

STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

JOYCE RUTHERFORD

December 27, 2017

Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic
Storm King Oral History 006
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Interviewee with Joyce Rutherford
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
December 27, 2017

Joyce Rutherford's home, Danville, CA
1 audio file
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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is December 27, 2017—

Rutherford: [looking at photographs] There's Bill [Rutherford, Sr.].

Dziedzic: —and this is an interview with Joyce Rutherford for the Storm King Oral History Program.

Rutherford: Yes, this is all very, very familiar. [laughs] That's what it looked like to begin with. Oh. I have a picture of that house. I did some work on that house, the Museum Building.

Dziedzic: We're just looking at a *Greenwich Magazine* right now. [00:01:00] I'll take that, but you're welcome to keep it if you want.

Rutherford: Oh, I'd love to. There's a lot of familiar things in there.

Dziedzic: Well, before we get to Storm King, I wanted to ask you how you became interested in architecture.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Ok, so [00:03:00] I wanted to ask you about what got you interested in studying architecture.

Rutherford: Well, of course there were very few women architects when I went through college, and I had always seemed to be interested in construction and artwork, and I was a good mathematics student, and so it all sort of blended in that I'd take architecture. And I really enjoyed it completely. Everyone was extra nice to me because I was a woman, and all the ladies I had to interview always told me that I understood their point of view, too, [00:04:00] better than men did. So I never had any problems. All the men on the jobs were so nice to me, and I was so very glad that I did take architecture, and now I'm very glad that my granddaughter is going to be an architect in one more year, so that's going to be nice to hear how she does. And of course, my son is a landscape architect, and he's been in the office with us all of his working life. And my next son, Jack, is an architect. My next son, Jeff, is a chemical engineer. He said, "Enough architects." [laughs]

Dziedzic: Was anyone in your family an architect before you?

Rutherford: [00:05:00] No.

Dziedzic: What kind of work did your parents do?

Rutherford: My father worked at the C&H Sugar Refinery in Crockett, which isn't very far from here. I don't know if you know where it is. It's on San Francisco Bay. I grew up right on San Francisco Bay and then went on to Berkeley, which wasn't very far. But then I went back east, and that was a long way.
[laughs]

Dziedzic: How did you decide to go to Berkeley?

Rutherford: Well, it was the one and only big university on the coast here that was very accessible. It was only about 20 miles from my home. But I lived in Berkeley, I didn't commute. I always knew I was going there, for some reason or other. [laughs] [00:06:00]

Dziedzic: What was living in Berkeley like at the time?

Rutherford: Oh, it was very nice living. I lived in an apartment with two other girls close to the campus, and I was also working at Kaiser shipyards during World War II. I'd go to school during the day and go the 4–12 shift, and I worked in the engineering department, and later all of us girls were known as Rosie the Riveters, so that's a part of history.

Dziedzic: Yes, that's amazing. [00:07:00] Did all the other girls that you went to school with have jobs like the one you had?

Rutherford: No. Actually, my two roommates didn't have jobs, so they had a bit more time to spend doing things. But I sure did a lot. [laughs] Kept up with everything.

Dziedzic: And after college, what sort of jobs did you look for?

Rutherford: After I graduated? Well, a couple of weeks after I graduated, I got married, and that meant that I—well, my husband was still in World War II, and so I went back home to live, and I had a baby [00:08:00] while he was overseas. And then after the war ended and he came back, we went back to Connecticut, where he was from, and we formed our office and all back there.

Dziedzic: How did you meet your husband?

Rutherford: When I was at Cal, one of his professors from Columbia was taking some courses, and I got to know him, and when Bill came into San Francisco, I guess he looked up his professor, and he introduced us, and that was it. [laughs]

Dziedzic: So did he [00:09:00] already have his degree?

Rutherford: Yes. He'd worked for a couple of years.

Dziedzic: And then what was the move to the east coast like for you?

Rutherford: Well, I sure didn't like it. It took me a long time to get used to everything in the east, and of course being without my family and friends was very difficult. But I lived there for, oh, 40, 50 years, I guess. Maybe even longer. [laughs]

Dziedzic: It's interesting that you and your husband decided to form a company together. Do you remember what the discussions were about that? Were there any reservations about working together?

Rutherford: Oh, no. We [00:10:00] worked together on a lot of projects. Some were just his, and some were just mine. He did work in New York City for the Boy Scouts of America, designing their camps all over the country at the very beginning. Well, I think for 15 years, so that was quite a while. And he'd come home at night and work on local jobs, and then I'd be in the office all day long, and even though I had four children, I worked it out some way or other. [laughs]

Dziedzic: And when did you move to the east coast? Do you remember the year?

Rutherford: What year I went to the east coast. [00:11:00] I think it was about 1942, just after World War II stopped.

Dziedzic: Well, let's talk about how you first got started working with Storm King. How did that first start?

Rutherford: Well, somebody must have heard about my husband and called him in for an interview. Peter Stern was head of the Art Center at that point, and he hired Bill, and hopefully he was very pleased. Over all the years, I think he was.

Dziedzic: He was.

Rutherford: And I did any of the construction work. [00:12:00] There were several homes built on the property, and different galleries. And Bill did all of the landscaping, which was a real mess because the property had been used to build the New York Thruway, and it was just a complete shambles, just gravel pits everywhere. So we really started at the very bottom, just did a section here and a section there until it all went together. [00:12:54]

Dziedzic: And I know that Ted Ogden [00:13:00] was acquiring sculptures at the time when you both started working for Storm King. Did you both go to Bolton Landing to see the David Smith sculptures?

Rutherford: No, I don't think we did. We saw them when they were brought to the Art Center.

Dziedzic: Do you remember when they were first brought to the Art Center?

Rutherford: Well, it was early on in the history of the Art Center.

Dziedzic: I wanted to show you some pictures and see what you remember about some of the architecture that you designed for Storm King. [00:14:00] So some of them, like you pointed out in the magazine, the Museum Building, you designed the office spaces in there. And I have some pictures of some plans. They're not all of the plans, but I think that—let's see here. So one of the first things was the caretaker apartment, some renovations to there, and that was on the second floor.

Rutherford: [looking at scans of architectural drawings] I see my name here, [reading] "Joyce Rutherford." "Remodel kitchen in caretaker's apartment."

Dziedzic: So this was on the second floor, [00:15:00] and there's some cabinetry drawn out there.

Rutherford: That's the cabinets, yes.

Dziedzic: I just wanted to ask if you remember the—

Rutherford: I don't remember this, but I recognize my work. [reading] Seventy-four.

Dziedzic: I think that was one of the first things that you did in the Museum Building, in the main building.

Rutherford: Yes. That was an old home to begin with, and we redid the whole thing.

Dziedzic: Do you remember designing the offices on the first floor and the second floor?

Rutherford: Yes.

Dziedzic: Eventually this became offices, the upstairs caretaker apartment. Do you remember those?

Rutherford: Yes. One thing I remember, the house was on quite a steep hill, and there was this huge basement, but it was all useless. And so [00:17:00] I excavated the downside of the building and put in large windows all across one side so that it opened up the whole basement to an art review, and they were so pleased when they thought they could use all that space. And it was very pleasant, because they had all the windows, full-sized glass doors, and there was a lot of artwork down there. [00:17:50]

Dziedzic: I have a picture of that, too. Eventually it became the conference room, [00:18:00] and—let's see. So there you can see some of the light coming in there on the left from the windows you're describing.

Rutherford: This was the basement, yes. Yes, I just remember it let in so much light.

Dziedzic: And I wanted to ask you what was here before.

Rutherford: Just an old, dirty basement. Very dark, because it was all below ground. We had to excavate the one side and let in all the light.

Dziedzic: I do have a picture of [00:19:00] the elevations, but I don't have a picture of the area that is the conference room now, the area that you dug out. So those are all the other sides [of the Museum Building].

Rutherford: Printing is so small, I can't see if my names are on here or not.

Dziedzic: Let's see. It's both of you, I think. [00:20:00] No, I can't see.

Dziedzic: Did you do all the drawings?

Rutherford: Oh, yes. In the first few years, we did all the drawings ourselves.

Dziedzic: We have all the drawings in a big cabinet in our Archives. So do you remember when you moved the kitchen to the basement?

Rutherford: No, I don't remember that.

Dziedzic: What David [Collens] said was—the second floor offices and the library and the kitchen, they're all in line with each other [vertically]. Previously the kitchen had been in the library, and I wasn't sure what was [00:21:00] in the basement. I thought maybe you were responsible for renovating the library and moving the kitchen down to the basement.

Rutherford: Yes. I can't remember that the kitchen was in the basement. I thought it was all viewing of artwork.

Dziedzic: Let me see if I can show you another plan of yours. So this was from 1987, and so it shows—let's see—a few things that I wanted —

Rutherford: First of all, this is the driveway going through, and the front door.

Dziedzic: Right.

Rutherford: [00:22:00] And one gallery, another gallery, and this was a big one.

Dziedzic: Yes, there's this big gallery space right there.

Rutherford: Yes, now this might be where—this was outside, and you could go down the stairs, and then it would enter that room that was a basement. So it had a little sort of garden in here and you could view it from the gallery.

Dziedzic: And I wanted to ask you—so here's the library, and then here are the offices. Now these offices used to be a garage. [00:23:00] Do you remember that renovation?

Rutherford: No. Was that done at the same time as the rest of the house?

Dziedzic: I think that this was done in the 1980s.

Rutherford: That's when I would have been there. I just don't remember this part.

Dziedzic: Yes, it wasn't the first renovation, but—

Rutherford: And if this was a garage, that's—and that's the library.

Dziedzic: And this is that driveway area that was converted into a Visitor's Center. Do you remember the Visitor's Center?

Rutherford: Yes, I remember the driveway.

Dziedzic: And there's a few things about this that I wanted to ask about. So I wanted to ask [00:24:00] if you remembered whose idea it was to have this [referring to former porte-cochère area] be the main entrance.

Rutherford: Have what be the entrance?

Dziedzic: Have this be the main entrance, that driveway, and to turn that [by enclosing it] into a Visitor's Center.

Rutherford: Let me just show you one picture I have. [00:25:00]

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: So do you remember any discussions about [00:26:00] designing the Visitor's Center?

Rutherford: No.

Dziedzic: And do you remember if it was always in the main Museum Building or if there was ever a discussion about it being a separate building?

Rutherford: No, as far as I know it was always the main building.

[looking at framed photograph of Museum Building] Yes, see, here's the drive-through come in and out [describing porte-cochère]—well, this was, of course, after it had been converted, but you could drive right through there and come out on this side. So this was the Art Center building. [00:27:00] This was the Visitor's Center. It was an old home. At that time, they were building beautiful mansions for people that worked in New York and had probably an apartment in New York, and then they had their country home up the Hudson River, and this was one of the country homes that was on the property purchased by the

Art Center. [00:27:46] This wasn't changed at all except for this little bit right in here, changed to a walkway rather than the driveway. [00:28:00] And then the front door was just in here.

Dziedzic: And that's where people would enter if they were going to look at art in the galleries?

Rutherford: Yes, the upstairs rooms were all art galleries. It was a big home. So it made a really nice place to have the art gallery.

Dziedzic: Now, David wanted me to ask you about some of the renovations in the galleries. He said that you had the idea to put up walls in front of all of the original woodwork.

Rutherford: Put up walls in front of the original woodwork?

Dziedzic: So instead of tearing down some of the wood paneling, you put up just walls in front of it to conserve it.

Rutherford: Well, maybe the woodwork wasn't a very good background to hang the [00:29:00] pictures, so they wanted to cover that with just plain walls, but I can't remember doing that.

Dziedzic: And he said something similar happened in the library, that the original paneling was preserved behind the shelves that were built.

Rutherford: Well, it's a good thing it's preserved. [laughs] Might have nail holes in it, though. [laughs]

Dziedzic: It might, it might. And so then that garage that I mentioned is over here [indicating area of photo].

Rutherford: Yes, this way.

Dziedzic: And I work in the attic of the building. That's where my office is, and I saw that there was an office space designed for the attic that wasn't built. Do you remember drawing any plans for the attic?

Rutherford: [00:30:00] For the attic? No, I can't think of any—I can't remember. That would have been one floor above this.

Dziedzic: That's right. Up here.

Rutherford: No, I don't remember that.

Dziedzic: All right. So you mentioned some of the houses that you designed or renovated.

Rutherford: Oh, [laughter] there were a number of smaller houses on the property, and Peter Stern—
[00:31:00] I did his house, but I think there was a small house to begin with, and we added on to it. So that was one of the houses I did. Made it much bigger.

Dziedzic: I think one of the first things that you did there was a curator house. And I think it was called Gordon House, and I think one of the first things that you did was to do some renovations to that house.

Rutherford: I can't remember which one that was.

Dziedzic: I don't know which house it is actually, [laughter] but I hoped you did. I think it's still on the property. It's had some subsequent [00:32:00] renovations, but it's still there.

Rutherford: There weren't that many houses, but everything needed renovating.

Dziedzic: So were they former farmers' houses?

Rutherford: Yes, the farmers and the workers that were working on the New York Thruway lived—probably not on the property, but it was more of an area where wealthy people had country mansions, such as this one.

Dziedzic: And then there were workers' houses, like you said—smaller houses for workers.

Rutherford: Small houses for workers.

Dziedzic: And even these, some of the upstairs [00:33:00] buildings were servants' quarters, right?

Rutherford: Well, probably, but I'm sure these were really nice bedrooms on the main part up here. And over this side was the kitchen, so probably above the kitchen there were a lot of the servants' quarters there. And right over in here, I think, is sort of a half a story difference right here.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: [00:34:00] All right. Ok. And you mentioned—I think that used to be the servants' area, and then it became the second floor offices.

Rutherford: Oh. Second floor offices here.

Dziedzic: I didn't know if the plans would be helpful to look at, or photographs of the finished spaces, [laughter] so I brought both. Now one of the houses I think you designed from scratch, it was called Townsend House, and it was meant for the security on the grounds.

Rutherford: Yes, I remember the name. Oh, I can't remember the house. [laughs] Do you have a picture of it?

Dziedzic: I don't have a picture [00:35:00] of that one, but it did have a big window. It had stairs right when you walk in up to the second floor, and it had a big window that looked out onto the grounds. Does that ring any bells?

Rutherford: No. [laughs]

Dziedzic: Well, let me tell you some of the other houses, and you can let me know if you remember anything from the work you did on them. There's George House.

Rutherford: I remember it, but I don't remember anything about it really.

Dziedzic: I think there were some small renovations, adding a porch and maybe moving it to a new location.

Rutherford: Of course, this was 60 years ago maybe.

Dziedzic: Yes, it was in the '60s and the '70s.

Rutherford: Fifty years ago.

Dziedzic: Yes, a long time. And then there was [00:36:00] Ryder House, which I think you drew the plans for.

Rutherford: Ryder House. I can't remember that name.

Dziedzic: And Kellogg House. I think there were renovations for that.

Rutherford: Renovations. Of course, there were a lot of farm workers in the area with smaller homes all over the property.

Dziedzic: Do you know how the houses got their names?

Rutherford: No. Probably named for the people that lived there originally.

Dziedzic: That's what I thought, too. So were there any other projects that you worked on [00:37:00] like Storm King?

Rutherford: Not a museum or anything. I did just a lot of homes. In Greenwich, Connecticut where we lived, I did a few stores. And most of the houses were big houses, because Greenwich, Connecticut was a wealthy town where all the people worked in New York City.

Dziedzic: So this kind of big house was familiar to you? You worked with a lot of grand houses?

Rutherford: Yes.

Dziedzic: [00:38:00] What were some of the unique things about Storm King that made it really different from the other projects?

Rutherford: [00:38:13] Oh, I should say that I worked with a lot of very nice, interesting people, and that made it enjoyable, and all of the work that I did there was fun work. Bill enjoyed all the work there, too, so we thought it was a great job. [00:38:42] Bill went at least once a week, and I didn't go with him all the time, just when I had a project [00:39:00] going.

Dziedzic: And when did your son start working with you?

Rutherford: Oh, Bill [Rutherford, Jr.] is now 78, so it would be about 60 years, I guess, that he worked there, and usually we went over once a week. I didn't go as often as that. My husband, Bill, did go once a week, and Bill would go when he was needed. And he sort of took over after Bill retired. [00:40:00]

Dziedzic: What sort of influence did the artwork have on your designs?

Rutherford: Oh, I can't remember that it had any influence on what I designed. In a building like this it was just mostly different rooms where they had pictures hanging up and some small sculpture pieces. And, of course, the outside, that really required a lot of work. Bill did most of that, and it was a lot of property, so the artwork was [00:41:00] spread out everywhere. And they had little parking areas for the people that came to see the work. And they had a bus that took people around, too.

Dziedzic: Did you and your husband collaborate on any of your designs?

Rutherford: Oh, all of them. [laughs] We worked together on everything we did. And we got along very well through all that. We always bragged that we never had a bad argument. [00:42:00] So that's pretty good if you're working with your husband as well as living with him. [laughs]

Dziedzic: That's excellent. So you helped a little bit with the landscape design as well.

Rutherford: Oh, I did a lot of the landscape work, too. Whenever Bill had more than he could handle, I'd step in and help him. And he'd help me, too, when I needed it. So we worked together a lot.

Dziedzic: I have one more picture of the main entrance, and I just wondered if you remembered working on that.

Rutherford: Show me the picture. Maybe I'll remember more.

Dziedzic: [00:43:00] This is from 1998.

Rutherford: Yes, Rutherfords did the work. I actually didn't work on this drawing, but I can remember the front entrance.

Dziedzic: And do you have any thoughts about how it grew over the years and how it came together?

Rutherford: Well, there were always more artists around that wanted have their work there. They had a lot of acreage [00:44:00] that wasn't in use, so they could expand all the time. The more artwork they have, the more of the property they could use. So they were very lucky to have all that property, because all of the big sculpture pieces demanded a lot of outdoor space.

Dziedzic: And then that meant more landscaping, right?

Rutherford: Yes. Oh, it was a terrible mess. It was a gravel pit and just the messiest landscape you could imagine, because it had just been dug up for years while they were building the [00:45:00] Thruway, except for the nice homes that were here, there, and everywhere.

Dziedzic: Were you involved in choosing any of the grasses, or working on getting the grasses to take?

Rutherford: Oh, my husband did most of that and all of the landscaping, but I designed several houses there for the workers.

Dziedzic: And they're still there, too.

Rutherford: Yes, still in use. [laughs]

Dziedzic: They're offices more than homes.

Rutherford: Offices, yes. They did have offices in this area of this [00:46:00] house at one time. I don't know if any of those are there now.

Dziedzic: Yes.

Rutherford: There are. Yes.

Dziedzic: So I wondered if you could talk about Ted Ogden and what you remember about working with him.

Rutherford: Oh, he just was a very nice man and was very interested in art and was always enjoyable to be with. He was always pleased to see the work we did.

Dziedzic: And I heard from his granddaughters that he really loved the future, was forward-thinking. I wondered if you got that impression, too.

Rutherford: [00:47:00] Oh, yes. He liked his family. And I did design his house, so I worked with him and his wife designing the house.

Dziedzic: And so when his son-in-law, Peter Stern, took over, what was it like working with Peter?

Rutherford: Well, he was a very nice person, too, and both Bill and I enjoyed working with him. Haven't got anything against any of them. They were all really nice to us.

Dziedzic: And finally, I wanted to ask about David Collens and any memories you have of working with him.

Rutherford: Yes, well, David was always fun to be with and nice to us and like another son. [laughs]

Dziedzic: [00:48:00] Yes, he's still at Storm King, and he's still just as vital and fun.

Rutherford: He's been there a long time. I can't remember when he started, but it was a long time ago. I can't remember there being anybody in charge before he came. I think it was just Peter and Mr. Ogden.

Dziedzic: Yes, I think that's right, I think. And I guess the last thing I wanted to ask about was just any thoughts you have about your legacy at Storm King or your family's legacy there.

Rutherford: My family? [00:49:00] Well, my son, of course, has been working there for a long time, and he doesn't go over as often as we did, because there isn't that much new work going on. But he keeps up with everything and just does any of the work that's required. And he enjoys that, too.

Dziedzic: Well, it's really nice for all of us who work at Storm King to know that your family has worked so hard to make all of the spaces.

Rutherford: Good, good. So you work at the Art Center?

Dziedzic: Yes.

Rutherford: Oh, lucky you. [laughter]

Dziedzic: In this building.

Rutherford: In this building. Oh, lucky, lucky you. This building has the downstairs where you can go out. [00:50:00]

Dziedzic: That's right.

Rutherford: It was a very enjoyable job. I can't remember that we ever felt that we—it was just sort of number one on our list of jobs in our office, and we enjoyed it all the time, and all the people there were nice.

Dziedzic: Well, are there any other memories that you have of working on any of the spaces at Storm King?

Rutherford: [00:51:00] Can't think of anything right now, other than the things that we've been talking about. And of course, Bill loved the job. That was his number one priority all the time.

Dziedzic: Yes, it's very beautiful to walk around outside and see all the landscaping that he did.

Rutherford: And I'm glad that our son has been connected with it since we retired. But there isn't that much work going on any more like there was before.

Dziedzic: Yes, there's no open pits [laughter] like there was.

Rutherford: No. [laughs] No things they have to cover up.

Dziedzic: That's right.

Rutherford: It was always interesting, too, because we got to meet most of the artists that came, [00:52:00] and worked with them to see their art was installed correctly.

Dziedzic: So you would be there on the days when the sculpture arrived?

Rutherford: Yes. Bill mostly. That was his part of the job. Mine was more the building.

Dziedzic: Do you remember meeting any of the artists?

Rutherford: Oh, yes, a number of them. A lot of them over the years. I can't remember the names much anymore, but that was always interesting, too. So you work in this building and live out there?

Dziedzic: I live in New York City.

Rutherford: Oh, you go out every day.

Dziedzic: About once a week. [00:53:00]

Rutherford: Once a week. That's what Bill did, too, and I'd go once a week when there was something under construction.

Dziedzic: Well, it seemed like there was something under construction for almost 20 years straight.
[laughs]

Rutherford: Oh, at least. Yes. I can't remember when we first started there.

Dziedzic: I think maybe 1963 was when—

Rutherford: Sixty-three? Something like that probably.

Dziedzic: Well, I think that's all the questions that I have, and it was really helpful to hear about what you remember, and it's so nice to work in the places where you've [00:54:00] made such wonderful designs.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: All right, well, I think we can wrap up.

Rutherford: Oh, well, that's great.

Dziedzic: Yes, thank you so much.

[End of interview]