Oral history interview with Nancy Bercaw and Alice Crayton, August 19, 2013

Bercaw, Nancy
Gallerist

Crayton, Alice
Gallerist

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MARGARET: This is Margaret Winslow, associate curator for contemporary art at the Delaware Art Museum, interviewing Nancy Bercaw. And your last name?

ALICE: Alice Crayton.

MARGARET: Alice Crayton. How do you spell Crayton?

ALICE: C-r-a-y-t-o-n.

MARGARET: Perfect. At the Station Gallery in Greenville, Delaware, on August 19, 2013.

NANCY: Didn’t interview us.

MARGARET: Oh, they did, I think you’re right at the beginning.

NANCY: Oh, we’re at the very end?
MARGARET: You’re either at the beginning or at the very end.

NANCY: Station Gallery, yeah.

MARGARET: Oh, yeah.

NANCY: I do vaguely remember this. Geez. It went on and on, didn’t it?

MARGARET: It did, it was quite a lengthy article. This was in Delaware Today in 1988. So let’s start by—I should ask you both, first, are you originally from Delaware?

NANCY: I’m not.

MARGARET: You’re not. So when did you come here to Delaware?

NANCY: I came in 1967, my parents moved here.

MARGARET: Okay. Did you attend college here?

NANCY: I went to University of Delaware.

MARGARET: Okay. And a background in the arts?

NANCY: I was an art history major.

MARGARET: Okay, perfect. And you just said before that you first started working at Carspecken–Scott Gallery.

NANCY: I did, and Alice did as well.

MARGARET: Okay, and when were you both there?

NANCY: Well, I was there before she was. I was there right out of college, so that was ‘74, ‘75, probably. For about five years. Well, four years, until we opened here in ‘79.

MARGARET: Okay. And Alice, when did you work at Carspecken–Scott?

ALICE: Well, I’m originally from Philadelphia. And I married a man from Wilmington, and moved here in 1979. So I worked there 1979 until 1981, when I came here to work.

NANCY: She was our first employee. I had another partner at that time.

MARGARET: Right, that was Mary Shea? And you all opened the gallery first as a frame shop in 1979?

NANCY: It was just as it is now, actually. We just didn’t have as much—we always had the gallery space, but it was primarily framing in those days.
MARGARET: Okay. And tell me a bit about your motivation for opening the gallery? Is this because you had the experience at Carspecken–Scott? Did you feel like there was something missing in terms of representation for artists?

NANCY: No, I’m just kidding.

MARGARET: Do you want me to pause it? Okay. Here wait, let me do one thing.

NANCY: No, it’s okay. So no, did we have the business experience other than working in another shop? Did I take business classes? No, no, and no to all of those.

MARGARET: But you had a background in art history. Did you have any background in the arts?

ALICE: I got with an art history from Moore College board as well.

MARGARET: Okay. And I’m just wondering a bit about early artists whose work you showed? In the November 1988 Delaware Today, it quotes you as saying you had shows when you knew you wouldn’t sell anything.

NANCY: Pretty much.

MARGARET: But you did so because you wanted to showcase artists you had confidence in, and now they sell. So can you remember some of those early artists you were showing, and are they still showing with you today?

NANCY: Some of them are, as a matter of fact. Our very first artist was Mitch Lyons. And I didn’t know him, but he was a neighbor, and I just called him and asked him if he would be willing to be our opening artist, and of course, he said yes.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s exciting. So if you would have opened in ‘79—

NANCY: We opened in January of ‘79.

MARGARET: January of ‘79. He would have just been making some kind of really significant work with his clay monoprints.

NANCY: He was just starting monoprinting, and he was our delightfully horrible invitation. Isn’t it awful?

MARGARET: Oh, this is wonderful.

NANCY: Well, it’s the archives.

MARGARET: This is great. This is wonderful that you have all of this archived.
NANCY: Well, we had a lot of it, but—

MARGARET: So these are his—so you opened—

NANCY: And he actually did a demonstration here, he was—you probably know Mitch.

MARGARET: I do.

NANCY: He’s very, very willing to share all of his technique with anybody and everybody. He has workshops all over the United States. So it’s not I didn’t know, as I said, but now that we’ve gotten to know him all these years later, it’s not all surprising that he said yes, he would love to do that. He came and did a big presentation, but he was doing the clay monoprints at that point, and his pots too.

MARGARET: And his pots as well. Oh gosh, this is wonderful.

NANCY: We had Jim Anderson, in the early days. He also was one of the founding members of the DCCA.

MARGARET: Yeah, so you had these great—this was probably an image from downtown Wilmington?

NANCY: Probably, does it say where it is?

ALICE: Yeah, it is, there’s the street.

NANCY: I think it does.

MARGARET: He did that whole series of reality scenes in downtown Wilmington. The museum had acquired one, but unfortunately it was deaccessioned. Which is kind of really frustrating—

NANCY: And you know, Mitch sold some—none of them sold a lot, they could certainly sell better now. Here was another artist that we still have today. This is Stephen Springer Davis. He was probably one of the first artists that we actually sold a significant amount of work for. They were what he called rubber stamp prints, and he would cut out the stamp out of an eraser type of thing, and then ink each one. So it was kind of a print. These are in black and white, but today—actually, we have—this is one of his up here on the top. He’s doing totally different work.

MARGARET: Different landscapes.

NANCY: But for our 30th show here, for our 30th anniversary, we had Mitch and Steve Davis. And we did a whole retrospective of all kinds of neat things.

MARGARET: That’s wonderful. Also, do you mind if I take a look at that James Anderson? I just want to get the dates on it.
NANCY: Are there dates? We might not have put dates.

MARGARET: October–November, 13–3\textsuperscript{rd} of ’79. Okay. That’s wonderful.

NANCY: This was long before Art Loop. We had Anne Oldach, who—she’s well known around the area. This was a friend of hers who did beautiful watercolors. I don’t think we sold any.

MARGARET: So you’re showing figurative work, but abstraction as well?

NANCY: When we first opened, we thought—and then, here we have Eric Parks, and A. N. Wyeth. It was Andrew’s nephew. We thought we’d like to show just abstract work, because it wasn’t being shown too much in Wilmington, and of course, we realized very quickly that—

ALICE: It doesn’t sell as well.

NANCY: It doesn’t sell very well. So that’s probably what I was talking about, not having—

ALICE: Bill Renzulli was a really good artist.

MARGARET: And other great scenes of downtown Wilmington. We have been touch in with him.

NANCY: He was fantastic. People loved his work. They related to it, it was the everyday little corner scenes, where you got your donuts or coffee or whatever it was, and we would be—those were sell out shows, almost.

MARGARET: And what were your clients like at this point? Not as interested in abstraction, but they really responded to figurative work?

NANCY: More probably to landscape work, I would say. Bill Radebaugh, you’ve heard that name?

MARGARET: I’ve not.

NANCY: He was a chemist, he was an engineer at the time. But in his spare time, he was a sweet older man.

ALICE: He was in vaudeville, he tap-danced.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s incredible.

NANCY: But he made these things called assemblages, where he would find funky different stuff and put them all together. We had one a few years later, and then he would title them really witty, like this would be, “Couldn’t play it anyhow.”

MARGARET: Oh, interesting. And it’s Radebaugh.
NANCY: Yeah, he was just a great guy.

ALICE: He was also known as the rat.

MARGARET: The rat?

NANCY: For Radebaugh. He always wore a little rat on his lapel.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s so interesting. I’ve not heard his name before, these are really interesting.

NANCY: Well, they were different.

ALICE: This is the gallery before—we had Nancy when she was twelve. Before we had the carpet and the drywall.

NANCY: That’s right. This was a terrible show.

ALICE: This is when I came. This show was up when I came, I thought it was fabulous. It was really cool.

NANCY: It was fun.

MARGARET: I don’t know this artist.

NANCY: I don’t know if we’ve ever—where she is anymore. They were kind of macramé, and beads, and they were really cool.

MARGARET: Interesting, and like found materials as well?

NANCY: Probably. Susan Rosenberg, have you ever heard that name?

MARGARET: Yes.

NANCY: This was a show we had here. It was fun. Those days, you could see from the invitations, we had lots of fun, we were younger, all the gallery owners were younger. I don’t know, we’re maybe more serious today, would you say?

ALICE: I’d say we know a bit more of what we’re doing.

NANCY: I mean, this was just fun and different—yeah, anyway. There’s Jim Anderson. We’ve always shown our artists, about every two years for the most part. John Bayalis was a wonderful artist. He, I believe—I don’t know if he still is with—he was with Hardcastle’s for a while. He was too early for us. Too good of an artist too early on, I think for what he was doing. People just didn’t appreciate it. I think if we had his work now, today, we could probably sell it.
MARGARET: Yeah, these are also incredible images of—it looks like possibly downtown Wilmington as well, or some sort of—Dave’s Shishkabob.

NANCY: Whoever that is.

ALICE: Wasn’t he from Baltimore, or—

NANCY: He was from like Milton area or something like that. And his wife was an artist.

MARGARET: So these are really primarily greater Wilmington area-based artists.

NANCY: For the most part, in those days, it was, yes. Jim Anderson again.

MARGARET: Oh, gosh, that’s a great image.

NANCY: We loved his work. The Charcoal Pit actually, it’s one of those.

MARGARET: Oh, really?

NANCY: They used to have it hanging on 202, but it’s not what’s going on.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s good to know though. Yeah, this is—

ALICE: We have one.

NANCY: We have another one too.

ALICE: We have another one here still.

NANCY: It’s an inside view.

MARGARET: Oh, you do?

ALICE: Looking out.

MARGARET: Looking out, early ‘80s?

NANCY: Are you looking for things to borrow for your show?

MARGARET: Yeah, so it’ll be a really ambitious exhibition, so the other difficulty is identifying works of art and their locations for the exhibition, because we’ll have the summer 2015 show. We’ll address a lot of the dance, music, theater through live programming, and then we’ll have an extensive catalog as well.

ALICE: Doesn’t the museum own a lot of pieces? Don’t they buy pieces every year from that time?
MARGARET: They bought a lot of pieces from that time, but not necessarily from artists who were as actively involved in this kind of contemporary art scene, which is unfortunate. They certainly have some nice examples.

NANCY: They have a Jim, yes.

MARGARET: We don’t have a Jim. We had the one work on paper, but it was deaccessioned.

ALICE: So where does it go?

NANCY: Do you sell them?

MARGARET: That was sold prior to my starting at the museum. Unfortunately, our previous curator, and probably with the department, went through and they deaccessioned quite a few works that were from the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, which is a shame, because there just hasn’t been enough history to make those kinds of decisions.

NANCY: Well, we do have this—

MARGARET: Anyway, we don’t have any James Anderson.

ALICE: We have this piece, we can show it to you.

NANCY: I have a wonderful piece, a great piece, if you want, we have Mitch Lyons.

MARGARET: Okay. That’s—knowing where works of art—where works of art are, and if they might be available for exhibition is important to me as well.

NANCY: This was a fun guy, Brian Torno.

ALICE: He’s from Baltimore area. They didn’t sell.

NANCY: They were watercolors.

MARGARET: No?

NANCY: No. But they were—I’m [inaudible]. But we thought they were fine. He was a great guy, he worked for Lego. And his job was to go around building Lego things.

MARGARET: Like displays? Wow, that’s pretty fun.

NANCY: Linda Ford, now she’s still around. She teaches at St. Mark’s [High School].

MARGARET: Okay.

NANCY: She has been, for—actually, she may be retired by the time you put this in the exhibition.
ALICE: She’s almost ready to retire.

MARGARET: Does she continue to work? Okay.

NANCY: We had a show for Linda and Marjorie Egee years ago.

ALICE: Her last show we had here was encaustic. They both went out of their norm and did encaustics together, but Linda more successfully than—

NANCY: Linda would probably at this point, other than Mitch maybe, have been our probably best-selling abstract artist. You can see, we had a number of them, we just—Here’s Bill Radebaugh again. Joanne Gross was another one that we did very well with.

ALICE: She—wasn’t she another starting member of DCCA or no?

NANCY: Joanne, I don’t think she was. She was in—what’s that group. There was a group that was seven artists, I forget the name of it. She passed away some years ago. But she did all these very linear—

ALICE: Oh, they were really cool, but they were really hard to sell.

MARGARET: Those are very interesting. And I’ve not seen her work before. Was she in a local group of artists? Was it part of SYNE? Was she part of SYNE?

NANCY: Yes. I think it was SYNE. I’ll double check, but I’m pretty sure that is what it was. But it would have been early on.

ALICE: Would have been 1984. Jody Hoffman was a huge success for us with her ceramics and raku pottery. She’s still around but hasn’t been producing in the past several years. She teaches at Archmere [Academy]. But she hasn’t been doing pottery.

NANCY: Linda Ford again. Tania Boucher, do you know that name?

MARGARET: No, I don’t.

NANCY: Do you know Tom Bostelle?

MARGARET: Yes.

NANCY: Okay. Tom and Tanya go together.

ALICE: They were very good friends.

MARGARET: Okay.

ALICE: She was married, and he had been earlier. But they were companions of some sort.
MARGARET: Okay.

NANCY: And we had her work here—we had both of their work, I don’t know which, will be coming up to Tom somewhere—

ALICE: Tanya would do really weird things. She would paint on magazine covers.

MARGARET: And kind of these abstract, figurative—

ALICE: Actually, yeah, we still have some of her pieces too. They were hugely new when prints—

NANCY: She was doing them on a computer, imagine this.

ALICE: Back in—

MARGARET: Oh. In ‘84?

NANCY: This is the other thing she did. This is ‘89. She also did—very unusual bronzes.

MARGARET: Oh, they’re bronzes.

NANCY: Yeah. Sort of bordering on disturbing.

MARGARET: Yeah. That’s interesting.

NANCY: And we sold a few of those.

ALICE: Were they these?

NANCY: Well, I was showing her the bronze later.

ALICE: Oh yeah. These were the early prints that they were doing on the computer way before—that’s in ‘79.

NANCY: But she was doing it separately from her painting.

ALICE: She would do these on magazines. You can see some of the—so terribly acidic.

MARGARET: Yeah, not great.

ALICE: And this is how they gave them to us to sell.

NANCY: Well, for the prints, but—

ALICE: For the prints, yeah. “This special edition of ten prints was pulled from my exhibit at the Station Gallery in ‘92.”
NANCY: ‘92? So that’s after years. So that’s way after—

ALICE: That one, that’s what said laser prints.

MARGARET: Laser prints.

ALICE: Can you stand that? And you can see there’s, within the eye, the magazine.

MARGARET: Oh, interesting.

ALICE: Pretty ahead of their time, I think. We’re still in the [inaudible]. So here’s Bill Renzulli. We actually did a print, a poster with Bill.

NANCY: They still have it.

ALICE: Called the *Victorian Sampler*.

NANCY: It’s in here, I think. I saw it somewhere, it’s in here.

ALICE: Here, what year is this? ‘86.

NANCY: It’s ‘86.

ALICE: How was—

NANCY: It’s all very light and airy, and we did really well with it. We sold it through a catalog in California, a poster catalog. When posters were really big in the ‘70s and ‘80s. And they would order them by two or 300. They were in San Francisco. So they—all the Victorian houses, and one of them was in San Francisco.

ALICE: One was Wilmington, Cape May, San Francisco. One was New York, and somewhere else.

NANCY: Massachusetts.

ALICE: Well, we still have a few of those.

NANCY: Here’s another Kevin.

MARGARET: Yeah, all right. So this is Kevin McLaughlin.

NANCY: Sorry, are you getting totally mixed up?

MARGARET: Oh no, this is good, I’ve interviewed Kevin McLaughlin before, and this whole series, these images of downtown Wilmington and the scenes of the beach are just incredible.

NANCY: Oh, he’s got that great big painting of Dolle’s [Candyland] that’s just fabulous.
MARGARET: Okay, this was in ‘86.

ALICE: And then—let’s see.

NANCY: This was a woman, who really—both of these were really a bit ahead of their time. Carmine Poncell and [Florine Huger] Tua Hayes.

ALICE: Oh yes, I’m sure you’ve heard of Tua.

MARGARET: Oh yes, and she’s—I have. I don’t have a great sense of her work, unfortunately. Where was she showing primarily, here?

NANCY: I think she was showing—she was fairly elderly at this point.

ALICE: Her work was all soft, and—

NANCY: I have one of hers that’s like—

ALICE: Very impressionistic.

MARGARET: And landscape.

NANCY: Little house on the hill.

ALICE: But a little more modern than—

NANCY: With a beautiful big foreground-of-green kind of thing.

ALICE: She was quite the lady. All these gals, old—

NANCY: And she was abstract.

ALICE: For her time, she was in her 70s or so, then. Doing stuff like this, the colors were like purple and yellow, and—

NANCY: She would do cut out things.

ALICE: Yeah. She was really ahead of her time.

MARGARET: And all in Wilmington? Were they all—

ALICE: They’re all from Wilmington.

NANCY: Eugenia Rhoads, very, much more traditional.

MARGARET: That’s a name I recognize.
NANCY: Why? Eugenia Eckford Rhoads was her name, was she a Pyle—part of the Pyle.

ALICE: She lived across from Friend’s school.

NANCY: Right, I remember that.

NANCY: Sweet lady.

ALICE: All three of these women were elderly back then. She was well—she was in the Bayard Berndt school probably, of painting.

NANCY: Catherine Gruver and Jim Anderson. Okay, Jim again.

ALICE: I haven’t seen—I don’t think she’s doing anything.

NANCY: She’s moved away. She was a photographer. Photography does not sell well here.

MARGARET: Okay. And tell me—most of these artists, at what point were they in their careers when they were showing with you? These were older, but Kevin McLaughlin, for example, he would have been younger.

ALICE: Our age.

NANCY: He was young. About my age—well, Mitch was older.

ALICE: 20s. Mitch is probably ten years older.

NANCY: Bill, of course is older, Bill Radebaugh. Jim Anderson is about my age, Linda’s my age.

ALICE: Anne Oldach’s our age.

NANCY: Most of them are—we’ve all kind of ran all together, I guess. I don’t know. So that was Kevin, Jim—who’s here? And then we had a great show for Tom Bostelle, which we did the cover.

ALICE: This used to be pretty popular, off the Gallery Guide, it was out of Philadelphia. It’s been out of prints for at least 10 years.

MARGARET: I’ve seen a few in vertical files, and in our materials though.

ALICE: We probably have a—we must have them somewhere. Because we used to advertise in there, so that—

NANCY: This was all about the—it was even calmer.
ALICE: But it was really a great thing for the area galleries, because it was Philadelphia and it was us.

NANCY: Do you own a Tom Bostelle?

MARGARET: We do, several. Paintings and sculptures.

ALICE: Jody Hoffman.

NANCY: You can see how beautiful her raku was. Graham Dougherty.

MARGARET: When did you begin exhibiting Graham’s work?


NANCY: Well, I think he was here before that. Get that thing out of the—throw it in the back room. You know where we have the—where we did the retrospective thing? We put down, we had all the dates of the people and the years they came.

ALICE: Graham is one that kind of falls in that category of he probably won’t sell much, but we’d like to share his work. That’s why we have framing.

NANCY: Anne Boysen. She was a fabulous artist. She passed away two years ago. Sold a lot of her work, she had varying styles. When did Graham come, was it ‘87? A bit before that, I bet.

ALICE: ‘87.

NANCY: ‘87, there you go. We sold one of Graham’s. Anne Boysen did things like this, which we sold a lot of these kind of things. And the late ‘80s, as I’m sure you’ve heard, mid ‘80s, late ‘80s, were very lucrative for the art business. We had a lot of wonderful customers who bought—we did a lot of work for the DuPont companies. For one of their floors in particular, they decided to buy all original work.

ALICE: This is when Susan Isaacs had her gallery downtown, and her gallery was truly more abstract.

MARGARET: Okay.

NANCY: No, she was there right in the middle, this was ‘88. She did a floor too. A DuPont floor.

MARGARET: Okay. And actually, this might be a good time. Tell me a bit more about corporate collecting and your involvement with some of these larger corporations that came into Delaware, and what was that relationship like? Did they approach you?

ALICE: Oh, they would be an ape—
ALICE: Well, he would contact the artists. Calling, right to the artist. And a lot of the corporations went to the Art Museum.

NANCY: The DuPont company—

MARGARET: For the Art Sales and Rental Gallery?

NANCY: With Alice. And we would have some of our artwork in there, with Alice Hupfel. We didn’t do a lot of corporate work. We’re more residential.

ALICE: We did a job in New York and the DuPont.

NANCY: Well, that was the DuPont connection, the one.

ALICE: And we would do smaller, and occasionally still do smaller offices in town. But not much.

NANCY: No, I would say our primary thing is residential. This was our tenth year—

ALICE: Carol Gray was huge.

MARGARET: Carol Gray. I don’t know if I have it written down here quite yet.

NANCY: No, she’s here.

MARGARET: Okay. So when she—

ALICE: Well, actually, she’s really more well-known for her gardens. People just love them.


NANCY: Mitch again.

ALICE: That was a great show.

NANCY: By now, Mitch is selling. So—

ALICE: People know him, and people—

MARGARET: Right. Oh, and his palate is expanding, vibrant colors.

NANCY: This was a great big piece.

MARGARET: So he’s doing vessels and clay modeling. At the same time.

NANCY: He’s still doing both.
ALICE: There’s one right behind you. A couple.

NANCY: This is Sylvia Naylor. We still have a little bit of her work, she’s quite elderly now too, but she did beautiful pen and inks and watercolor. Maine, she would spend her summers in Maine, so she would paint the flowers for those landscape up there.

MARGARET: And is she still here in Wilmington?

NANCY: She lives in Pennsylvania now, she’s moved to a retirement home. But she actually teaches at her retirement home. She teaches art.

MARGARET: Oh, she does? Oh, that’s wonderful.

ALICE: She would do classes in Maine in the summer time. She lived on Hupper Island.

NANCY: Linda. Linda has the same kind of ideas for her work.

MARGARET: Yeah. She’s certainly the same with Graham’s work as well. Very recognizable, the composition, brooms, yes.

NANCY: And then we got—

ALICE: Jim Anderson.

NANCY: Jim. Sharon Mills.

MARGARET: So this is ‘89, September, October 1989. Can I just look at that previous page? What’s this?

NANCY: Wasn’t much. It was filler.

ALICE: Just a fun little show.

NANCY: Put on a little something.

MARGARET: Were they scenes of Wilmington?

ALICE: Yeah. And Moshe Mark, and Jim Graham—Jim Graham is still around—well Moshe’s still around, but I don’t think he’s—I don’t know if he’s doing photography or—photographers. And they don’t sell. Excuse me, they don’t sell well here. They may sell, particularly Jim may sell well other places.

MARGARET: So this was Jim Anderson, okay. And then Mark and Jim Graham. Okay.

ALICE: She’s up and retired to Maine. 1989, January.

MARGARET: So January ‘89. Okay. Okay, thank you.
ALICE: Geez, “Wednesday Nights until Eight”? What were we thinking?

NANCY: That was our—that was the year that, because one of our customers said you need to be open late for Christmas—no, this was after Christmas.

ALICE: Yeah, what were we thinking?

NANCY: Nobody CAME.

MARGARET: And now I can’t find it, the art we were starting 80—

ALICE: We have some old Art Loop brochures too, let me see.

NANCY: Well, find it here. It’s going to be along about here, probably. Because we used to have our openings on Wednesdays and when the art loop started, we started doing it on Friday. And here’s a Friday. Here’s a Wednesday.

MARGARET: Oh, here it is. “Art on the Town.”

NANCY: ‘88, ‘89.

ALICE: I probably have it here—


NANCY: So then whatever month we’re in here, the spring. Laura Hickman was before that. Laura Hickman—do you know that name yet?

MARGARET: I don’t.

NANCY: Well, she was a huge artist in this area. She lives in Bethany Beach. But she came up with these wonderful—

ALICE: Large pastels.

NANCY: And she wanted, she said 400 dollars. And we were like, oh, we can get more than that, so we—

ALICE: So we sold for the half sheet, and then she started doing the—but she was just selling like hotcakes.

MARGARET: She just sold really well. So this was your first show with her?

NANCY: I guess it was.

MARGARET: ‘89? April ‘89?
NANCY: And this was Cape May. She did a lot of things down around Bethany Beach, like the old—

ALICE: Addy beaches.

NANCY: On the sea house. That was there too. But she would do things, like looking down an alley.

ALICE: The backyard.

NANCY: Or the backyards.

MARGARET: So kind of like isolated, like [Edward] Hopper—

NANCY: A lot of people compare her to Hopper.

ALICE: And now she has her own gallery, I think, but we haven’t seen her in ten years.

MARGARET: Okay, and you haven’t shown her since.

NANCY: Well, we had her in one little group. So that was Laura. She was—we did very well with her.

ALICE: Wilmington Trust. We sold a lot of pieces of hers to Wilmington Trust.

NANCY: And they were big. They were big huge pastels. She would also go to France.

ALICE: Italy. And Italy is the really beautiful ones.

NANCY: Tuscany, that’s Italy? Tuscany? Where she would do over the big fields, was that?

ALICE: Provence.

NANCY: Provence. That’s France. Anyways, besides the local things she would go over there. Carol Gray—

ALICE: After a while, she started travelling more.

NANCY: And then we’ve got to show you Elizabeth Borné is just fabulous. This is one of her pieces with the fish.

MARGARET: Oh.

NANCY: It’s colored pencil. She’s 85. She’s no longer painting, but this was one of her early—she was in an early group show.

MARGARET: Oh, interesting. So this was ‘89.
NANCY: ‘89.

MARGARET: And those are quite different. So very—all of the work is very fantastic.

NANCY: Very whimsical, yes. I have some others of hers I can show you. We had a customer who brought a piece to be framed and we just fell in love with it. And she was from Philadelphia at that point. And we would go up and bring back these beautiful paintings, and people today—this, we’re selling on the secondary market for somebody. People love her work. Either love it or don’t like it, I mean there’s no in between. But once you have one of hers, you generally end up with a few. Anyway, that’s Elizabeth Borné with a thing over the e.

MARGARET: And is she still in Philadelphia?

NANCY: No, she has moved to Missouri, where she—or Arkansas, where her children are. Louise Clearfield, she was another one great—now we’re into 1990, I don’t know how far you want to go.

MARGARET: Well, I think up to 90 is good. And my goodness, this is just—this is beautiful.

NANCY: Well, you can just look at it, just to see.

MARGARET: I can’t tell you how much I appreciate—

NANCY: This is what you do in the winter sometimes when you’re really, really slow. We do this.

MARGARET: This is really good, because—it’s just, it’s hard to remember to document when you’re in the middle of it.

NANCY: Well, a lot of it as you can see, we don’t have the back of the cards. We would keep a filing with all the old cards, but we lost a lot.

MARGARET: Right, but if you really needed to, you could.

NANCY: She was fabulous, and we still have her work today. Louise Clearfield, big—again, she would do landscape, she does flowers. Here’s another—Neil Savage was a wonderful artist, he’s an art teacher out in Pennsylvania. He did more abstract work. Animal dog—

MARGARET: So really throughout all of this, it seems like there is kind of the furthest away would be Philadelphia or someone in Sussex County. So it’s really focused on artists really in this immediate area.

NANCY: Pretty much, pretty much. We have people from a little further afield now. Emily Bissell Laird, for example, her roots are here, but she lives in Vermont. Tolman Evans was a fun—weird, odd things. Here’s Kevin again, it’s a nice one.
MARGARET: Okay. That is nice. Oh, this is wonderful. So I have a few other various questions. This is wonderful.

NANCY: Wendy Hatch.

MARGARET: Was that the first time you were showing her work in ‘92?

NANCY: Mm, hm.

MARGARET: Okay.

NANCY: Here’s another Tania Boucher. Remember the weird_? Scott Cameron. Sylvia—it’s the same artists, but it’s what they’re doing. Carol Gray, here’s another Emily Bissell Laird, she was really good. We sold every one of her paintings. Linda Ford, you can see Linda’s style is—doesn’t vary too much. Laurie again. You can see why she was so popular. Here’s another Louise. Emily Bissell Laird. And here’s another Elizabeth Borné. Her things—not this so much, but you look at her work, and you see so many different things.

MARGARET: Oh, interesting.

NANCY: That’s a Laura Hickman, I think. Here’s Emily. A lot of people say that we show things with a lot of color, this was a terrible printing, so I don’t know. This was two solid shows, back to back. Laura Hickman, and then Louise Clearfield. What does that say?

MARGARET: This is *Awakening*, ‘96.

NANCY: Doesn’t say where. “Images of Provence.” That’s France. And I think this was, this might have been Italy. Elizabeth Borné.

MARGARET: Oh look at that, that’s wonderful.

NANCY: This was her thank you.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s incredible.

NANCY: That she sent in the mail, so it’s a postcard. She—her eyes would often be little birds. She was such a—

MARGARET: This imagery is really—

NANCY: Oh, she was so neat. You see how it just goes on and on, hearts? And she started as a mask maker in New Orleans. We had a—it’s in here somewhere. We had a, I think it was a 40 year retrospective for her, and her children brought up some of these masks. Her son came up with her, they stayed for a week, we had a tiny little reception, and it was so much fun. And she walked around, and just—here’s another Sylvia Naylor. And looked at these things, and said, “you know, that was my first painting I ever did.” Let’s see, I’m trying to see if there’s anybody
else in here. Here’s Emily, that’s when she went off different direction. Anne Boysen. If you go over to—it’s no longer Christiana Bank. Have you ever been in Christiana Bank over here, it’s kind of WSFS?

MARGARET: Oh, no, I haven’t been there.

NANCY: They have a collection of Anne’s work. This was telling you—we had her before. She was one that we did really well with early on, then she changed her style. Elizabeth, Louise. Every December we do this “Artworks for the Holiday” show, where we have a big group show. One of the last Laura Hickman’s probably that we have.

ALICE: This was beautiful, this piece.

Nancy: Michelle Green, too bad. She’s really popular now. But she’s not—she’s older. I was trying to find—here’s the Anne Boysen again. Here’s another Elizabeth. Sylvia Naylor, this was a neat show. This was a friend of hers. This woman actually started at the art museum, making jewelry, and I think she was 75 years old.

MARGARET: Oh really? In the studio?

NANCY: She passed away a few years ago, but she took elements out of Sylvia’s paintings, and made one-of-a-kind pieces.

MARGARET: And I know Donna Lovely.

NANCY: Okay. She was here for a brief moment. I think she’s in Folks County now. This was Elizabeth, she decided to do things based on rocks. It was not the most—

ALICE: But the rocks were like this big, they were more like stones.

NANCY: She was just—she was wonderful. Oh no, there’s another Laura Hickman and another Louise. [W.] Gary Smith is fabulous, too bad you can’t have him in there, he’s a landscape architect, he designed the children’s garden at Winterthur [Museum].

ALICE: Have you taken your child there yet?

MARGARET: Not yet, she isn’t walking independently. She’s determined though.

ALICE: Well, when she does. Little bit older.

MARGARET: I think it might be at two, hopefully she’ll be walking independently.

ALICE: She’s 17 months?

MARGARET: 17 months.
ALICE: Was she like a December or January?

MARGARET: March.

ALICE: Oh, March. I have a grandson who lives with me who will be two in October.

MARGARET: Oh. That’s a fun age.

NANCY: This is a fabulous show by Anne Boysen. I mean, we’re past your time period now, but this was Costa Rica. Sold out most of those. Ed Bronstein, we still have. Here’s Steve Davis, the rubber stamp guy. It’s different.

MARGARET: Very different.

NANCY: This is Laura McMillan, who actually works for us.

ALICE: These are her pieces.

MARGARET: Oh, okay.

ALICE: We’ll have a show for her in November.

NANCY: So Louise—and here’s another Laura. She does a lot of long wood. I was looking for Anne Boysen’s—I mean, Elizabeth Borné’s retrospective.

ALICE: It should be in there somewhere.

NANCY: All right, so we got off the track. Here’s another wonderful Emily Bissell Laird, I told you she was in here. Have you heard of Emily Bissell Hospital?

MARGARET: Yes.

NANCY: That would have been her grandma.

MARGARET: Oh, okay. I thought the Emily Bissell sounded familiar.

NANCY: This was what he did for Mitch and Steve in 2009. It was their 30th year, and—

MARGARET: Okay. So kind of similar [inaudible].

NANCY: I mean, yeah. “Old and New.” That’s Gary Smith again, the landscape guy. She’s popular, this one. This was a self-portrait she did, I think in like ‘60-something, ‘50-something—

ALICE: 70—well, her kids are little, so it’s probably the 60s.

NANCY: I think it says ‘65.
ALICE: And her kids are our age. She was a real old hippie. We met her, she was living in Philadelphia, near in university city, in her tiny little apartment, slept on a mattress on the floor, very Spartan existence. Her whole front room was her studio. Her life was her studio and her art. She was really cool. She is still cool, but the dear thing is—

NANCY: We did a show for him. Here’s a—where did I just see, I just saw—Anne Boysen. Remember I was telling you she did other things, she was the early landscape person, and this is her. In the second one between them. She did huge paintings. I don’t know, that’s pretty much—

MARGARET: That’s wonderful.

NANCY: I mean, you’re welcome to look through any more you want, but this is past the—

MARGARET: Oh no, this is good.

NANCY: And here’s another Steve Davis, this is more of what he’s doing today. Never really got—

MARGARET: Okay. Oh, this is great, you have all of these archival materials. This is so wonderful.

ALICE: I think I might even have early Art Loop brochures.

MARGARET: Oh really? Those would be great to see.

ALICE: I’d have to see. I think they might be in here. I know we’ve got a lot of old stuff in here.

MARGARET: Okay. So then also, just some other kind of—other questions, in no kind of specific order here. So if you both—well, you, Alice would have been here in the late ‘70s, but Nancy you would have been at Carspecken–Scott earlier, in ‘74. I’m also trying to get a sense, and kind of people’s recollections of other commercial galleries in Wilmington. And specifically if you have any memories of Fifth Street Gallery. And Rob Jones.

ALICE: Very big. I remember it was upstairs. Don’t remember too much about it, except that it was pretty cool, I guess.

MARGARET: Yeah, it seems like in terms of—

NANCY: But I didn’t really know him.

MARGARET: Okay. In terms of commercial galleries, he certainly seems like the pioneer in downtown Wilmington.

NANCY: On the cutting edge, absolutely.

ALICE: He answers in [inaudible]. What year did Susan start, did she say?
MARGARET: Susan started in ‘87?

ALICE: Oh, that much later than us?

NANCY: Well, because Carspecken was certainly before that. When I was working that, there was a show with Mary Page, ‘79 or ‘80, and it was just total—almost a sellout.

ALICE: His shows were—Fred had a very good—

NANCY: Social event back then.

ALICE: And he—there weren’t many galleries. There was Hardcastle, Carspecken–Scott. Fifth Street, the Art Museum. That was really about it. And back in those days, Fred sort of—

NANCY: He had a bartender.

ALICE: A bartender. It was a cocktail event.

MARGARET: So it was really that kind of social event. Okay.

ALICE: And there was no competition really.

NANCY: It was the first of—

MARGARET: Well, certainly in the early ‘70s, there was one other gallery. Do you remember the Wilmington Gallery of Circulating Paintings?

NANCY: Was that from—

ALICE: The Wanamakers.

MARGARET: It was the Wanamakers. Grace McFarren. And she was—she started that in like the ‘60s.

ALICE: Yes. She still has some of the paintings that she showed there.

NANCY: We showed her work in the ‘90s.

ALICE: Yes, I do remember that. But I don’t remember—mostly what I remember, it was up in the tea room or something upstairs in Wanamakers, and I don’t really remember—I was younger, I don’t remember going to events there. But you would see the paintings when you went to have lunch there. And I think it was probably fairly successful.

MARGARET: I think so, and I know when they closed that space, she moved up to the Concord Mall on 202, but I think that was a little less successful, her time there.

ALICE: I don’t remember that.
MARGARET: Any recollections, in addition to what’s happening with the galleries, there’s also this strong interest in Xerography and in kind of the comic book scene. I don’t know if you remember Tom Watkins or Xanadu comics, which would have also been downtown. And I think he first opened Xanadu with Joyce Brabner.

ALICE: Any recollections there—

NANCY: No. Don’t have kids.

ALICE: Rings a bell, but I don’t know.

NANCY: I think the gallery—what’s the gallery over on 202?

ALICE: The Talleyville [Frame Shoppe &] Gallery.

NANCY: The Talleyville?

ALICE: Frame shop.

NANCY: Frame shop. I think they’re younger, but I think they show today’s kind of comic genre, if you want to check that out. Because they’re often on Art Loop, and it often looks interesting. Like a young, hip, group of people, but—

MARGARET: Do you know when they would have opened?

NANCY: I think they’re more recent. Like I said, I think they’re young. I mean, I haven’t been there, I just get a feeling that this is a young group, or a young couple, or—because, yeah. It’s like tattoo art and stuff. It looks cool.

MARGARET: Okay. That’s good. So this is all wonderful. Do you all have any recollections of interesting programming that you remember in the late ‘70s or in the ‘80s, either at the DCCA [Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts], since of course it was founded in the late ‘70s, or at the Delaware Art Museum, in terms of contemporary art?

NANCY: Don’t know too much contemporary art at the [inaudible] but that might just be my bad recollection. Well, when the DCCA opened, it was a big deal. I think we were all fairly involved, really. We would help with their—whatever they were doing.

ALICE: I remember when it was at the Water Works, they had somebody come, an artist, I’m sure someone else will remember his name. Maybe—I’m thinking like, Maine or somewhere, but he did this installation that took a week or so, and you could go there and help him, it was all with hay.

MARGARET: Oh, interesting. I’ve not heard anyone speak about that yet.
ALICE: And he created this big structure, abstract thing, out of hay, and you could go. I went with my daughter and we both shoved the hay in whatever the net was or something. But it was cool that people could be involved in the construction of the finished piece.

MARGARET: Oh, interesting.

NANCY: I do remember one funny thing, but you can’t print it.

MARGARET: Oh, okay. Should I pause?

NANCY: It’s fine.

MARGARET: I’ll pause.

NANCY: The show, we can just say that.

MARGARET: It seems like though—so DCCA founded in late ‘70s, Rick Rothrock.

NANCY: I think it was ‘79.

MARGARET: All in ‘79.

NANCY: In the same year as we started here.

MARGARET: So tell me about—was there, there must have been that excitement about this new space, so it’s [unintelligible] but it’s not a commercial gallery—the artist studios, this exhibition programming. Did it feel like it was filling a need here in Wilmington?

NANCY: I think for the artists, definitely. It really helped bring the working contemporary artists to a different level, because before that, it was only the Art Museum. And that certainly isn’t a venue for working contemporary artists. Know what I mean? Where their goal was—because they didn’t start DCCA with the studios, that was a vision of the future. Because I think they started in like a row house, down by—

ALICE: I think it was—yeah.

MARGARET: Down by French Street.

NANCY: Yeah.

ALICE: I think it was right around the corner from the Fifth Street Gallery. Or it might have been in the same spot.

MARGARET: It was. It was right in that area.

ALICE: So even if they had a studio, it might have been two or three, would have been the bedrooms.
NANCY: And I think everybody was young, and excited and enthusiastic.

ALICE: Yeah. And had a lot of enthusiasm.

NANCY: The artists, there just was a lot of enthusiasm around, with all of us. All of the gallery owners for the most part, I mean the ones that we’ve been talking about. We’re all about the same age, we all know each other.

ALICE: There’s almost like a niche for each gallery in town for what they sell.

NANCY: I think it’s interesting that there haven’t been too many other galleries that have come in. I think it’s—we’ve all sort of struggled, certainly. Some of us more than others. But like Alice said, everyone has their own sort of look and I think we all for the most part try to respect that.

MARGARET: You’re right, that own kind of niche market. But it is very interesting that there haven’t been a lot of newer galleries that have existed as long. So Susan Isaacs’ gallery was pretty short lived.

ALICE: It really was. She was pretty—

MARGARET: It was only ‘87, ‘88 through ‘92. So pretty short lived. But it’s interesting that this gallery, Somerville-Manning, and then of course the foundation of the DCCA, the Delaware Theater Company, all of that is really happening in late 1970s. All right at the same time.

ALICE: All at the same time.

NANCY: I mean, it does make you wonder why or what—

MARGARET: What exactly was going on and what was happening at that moment?

NANCY: Well, I don’t think there was a lot of—there wasn’t anywhere in Wilmington to look at art really, except for the Museum.

MARGARET: Right. And I think that it’s interesting, there was a lot of—

NANCY: And Harcastle.

MARGARET: And Harcastle, right. It is interesting that there’s a lot of federal funding that’s coming through right around the same time.

ALICE: But we didn’t get any of that.

MARGARET: So there is this seed of—the seed of program that was happening, so all of those artists at the Delaware Art Museum, all the photographers, Parson was there at the time, this is
all coming through from federal funding and I think that’s providing a lot of that energy that then leads to the foundation of organizations in the late 1970s.

ALICE: That probably is true.

NANCY: Somerville-Manning, when they opened was right across the street. Did you know that? Where Talbot’s is.

MARGARET: I thought—I did read, I think in this, actually.

NANCY: It was actually called the Gallery of Greenville.

MARGARET: The Gallery, right.

NANCY: Which we always thought was not a good name, since we were first, and we were more visual. People would come in, “Are you the Gallery of Greenville?” “No.” So when they moved, they changed—they may have changed their name before they moved.

MARGARET: So looking at the end of the 1980s, and into kind of the early, mid 1990s, I’ve seen, and it’s interesting because as I’ve just said, Susan Isaacs’ gallery is kind of short-lived. And closed then in 1992. You have, I think, the effects of the culture wars happening as well. What sort of impact did you see here in the contemporary art scene or in your gallery business, going from the late ‘80s into the early 1990s?

NANCY: Well, that’s when Laura Hickman really started to take off here. They were selling a lot of her work.

ALICE: And for our gallery, we don’t need to have a lot of big selling—at that point, we were still really relying on our framing for the bulk of our business. Which is actually probably turned around at this point, but—so our art sales were sort of the icing on the cake.

NANCY: Back then. So we really were not dependent on the artist’s work. It helped, of course. But a place like Somerville-Manning, they do offer framing, but their—

ALICE: It’s not their main—

NANCY: Their main gist is the art.

MARGARET: Right, okay.

NANCY: So I don’t know. It’s hard to say. We had all those great sales at the end of the ‘80s to the DuPont company, and I’m sure you’ve heard about Mrs. [Wilhelmina Wemyss Laird] Craven, who is a wonderful collector here in town.

ALICE: She was.
MARGARET: Not yet, no.

NANCY: No? Nobody’s mentioned Mrs. Craven.

ALICE: Well, if you go talk to Hardcastle’s. However, Hardcastle’s is under new ownership now. It’s not owned by David Berndt anymore. But you probably really want to talk to him more than the current owner.

NANCY: So what was my point?

ALICE: Mrs. Craven was a wealthy woman in the area of DuPont heritage. And she would go to the galleries, mostly Hardcastle’s, but us occasionally, if she liked the artist you were showing, and would come in and buy ten paintings. Or twelve paintings. Because she liked them.

MARGARET: That’s an incredible level of support.

NANCY: And she would do this occasionally here, often at Hardcastle, she would go to the Yellow Spring show and do that. The flower markets, they used to have art shows, evening of art. She would go to that ahead of time. And everybody kowtowed to her, because she was the grand dame.

ALICE: Got a little prickly. This woman would come in, oh, let’s see, Mrs. Craven is right here.

NANCY: What could you do? She came in and bought ten paintings, you know? But she would support a lot of the fundraising art shows, of which there are many in this town.

ALICE: And she supported the symphony, the opera. She supported, and not just visual arts. She was a huge support.

MARGARET: Just a strong art supporter?

NANCY: And she would give those paintings to every doctor she went to. She would redo their office. You could go into an office in town, and go, oh, Mrs. Craven’s a patient here. She would give them away to people.

MARGARET: Wow, that’s incredible.

NANCY: And redo offices. I think she did the Surgicenter downtown. All the paintings that are in here, she bought and donated to them. So she was a huge supporter, and there hasn’t been anybody like her.

MARGARET: Like that since.

NANCY: Of course, people probably don’t have money like that. If they do, they give it to the symphony or something else.
MARGARET: Right. Okay.

NANCY: But there hasn’t been an art supporter like her since. Not at all.

ALICE: We did have, and I don’t remember when it sort of stopped. We used to have wonderful art critics for the paper. Otto Dekom, Edith DeShazo, they were—

NANCY: Penny. Penny.

MARGARET: Penny Cope?

NANCY: Penny Cope. Yeah.

ALICE: They would actually come out—

NANCY: To an opening.

ALICE: And look at your gallery, and write things about it.

MARGARET: Right. And from the articles I’ve read by Otto Dekom, he was a critic in every sense of the word.

NANCY: He was very much a critic. And if you had a bad review, it was almost better than a good review by Otto Dekom.

MARGARET: Oh right. He must have generated a lot of strong responses.

ALICE: People would come out and say—

NANCY: So yeah. And now the paper doesn’t do anything like that, they don’t leave their computer.

MARGARET: Right. One—Victoria Donahoe wasn’t reporting on things anymore either unfortunately.

NANCY: So now there’s none of that.

MARGARET: So it seems like those critics really did generate a good level of buzz and excitement.

NANCY: I think they did. And again, it was all during the—I’m sure we do.

ALICE: We probably have some of them in there too.

NANCY: It was all during those early years for most of us. And it was just—I don’t know, it was a lot of excitement.
ALICE: He had to type a press release on a typewriter and mail it to them. To any magazine or to anything that you wanted to maybe get published then.

MARGARET: You did say though that some of the corporate sponsorship decreased in the—or not sponsorship, but support would have decreased by the early ‘90s?

NANCY: Buying? Yeah. Mid ‘90s.

ALICE: We didn’t really go out after that.

NANCY: It’s just that I think the economy was so good in the late ‘80s that they had money, and said, okay, let’s buy art, and they did. And of course when the economy went down, so did art sales. It’s only just in the past year or two that I think the art sales have come back.

ALICE: And you probably will hear something very different from other galleries about that. Because some of them are more—Like Fred is much more, I would imagine he has a bigger corporate base.

MARGARET: And that’s why I think it’s—and actually, I think that you two are the first two gallerists that I’m interviewing. But I think that would be incredibly helpful to hear all of these different stories, because like you said, you are showing the work of different artists, you’re in these different kind of niche communities and with different artists. So that will be incredibly helpful.

NANCY: You know who would be really good for you to talk to is Ellen Bartholomaus.

MARGARET: Oh yes, actually, that’s—I am incorrect. I did talk to Ellen already.

NANCY: Because she is and was huge at DCCA.

MARGARET: Right. Oh certainly, her involvement there, and of course with Blue Street. I didn’t realize she had her own kind of cottage industry.

NANCY: Oh my gosh, yeah.

MARGARET: I had no idea. I worked at Blue Street for a year and a half, and I know Ellen, and I never knew about it.

NANCY: That she did the knitting, the coats.

MARGARET: All of the knitting and the coats, I had no idea.

NANCY: Oh my gosh.

ALICE: Where does she have time to do it?
MARGARET: I know, exactly.

NANCY: She doesn’t do them anymore though, does she?

MARGARET: No, I don’t think so. But I had no idea about that history.

NANCY: Does Chris Johnson have one? Because I remember, there was a woman back in the day, her name was Kathy DuPont, and I think she subsequently divorced that DuPont and married somebody else, and has moved away. But she was tall and thin and elegant, always when she would come in for framing. She’d come in, and I was like, that’s one of Ellen Bartholomaus’ coats, I’m so impressed. And it was lovely. Really lovely. She’d do like mohair.

MARGARET: Oh yeah, she was describing the designs. I’m like, Ellen, I have to see images of these, I haven’t—

NANCY: Beautiful.

ALICE: When did you work there?

MARGARET: Let’s see, I would have been—and I think for our purposes, I’m going to stop our recording.

NANCY: Okay, fine. Good.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 63 minutes