THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Oral History Interview

with

William 'Bill' Conkey

Interviewer: *Kerry James Reed*

Narrator: *William 'Bill' Conkey*

Location of Interview:
Alexandria City Hall, 301 King St, Alexandria, VA, 22314

Date of Interview: *7/31/2023*

Transcriber: *Kerry James Reed*

Summary:
Bill Conkey reflects on his career as an architect in the D.C.. Metro area, with focuses on his time spent working on D.C.. Public Schools, his time on the Parker-Gray Board of Architecture Review, and the material and cultural significances and struggles of a historic preservation architect in the City of Alexandria

Notes:

This recording is part of a special project about the history of historical preservation in Alexandria. Kerry James Reed served as an Oral History Intern in the summer of 2023 and worked on this special project.

Table of Contents and Keywords

General	Architect Career; Work on D.C.. Public Schools; Preserving Historic Buildings in Alexandria; Materially and Culturally Significant Architecture; Architecture trends
People	William 'Bill' Conkey
Places	St. Augustine; City of Alexandria; Old Town; Parker-Gray; D.C..

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:02]* Bill Conkey, 50 years old, and today is 7/31/23. *[00:00:05][2.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:08]* My name is Kerry James Reed. I am 26 years of age. Today is July 31st, 2023, and we are at city hall. So, thank you so much for doing this, Bill. It's been a pleasure, you know, just discussing things with you, getting to know you over this past month or so. So, I guess we'll start from the beginning. Where were you born? *[00:00:26][18.1]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:27]* Silver Spring, Maryland. *[00:00:27][0.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:28]* Silver Spring, Maryland. Where did you grow up? *[00:00:30][2.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:31]* I grew up outside of Manassas in Virginia, a small place called Nokesville, which was, at the time, extremely rural. It's no longer anymore, but it was back then. *[00:00:40][8.7]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:40]* Ok. How do you spell that? Nokesville? *[00:00:41][1.2]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:42]* N-O-K-E-S-V-I-L-L-E. I went to Brentsville High School. *[00:00:47][5.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:48]* Brentsville High School. *[00:00:49][0.8]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:50]* Which was tiny back then. 95 kids in my graduating class. *[00:00:53][3.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:53]* Oh, wow. Big difference from Alexandria. *[00:00:55][1.7]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:00:57]* Yes. Quite a big difference. *[00:00:57][0.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:00:58]* Do you have any special memories of your family or your childhood growing up in Nokesville? *[00:01:02][3.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:01:02]* Yeah, I was thinking about that, actually. It's not there so much, but when I was a kid we used to go, we had family in St. Augustine, Florida. And so every summer we would spend a couple of weeks to a month in St. Augustine. And I was thinking about that this weekend as I saw this, I was thinking about some of those memories. And one of the things that I hadn't thought about in a while actually, was that in St. Augustine, if you've never been to Saint Augustine it's this old city in northern Florida, and they have an old fort. There's an old stone fort. And I grew up every summer going down there, playing run-around in this fort, you know, And then I'd always try to build the fort, like in Legos and stuff. And now that I kind of think back on it, it's funny. It's like no wonder I became an architect, like playing around in an old fort in like the oldest city in the country. It's no wonder I ended up in historic preservation after all that. [Bill Laughs] *[00:01:53][50.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:01:56]* What kind of fort was it? *[00:01:57][0.8]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:01:58]* It was a Spanish fort. It was a Spanish colony. They claim to be the oldest city in the country, St. Augustine. But I don't know. It's a cool old fort to play around in. [Bill Laughs] *[00:02:10][12.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:02:12]* Did your parents put a lot of emphasis on that growing up? Going to, you know, historic places and things like that? *[00:02:16][4.4]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:02:16]* Not really. Not really. We did some. Mostly, I mean, growing up, we didn't have a lot of money. So, our vacations were to go see family. And so, and like I said, I had my grandparents and my uncle lived in St. Augustine. So, that was kind of what we did, you know? So not really. I mean, you know, I guess I guess we went to Williamsburg maybe once, but not really. It wasn't something we did a lot of. *[00:02:41][24.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:02:42]* Can you describe your parents? *[00:02:43][0.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:02:44]* Yeah. So my dad, let's see, my dad still alive. He lives in Front Royal now. Growing up, he worked for for Xerox. He repaired copiers and so he worked in D.C... And, you know, I never forget him waking up at, like 4:00 in the morning to try to commute into D.C.. everyday and from outside of Manassas and getting home late, you know. And so he did he did that in my entire my youth until college. And my mom she worked like at the school occasionally, you know, she did like substitute teaching stuff like that. She passed away a couple of years ago. They retired and went out to Front Royal, and he still out there. *[00:03:34][50.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:03:36]* When did you move to Alexandria? *[00:03:37][0.8]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:03:38]* Right after college. So, I went to Virginia Tech for architecture, and it's a five year program. And in your fourth year, you can either go to the villa in Switzerland or you can come to Alexandria or you can stay in Blacksburg. I couldn't afford to go to the villa in Switzerland because it's extremely expensive. And if you come to Alexandria, you can get a job and you can work. So I came to Alexandria, so I spent my fourth year here. That was in '93, '94 and loved it and went back down to Blacksburg for my fifth year of architecture school and then immediately moved back. So in '95, when I graduated in '95, I moved here. So, my now wife and I moved in together in a little apartment above the Taverna on King Street, the little Greek restaurant on King Street. Tiny little one room apartment. We were there for a couple of years. And then we moved one block directly, one block back on Prince Street to a slightly larger apartment. There for a couple of years and then bought our house. So. *[00:04:45][66.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:04:46]* Terrific. What were your first impressions of the architecture in Old Town when you came here as a student? *[00:04:51][5.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:04:52]* Oh, I loved it. I mean, like I said, growing up where I did, I had no connection to this at all. And it was just it was amazing to me to see, you know, the old buildings and just the fabric of the city. I never lived in any kind of city experience at all. The closest thing was down in Blacksburg, which, you know, it's a college town, right? But to see these old buildings and things were just, they really were just stunning. And I had no reference point for them other than what I knew from history of architecture classes. I had no real reference to understand, like, these things and what they were in real life. But it was the buildings themselves, but really more it was just the kind of the texture. It was just the overall feeling. Just walking the streets just seeing the different things, you know. The buildings from the, you know, 1700s buildings to some of the mid 20th century ones. And just seeing the variety and stuff was just so amazing. So I fell in love with it immediately. I mean, when I was in school here, I was like, yep, I'm going, this is where I'm coming back as soon as I graduate. *[00:05:58][65.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:06:01]* So you mentioned that you were taking historic preservation classes during college. When you went into architecture, did you immediately specialize in historic preservation? *[00:06:10][9.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:06:10]* No, not at all. And actually they weren't even really historic preservation classes. It was a general history of architecture. So, every architecture student has to take a general history of architecture class. So they're not really historic preservation. And I had, really had, no interest in historic preservation. You know, I guess when I went into college, I didn't even really know what I wanted to do in architecture. I wanted to design something. And I had always loved buildings and I didn't even really know what an architect was necessarily. I didn't know what that meant. I just wanted to design things, and I just kind of had my love of buildings and things and just started that way. But no, I never thought I would do historic preservation. It just kind of worked, as I got through my career, kind of turned into that. *[00:06:57][47.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:06:59]* Was that special specialization available though, at Virginia Tech to be a historic preservation architect? *[00:07:04][5.1]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:07:05]* No, they don't have a dedicated historic preservation. No. So, Virginia Tech, every school has its own kind of bent on the way that they do things. Virginia Tech is very much a modernist school. For what it's worth, they are based, the education there is based on the Bauhaus, mid 20th century, early 20th century architecture program in Germany. And so that's kind of the foundation of the Virginia Tech architecture studio. So it's very much modernist. So, yeah. *[00:07:37][32.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:07:41]* So while you were studying, was there any, you mentioned you mentioned the classes, you mentioned coming to Alexandria. Were there any architects that, you know, inspired how you think about architecture materially and culturally? *[00:07:53][11.2]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:07:53]* Yeah, very much so. Very much so. Really, there's two of them that I think are probably my, of the really well-known architects, there are two of them. I think probably my favorites that really have influenced me the most. One is Frank Lloyd Wright. I mean, honestly, not his personality, he was a terrible person, but his buildings are beautiful. And I think I love the way that he handles scale. If you ever walk through his buildings, the way that he handles scale is just beautiful. And that's true of every building I've ever been in of his. It's just, the walls close down and then they open up again. And it's just how you experience the buildings. It's just very intentional. You don't see that a lot. A lot times buildings I feel like our collection of things, his is like a sequential as you experience the building type of thing. So that, and the other one is Louis Kahn. Louis Kahn, I love Louis Kahn's buildings in the way that he uses materials. His use of materials is very unique, but he has a very intentional way of using the materials. And it always feels very natural, like he has a thing about, it's really corny, but it's the saying that he came up with and it's like, "you look at a brick and you ask what it wants to be," super corny, super architect-y. But what he means by that is the materials should be used in an honest way. He would never take a brick and have it hanging out over top of a piece of glass, because the brick is heavy and shouldn't sit on top of that. So it's like there's just that there's a real integrity to the way that he uses materials. So, heavy things rest on each other and go to the ground and they're set apart from each other with light things. And so it's just the way that he uses those materials in organizing them, it just feels so natural to me. And it helped that when I was here at the center at the architecture school in Alexandria, the guy who was the head of the school at the time, John Holt, he was Estonian, just like Louis Kahn was, and actually was a student of Louis Kahns and worked for him. So it's kind of like I got a second, like I got a sort of secondary Louis Kahn influence there. So yeah, really, I guess those two were really in terms of like, well, architects is probably my most influential ones. *[00:10:20][147.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:10:22]* It's interesting when you mentioned the material significance of architecture like that. So when you came to Alexandria for the first time, you when you looked at the buildings, you mentioned, you know, the texture of them and the sort of immediate impression you had of the historic district, were you really paying attention to the materials of the buildings, or were you more interested in the colonial Georgian design? *[00:10:45][22.4]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:10:46]* A lot of it had to do with materials. It's interesting that you point that out, because I think a lot of they'd have to do with materials. Growing up in the suburbs like I did, the building materials aren't real. It's vinyl siding, aluminum siding. They're not real. I mean, they don't have any weight to them. They're not like actual real materials. They're just temporary. And I was struck by the permanence of, you know, a 250 year old brick building. And, you know, you look at some of the some of the wood and some of these things and you realize the tree was cut down 300 years ago and it was full grown at the time. So, it was 150 years old when they cut it down. You realize just the permanence of these of the materials that you're looking out here. That was so stunning to me. Just, like I said, kid from the suburbs where nothing is permanent, everything is meant to be disposable. That was just really shocking. *[00:11:37][51.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:11:39]* Do materials like the ones you're describing, a 250 year old growth wood or what have you, do those do those still exist in current architecture? *[00:11:45][6.5]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:11:46]* Not really.Now it's, not really. There are still real materials and there's some really interesting materials being made now, it's just different. And I love modern architecture, I love some of the things that are being done today. Beautiful, interesting things. But they don't have that level of permanence. You know, if you're traveling and you see Calatrava, Santiago Calatrava, the Spanish architect, he builds bridges and some beautiful buildings, there's this really sinuous sort of like bird like structures and things, gorgeous. They don't have that permanence that like a Georgian house does that looks like it's been here forever. And it's always going to be [Bill Laughs], it's going to outlast all of us. You know, Frank Gehry, his buildings, as nice as they are, they're not going to last. They're not going to outlast all of us. They're kind of temporary. So while I love the forms and I love the interesting stuff that's going on now, materially, I don't think it really exists anymore. And the craftsmanship isn't there. You don't have the the Masons that didn't have the Masons to build these things the way they did back then. *[00:12:58][71.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:13:00]* So considering the scarcity of some of the materials that went into these homes in Old Town Alexandria as a whole, what is the importance of how you see historic preservation architecture in the city then? *[00:13:11][11.2]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:13:13]* Well, I think the fact that when I talk about the permanence of these materials, the materials themselves are permanent. But I think there's a fragility to the buildings. You know, they're subject to all sorts of things. Careless redesigns. You know, the whims of modern culture and modern conveniences can destroy an old building, even though the materials themselves have this permanence, the buildings don't necessarily. And I think that given what went into making these structures, making these buildings, given the, you know, the materials that are there and how important they were and how hard they were to make and what went into them, I feel like we need to protect them. And, you know, it's our job to protect that history. *[00:14:06][52.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:14:09]* What did you do after college, after you moved to Alexandria in '95? *[00:14:11][2.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:14:12]* So I got a job immediately, in a recession, thankfully, which was tough. So I've only had one. Unlike most architects, I didn't really bounce around very much. I had a job right away working a three person firm with two guys who I realize now were very, very young at the time. I didn't realize it when I was 22 years old and they were like 40. They seemed old. But now I realize how young they were, and they had one project. It was these two guys, they were friends, they got a project and they started a firm and they hired two kids right outta college to work on stuff. And we worked around the clock. That lasted about a year and a half. And then that project died, went away. The firm immediately died because they didn't have the work, so that went away. So I worked there like a year and a half. Then I worked for somebody from here in Old Town doing, another three person firm, a small firm, doing a lot of commercial work, just mostly just kind of learning about what it means to be an architect. Did that for about five years and then, you know, and the work there was really not all that interesting or whatever, but it was really just about at that stage in your career, it's just like, what is an architect? What does it mean to do this for a profession? And, you know, how does that even work? Because you're young. I mean, you know, you're five years out of college. Architecture is a business, generally speaking. If you look at even the really great architects, they didn't become good until much later in their lives. And so architecture, there's a lot to learn. So it takes a long time to get to know what you're even doing. So anyway, did that for about five years. Then I went and I did some interesting work. I worked for a guy named Phil Isikoff in D.C.., spent about ten years working there, and we were doing some really interesting work. We're doing multifamily buildings. This is in the early 2000s. Doing, like, condo and apartment buildings up and down Massachusetts Avenue, some really cool looking, curved brick, all kinds of really cool and interesting stuff. His thing was he loved decorative brick and really making interesting brick buildings. And so we did some really cool stuff. And it was early 2000s, and the residential market was on fire. I literally had a project that I was working on where we had, we were still building the top three floors, I mean, still pouring concrete on the top three floors, we had people living on the ground, on the first two floors, because they were trying to get people in these buildings so quickly. That's how fast it was. So, I did that until 2009, market collapsed, end of residential market architecture at the time. So went off, got laid off there, went over to my next firm, which was Sword architects. I got there and they said, "Hey, we have a school project and we need someone to run the project." And I was like, "you know I've never done a school, right?" And they said, "Yeah, it's fine, figure it out." So, I spent the next ten years doing schools, working on D.C.. public schools with Sword. So that was great. Did some really interesting projects there. So I did that for ten years, then the D.C.. public schools stopped doing much work. Got laid off there [Bill Laughs] and then went over someplace else and that lasted only for a few months because this job became available at the time. The guy who was in this job before me retired and he was recruiting somebody and he needed to recruit someone for his job. And I've been friends with him for a long time and he's like, "Bill, you gotta to take this job." I was like, "Al, I don't know. I'm not you. I can't do this job. What are you talking about?" But he's like, "Yeah, you can. You've lived here forever, you know everybody. You can do it." So, that's kind of how I ended up here. *[00:18:00][228.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:18:04]* In what capacity did you work on D.C.. public schools? Were they redesigns? Were they, you know, entire buildings from the ground up? *[00:18:12][8.5]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:18:13]* No, we didn't really do any new construction. D.C.. Schools owned so much property that there's not really a lot of new construction. But the buildings are in, or were in, really, really bad condition. There was, before we started working on them, I remember a couple of years before that in the wintertime they'd actually shut the schools down for a week or two because they didn't have any heat. Their buildings had no heat and if it got cold enough, they just couldn't have school. So, they brought in a guy and said, 'we're going to fix all the schools.' And so they did this, they called it a Phase One program. And basically what they would do is they'd go in and over the summertime they would renovate a school. And first couple of years it was pretty simple stuff. Classrooms, fix up the classrooms, put in air conditioning and heating that worked. Fix up the bathrooms in the hallways. And that was kind of limited because, again, it was summer. The work had to happen from the last day of school to the first day of school. There was no moving kids out for a school year or anything, it was just in the summertime. But as we got more proficient at it and as the contractors got more proficient at it, these jobs became bigger and bigger to the point where the last few that we did were full on, completely gut the school down to the structure, rebuild everything in there. And we would do that work. I mean, the contractors would be there the last day of school. School gets out at noon or something, they would be in the parking lot and they'd start demoing that afternoon. And we were doing punch lists. We were getting ready to go like the day before class started. We were in there, you know, painting last bits of the walls and things. So that was most of what I did. I did have one project where we did a major addition and renovation. So it was a fairly small school and we did a really large addition and that was the last project I ever did with D.C.. Public Schools was this really large addition to it. And that was cool because it was it was a beautiful old 1920s schoolhouse right on Capitol Hill, and it had a really big space next to it. So we designed a very modernist addition onto this really beautiful 1920s school building. So it was cool, it was fun. That one was a fun opportunity to do something modern. In addition to the preservation, which was really interesting. *[00:20:37][144.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:20:38]* Were most of the schools that you worked on, were they in that 1920s era? *[00:20:42][3.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:20:43]* Yeah, D.C.. Built a lot of their schools right around the turn of the century. A couple of them, they were a little older and a couple that were, I think I did one that was like a 1950s something, and then we had a couple that were in like 1905. But I mean, really they were all kind of in that 1910 and 1930ish. That's when D.C.. built a ton of schools. They just went nuts back then. And most of them, in fact, what I learned was a lot of them were the same architect. There was one architect who was just cranking out these schools, and a lot of them look very similar because of that, but they're beautiful, beautiful buildings. *[00:21:15][32.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:21:16]* So that's what I was kind of driving at. We mentioned the materially significant architecture pretty early on. When you saw these D.C.. public schools, did you view them in that way, as materially significant? *[00:21:27][10.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:21:28]* Yeah, they very much were. When you go in there, you realize that they are the character of the neighborhood. The ones that are good, and there's some that are later in the 20th century which are not as good and don't have that same impact. But if you go to one, if you go to a neighborhood and you see the school there and it's 1916, let's say something like that, the architectural character of that building was reflected in the neighborhood. And most of the townhouses and things have a similar style to them or similar materials, things like that. So yeah, it was one of things I was really struck by was how that school became the center of the neighborhood. And it really influenced everything about that neighborhood. And I think that was one of things that I thought we could help to bring back, because the schools had become so, they were in such bad shape and they were so neglected that they really were no longer were the center of the neighborhood. It was like, well, maybe if we can get kids to come back, if we can make these schools so nice that parents are willing to send their kids here instead off to private school, maybe these schools can return to being a focal point of neighborhood. And a lot of cases we did. I mean, we'd go back and check a couple of years later and enrollment was way up and test scores were way up. And, you know, so they were trying to return to that again. So, like architecturally they always were. Culturally, they kind of went in and out. *[00:22:49][81.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:22:51]* So you mentioned these education centers, these public schools being sort of a, I guess, a nexus for the neighborhoods, for the community around them. So, when you were going in and redesigning these schools, what was the community, the neighborhood, reaction to you guys coming in? *[00:23:08][16.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:23:08]* It was always mixed. You always had the one neighbor who was the curmudgeon who didn't want anything to happen. I mean, I can't tell how many times I had people come up in public meetings to say that, 'this addition you're doing to the school is going to destroy all of our property values.' And I think, you know, I wanted to tell them like, you know, at no point in history has a modern, modernized school ever taken anyone's property value down. It doesn't work that way. But I mean, it was usually people were very interested. The ones with families were super fun to engage with because they had a lot of input and I really enjoyed working with them. My favorite one was there was one I did up in Northwest off Georgia Avenue, and it's a beautiful old building. And the principal there was great, I loved her. She was just amazing. She was so much fun to work with. There was a guy who was a neighbor, who had written the history of the school and was just in love with the building, just absolutely loved the building. And was super, you know, really into that. He fought with the school people alot, because he thought they weren't maintaining the building to the standards he wanted it to be. So, when I got there and I was going to renovate it, I met with him and he was super antagonistic. Just like, 'don't ruin this building. This building is super important. Don't ruin it.' I kept telling him, 'No, we're going to make it nicer. We're going to help. We're going to help with this thing.' And he just was super antagonistic. I mean, all the way through the design phase and, you know, to the point where the principal would fight with him all the time, like it was just a thing we had to deal with. And I will never forget, they invited me back for the back to school night because they were so excited. The school, when they got it finished, the principal loved the building, loved the design, the kids all loved it. And so they invited me and my design team to come to back to school night just to see the kids and the families and stuff. And this guy, this neighbor, was there and he was doing, he was an ANC guy there, so he was handing out stuff for fliers for, you know, community events. And I walk by, he comes over, he jumps up, comes over, gives me a big hug. He's like, "I love that building. You guys did such a great job. I'm so happy with it," you know? So it was one of those moments where we fought [Bill laughs] and fought with him over and over again. At the end of it all, he was so happy. He loved the level that we did. And that was one of the really nice ones. Some people you just can never please and they'll never be happy. *[00:25:35][146.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:25:35]* Absolutely. *[00:25:35][0.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:25:36]* That was one I thought was nice because he actually had a, he had a passion for it and he really was worried about it. And he wasn't coming at this just from a place of 'always no,' which a lot of people are just 'always no' and whatever, you can't do anything about that. But he was, like, he really wanted to do the right thing. And so once he got comfortable with that we were not there to destroy this building, he played along. And so that was fun, that was a nice one. *[00:26:02][25.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:26:04]* So, like you said, people are very emotionally charged when it comes to, you know, buildings within their community. How did you, or how do you, go about educating people about the, you know, materials in their community, the cultural significance of these buildings? What does that you know, when you're working with D.C.. public schools and you're with the commissions, what does the education process look like in that? *[00:26:29][24.2]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:26:30]* I have done it a bunch of different ways, and over the years I learned that really the best thing to do is actually to go in and listen first. You can't you go in and, you know, I mean the arrogant architect is the oldest cliche in the world. You know, the arrogant architect wearing all black coming in and telling you, telling the people what to do. I mean, it's a stereotype for a reason, because it exists and it's real. And I've worked for several of them. What I have always found was the best thing to do in terms of educating them about what what this thing, what it was, what it can be, what we can do going forward, how can we help, is to sit and you first approach them and you listen and to say, "what do you want out of this building? What can the school be to your neighborhood that it isn't now?" And just listen. And, you know, you get a wide variety of different things. And a lot of it is people don't know. They don't really know what they're asking for. You know, they may say, I really want a pool or I really want this. Well, they don't necessarily want a pool. They they're looking for some sort of engagement where they can mean. And sometimes you can kind of put all this together and you can see, 'ahh they want after-school.' They want an afternoons center. They want something that they can do in the afternoons or, you know, sometimes we go into places where people needed adult education and they would say, you know, "we need a computer lab." Well, again, they don't need computer lab because it doesn't really, they're not really a thing anymore, but they want adult education. So, like, you know, you can listen to them and find out what it is that they're looking for. The good thing about an architect is that we're problem solvers. And so we can take all that information and kind of get to the root of it and come back to them with something, a proposal. And usually, if you're being reflective of them, then they embrace it. And then you can say, "okay, now how do we make this into the building?" So now we say, "alright, the building going to be a reflection of this, too." So, I think if you can reflect what the community wants in the building, in the function of the building, and then that translates into the actual architecture of the building. So the building becomes, they embrace it because it's kind of a reflection of them, if that makes sense, you know? So, that's kind of what I came to over many missteps over the years, was don't force it on them. Don't force it on people. Don't come in and say, 'this is what you're going to have and listen to me, because I'm smarter than you.' No, you're not. No, you're not. *[00:28:56][146.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:28:59]* When did you get involved with the Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review? *[00:29:04][4.7]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:29:05]* So, once I bought my house, and that was '98, I bought my house, and had always wanted to be involved in the community. And I really just wanted to be involved and stuff. And I wasn't sure how to do that necessarily. But there was a woman who, she just passed away a couple years ago, last year, just last year, and she was a community leader around here and she was an architect. And I was friends with her, my wife had worked for her for years. And so I was like, "Judy, I want to get involved somehow, what can I do?" She said, "Well, get onto a board, board or commission." And so first off, I went to the Park and Recreation Commission. They had a vacancy there and she was the chair. She's like, 'come join me on this one. It'll be fun. We'll go to that.' So I was doing that for a while and I, again, you know, we talked about earlier that I've always been into sports, always been into physical activity and stuff like that. And so I was like, 'Parks and Recreation, perfect. I can go to that.' And I had decided then that I wanted to get a skate park built someplace in the city. So, while I was in the Park and Recreation Commission, I got a skate park built, which was cool. So then a vacancy came up on the Parker-Gray B.A.R., and I had always wanted to do that, but there wasn't a vacancy. So, a vacancy popped up and I went to Judy and I'm like, 'Hey, Judy, listen, I need to go do that. I've always wanted to do that.' And she's like, 'Oh, yeah, yeah, that's great for you.' So, I got involved there and just kind of got started. And I'd wanted to be involved in my community. The other thing that I had wanted to do was that I realized that I needed to become better at public speaking. And I was always scared of public speaking. And I realized that in architecture you have to speak in public quite a lot because you have to talk to boards, you have to talk to communities. And I was really scared of it, and I thought, 'well, a good way to get over that is to go sit up on a dais twice a month and talk about architecture and kind of get over that.' So part of it was that I needed to find a way to get over this. And part of it was I had really wanted to become involved in the community somehow or other. And that seemed like the best way to do it. *[00:31:11][125.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:31:12]* What was your first impression of the B.A.R. when you got onto the board? *[00:31:16][4.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:31:16]* Oh, I was scared to death. I mean, I was way younger than everybody else by a lot. And was totally intimidated. [laughs] *[00:31:23][6.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:31:24]* Were you the only architect or were there other architects? *[00:31:25][1.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:31:25]* No, no, no. When I first got on there, there was, I think three or four. And I was younger than the rest of them by a lot and totally intimidated. But I found it interesting immediately. And I found it interesting that you could have an impact on buildings. Not through your work, which I thought, and this is something I tell people, I tell young architects all the time now. Something I never realized was that when you're in architecture as a young architect, you don't get much chance to really affect your buildings. I mean, honestly, if you're working at a firm, it's your boss. Your boss designs it, you know, maybe you get to do some details here and there or whatever. It takes a long time before you get to do anything. If you get involved in one of these groups, a board of architectural review, you get into some sort of zoning review or whatever, you can have an impact on the buildings in your community in a way that's totally different. So, that was my impression immediately was, 'wow, this is fun because I can have an influence on these things. I can be involved in these.' The design of the stuff in a different way than just, you know, through work. *[00:32:33][67.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:32:36]* How long were you on the Parker-Gray B.A.R.? *[00:32:37][1.1]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:32:38]* I was on there for ten years. So, basically at ten years, there's a term limit. So ten years. And I rolled off and then I was off of it for about a year. And then they combined the two boards into one, which is what it currentl is. And I got onto that board, I was on that board for about two years and then I took this job and, you know, had to get off the board, obviously. *[00:33:01][22.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:33:03]* What sort of projects did you work on while you were with the Parker-Gray B.A.R.? *[00:33:09][5.9]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:33:09]* We saw all kinds of stuff. There's everything from your sort of everyday person fixing up his house to some of the bigger ones. I've always been more interested in the bigger projects. I think that's just because of my background in terms of my career. I've never designed a house. I've always worked on big projects, so I've always found them more interesting, even on the board. I mean, I like working. I like helping out and working on people's houses, too. And, you know, I enjoy that, kind of the fine level of detail there. But the big projects are always kind of where I gravitated towards. So, on the Parker-Gray board, probably the biggest one was the James Bland project. That was the redevelopment of former early 20th century garden style affordable housing projects. And it was all redeveloped in the north end of Parker-Gray. And that was probably the most significant project that I worked on during my time on the board. *[00:34:08][58.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:34:10]* So, you know, going back to that materially significant, culturally significant architecture we talked about. So, James Bland, you know, probably materially, you know, garden style homes, 20th century is not the most materially important thing. But, you know, culturally in Alexandria that stuff has a lot of a lot of significance. *[00:34:26][15.9]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:34:27]* Very much so. *[00:34:27][0.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:34:28]* So what were some, you know, community reactions that you remember when this project, the James Bland project was proposed? *[00:34:33][5.8]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:34:34]* And it's interesting cause it's almost the same thing that we're experiencing now with the Samuel Madden. The people who lived there were very, very excited about it. The housing that was there for James Bland, which is still there for Samuel Madden, soon to be demolished. I mean, it's, you know, early 20th century it was built as segregated housing. So, people who live there, have no love for it. And it really represents, you know, some of the worst of our culture. And so, you know, the demolition of it was looked upon kindly by most people and the people who didn't like the demolition of it, it wasn't because they loved the buildings, it was because they didn't want more density. So, you know, I think that's a lot of what we encountered there. And we encountered the same thing here. At Samuel Madden it's just people, you know, they're trying to use the demolition of it as a way to stop the additional density. And even that it's not for architectural reasons. It's just for, you know, societal reasons and things. But I think it's a really hard thing and we're struggling with it even right now. We struggled with it at James Bland. How you remember, how do you memorialize, you know, the events of the area? And this was a Jim Crow development, you know, and how do we make sure we don't forget that? Without keeping this physical reminder of it that's outdated. I mean, at best, it's, you know, bad housing and bad buildings. At worst, it's really like a commemoration of Jim Crow policies, right? So it's, there's nothing, no love lost when those things are torn down, you know? How do you memorialize that culturally without keeping the buildings, you know? And I don't have a good answer for that. We've been trying to do that. We're struggling with it. You know, some of it comes down to memorial plaques and things. You know, I'd like to think we could do better than that. I'd like to have some of that stuff built into the architecture. And I think you can memorialize some of the buildings into the architecture. It's not always done very well, and it's hard to do. So, I don't know if we've done a great job of that so far. You know, there's a couple of developments that have done a pretty good job of baking in some of the industrial past. But this is a type of housing. It's hard, it's really difficult to do. And we try to, you know, I know that your team has been involved with some of the oral histories for Samuel Madden. And James Bland did the same thing. And the Ramsey project, another one that I worked on there, did the same thing and trying to capture the history of the people that are there as best you can and just acknowledging that that's not in the structures. So that's a tough question and I don't have a good answer for that right now. I think we're doing the best we can to try to capture the history as best we can through other means. But it's not directly an architectural question, which I guess is why I struggle with it. Being an architect. *[00:37:48][193.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:37:51]* So we've talked about the community reaction to these: James Bland, Ramsey homes, and whatnot. Do you remember how these communities changed after these developments while you were on the Parker-Gray board? Any significant, you know, people that came up to you and said, "oh," you know, "our prices have gone up," or "prices have gone down," or things like that? *[00:38:14][23.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:38:14]* Not that, but I live really nearby. I live only a few blocks from Ramsey and James Bland. And I just can say, even as a resident, as a neighbor, the density is great. I mean, the neighborhood is so much, we actually have more affordable housing in these communities now. There's more affordable housing units than there were in the original because the density is so much greater. So there's a lot of mixed, there's a lot of market rate in there now. So it's a mixed and market rate and an affordable all mixed together. And then the idea is that you can't tell the units apart from the outside. That is not to stigmatize it. So, they're all the same. Some of them are being subsidized, some of them aren't, right? What's great about it, though, is that the density means that there's so many people running around. Like I go out, I want to go take my dog for a walk, there's just people everywhere. And some of it's the market rate people, some of it's the affordable housing people. And they're all just out running around doing normal stuff. But it's fantastic. It's just so nice to see where it was, this sort of stigmatized area where like, 'oh,' you know, 'you can't go over there,' or whatever. And it played into it. You know, the people who live there, they didn't deserve that and it wasn't right to do that to them. Andyet it was. It was done architecturally. It was done culturally. But by having this additional density and just having extra people running around all the time, you get these interactions, which are fantastic. You get to see, you know, it just becomes one big community, which has been great, you know. And so I think it's been, as a resident, maybe as a nearby neighbor myself, I think it's been fantastic. And once it's built, people stop complaining. [laughs] you know, they'll complain before it gets built, they love complaining. But once its built, I've never heard anything negative. No one's ever come up to me and said, 'Yeah, you guys really screwed that up.' I mean, there's things I would do differently architecturally. There's some stuff here in there and the buildings that I don't love, lessons learned. But, you know, I think from a development standpoint, it's been fantastic. *[00:40:18][123.4]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:40:19]* So you mentioned that, you know, you see the community being more, you know, visible, I guess you could say. What other changes have you seen in the Parker-Gray community since those developments occurred? *[00:40:30][10.5]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:40:30]* Well, the Parker-Gray neighborhood has changed dramatically in the 20 something years that I've been there. *[00:40:36][5.8]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:40:37]* Could describe some of those changes? *[00:40:37][0.8]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:40:38]* Yeah. When I first got there, I mean, the Parker-Gray community was historically the African-American part of Alexandria. It was starting to change before I moved in. When I moved in, it was, you know, there was some old timers around who were just amazing. They were really great. And the woman across the street from us, she was in her nineties and she lived her whole life in that house. Someone down the street from us, his grandfather built the house and they've been there forever. And they just, you know, they were just really interesting, had great stories about the place. So, you know, they were really great. Around the corner from us was a crack house, and you'd hear the gunshots over there all the time. So, not so nice, you know. So now, you know, it's gentrified. Parker-Gray pretty much gentrified at this point. The old timers that were there, most of them are gone now. There's still a few. Not very many, unfortunately. What I saw happen a lot was, and I saw this in my in my block, was these guys, they'd be in their eighties and nineties. They would either have to go live with somebody because they couldn't live by themselves anymore or they would pass away. And their families are kids who don't live in the area, living, you know, someplace else. They saw it, and all of a sudden the property was worth, you know, a ton of money that it wasn't before. Now it's worth a ton of money and they don't live there. So they just sold it off. So they sold them off to flippers who, you know, put a beautiful adition on the back and changed the house and, you know, modernized it and everything, which is good. You do lose that fabric, unfortunately. But, you know, you also lose the crack house and the shootings. So, you know, that's the hard part about gentrification is you lose so much in terms of that original fabric. But then, you don't get shot. [laughs] So, you know, I wish there was a way we could, wish there was a way to incentivize some of these people, these families to stay around. And it's just not eventhat, not that they're being driven out. It's just that, you know, they're die off essentially, unfortunately. But yeah, changed a lot. *[00:42:49][130.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:42:50]* When these developers came in, I know that, you know, in Parker-Gray during the '80s and '90s, a lot of homes were rooming homes. Boarding homes. *[00:42:59][8.9]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:42:59]* Yeah. *[00:42:59][0.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:42:59]* So they were rented out to a bunch of different people. So when these developers came in, how did they change the, I guess, interior of the house? And while you were on the board, did you oversee that process? *[00:43:12][12.7]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:43:13]* Oh, yeah. And there's one on my block. There's a building in my block that was a boarding house, and is slowly just, and it was slow because eventually the people who lived there just either moved on or passed away honestly. It wasn't that someone came in and kicked them out. They just kind of, like it outlived its usefulness. And then someone would buy it and then flip it. So, they just, basically what they do is they just gut the house. And they do an addition usually. So, yes. When I was on the board, I would see a lot of these things because they'd have to come in for the addition or the modernization of it. And so yeah, we saw that all the time. Still do. *[00:43:49][36.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:43:50]* What sort of units did the developers typically change these dwellings into, like single family or? *[00:43:56][6.4]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:43:57]* Single family. *[00:43:57][0.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:43:57]* Single Family. *[00:43:57][0.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:43:59]* Because these were usually, you know, fairly large houses and they would rent out one, or rent out a bedroom at a time essentially. So, let's say you'd have a four or five bedroom house, you'd have four or five tenants living, you know, each person had a bedroom. So they'd just make them into big houses and sell them for a lot of money. Basically. *[00:44:17][18.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:44:22]* Right. So we talked about, you know, community and diversity changing in Parker-Gray because of these developments. What about commercial changes? Did you witness any commercial changes to the area? *[00:44:35][13.4]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:44:36]* Yeah. Yeah, it's been interesting because I think the time that I've been there, the economy has changed a lot in the time that I've been there. Overall economy. There used to be when I first moved in there, there was a lot of office buildings along Washington Street, was all office buildings. So you had a weird thing where you'd have, it'd be pretty busy during the day, and they're just super quiet at night because the buildings would empty out, they'd all go away. And then it would just be the residents, just us that live there. With office buildings, particularly since COVID being before that, those went away. People were going, even before COVID, those office buildings were emptying out on Washington Street because they were just going to D.C.., the newer, better buildings in D.C... These were, you know, mid 20th century buildings that were losing their luster, and so they were moving into the bigger buildings. So those are going away. And so now commercially, we're seeing more small businesses, which is fun. I mean, there's a lot of little niche little restaurants and things that, we never had that. We didn't really have a lot of that in Parker-Gray when I first moved in, it wasn't like a lot of little neighborhood restaurants. Now we're seeing a lot of, you know, little coffee shops. There's a little bagel shop. There's a place that sells seafood. All these little infill restaurants and things have moved in over the last ten years or so, which is nice to have neighborhood-owned, you know, locally-owned, neighbor-owned, like the guy who lives there owns it. My neighbor, guy who lives right next door to me, owns Mishas's coffee shop, and he's owned it for, you know, as long as I've been there. *[00:46:12][96.6]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:46:13]* Interesting. *[00:46:13][0.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:46:13]* It's just, you know, it is nice to see that where you've got these, like, the guy lives right there, and that's his restaurant right there. That's his coffee shop right there. So that is kind of nice to see that, that change away from, you know, the transient business office building type stuff into more of this type of stuff. So, yeah. *[00:46:31][17.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:46:32]* So there's a push previously and now, you know, for more urban, walkable communities, especially in America, you know. A lot of jealousy I suppose over the European palazzos and things like that. *[00:46:45][13.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:46:46]* Yeah. *[00:46:46][0.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:46:47]* How do you see that sort of cultural push influencing the developments that you've seen in both Parker-Gray in your capacity as historic preservation architect? *[00:46:58][11.4]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:47:00]* It has definitely become a focus. We, the city, just approved a project on King Street with zero parking, which is really unheard of. And this is a change I've seen since I've been involved in the city. It used to be that the parking and the car drove everything about the development. It was like, 'okay, how much parking can you get? You're going to build that, how much parking and make sure you get one per person.' That drove everything about the the development. Now it's like, it's really interesting to me now, the car parking numbers and things, they're like, 'do we need that much? Can we can we maybe get rid of some of that and turn it into this,' or, you know, whatever. Particularly since COVID, though. After COVID, I mean, it used to be like when we used to talk about closing down the whole hundred block of King Street, we talked about that for years. For decades we've talked about doing that. It was always, 'Oh my God, how can you do that? People can't park in front of my restaurant. They're never going to come.' As soon as COVID happened and people weren't going places as much. All of a sudden, these walkable communities just kind of, it became real. Like all of a sudden, like you weren't going to drive someplace, so maybe you just live here, you know. And COVID accelerated it, but even prior to that, though, people were just really starting to to embrace it. And the whole notion of how much parking can you get or what the impact going to be on traffic or parking, that really has dwindled in terms of driving these developments. It's not the first question you ask anymore. It's like maybe the 10th question. Now it's like, well, you know, are you going to have amenities, ground floor amenities? Are you going to have a coffee shop on the ground floor? Are you going to have a rooftop deck so that your tenants can be enjoying, you know, that amenity. Like those are the first thing that you ask. And then you say, well, okay, how much parking do you have? You know, what's what's going to be offset? So it's nice that that's not driving things anymore. And I think you're right. I think it's part of this walkable community movement that was happening anyway. But then COVID seems to have really accelerated that. I couldn't believe that they passed, approved this zero parking, and it's a multi-family apartment building on King Street that has zero parking, which would have been unheard of ten years ago. So it's really fun, it's really nice to see. *[00:49:25][145.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:49:27]* So what effects does that have on architecture in the design process, not having to plan around vehicles? Because, you know, a lot of these new buildings in Parker-Gray are a bit, you know, transit oriented, I guess. *[00:49:43][15.9]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:49:44]* Yeah, yeah. *[00:49:44][0.1]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:49:44]* So when you build new transit-oriented housing, what does that allow you to do with space as an architect? *[00:49:52][7.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:49:53]* Well, so if you're doing a large building and you have to do a lot of parking and you are within a short district or something, ground level parking, surface level parking is just not going to work. It makes for a terrible pedestrian landscape. And so the city would never allow it. So it means you have to go down, means you have to build below grade parking below the buildings, very expensive. Below grade parking is very expensive. And the deeper you go, the more expensive it is. So when we can limit the number of parking spaces that are required, when they start to go down, there is less excavation. It means that money goes elsewhere. You're not putting that money into the ground. That money is going into the building. It means you can focus on ground floor retail, you know, and that type of thing, to encourage these walkable communities where you have coffee shops and barber shops and stores and restaurants and things like that on the ground floors. Because now the money is not going in the ground, so the buildings get better. If you're not burying that money, it goes someplace else. So, you know, if you have to put $5 million in the ground, you know, that money's got to come from someplace. So I think that it really does have an effect on the development itself and the architecture, because it just frees it up a lot. *[00:51:19][85.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:51:21]* So you mentioned the benefits to the Parker-Gray community from these James Bland, Ramsey developments. So, what does it do to the historicity of a historic designated neighborhood, though, when you add these, tear down old buildings and put in new buildings, right? How does that, you know, from a architecture standpoint, what does that do to the historic designation of the district? *[00:51:49][29.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:51:51]* It doesn't really affect the designation. We have a lot of regulations about new developments and what new buildings are supposed to look like in the historic district. The goal here is not to replicate historic buildings. It's something that tell people all the time. People think that historic preservation means that if you build a new building, it should look like an old building. And I find that to be just entirely wrong. That's actually one of the worst things you can do, if you build a new building that looks like an old building, you're watering down the old buildings, and so they become less special. So, we want new buildings to be good quality designs that are compatible with the existing buildings without looking just like them. We want them to be a product of their time so that you can say, 'Oh, that's a you know, that's a 2010 building. You can tell from that from the technology, from their architecture, but look how compatible it is. Look how it fits into the overall historic buildings.' It compliments them by taking pieces, design pieces from them. And that can be things like, you know, maybe it's a it's a type of trim that you use and you use it in a new way. It's reflective of it, but it's different, you know, or it's if you look at the overall wall to window ratio on the exterior of building, you say, 'Ok, this is a typical ratio for a building. This one's going to have that, but the skin's going to be metal or something like that.' So it's got that a lot of that same pieces here and there. But the tectonics of it are slightly different or modern, you know. So I think that's actually one of things that makes a living historic district so interesting, is that it's constantly changing, constantly evolving. You're constantly getting, you know, really interesting new architecture being inserted into it. And as long as it has that compatible sort of feel to it, you're not watering down the historic stuff, but you're also not overpowering it because, you know, it's being controlled. So I don't find new construction to be detrimental to the structures at all. I think it can really keep it really dynamic. *[00:54:04][133.5]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:54:07]* Terrific. Well, we've been talking for almost an hour here. I don't want keep you for too long. Before we get to the closing questions, is there anything else you would like to mention about, you know, changes you've seen since you've lived in Alexandria, changes you've seen in Parker-Gray, in Old Town? Anything like that that we haven't touched upon? *[00:54:24][16.5]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:54:25]* I don't think so. I think the, you know, the physical changes are dramatic in terms of just the transformation of the city with a lot of this affordable housing that that really needed to go away, going away. So the physical changes are dramatic and that's probably all for the good. And culturally, there's some loss to the city, which is unfortunate. And I think it's not just unfortunate, it's a real loss. It's a real loss to the fabric of the community. And I don't have a good answer for how to reconcile those two things. You know, from an architectural standpoint, how do you improve a city without losing that fabric? I don't have a good answer for that. I'm an architect. I'm not a something else. [laughs] You know, whatever. You know, I can just deal with the buildings. But I think it has been really interesting to be a resident and architect and also involved in the city government during this time. It has been really interesting and I've learned a lot. And there's a lot of things that I still don't know and still don't have answers for, but it has certainly been interesting time to be here. *[00:55:41][75.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:55:42]* Absolutely. All right. So what are some of the hopes you have for your discipline moving forward? *[00:55:48][6.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:55:49]* So for architecture in general. Architecture in general, I would say that green building is going to be, it has to be the future. And I think the first thing we need to do is look at adaptive reuse. The vanity projects of knocking down a building just to build something new and make it a shiny as possible is just not sustainable. To a large degree, we're overbuilt in this country, and particularly in this area, we're overbuilt already. So reuse the buildings, go back to the concrete if you have to. The concrete that's there, the bones of the building. And we skin it, gut it, change it around. You know, that's one of things we learn from historic preservation is that these buildings, you know, these houses on the inside often don't look anything like they did in 1850. You know, they're modern houses, you know, with modern conveniences and things. But the buildings are still there and they're gorgeous. So, you know, I think as a profession, we need to move away from the vanity projects and start to get back to preserving what's there, reusing it in a new way. I mean, I love nowadays, we've seen a lot of projects recently which are converting the dying office market into multifamily buildings. *[00:57:06][76.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:57:06]* Mm hmm. *[00:57:06][0.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:57:06]* Really interesting work. There's one on King Street that's happening. King and Henry Street, which is really interesting. It was a really out of date office building, but it's going to be a fantastic apartment building. *[00:57:21][14.2]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:57:21]* Have you seen a lot of that recently? Changing office buildings into residential spaces? *[00:57:23][2.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:57:24]* That seems to be the new trend right now, specifically in this area. But yeah, and it seems to be a trend. The office market is dying. Post-COVID, the office market is just going away. So people want to live in cities now, as we talked about for these walkable cities, and there's these buildings that no one wants anymore. So it's great way to do it, you know. So architecturally, I think that's a direction we need to go for architecture. From historic preservation, I think historic preservation needs to be a lot better in looking at things we never thought we wanted to preserve. And how do you preserve those things that are maybe not as as physical, you know. It's there's an 1850 gorgeous brick building. I mean, yeah, I know how to preserve that. And we all know how to preserve that. We can recognize that it has value in terms of just it's architecture. So we say, 'ah, I can do that,' you know, 'I know how to do that.' There's a lot of stuff that happened in this country that needs to be preserved and needs to be remembered. And maybe it doesn't have that physical manifestation, but we need to preserve it anyway. And so I think we need to, from a historic preservation standpoint, we need to do a lot better at identifying those things, finding ways to preserve them, and maybe finding new ways to use those spaces that keeps the physical manifestation of it without keeping some of the baggage. So so we need to figure out a way to do that, I think. So in terms of my profession, I'd say that's a direction from historic preservation. And then architecture I think is actually kind of kind of hand-in-hand with that in terms of adaptive reuse. So I think they kind of work together. *[00:59:00][95.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:59:02]* What are some of your best memories of Alexandria? *[00:59:03][1.3]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[00:59:04]* Oh man, so many fond memories of Alexandria. I mean, I've raised my daughter here. I mean, it's been some of the small things, you know. It's been when she was in school and making all the friends with all of her friends and this group of parents that all became friends and some of the impromptu like, you know, cookouts and things with them, you know. And then even some of the bigger stuff. I have one of my neighbors has a boat that's down the docks, down at the waterfront. And she always has parties on her boat for the fireworks and stuff. So, you know, going down there and having the place just absolutely packed and, you know, everyone's around and sittin' on the boat watching the fireworks and just, you know, the entire neighborhood is just down there. So, you know, that's the kind of fun stuff that I have some of my good memories. *[00:59:53][48.9]*

Kerry James Reed: *[00:59:55]* And lastly, if you could hold on to one memory forever, what would it be? *[00:59:59][3.9]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[01:00:00]* Oh, man. One memory forever. That's a tough one. I mean, there's so much. I mean, I guess it would have to be, it's more of a collection of them. It's some of the stuff with like when my daughter was young and she and all of her friends would do stuff. And there was a few times in particular, I remember, where we would have this, I remember there was one time I'm thinking about. There was some snow day we had, back when it used to snow, and there was a big snowstorm. And one of my friends over in Del Ray, had a party for the snow. And so the kids were all over there, all sledding at the Masonic Temple. So we spent all day over there sledding. And they said, "All right, come back to our place over in Del Ray." We went over there. The kids all played and had snowball fights in the backyard and all the parents would just stand around outside. We had a fire going outside on the outdoor fire pit and everything. We were all there. The kids got all cold. They all went inside and watched movies and things. And we just stayed out there forever. So I think that memory is one of my all time favorites of just like the community of like the adults and the kids all doing their thing and the kids just having fun and spending the day sledding with them and then spend the evening with them, you know, inside watching movies while we were outside. And that's probably one of my best ones. *[01:01:20][80.3]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:01:20]* Oh, yeah, that's beautiful. Well, that's all. That's everything on my end. Thank you so much, Bill. This has been an absolute pleasure talking to you. *[01:01:27][6.6]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[01:01:27]* Yeah, hopefully it's been interesting. *[01:01:28][1.0]*

Kerry James Reed: *[01:01:28]* Oh, it absolutely is. Thank you so much. *[01:01:30][2.0]*

William 'Bill' Conkey: *[01:01:31]* Thank you. *[01:01:31][0.0]*

[3562.1]