

Excerpt from Norman Weiss' oral history interview Part Three conducted by Rebecca Rushfield on Friday October 7, 2016 in New York City [NCAC STUDY COMMITTEE]

At some point prior to my starting to teach at Columbia, I joined a committee and I think that the committee may have been put together by Elliott Carroll who was the Assistant to the Architect of the U.S. Capitol and a wonderful gentleman. Elliott was, had gotten involved with APT. And because of his role at the Capitol and being in Washington, was quite central to other things going on within the U.S. government. And there were others on that committee whose contributions were incredible. Morgan Phillips who I've mentioned before. Hugh Miller who I just mentioned-- a moment ago—with the National Parks Service. Roy Graham who was at the time probably still the restoration architect for Colonial Williamsburg. A few others. But the committee was trying to do a parallel job to that of other committees that looked at the, let's say more traditional parts of conservation—paintings, sculpture. Those sorts of things. And we were delighted to be able to make reference to architectural conservation at a time when the field was really almost non-existent in terms of technical studies and people were still unsure what the connection was between preservation as a movement to somehow legally save buildings from the bulldozer and this other area of conservation, which was much more material science based.

The product that was important to me was that we saw a need for education and acknowledged that there were existing programs in historic preservation, understood that the graduates of those programs knew about architectural history. They knew about the value and significance of historic buildings, but very few of them knew what to implement to actually preserve these buildings. To protect them against aging, weathering, and so on. And, in recognition of that, the committee started to put together guidelines for what an educational program should teach. And when I then came to Columbia, the committee was still going on and we had, I invited them to Columbia to at least look at our, at the existing curriculum in historic preservation that Jim Fitch had created. And then we took the guidelines and said, "Well okay, Columbia needs a course in this, a course in that." And so on. And in those years, I was actually able to build it. So, that was an important thing that I think the Columbia curriculum as an architectural conservation curriculum-- Fitch's original preservation architecture curriculum-- got built with the help of that committee. And I can't remember what year we sort of stopped doing those things, but maybe it was the late 70s. Maybe it was the early 80s.