The Georgetown Library, yeah. It was a bad day.

HANNOLD: And when you saw it, was it worse, better?

BROCKETT: When I saw it in person?

HANNOLD: Yes.

BROCKETT: It was actually worse than I thought it was going to be. Knowing the building, you know, its brick construction, concrete floors, steel truss, you wouldn't have thought there was that much that was flammable but so I thought it would have been a lot more intact and when I went to the site it was pretty real, you know, you really saw the damage that was done.

HANNOLD: Was that in part also, do you think, because of the things that firefighters have to do to control fire?

BROCKETT: Yeah, I don't know, well they did a good job of containing it to the market building, I mean it could have jumped right across to the natatorium or across the street to the shops and residences so I guess we should be thankful about that.

HANNOLD: Were the response to the Eastern Market fire and the next steps were just, it seemed, as a very interested observer to be really quick and well-organized.

BROCKETT: That is really the Office of Property Management who jumped in. Because the building had already been under renovation and it was on a timeline, they wanted to keep to that timeline or at least as closely as they could while, you know, doing all this extra work that they hadn't foreseen and they, originally they had planned on keeping the merchants in the market when they were doing the renovation work and so they had to immediately respond to keep the merchants in business and I think they did a pretty admirable job about continuity and keeping the services available and the merchants getting them into a space where they could continue to work with the temporary market that they installed. So I think they did a great job, personally and I think DDOT [DC Department of Transportation], they had to work closely with DDOT as well in getting electricity, you know, hooking up to the electric system, hooking up the septic, water and sewer, etc. so everybody from DC government jumped right in.

HANNOLD: So did the same architects who had designed the renovation plans then go on to design the—

BROCKETT: Yeah, yes. It was Quinn Evans Architects. They had to sort of revamp their plan substantially when they—

HANNOLD: Do you want to say something about Quinn Evans and their background?

BROCKETT: Well, they're, I mean they do a lot of work in DC and nationally. DC is not their only office and they're known as historic architects so that they do come to projects like Eastern Market with a sensitivity that a lot of sort of architecture engineering firms wouldn't necessarily have. So and they were of all the people who, I mean, from my experience, I'm sure other people felt the pinch, but from my experience they were really under the gun in terms of time and scheduling because they had to revise the drawings, they had to go through the permitting process, they had to go to all the community meetings so they really had to, you know, there were a couple of people on their team who lived and breathed Eastern Market for some time.

HANNOLD: Can you briefly say how you are involved in the new subsequent plans as they went forward, what your role is for those plans.

BROCKETT: Well, my office reviews building permits, applications for historic work. Eastern Market is more special than a lot of other properties because the interior is also designated so we had to do a lot of review, not just for the exterior rehabilitation but for all the interior work both before and after the fire.

And, of course, after the fire there was a lot more interior work that had to be done because, you know they hadn't initially intended on replacing the floor, they hadn't initially intended on resurfacing the walls to the extent that they had to after the fire, the roof obviously had to be replaced. So we, you know, my office and, in particular, me were pretty heavily involved in the design aspects and the preservation of particular materials and sort of the selection of where they could install new systems that wouldn't be highly visible, things like that.

HANNOLD: And in this case, the client or the applicant would be the Office of Property Management?

BROCKETT: Uh huh, that's correct, as the owner.

HANNOLD: And your relationship with them?

BROCKETT: You know, I didn't have a lot projects with them previous to Eastern Market and since and even before the fire, I worked almost exclusively with the architects because they were handling it for the Office of Property Management. After the fire, though, because things got compressed schedule-wise, there were a lot more site visits with Office of Property Management people and sort of getting paperwork processed really quickly on their behalf. So they jumped in I think more heavily than they would have normally on a project management level.

HANNOLD: They would normally entrust a project to—

BROCKETT: I think the architects, you know, working out, hashing out the details probably would have been handled by the architects but I think to expedite things they became more personally involved.

HANNOLD: So who were some of the major players that you dealt with?

BROCKETT: Well Curtis Clay was the primary contact I had on the project. He's still the primary OPM person on the project as far as I know.

HANNOLD: How would you describe the work that was done—and I know that this is sometimes, projects can't be pigeonholed in this way—but was it rehabilitation, restoration, did it vary according to the zone sort of?

BROCKETT: Well, it's tough because I think the fire made this much more of a reconstruction/rehabilitation.

HANNOLD: Reconstruction [unintelligible]

BROCKETT: Well, yeah, I mean, there's really very very little, I'm sure the architects would differ with me on this, there's a lot less original fabric and when the market reopens it's going to look very new because everything was water damaged or fire or smoke damaged. So there's a lot more new surfaces, everything's going to be clean, the floor's new, you know, it won't have sort of that old market grungy feel to it the way it did. And I think that's more of an emotional loss. But it'll still be a great, vibrant place. And we're lucky that the market master's office was not damaged in the fire significantly and is going to be restored. The big introduction will be the skylight which runs the length of the roof which was, we don't believe was ever there historically.

HANNOLD: Do you want to talk a little more about the logistics involved with it?

BROCKETT: Yeah, that was an interesting one because honestly I was not in favor of installing the skylight, as a purist in preservation. We could never prove that it was there originally, there were no photos that showed that it was ever there originally; however, there were some structural skylight framing members in the roof that were discovered that indicated that there might have been one there. If it was ever there, it was only there very briefly because we have pretty old photographs of the building.

HANNOLD: But no original drawings or—

BROCKETT: As far as I know, there were not drawings of the building, certainly not showing the skylight. So it was a supposition and Adolf Cluss had done, had apparently done another building with a skylight in it and then there were these structural framing elements for a skylight that were discovered during the roof removal, so it was a pretty good indication that there could have been a skylight there but from a history perspective no one ever recalls or knows, you know, the sense of the building was without a skylight. But I've since been in the building since they installed the skylight during the course of the work there and it really looks great. It really brings a lot of warmth and light to the market that wasn't there. So in retrospect I don't think it's a bad thing.

HANNOLD: Do you want to say how the skylight even came up if it hadn't been there previously?

BROCKETT: Well, the architects really wanted the skylight and perhaps OPM [Office of Property Management] was behind it but I, you know, this had been proposed before the fire as well and the case went before the Historic Preservation Review Board and the architects made their case for the skylight and the board was not opposed to the skylight so they continued to study it and then when they found the remnants it certainly made the case a lot stronger and so the board approved installing the skylight. And I have to look at my notes but I believe that was against the staff recommendation because, as I said, I was

not convinced about the skylight issue but, again, having been in the market I think it really is a nice addition and it doesn't make it seem less historic to have a skylight, which was the big issue for me.

HANNOLD: And from the exterior, you're also satisfied or comfortable with its appearance?

BROCKETT: No, I haven't really, I haven't stepped back. Well, there was a lot of scaffolding up when I've been before and I didn't, I don't think I took a look at the skylight from a distance.

HANNOLD: What were—you've already talked about the skylight—but what were some of the other sort of challenging issues or decisions? [laughing]

BROCKETT: [laughing]

HANNOLD: Just a handful.

BROCKETT: Well, installing—the market never had air conditioning and it had very outdated—all the systems were outdated, the water, sewer, ventilation, but the big one was installing air conditioning because of the introduction of ducts. And that took a lot of work on the architects' side as well as the board and my perspective because when you're introducing a big new element, you know, there was a lot of discussion on whether they should be horizontally suspended down the length of the South Hall or if they should be vertical, you know, sort of like columns that would project up from the floor or along the walls. The comparison was made to the metro, the square Metro markers at the entrances to Metros, that they would look somewhat like that only a little bit smaller. So there was a lot of discussion about how to do that. They did a mock-up of the air conditioning. So that was a big issue. Another big issue was the windows.

HANNOLD: Can you say what was—

BROCKETT: What was approved? Um, they're introducing along the walls of the market little projections that will have vents. They're sort of columnar but they're engaged against the wall, so those will be the primary intake and air conditioning ducts so they won't have the suspended system that was originally proposed. The windows were a big one, whether or not to make them operable, whether or not to repair or restore or replace them. And if they replaced them, what kind of glass to use in the replacement because there was a lot of discussion about food, the food quality and food safety and if you introduce a lot of natural light it might make the food go bad or not look as fresh. So they, you know, there's a lot of discussion about the type of glass to use and that's not my area of expertise in terms of the food but for appearance's sake we went with something that's pretty traditional. And then the other big one that came up during the course of the restoration was in the basement, there's an arch system that

supports the floor and there was a tremendous amount of water damage underneath and a lot of the arches had buckled. And so when they needed to pour the new concrete floor with its new reinforcement system, it would make—and if they kept those arches in place—the floor would have to be raised so that you would have to take a step up to get into the market to get onto the new floor surface, so they had to eliminate or rework a lot of those arches under the floor. And we considered these significant because they were exposed structure. The basement is going to become public space, which it really hasn't been before but it really is a historically important part of understanding how the building works or how a building of that period and that size works. So that was sort of a compromise where a lot of the arches were removed so that they could pour the floor and then in other parts where they weren't quite as damaged they were preserved and protected. So that was sort of a big wrench in the plans and certainly a bigger expense than they ever intended and time as well. So those are some of the big obstacles.

HANNOLD: And the trusses?

BROCKETT: Oh in the roof? Uh, the trusses I don't believe they had intended to replace them before the fire but they were significantly damaged by the fire and they discovered that they really weren't in as great a shape as they had thought so I think the architect proposed a very successful solution to keeping about half of the original trusses and then introducing every other truss with a replacement truss that was structurally sound that would carry the load of the building on the new trusses and allow the old ones to just be decorative. And they replicated them pretty exactly. I was up on the roof before they installed the roof surface looking at the trusses and the new ones and the old ones are virtually identical. It's very—it's impressive, it's impressive.

HANNOLD: So was there consideration to using ones that would appear, that would clearly be modern, versus the—

BROCKETT: If there was, it wasn't a long-term discussion. I think it was pretty quickly—and I think there's going to be a color differentiation because they're going to have to paint them because of the exposed metal so they will, if you know what you're looking for or looking at or if there's interpretation in the market, you'll know which ones are original and which ones are replaced based on the color.

HANNOLD: What have you been most pleased about in terms of the work on the market and how it's turned out?

BROCKETT: That's a good question. Well, I'm really looking forward to seeing the finished project because I actually haven't been out there in some time and I know it's getting near its completion. I would probably say that the introduction of the skylight is a really successful introduction to a historic building

that it compatible to a building of this period, even if the market never had one, it still seems like it could have had one and it's a very successful introduction to Eastern Market and I think very appealing—not even, I mean, from a historic perspective but also just from a human perspective of having that natural light. So I am quite pleased that the board allowed them to go ahead with that.

HANNOLD: What about the use of substitute or replacement materials? Was that extensive and were you comfortable with all the choices that were made in that regard?

BROCKETT: You know, as a preservationist you always wish that more could be preserved and, honestly, I think there's always room to say more could have been preserved, particularly the windows but you know they were in really rough shape. So they replaced a lot of the windows and they preserved a lot of the other windows, you know, and renovated them and reinstalled them.

HANNOLD: They were covered so I wasn't sure to what extent—I'm surprised to learn.

BROCKETT: Yeah, they did rehab a number of the windows and reinstall them. It's a little bit of a regret for me that none of the windows will be operable and I think that fresh air rather than having air conditioned air is a bit of loss to the market. But, you know, these are—people's standards are a little bit different than the late 1800s.

HANNOLD: What would you say has been learned about the building in the course of the renovation? Anything new come about or revelations about its construction?

BROCKETT: I, you know, I don't really know because the market has been so well-documented over the years. You'd think that there would be something. I mean, the paint analysis, that came about because of the damage to the surface of the walls. They were able to trace back to the original paint color, which is very exciting. It's a very interesting shade of sort of pink. So that was a good, that was a great discovery that I don't think would have occurred had there not been the fire. That's the only thing—and the sort of the market master's office wasn't really initially part of the plan—they were sort of just going to leave it alone as far as I recall but they did, as part of the after the fire they got a grant to study the market master's office pretty completely so that will be restored to its original appearance which I think will be helpful. It was kind of a mess in there. I mean, a lot of original fabric. Some of the most original fabric in the building that's left but I don't know what the use will be or what the public access will be.

HANNOLD: How useful or complete was the documentation that was on hand for the building?

BROCKETT: You know, we didn't have very good interior plans. I mean, not that that would have helped tremendously because a lot of what happens in the market is moveable, is sort of impermanent, the

stalls of the merchants. So that really wouldn't have mattered a whole lot but it would have made it easier for somebody like me who didn't know how a market operated and all the needs of a merchant in terms of refrigeration, in terms of lighting, in terms of surfaces. That might have made it a little easier for me because I had to, sort of had a learning curve to catch up on how you outfit—

HANNOLD: Documentation of the existing—

BROCKETT: Yeah, of the existing market. And it would have been so nice had we had more photographs, more historic photographs of the interior and the exterior, which you really be able to choose lighting fixtures and, you know, things that were historically appropriate to the market so we kind of had to guess on that.

HANNOLD: I've seen the fixtures peeking in the windows and those are just sort of generic turn of the century—

BROCKETT: Right, and we sort of, not that I had a lot to select but the architects presented options that they thought would be appropriate to the market.

HANNOLD: And were you comfortable with the features that have been missing that were restored, such as the rooftop embellishments?

BROCKETT: As I said, I haven't been out there to see those actually installed.

HANNOLD: How long since you—

BROCKETT: It's been months since I was out there. Last time I was out there was to look at the brick vaults in the basement which was in the winter so it's been some time.

HANNOLD: Well I hope you can see it soon.

BROCKETT: Yeah and I actually would like to get an inside tour before they reopen so I might be talking to my colleagues at Office of Property Management. I suspect that the metal work is going to be pretty good just because it's an easier, it's not as difficult to fabricate metal based on existing examples.

HANNOLD: And they were showing up in the photos, the historic photos.

BROCKETT: Right, right. And what was there a lot of it was newer but it also replicated the historic photos so I think we'll, I'm pretty comfortable that the metal work is going to look good but, again, haven't seen it so I'll have to get out there.

HANNOLD: It looks good to me. What was the board's reaction to the project if you can quickly characterize that?

BROCKETT: Well I don't know that the board reviewed a lot after the fire because they had already reviewed a lot of the work that was proposed before the fire. The bigger discussion items were the air conditioning and how that was going to be handled, ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] accessibility but because most of the work was restorative at that time, not so much replacement, they, the board was I think pleased to see that this work was going to occur on a city landmark. But it really, I know the air conditioning was a big one for a lot of our board members.

HANNOLD: What was your sense of the level of interest and support for the project within the planning department and the greater city government?

BROCKETT: Well, the community, I would say, was the big voice and EMCAC, which is the Eastern Market—

HANNOLD: Advisory Council people. [ed: Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee]

BROCKETT: Yes, who I believe speaks more on behalf of the merchants although there may be a separate merchant's association but there are a lot of voices involved and a lot of community support and when the fire occurred there was a tremendous outpouring of support. I know a lot of donations were made to make sure the merchants were taken care of—not so much, I mean OPM being the primary, I know there was DDOT was involved in the crosswalks and the paving on the sidewalk but I was not tremendously involved in that.

HANNOLD: Did you feel that there was too much pressure to get the project done so that things weren't given proper consideration or do you think it's—

BROCKETT: No. I don't think that at all. I think there was different proponents, you know, my office wants it the most preserved as possible and wants it to feel like a historic marketplace, the merchants want it to be modern, clean, up-to-the-minute facility for food service. And, you know, Capitol Hill Restoration Society was involved heavily and the ANC [Advisory Neighborhood Commission] was involved heavily so everybody sort of brought a different perspective to it but, I mean, ultimately I think ultimately we're all working towards the same goal: getting the market back up.

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