



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



Oral History Interview

with

Barbara Barton

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *Barbara Barton*

Location of Interview:
6301 Stevenson Ave, Alexandria, VA, 22304

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Transcriber: *Kerry J Reed*

Summary:

Barbara Barton reflects on her experiences working in the tourism industry for Alexandria in the latter half of the 20th century.

Notes:

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| General | Childhood; College Experience, T.H.I.S, Cultural expectations of Women, Volunteering, Tourism |
| People | Barbara Barton, Wilhelm Pollac |
| Places | Michigan; Cleveland; Alexandria; Old Town |

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:00:00] All right. [00:00:00][0.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:00:05] My name is Barbara Barton. I'm 90 years old. Soon to be 91. [00:00:13][8.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:00:14] Right. [00:00:14][0.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:00:17] And the date is June 14th, 2023. I live at 6301 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, 22304. It's the west end of Alexandria. [00:00:28][11.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:00:30] Great. My name is Francesco. Today is June 14th, 2023, and we're at Barbara Barton's home over at 6301 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia. So why don't we start from the beginning and tell us a little bit about where you grew up? [00:00:48][18.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:00:50] I was born in Detroit, but every time my dad got promoted, he had a great job, and every time he got promoted, we moved. So, shortly after I was born, we moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Lived there a couple of years, two of my siblings were born there, and then we moved to Omaha, Nebraska, and then finally to Cleveland. And I consider Cleveland, Ohio, where I grew up. Because I lived there the longest and I lived there during my school age and teen years. So, I usually claim Cleveland as my home. [00:01:25][34.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:01:26] Yeah. So what were some of your earliest memories growing up in Cleveland? [00:01:29][3.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:01:31] Well, my earliest memories were not in Cleveland. They were elsewhere. Probably my earliest is Grand Rapids, and we had a lot of jolly times. That area of Michigan has a Dutch heritage. So, many of the events that we went to, parades and so on had a Dutch theme. I even had wooden shoes, which was rather clumpy, but we had very good times. I grew up in a great family and we had wonderful times. I'm very grateful for that. [00:02:04][33.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:02:05] What were some of those wonderful times? [00:02:06][1.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:02:07] Parades. Festivals. When we lived in Omaha, my parents threw a lot of parties and kids went to the parties too, and we played games and put on little skits and so on. It was a lot of fun. My parents saw to that. We had fun. [00:02:26][18.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:02:27] And what were your parents names? [00:02:28][0.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:02:29] Ruth and Bob Young. [00:02:31][2.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:02:32] Can you describe them for us? [00:02:34][1.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:02:34] Oh, yes. My mother was born in a small town in southern Missouri, where she grew up. Her father owned a store that was an implement dealers. He sold tractors and so on, but he also had a lot of goods to sell. It was a very small town. There were about 600 people there. There are now about 1200. My husband and I live in an apartment building here in Alexandria

that has about that same number of people. So I'd say we live in a village. And you get a variety of people in the village. [00:03:08][34.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:03:11] And what are some of your favorite memories with your parents? [00:03:14][3.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:03:14] Oh, the games we played, the parades and things we went to. When we lived in Omaha. My dad's parents lived in Des Moines, Iowa, so that wasn't too far away. I went there quite often. But my main memories are in Cleveland when I was older. I do remember that when I was four. And that would have been in Grand Rapids. My mother had a birthday party for me and she trained me in how to greet people. This is the way you say hello. This is how you tell them to come in. And I remember that all my life. I think it was kind of a testing ground. [00:03:53][38.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:03:55] Why do you remember that? [00:03:56][0.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:03:58] When you get older, which clearly you aren't there yet, somehow your memory is picky. You remember some things and other things. I doubt if I could tell you the name of my first grade teacher, but I can tell you some of the parties that my parents had and that we went to. And when we moved to Cleveland, let me do a little aside. The big cities in those days were wonderful places because the various mining and other businesses kept them wealthy. So Cleveland has still has but had one of the world's great symphony orchestras, a number of museums and so on. And we visited all of those. We had great things and we lived two blocks from the lake, so we were swimming every day and so we had a great deal of fun. The one thing I didn't like about swimming was people who would just lie on the beach. I thought that was a waste of what you could have a wonderful time doing. I had a classmate that had, I think she had 15 bathing suits, but she never went in the water. And I think if you live in any area, you should take advantage of what there is. [00:05:17][78.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:05:18] Can you describe a little bit about why your family moved so much? [00:05:24][5.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:05:24] Well, my dad had a job with a national, in those days a international, company. And he'd get promoted. And when he got promoted, we moved to that city where he'd go and be the manager there. He ended up at the end of his career in Philadelphia, where he was one of the officers of the company. We loved Philadelphia, too. [00:05:47][22.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:05:47] What was it like for you to move around? [00:05:49][1.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:05:49] Oh, we loved it. It's kind of funny because when we'd leave a place, there would be people there waving his goodbye and crying, and I never understood that. I thought maybe because my parents were great about saying, "we're going to this place, they have a wonderful children's library," or whatever the the attractions were. So we were always looking forward to moving. [00:06:10][20.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:06:11] Mm hmm. [00:06:12][0.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:06:12] It was never sad for us. It was sad for the people we left behind, apparently. [00:06:16][3.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:06:18] Do you have any other memories from growing up in Cleveland that you want to mention? [00:06:21][2.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:06:21] Lots of them. Lots of them. Have you ever seen the movie called The Christmas Story? It was filmed in Cleveland. I recognize a lot of it. Again, we went to the beach every day in the summer. In the winter you couldn't go and ice skate or anything because it was Lake Erie. And when the cold came, the ice froze in caves and the waves froze. But where I grew up in Rocky River, Ohio, one of the Cleveland suburbs, they had put in a pond. And we skated every single night in winter at that pond because it froze reasonably level. We played hockey or figure skating or whatever we did. We did the winter sports. [00:07:13][51.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:07:15] Wow. [00:07:15][0.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:07:15] Except I've never skied. [00:07:16][0.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:07:18] Yeah. There's big skiing in Cleveland. [00:07:19][0.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:07:20] I did curling. [00:07:21][0.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:07:22] Curling, ok. [00:07:22][0.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:07:23] My parents did curling. [00:07:24][0.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:07:28] I think you've hinted at it, but can you maybe describe your siblings? What are their names? [00:07:32][4.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:07:33] All right. I'm the oldest. In fact, I was the oldest for about five generations. I'm the daughter of an oldest woman in the granddaughter of two oldest women and great granddaughter of oldest women. So this makes me rather bossy. Just do what I say. My siblings, my brother was next in line. He was born in 1935 and my sister Janet was born in 1937. And then later on, my baby sister, Cindy was born in 1947. So we all adored her. Still do. [00:08:22][49.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:08:24] What are some of your favorite memories with some of your siblings? [00:08:27][2.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:08:28] Christmas. Christmas was a great deal of fun, and we had Christmas games we played. We trained Cindy when she was a toddler to play them, and she got rather irritated when we would pretend not to know the answers. "You know that. You know that." But she's very close to her own grandchildren now. So, life goes on. [00:08:55][26.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:08:58] Do you have any other memories from Cleveland that you want to share from your childhood that really stand out to you? [00:09:04][5.9]

Barbara Barton: [00:09:05] A lot of theater. Cleveland was and I guess still is, I'm not sure, a theater town. And we did a lot of theater. I was in things sometimes. One of my sisters is an actress, so she really holds the acting crown in our family. But I did quite a bit of it when I was young. I remember being in some show when I was nine years old and I was the main singer, so that, you know, it just happened. We did whatever seemed appealing. When I was in high school, I was active in a number of of the activities in the high school. In those days, Rocky River High School won all kinds of awards as the best school in the area, best high school in the area. But I don't know whether it still does or not. You know, things change over time. [00:10:01][56.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:10:02] Did you end up going into theater? [00:10:03][0.9]

Barbara Barton: [00:10:04] No, no, no. I went to a university where there is and was a lot of theater. [00:10:14][10.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:10:16] Where did you go? [00:10:16][0.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:10:17] The University of Michigan. And my brother followed me and went there as well. He's a musician, and Michigan is a good school for that. But the university, surprisingly, because it's a Big Ten school was, and I think still is, a center for medieval history. They had a whole department of medieval history. A Big Ten University had that, if you can believe it. But I was fascinated with that. Fascinated with history. [00:10:52][34.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:10:52] With history. So did you study history? [00:10:54][1.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:10:55] Oh, sure. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. History and English literature and all the usual. [00:10:59][3.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:10:59] Why do you think you're fascinated with history? [00:11:01][2.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:11:03] I'm not sure why. My parents always had a lot of books and we were allowed to read any book we wanted. It was nothing like, "don't look at that shelf," just any book. So, I grew up reading a lot of books. And my parents did too. We spent a great deal of time at my grandparents home in Missouri, southern Missouri, and there were a lot of books there. And it was one area on the second floor where you could sit. It was a big hall, and you could sit and just read a book for a long time, if that's what you wanted to do. And if it was hot weather, that's what I wanted to do. I wasn't crazy about being outside in hot weather. I still don't like it. [00:11:48][44.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:11:49] Yeah. And so from University of Michigan you sort of found this passion for history and what happens after that? [00:11:58][8.9]

Barbara Barton: [00:11:58] Well, when I was younger, if you didn't have to work, women didn't. It was regarded as slightly immoral, not intrinsically. But the reason it was if you didn't have to work, then you could volunteer and you could save the job for somebody, a widow or somebody who really needed the job. But you were expected to spend as much time as you had doing volunteer work. I had kids. I got married the first time in 1953 when I was at university, but I went on to get my degree. And I had all my children before I was 30. Women don't do that now. They don't have

to. They can establish a career or do things and have their kids later. It's a lecture, but one of the most interesting things I got involved with was, well let me back it up a bit. During the John F Kennedy presidency, there was a woman in New York. Her husband was with the U.N. and she was so lonely. She was from another country. She was so lonely that she committed suicide. And Kennedy said, "we cannot have this with diplomats. This is wrong. We're not being welcoming." So he asked, I think it was his, I've forgotten which Cabinet department it was, it was the secretary of State I think, to establish some kind of an organization that would reach out to diplomats so we would never have such a tragedy happen here. And what transpired was T.H.I.S., The Hospitality and Information Service, and it was all volunteers. We paid someone to do the office work, but it was all volunteers. And we reached out to the diplomatic corps with kids events, I chaired the cooking department for years and we tried to show them American styles of cooking. And here's one of my favorite stories that came about. We were all on a bus, diplomats and some of the T.H.I.S. volunteers, we were going out somewhere in Loudon County. And I had my youngest son, who was then five with me, and he and a bunch of the diplomat's kids went to the back of the bus and they started playing some game, which I never figured out. I said, "I don't understand how you could do that game because no two of you spoke the same language." He looked at me and said, "we didn't." And I thought, "that's the way the world should be," where you're not noticing the differences, you're celebrating whatever you're celebrating. And that is one of my happiest memories. I mentioned it to him when he was here recently. He said, "yeah, that was great."

[00:15:01][182.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:15:02] What made you want to volunteer? And be a part of T.H.I.S.
[00:15:06][4.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:15:07] Um, volunteering is what I did. It's what my mother did. Women didn't work. Again, there was no prohibition, I've never been treated differently because I was a woman. It doesn't bother me at all. You know, I just do whatever I want. I did here when I first came back to Alexandria, etc. But, if you didn't have to work, it was regarded that you had talents and those were to be used for the public good, whatever they were. [00:15:42][34.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:15:42] Yeah. Do you know what drew you to hospitality and tourism?
[00:15:48][6.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:15:49] Oh, I liked having parties. I still do. No, it was was fun to entertain diplomats, which was one side. thing of T.H.I.S. And we had a number of prominent people in the area who helped us as well, who made their properties available or whatever. [00:16:10][21.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:16:12] So really quick, so I understand the timeline, when did you graduate from the University of Michigan? [00:16:18][5.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:16:19] 1954. [00:16:19][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:16:21] Okay. And then when did you move then to this area, to the D.C., Maryland, Virginia area? [00:16:26][5.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:16:27] Oh, that's a good question, because I lived here two or three times and then went elsewhere. I think the first time I came here and lived was about 1956. Maybe '57.
[00:16:41][14.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:16:42] Mm hmm. [00:16:43][0.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:16:45] Definitely '57 because my middle son was born here. But I think 1956 was when I first came to the Washington area. My then husband was an astrophysicist and they were setting up NASA and he was a part of that. [00:17:03][17.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:17:06] Wow. Ok. And then when? Well, really quick, I want to talk about your time at the University of Michigan. So you started having kids while you're in college, correct? Is that what you said? [00:17:15][8.9]

Barbara Barton: [00:17:17] No, no,no. Not till after I graduated. [00:17:17][0.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:17:18] Okay. But can you maybe describe some of your fondest memories being a mom during that period? You know, being a younger mom in your twenties I know at that time wasn't uncommon, but what was it like? [00:17:32][14.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:17:33] It was common. You had your children when you were young, and that way you had them all before you were 30. And then you could do something. You could have a career or something. I had a career in volunteering, but that was usual. That wasn't unusual at all. My memories of the university? [00:17:54][21.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:17:56] Not the university, but from, like, being a mom during that period. [00:17:59][2.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:17:59] Oh. I enjoyed it. It was great fun. My kids were fun. I had all boys.
[00:18:06][6.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:18:06] What are the names? [00:18:07][0.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:18:09] Mike, Jeff and Donald. And Donald is my baby. He wouldn't like me to use that word, but he is. He lives in Alabama. [00:18:21][12.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:18:24] What are some of your favorite memories from that time?
[00:18:26][2.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:18:27] Oh, when my kids were little? [00:18:28][1.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:18:29] Yeah. Yeah. With them. [00:18:29][0.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:18:30] Oh, playing games. You know, one interesting thing was we ate a lot of food that people don't eat nowadays, for whatever reason. I think in many households, there isn't much time to cook. And so they tend to buy pre-made meals or whatever. But I remember when my kids were growing up, we had frog legs reasonably often. We had things that were a little more

exotic. And it wasn't because I was cooking exotically, it was because that's the way people ate. And there were no supermarkets. Well, yeah, supermarkets came in eventually, but not to the extent they are now. So you tended to eat from different shopping places. Yeah. [00:19:24][53.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:19:25] Ok. [00:19:25][0.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:19:27] And as I say, I remember my kids, I won't say they loved everything, but we had things that kids don't eat nowadays. [00:19:36][8.8]

Kerry J Reed: [00:19:37] Would you say that the rise of supermarkets in America has taken away some of the more... [00:19:42][4.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:19:44] Private? [00:19:44][0.0]

Kerry J Reed: [00:19:44] Nuanced American dishes? [00:19:46][1.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:19:47] Probably. I you know, I still cook. And one thing in our current household, my husband cooks the dinners and sometimes he'll say, "what should we have for dinner?" And I said, "Go and forage." Meaning go look in the fridge and see what there is. There might be some leftover pasta and some leftover something else that you can make a sauce with. And he's very good at that. He does it all the time. And I think we did that when we were younger, too, because when I was young, because there were no supermarkets and you also had to just make do with what was there in. In the thirties, forties and even the early fifties, there weren't that many places to shop, and I don't remember that we had many things delivered. We probably did, but nothing like what goes on during the pandemic. [00:20:44][57.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:20:48] So when did you transition to Alexandria? When did you officially, kind of, move here? [00:20:54][6.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:20:55] Okay. [00:20:55][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:20:57] To Alexandria? [00:20:57][0.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:20:57] I've done it two or three times. [00:20:58][1.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:20:59] Right. That's right. [00:21:00][0.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:21:00] You came to Alexandria in the fifties and then moved out to Silver Spring [Maryland] when my husband's job went out there, my then husband. And then because he was gone a lot, going down to Huntsville, Alabama, we moved down there and I lived there about eight or nine years. And it was very interesting. It was and is Rocket City, USA. But they had a lot of economic development, in the days I was down there. They wanted to make sure that the town wasn't dependent on just one industry. So, it has a lot of different industries now. And my son, he founded a brewery which he owns, and the brewery is doing fantastically well. In fact, they have a lovely problem, they can't keep up with the demand. [laughs] So. [00:21:56][56.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:22:01] So when did you officially move here and stay? [00:22:04][2.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:22:04] Move back to Washington, to Alexandria? I came back... Well, my husband left and I came back here. Ohm here's what happened. I was looking for a job. I'd never had a job, and I was looking for a job, but I had a lot of volunteer work that was very professional, so I traded on that. A friend of mine came to me and she had come up here, was planning to come up here because her boyfriend moved up here. She said, "you know, I'm looking at the jobs here. There aren't any that are suitable for me. But here's one you might like." And it was heading the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Bureau. So that's what I did. I came back and did that. [00:22:53][49.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:22:54] When was this? [00:22:55][0.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:22:56] I came back in 1978. And I ran the bureau for almost 20 years. Not quite 20 years. [00:23:04][8.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:23:07] So, when you came in 1978, what was tourism like in Alexandria at that time? [00:23:15][7.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:23:16] And I will tell you, and I take a great deal of pride in this. We didn't have much money in the bureau, but I had a full time writer and she would line up journalists from all over the country, sometimes the world. We'd entertain them here. I'd get the hotels to give us rooms and meals and so on. And so we'd entertain journalists a lot. We'd entertain meeting planners. We were able to do enough things using that sort of methodology, that our annual tours and income was always in the top ten, usually in the top five. The income from tourism in Alexandria was very competitive. [00:24:04][48.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:24:06] And what was it like before you came? When you arrived '78, what was the state of it? [00:24:09][3.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:24:11] I was the third executive director and there were some problems with the locals and so on. That's as far as I'll go. But I really had to clean things up quite a bit when I first came. [00:24:26][14.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:24:27] What do you mean by that? [00:24:27][0.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:24:29] Oh, just contact the businesses and make sure they would talk to the bureau and realize that we were there for them. The other thing that we had to do, I think, because we were wanting to attract meeting planners, which we did, Alexandria at that time had an association of people who planned meetings. There were maybe 100 of them, and we worked with them a lot. But one of the things we had to do was convince the businesses to stay open a little later because meeting planners work during the day and then they go out for dinner or they want to shop. And the businesses did start to stay open. They were closing at 5:00 in those days, which wasn't good for their own business. So we did that. [00:25:17][47.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:25:18] What were other projects or initiatives or just things that you had to change? [00:25:23][5.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:25:24] International Tourism. We did a lot to attract international tourists. Washington did some, too. But, you know, the surrounding area of Washington as well as Washington itself is very popular, was and is very popular internationally. What we could offer them was the history of Alexandria, the places where people could go, and we're as close to downtown Washington here as much of the Washington area is. If you're out in Bethesda, you're farther away from downtown than you are if you're in Del ray or Alexandria proper. And we wanted the hotel business and the dinner business and the restaurant business. So international tourism, very important, still is. So we did a lot of prospecting for international visitors. [00:26:16][51.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:26:17] How'd you do that? [00:26:18][0.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:26:19] Various ways. We'd attract international travel writers here. We didn't have much money. Sometimes we went to the trade shows, but only the ones that were in this country. And I don't know whether they're still going, but there were trade shows that marketed to the international visitor, and that was important to us, I'm sure it still is important to the bureau. But as I say, our income, our tax revenues, here in Alexandria and in Virginia, we're always very high. So whatever we did was working. [00:27:00][41.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:27:01] Where were most tourists coming from internationally? [00:27:04][2.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:27:05] Europe. But I will say that we had and solicited a lot of Japanese tourists. And one interesting thing, I had a friend or colleague, whatever you want to call her, who was herself Japanese, but she lived here. She and her husband ran a restaurant. And so I just go to her, and she had all my business cards printed in Japanese so she could hand them out when she was dealing with colleagues back in Japan. So that was very handy. [00:27:38][32.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:27:41] Where there any other projects or initiatives that you worked on? Or what are some that you're most proud of? [00:27:48][7.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:27:50] I'm proud of increasing the tourism revenue of. Helping the city. I was a city employee at that time, helping the city as well as the businesses, not only to realize the importance of international tourism, but to celebrate it. I've got it somewhere, I may have given it away. A box of all the brochures we produced and we had a great deal to offer. I think I think Alexandria still does. What is pleasing is it has more than just Old Town now, and it was gradually kind of moving west when I was at the bureau in terms of the attractions and the restaurants and so on. [00:28:35][45.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:28:35] Moving west of Old Town? [00:28:36][0.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:28:39] Uh huh. And to some extent into Del Rey. And so it expanded from just Old Town. It started to move to West Old Town when the Metro became really viable. Then west Old Town and then moving on West. [00:28:57][18.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:28:58] Say more. Why was it moving into these other neighborhoods? [00:29:02][3.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:29:05] Economic expansion. [00:29:05][0.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:29:06] Okay. What did you see happening in terms of economic expansion? [00:29:10][3.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:29:11] More hotels being built, being built out of Old Town and the ones in Old Town sometimes changed the way they operated and how they looked for the market. We did have, still do, I think, a lot of boat traffic that would go from, boats that originated here in our harbor and they'd go into downtown or down to Mt. Vernon. They went a lot of places. And the man who owned all the boats that time was he worked with us a lot and he was very helpful. [00:29:50][38.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:29:50] What was his name? [00:29:51][0.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:29:52] Willem Pollack. Wilhelm. P-O-L-L-A-C? I may have the spelling wrong. I haven't seen him in a long time. [00:30:03][11.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:30:05] What were other successes during your time that you want to share? [00:30:08][3.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:30:10] We did all the publicity for all the museums at that time, and events. So we did all the publicity for ads. We used to have a museum and so on, which means we were terrifically involved with the museums and that was a great pleasure. As we've established, I love history, and I'm very proud of the fact that we did so much. We sometimes produced their brochures. We produced all our own brochures for a while until a man named Roger Parks, who had a printing company said, "you know, I can print your brochures, I'll put a little bit of advertising in them, but they won't cost you anything." And I said, "Huzzah!" And that's what you say in Old Town. You say "huzzah," instead of "hurray," you say huzzah. [00:31:04][53.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:31:04] Why? [00:31:04][0.0]

Barbara Barton: [00:31:07] It's an 18th century, explosion of delight. Huzzah! I still use it. Gretchen does, too. [00:31:14][6.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:31:18] I'm curious about the language you would use. What's the language you would use to describe Alexandria to tourists during that period? [00:31:27][8.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:31:27] Well, in that period, of course, we were celebrating its history, so many ways you could do that. It was nothing for me to call up for a re-enactor if I wanted. If we were entertaining a tour group, let's say they were meeting planners and I needed a re-enactor, maybe George Washington or somebody else, it was nothing for me to call them up and they'd come in costume and charm everyone. That was a great privilege that I was very glad we had. And the other thing that's true about Washington, and we had access to that as well, they have a lot of bands, military bands, sometimes re-enactor bands, and they're not allowed to charge. So we could get them. You still can. You can get all kinds of music. It is free, basically. But having all the re-enactors, that was very special. [00:32:23][56.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:32:27] So a lot of the ways you would describe or showcase Alexander was through its history? [00:32:32][5.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:32:34] Yes. Because it was unusual for people, let's say from the Midwest, it was very unusual for them. The history here. [00:32:44][10.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:32:45] Mm hmm. [00:32:45][0.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:32:46] I mean, I'm sure they had their own history. But it is unusual here. And the fact that you have a lot of re-enactors and that it's nothing for them to come in costume. [00:32:56][10.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:32:57] Yeah. What is the history? What history were you describing to a tourist to attract them? [00:33:08][10.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:33:08] The city was founded in the 18th century, but it was established way before that and interacted with the Native American population to some extent. I mean, I know that the history is not wonderful, but there was interaction in the earliest days and we had shipping here. You know the Carlyle House? They had a boat that left, because the water came up to the Carlyle House, a boat that left there and might go to Britain or other places. We had a lot of interactive trading that went on. And when I was at the bureau, we were involved in a great many events that were on the water. The trick was getting the Army engineers, I guess it was. Navy engineers? I forgot, anyway to come and drain the water every so often because it silts up, the Potomac silts up and has other things to [unintelligible] to mention. So we try to get them to clear it, because we had a sea port festival for years and celebrated being on the water. So that was unique to Washington suburbs. I mean, yes, Fairfax County has some, but in those days they didn't have a town that was based on the water. So we did celebrate that. We had a mayor that, because lower King Street would flood every so often, we had a mayor who would go get in a boat, row a boat round on lower King Street. [00:34:56][108.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:34:58] What was his name? [00:34:58][0.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:34:58] Oh, no, I'm not going to mention him. He's still alive. No, I think we were also fortunate in our elected officials. I'm not aware of anything that ever happened in Alexandria that was even close to corruption. We had people who served in office because they cared about the city and wanted to benefit the city. I was a city employee, I knew the back stories. But in general, there wasn't corruption. There might be opposing views, but that's not the same as corruption. Despite what some people say today. [00:35:40][42.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:35:44] Yeah. And I'm curious too, like, what were the challenges that you faced to build tourism in the city? [00:35:53][8.9]

Barbara Barton: [00:35:54] Well, money, of course. When I went to anything that was kind of a tourism group, like a national or international association, I'd hang out with the people that had bigger budgets than I did because I wanted to know what they were doing. One of them was my now husband. He'd go to a trade show and he'd take a display in styrofoam. I couldn't do that because you it doesn't last. So you had a lot of decisions. I had a lot of decisions to make based on

money, but I think that was an advantage because we had to find creative ways. We had travel writers all the time. We knew how to entertain them. There's one that's still in touch. She still, after all these years, she's still placing stories somewhere in Indiana about Alexandria. And she's got to be, if she's still alive, in her eighties. You know, it just pays off because they develop a liking for what they find here and they'll come back. One time, we had several travel writers in town, and then there was, I think it was a flood, anyway they couldn't get out of town. All the airlines were shut down. Everything was shut down because, I've kind of forgotten exactly what it was, but they had to stay. [00:37:24][90.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:37:25] For a hurricane? [00:37:25][0.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:37:26] Might have been a hurricane. I know they had to stay five or six extra days. And I was going [laughs] because we got to know them even better. It was a snowstorm. That's what it was. Because I know I went to one of the restaurants and got the bus trays that they use in big restaurants. I said, "Let me get them because we've got some kids here in town and some travel writers," and they'd go down King Street on those trays. Yeah, it was a major snowstorm. It shut everything down for, I think it was six days. Everything in the Washington area as well as Alexandria. But I remember the travel writers tobogganing down King Street on those bus trays. I hadn't even thought of that for a long time. You're bringing back some memories. [00:38:20][54.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:38:22] Were there any other challenges that you faced? About tourism in the city? [00:38:26][4.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:38:27] There are always challenges, whether you have a big budget or not. And I think right now one of the challenges is getting people to travel again. And I understand it's perking up. Travel is perking up, generally. [00:38:43][15.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:38:44] Was that an issue when you were working? [00:38:45][1.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:38:47] Not really. People were traveling. I'll tell you one of the issues. In those days, tourists tended to come in the spring for a couple of reasons. The Cherry Blossom Festival, I worked on that. And we managed to get, as part of the Downtown Cherry Blossom Festival, we managed to get one of the boats that Wilhelm Pollac owned to go down and pick up all the cherry blossom queens and bring them down to Alexandria. And that got a lot of publicity. And that was that was a good thing. So, the challenges were partly to get tourists to realize Alexandria was here. They'd go to the, I was going to say, well, I'll say it, el-cheapo properties in Washington and the challenge was sometimes to get them to come over here. But we did. And it was fun. We had a lot of fun at the bureau. [00:39:46][59.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:39:47] How do you think tourism has changed the city? From when you started in 78 to when you ended 28 years later? How did it how did the tourism business impact the city? [00:39:58][11.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:40:01] Yeah, I'm sure it's still doing well. [00:40:03][1.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:40:03] Well, like physically. Like, what did you see change in the city? [00:40:05][2.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:40:07] The move westward for businesses, that was changing. And also north as far as Del Ray goes. But West, yes, we have restaurants and places out here and not as many events, but we do have some. The other change is that tourists are welcome kind of all over. There were people, you asked about challenges, there were people who were old town residents who didn't want tourists. Buses parked on the street or other things. And I remember telling one of them, sometimes who was complaining to me about tours, I said, "you know what? I could get rid of those buses. Your taxes would probably go up by about 30-35%," because tourists do provide a lot of the tax revenue. He said, "bring it on." Didn't bother him. So one of the challenges was dealing with the residents. Not all of them, certainly. Many of them welcomed tourists, but some found them invasive. And we established a couple of systems where the tour busses offloaded in Old Town or wherever, and then went and parked somewhere else. Not in Old Town. [00:41:31][84.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:41:33] How else did you deal with residents who were critical of tourism? [00:41:37][3.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:41:38] Oh, asked them in. Asked them to come in. In those days, the Ramsay House Visitor Center was also our office. It isn't now. The offices of the Bureau have moved out of Old Town. But my office was on the second floor of the Ramsey house, and I could look out and see what was going on around there. And I think that was a great advantage. I didn't want to be in City Hall, but. The Ramsey house was good. For one thing, it's considered, there's a little dispute, but it's considered the oldest building in Alexandria. So we could celebrate that, too. [00:42:21][43.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:42:24] So when you moved Alexandria, where did you live? [00:42:26][2.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:42:28] Oh, golly. I lived in Old Town part of the time. I lived south of Alexandria for a year and then moved into the city and I am going to get the date wrong, but then moved out to Maryland, outside Silver Spring when my then husband went to Goddard Space Flight. [00:42:51][23.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:42:51] When you moved here for the job? [00:42:53][2.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:42:54] Oh, I lived in Old Town. [00:42:55][1.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:42:56] Okay, so what what were your impressions of that time when you first moved there? [00:43:00][3.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:43:01] When I came back? [00:43:01][0.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:43:02] In '78, what were your impressions? [00:43:03][0.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:43:05] They were positive in terms of the impressions of Old Town, because I lived there and it was wonderful and I loved it and so on. But I think in those days I did see the possibility of expansion, which happened gradually and was to some extent related to the expansion of the Metro. When the Metro station came in, and then when the busses started picking people up at the Metro and taking them down to the waterfront. Well, that was the route anyway, and just dropping them off in various places, that was helpful. [00:43:46][41.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:43:47] So what do you mean by expansion? What do you mean by that? [00:43:52][4.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:43:57] Tourism locations expanded, so they moved westward. More opened, going westward. You're young enough that you probably don't even remember when there wasn't anything after about Saint Asaph Street. It kind of stopped there. [00:44:16][19.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:44:20] Can you describe the old Town neighborhood when you moved there? [00:44:22][2.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:44:23] I lived on Queen Street. [00:44:24][0.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:44:24] Yeah, can you describe that? Early '80s, late '70s. [00:44:29][4.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:44:30] Yeah, it was absolutely charming. Wonderful place to live. I'm trying to remember what it was, but in our back yard there was a fence and then an alleyway, and then there was a restaurant. There would have been on whatever that North-South street is, and the restaurant had people employed who were not citizens and not native to the area. And every so often the cops would come around or whatever they are, and we'd see people jumping, jumping over the fence to be in our back garden because they were trying to get away from whoever might arrest them for being illegal immigrants. And it was just it was a great place to live. I walked everywhere because I could walk to work. If you found a spot to park your car because we didn't have a garage, you left it there as long as you could because there weren't that many spots. And now Queen Street has upscale houses going down to the water. It didn't then. It had some shops and so on. [00:45:46][76.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:45:47] Mhm. What were some of the businesses that you frequent during that time? [00:45:51][4.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:45:53] Well, there were restaurants. One of the restaurants, and you're going to ask me its name and I'm going to flunk that, but I knew the restaurant owners very well. It was two brothers, one was a chef, and the other ran the restaurant and they had joined an International. They had to apply because they were French. It was accepted and they become part of this international group and they had all these chefs over one year and had the whole convention here and then entertained all these French chefs. And they asked me to come and meet with them. And one of my staff said, "Oh, there goes Barbara to heaven," because you how can you do better than meeting a bunch of French chefs? I mean, it was just magical. And that restaurant is no longer there. The brothers retired and sold it and moved on. And I've even forgotten what's there now. It's changed several times. We had restaurants that were unique and unusual in attracted people. Washingtonians would come over. Colin Powell came all the time. And that's more recent, of course. He was probably still in school when I'm talking about. But he did come over quite often. [00:47:19][85.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:47:21] Mm hhm. [00:47:21][0.2]

Kerry J Reed: [00:47:22] Would you say the push for more tourism and more focus on the history of Alexandria has changed the local landscape since you've left? [00:47:32][9.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:47:32] I'm not sure that the tourism was responsible for the change. I think societal changes had an influence as more people came, moved to Alexandria. And very often, as you know, the people who moved to Alexandria were involved either with the government or with lobbying or some government related agency. And that brings a great many people here to live in that expanded partly depending on political changes, but not always. And there's a workforce that has influence, people moving here, moving out. I mean, Fairfax County is huger, more huge than it was. It was kind of rural when I started at the bureau. It's not very rural now, and Dulles hadn't been built. And when it was built, people said, "Oh, nobody will ever fly out of Dulles. That's really strange location." People make predictions that are just never going to come true. This is why I'm sometimes cynical about the predictions. People here or anywhere make because it's always guesswork. And the rest of your question? Was that it? [00:48:59][86.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:49:06] I have some clothing questions, but is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to mention? [00:49:10][3.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:49:12] Yes, I had, the years I was at the bureau and even afterwards, the most wonderful staff. They were magical. They really were. And they worked as a team and worked together and would come with ideas. And it was just... [00:49:28][16.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:49:29] What were their names? [00:49:29][0.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:49:30] Okay. The fulltime writer I had was Diane Bechtold. I had two or three who became the meeting planner marketers. One of them was Linda Jeffries. She went on to to the museum, which is now closed, but she ran all their group tour markets and she lives in North Carolina now. And I had several different people who worked in marketing the trade shows, and that was wonderful. And we would have at least weekly meetings. How can we improve what we need to be doing? What is the buzz among businesses? And, you know, we did do that. I also had good staff people downstairs who welcomed. The Ramsey house where my office was, was also the visitor center. So visitors would come in and we'd recommend that they take the walking tour or whatever. You know, I had staff that would interview the visitors and find out what their interests were. So, it was kind of different from what it is now. I'm not saying it's better or worse because Patricia has adapted to the modern world and she has a way bigger budget than I did. So most of her marketing is through paid advertising. I couldn't afford that. So I had to develop other methods and they worked pretty well. [00:51:11][100.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:51:13] Did you ever work with film companies? [00:51:14][1.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:51:15] All the time. When I was head of the bureau, I was also the head of the film attraction. I have a funny story about that. [00:51:24][8.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:51:24] Yeah, can you describe it. [00:51:24][0.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:51:25] Well, you know, Burke and Herbert Bank. [00:51:27][1.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:51:30] I don't. [00:51:30][0.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:51:31] It's the oldest bank in Alexandria. It's in its founding place is down in Old Town, you know. Yeah. Anyway, the then head of Bourke and Herbert was quite a character and he wanted me to be sending people all the time. And at one point we had a film company coming in looking at various places to film, and they did film here quite often. And I'll tell you one story, but this film company that came here wanted a bank as part of their scenery, and I said, "Well, I'll take you to a bank." And they said, "No, banks will never hire us." And I said, "This one will, he wants wants film work." And they didn't choose him, and he never quite forgave me for that. No, one of the most interesting things, we were doing a film about George Washington, and a lot of the filming would take place at Gatsby's Tavern of course, in the museum. We put dirt down. Well, I didn't, but dirt was put down on that block. So there could be horse horses and then the city person who had to do that said, "what if there's manure?" I said, "you'll deal with it," you know. But filming for me was and we had stars here that would stay. Do you know the film Broadcast News? Most of it was filmed here and we did a lot of film work. [00:53:09][97.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:09] How did you attract films here? [00:53:11][1.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:53:12] Well, we worked together with the people in Washington and in the area who, it was all bunches of people that kind of worked together for the location. We wanted the location. That's really what we were selling. Because we have so many museums and a couple of them that are now privately owned were used for filming. [00:53:35][23.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:36] And did you handle the permits for filming? [00:53:40][4.4]

Barbara Barton: [00:53:41] Yes, I did, to some extent. And then I'd send them to go get their own permits. [00:53:46][5.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:47] From the city? [00:53:48][0.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:53:48] Yeah, they had to have, you know, everything has to have a permit in the city. [00:53:52][4.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:55] And so did you ever advise them on... [00:53:56][1.7]

Barbara Barton: [00:53:58] Oh yeah. [00:53:58][0.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:58] On how to shoot in Alexandria or how to present the city? [00:54:03][4.1]

Barbara Barton: [00:54:03] Well, yes and no. I would send them to certain museums and the museum people would work with them. Gretchen was one of them In later years, when she started with the city she wasn't at Gadsby's. Yeah, we would have joint meetings and I'd say, "this is what you can't do and this is what you can do and here's what we can offer." And so I'm sure that goes on today. It's usual. It's what always made me angry when it happened, and it didn't happen often, but once or twice when they'd be filming supposedly about Alexandria and they'd film it down

Route one somewhere. You know, if you're going to film about Alexandria, film in Alexandria. And that's been in recent years and it's not my business to comment about it. [00:54:57][54.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:54:57] Right. So, I have some closing questions. But just one last time, is there anything I haven't asked that you want to mention before? [00:55:07][9.5]

Barbara Barton: [00:55:08] Probably. I'll think of it after you leave. I can't think of anything now. You've been very thorough. Both of you. [00:55:13][5.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:55:13] I'm curious. If there is a memory you could hold on for the rest of your life, what would it be? [00:55:19][6.2]

Barbara Barton: [00:55:20] Regarding my time? [00:55:21][1.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:55:22] Just in general, throughout your entire life. [00:55:23][1.8]

Barbara Barton: [00:55:24] Oh, my goodness. [00:55:24][0.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:55:26] Easy question, right? [00:55:26][0.3]

Barbara Barton: [00:55:27] No, it isn't, because I have so many. So many happy memories that are wonderful. I loved, when I was at the bureau and even later, really, really getting to know Virginia. And the reason that happened is that almost all the heads of convention visitors bureaus in those days were, the bureau itself would be an agency of the city or county government, which meant that Virginians tended to stay at their jobs longer. If it's an agency of the city or county government. And we got to know everyone and all the places in Virginia because our annual convention would be held at a different location all over the state. And that and because we got to know each other, because we all stayed so long, we did a lot of joint marketing. Where we'd all wear the same outfit. Be marketing certain things. I go to IKEA and buy set ups that could go all over. That was a privilege. And actually, that's something about how my husband and I got together because we were marketing Virginia together. And I don't think that's done as much now, because nowadays tourism agencies are no longer agencies of the city or county government. They're private or whatever the set up is. I think that's less common now. [00:57:02][94.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:57:04] What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your life? [00:57:07][2.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:57:10] You can get along with anyone. If you reach out and you make an effort to understand where they're coming from. And there's always something in your life or your outlook or your something you get paid for to celebrate. The bad things pass. This will pass. This, our country right now. That will pass. It's one of the advantages of being older. You know that things will pass. [00:57:43][33.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:57:45] Well, that's great. Well, thank you so much for speaking with me. [00:57:47][2.6]

Barbara Barton: [00:57:48] It's been a great pleasure. I've enjoyed it. And it brings back some memories. I did have to dig sometimes through the memories, as you noticed, because you brought up some things I hadn't thought about for quite a while. [00:57:59][11.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:58:00] Well, thank you so much for sharing. Thank you.