

**Elizabeth White: EW**

**Amy Parrella: AP**

**Helene Tieger: HT**

AP: Okay, alright. I wanted everyone to know today is December 7, 2021, and we are interviewing Elizabeth White about her family connections to the memories about Blithewood and the Blithewood garden. Elizabeth is currently the managing editor and production director at the Monacelli Press. So, everyone knows I'm Amy Parrella, class of '99, Director of Grounds, Horticulture, and Arboretum at Bard. And we're also joined today by Helene Tieger, class of '85. And she's the college archivist. We were hoping, Elizabeth, you could start us off by telling us a little bit of how you are related to the former owners of Blithewood estate, Andrew Christian Zabriskie and his wife Frances Hunter Zabriskie. And when and why, if you know, did the Zabriskies first come to Blithewood?

EW: Well, for starters, I am the great granddaughter of Andrew and Frances Zabriskie. They had two children, Julia and Christian. And Julia is my grandmother. Julia married a gentleman called Edward Powis Jones in 1918 and my father was their oldest child, Edward Powis Jones Jr. —which he got rid of as an honorific—in 1919. So it was pretty quick after the marriage. I don't know specifically when and how the Zabriskies came to the Hudson Valley. What I do know is that Andrew Christian Zabriskie was a very important and influential real estate owner in the city—New York City—and in New Jersey. The Zabriskie family is very spread out in New Jersey. The 'Andrew Christian/ Christian Andrew' group developed these very large holdings in, principally, Manhattan. The family office—which I'm not sure was a term in those days—was at 52 Beaver Street. And that's a building I actually still access and I have a plan to go down and take a look at it. Anyway, Andrew Christian Zabriskie was very prominent in real estate, and I think that he probably got wind of the fact that the Blithewood property was basically in distress. That the Bards had moved away, that it had been rented, it hadn't been well cared for, and that St. Stephen's College—I'm not quite sure what motivated them—had bought the property. But I think it was a burden and they were quite grateful for the interest of Andrew Christian Zabriskie to take it over. The other factor is that Andrew Christian Zabriskie was a bachelor until he was about forty-two. And in 1895 he married Frances Hunter. He bought the Blithewood property, I think, in 1899. And in the meantime, the two of them had had two children, Julia and Christian. Andrew, as a bachelor, had been spending his summers on a private island on a lake on the Canadian border with Vermont. And he had quite an elaborate establishment up there. But I imagine that once the two children were born, it was a bit of a trek to get up there in the summer. It wasn't accessible other than in the summer. So they were probably in the market for a place closer to the city. It's said that Andrew Christian's intent was to retire to the Hudson Valley. There are some scrapbooks—he was a big clippings person. I think he must have had a personal assistant who cut these articles out of the paper and just carefully, carefully jammed them into these scrapbook pages. So there's a fair amount of material in one of the scrapbooks about his acquisition of the Blithewood property and the other farms that he bought up that were contiguous to it. There's quite a bit about the purchase of the chocolate factory.

AP: Oh. Do you know if there's—oh, go ahead. Sorry, go ahead.

EW: And also other kind of philanthropic things that he got involved with. Apparently he funded a restoration of the Blithewood train station—or no, the Barrytown train station. Anyway, they were established here. The construction of the house started in the spring of 1901 and was finished in April of 1902. There is a little article about their arriving and their first night in the house on April 24, 1902, where they were serenaded by a—let me make sure I get this name correct—

EW & AP: The Citizen's Cornet Band of Red Hook.

EW: Now I don't know what that was (all laughing) or what it sounded like, but it was just a—it's a very charming idea. That they had come and that they were welcomed in that way by the community.

AP: That's amazing. Go ahead.

HT: Sorry, that just leads to this other thought that I'm having. We have a flag that is the 'Zabriskie Light Infantry' flag, which is very large and old—sort of in crumbling shape. It just makes me wonder whether or not you know anything at all about the stories that came down about the Zabriskie Light Infantry that he led until nineteen si—

EW: This was another one of his 'community activist', um, social benefit kinds of ideas. I think he felt that if he provided a kind of outlet for young men in the community to come to Blithewood and be part of this group—I mean, his background was military. He was always known as Captain Zabriskie and he was in the National Guard. I think he was Captain of his regiment, in the seventh regiment army. I'm not quite sure which company it was. So he believed in the merits of the discipline of military exercises. I don't think he was—it was not intended to train anybody for warfare. It was more the exercise of marching and music. And I actually have some pictures of the unit of people in the uniform with their instruments. And then I have, also—I just discovered this this week, that's why I've never mentioned it before—this music that was composed for the Blithewood light infantry to play. So this was a big feature of—an aspect of the life at Blithewood. And, you know, that building is known as the 'drill hall', I think it previously had been a barn, or something else, and became known as the 'drill hall'. But it's not unusual at this period for the major landholders to do something like this for the community. I think down at Lyndhurst, for example, the Goulds—Helen Gould, I think—had a similar sort of gathering of women to do needle arts or whatever that's called as a way of bringing people together and giving them something recreational but constructive, also, to occupy themselves. So yeah, but the Blithewood light infantry is—(laughs) why it was called that, I don't know. And I'm sure there's no one still alive who—cause I doubt that it survived long after Captain Zabriskie died. He

died in 1916. So the majority of the years that the Zabriskies owned the property were after he died. And I don't think that Christian was the leader of the Blithewood light infantry (laughs). That I can tell you for sure. (all laughing)

AP&HT: Mhm.

HT: Well feel free—that is one of our questions—do you want to say anything? He was your uncle, right? Christian Andrew—

EW: He's actually my great uncle. He's my grandmother's brother. So my father's uncle. And he lived until the seventies, so he was a feature of my childhood and through college. He was a very serious bibliophile and military historian. And philanthropist. He supported a number of military institutions, including West Point, and there's a canon there at the bluff. There's, I don't know, eight or so canons looking out over the Hudson, and one of them is given in his honor, in gratitude for his support of West Point and its collections. In terms of books, I remember there being a very substantial library in the apartment that he shared with my aunt, my father's sister. Whether those books largely came from Blithewood and he added to them, I don't know. And what happened to them, I also don't know. I'm sure my father took some, but I don't really remember. He was a life fellow of the Morgan Library and he supported institutions that shared his interests. And he was very, very shy and taciturn. When I was a child, my parents gave him every year a subscription to the Illustrated London News, which was this tabloid paper out of London that just had all of these wonderful pictures of the Queen doing things. I loved this! I was completely besotted with Prince Charles. He's a little younger than me. (laughs) Anyway, what Christian would do: Christian lived on 89th Street and we lived on 80th Street, and so once a month he would gather up his four or five copies of the Illustrated London News on a Saturday and he would walk down on Saturday morning to give them to my mother. And she would have coffee waiting for him and so on. And I just remember him sitting in our living room, sort of talking to my mother, but my mother was really doing the talking. It's a very sweet kind of relationship they had. And then he would get up and I think he went to the Society Library, which is on 79th Street, so it was very close by. And then eventually he would go back home for lunch. He was exceptionally generous to us as children. My mother would confer with him about what would be an appropriate present for Christmas or New Years—or, for birthdays. I remember that he decided that I should have a classical music education and so he—every Christmas and birthday—was giving me operas and the works of Beethoven and so forth. Which—I was ten— (all laughing) and it went past me. But when I got older, I appreciated it more.

AP: He seems to be pretty influential for you as a character in your life. Did his love of books have any bearing on your career?

EW: Um, probably. It was interesting to see that in your question. I think my father's family, in general—my father, and his sister, and Christian—all had a deep respect for literature. My aunt Frances, my father's sister, learned Russian and translated Chekhov's short stories. So it was definitely something that was important, along with, particularly for my father, paintings, and works on paper. My mother's family lived out on Long Island. Her father was a big golfer and a lawyer and kind of more in the world of commerce. He was a lawyer for the US lines and—he had a very quite brilliant career as an admiralty lawyer, but it was very, very different from Christian at the Morgan Library. (laughs)

AP: Elizabeth, do you know where your name came from? Were you named after anyone?

EW: I was named after my grandmother and her mother, my mother's mother, and grandmother. And then my middle name, Powis, is from my father. And that name was introduced in about 1850. It's Welsh. The Joneses, who are not incidentally connected to Edith Wharton, sadly—

HT: Okay. (all laughing)

EW: I really, really want them to be, but they're not. The Joneses were English and Welsh, apparently. The relevant Jones is called William Francis Jones, and as a very young man, at the age of thirteen, he was sent to Amsterdam to be an apprentice to a shipping company. And after a few years, they sent him to Brazil, where they had a big office. He married a woman who was the daughter of a partner in the firm that he joined down there. And he stayed there until 1850. By that time, I think the rest of his family had come to New York, and so he came up from Brazil. He lived in Brooklyn where he was described as one of the wealthiest men in Brooklyn. So in the 1850s we have Andrew Christian Zabriskie with his real estate empire and Mr. Jones with his—(laughs) somebody told me a long time ago that it was connected to Maxwell House Coffee, but I don't think that that is correct. I think it was a little apocryphal story for kids. Anyway, in the 1850s, there was plenty of money on both the Jones and Zabriskie sides. So the first Edward Powis Jones was born in 1850 and then my grandfather was born in 1880.

AP: So interesting. You know, I was reading a history of the Hudson River recently and they did say that keeping up with the Joneses originated from this area. Could it perhaps be—

EW: No, no, no, that—

AP: (laughs) your family?

EW: There was a woman in New York, she's very famous—

AP: Okay.

EW: Mary Mason Jones.

AP: Okay.

EW: And she is the Joneses that we were all—

AP: That's the Jones line. Okay.

EW: Sadly.

AP: Oh okay, alright. (laughs)

HT: That one is more connected to Edith Wharton. (laughs)

AP: Ohhh that one is.

EW: Right, yeah. Exactly.

AP: Okay. Alright, well, Elizabeth, you recently donated some portraits of your grandparents Julia Zabriskie Jones and her husband Edward Powis Jones. And these have been hung up in Blithewood now, I think I sent you some photographs of them hanging there.

EW: Yeah, they look great.

AP: Can you tell us more about them? And also perhaps talk about the—well, you did the Jones family history already and then you already told us about the Edith Wharton connection—but maybe just anything else you know about those paintings specifically?

EW: I don't know very much about those paintings. They were definitely done—I think the one of Julia is about the same time as her marriage. 1918, maybe a little bit earlier. She looks very fresh and young.

AP: Mhm.

EW: And then her husband, who was a bit older than she was, I mean, he was born in 1880. She was born in 1897. So there was quite a difference in age. The more I look at that portrait, the more I think it might be a posthumous portrait.

AP: Mhm.

EW: Ted Jones—he was called Ted—went to Harvard and Harvard Law School and was practicing in New York when World War I broke out. And he joined the army—I think he was a lieutenant. And he must have known Julia before he joined the army. They got married. The New York Times write-up says ‘Julia Zabriskie, a hurried war bride’ and then proceeds to describe these bridesmaids and the very elaborate dresses they were wearing so they—the fact that Mrs. Zabriskie didn’t get engraved invitations done in time didn’t stop the rest of the ritual of many bridesmaids with a lot of chiffon and lace coming down the aisle. When he came back from the war, I think he was in practice by himself as a lawyer. They were in the twenties living here in the city. They lived at 1105 Park Avenue. And they were spending a lot of time up at Blithewood with their children. And then they took a vacation to Europe and that was in the late twenties. They were in Italy and he got some kind of an infection and died very suddenly. So Julia was over there with her three children—it must just have been unbelievably horrible. I suspect that that portrait was done in his honor after he died, but I don’t have any—I don’t know who the artists are. They’re clearly sort of society painter kinds of people. And clearly two different painters. There are three pastel pictures of—one for each of the children. So there was a kind of tradition or cultural something that had these portraits done. I’m not aware of any painted portraits of Andrew Zabriskie, or his wife, or Christian. There are some recognizable pictures of Christian as a small boy, but not anything painted that I’ve ever seen. And these portraits were in Frances and Christian’s apartment. In the eighties, Frances was living there by herself, and she had a fall, and she decided that she wanted to move out of the apartment. It was a pretty big apartment, eight rooms or something. The apartment was broken up and a lot of the furniture was sold. And my father didn’t really know what to do with these paintings and so (laughs) he looked at me expectantly. And I took them because I then was living in quite a big house here in Manhattan and so we hung them up for a while. And then we moved to a smaller apartment. And then I was really, very happy to have them come home to Bard because I think they actually did hang in Blithewood for a time.

AP: Mhm. Mhm. So nice to have them back. Thank you.

HT: Since we’re coming back to Blithewood now, we were—if Blithewood came to Bard in 1951, you were pretty small, at any rate. But you do have some early memories of Blithewood. What were those circumstances like? Did you spend time in the house? Did you just visit for the day? What are your memories of coming to the house?

EW: Well, I was trying to puzzle that out. The summer after I—I was born in May, and I know that my parents, after I was born, had rented a house in Rhode Island for the summer, or part of the summer. And then, before I was born, they had rented a house called ‘Good Hap’ which is the Chanler-Chapman, uh, I think it’s on the Sylvania property?

HT: I think so. It's in Barrytown?

EW: Yeah, it's in Barrytown. It's a red—or used to be red—kind of gingerbread-y cottage. It looks—when you approach it—it looks like it's one story, but it actually has another. It has a lower floor with some bedrooms down there. We had a friend who was on the Bard faculty who was renting the lower part of it, so I'm very uncertain about what is going on with 'Good Hap' these days. But my parents rented it a few times and whether they rented it—by the time I was six or so months old, they had bought a house in Suffern, which is a striking distance to Blithewood. So I don't know that they ever—except maybe right after I was born—brought me, other than for the day. I don't know if I actually ever had a nursery there. I found a reference to the fact that when my father was growing up—and his younger brother Henry would have benefitted from this, too—that there was a little room to the right of the front door that was a playroom. And they had an electric train set set up in there. And I imagine some other toys. So, in spite of the fact that this is one of the more formal places you would ever go to, there was accommodation for children and playing. I was four when the house was given to Bard. And I believe that the summer when Mrs. Zabriskie was failing was another time that we were all at 'Good Hap'. But it's also possible that we were in the Suffern house. I just don't know. My memory, such as it is, is of an earlier summer, though. I remember being quite—there's a picture of me, just learning to walk, with my father. Let's say that I was one that summer. And I'm pretty sure we visited regularly. We also visited Mrs. Zabriskie in her apartment in Manhattan. She lived at 960 Park Avenue. She would invite us over for tea with the little sandwiches and my younger brother disgraced himself by taking a huge bite of some watercress or something and just spitting it out on the carpet and my mother was just beside herself with embarrassment. (all laughing) I think Mrs. Zabriskie probably was quite charmed. I don't have a good sense of her. There were some pictures of her at my parents' wedding where she looks very in charge. But my memories really are of being in the garden, as a place you could run around and play, and being allowed to splash around a bit in the fountain. I do have some memories of a big, expansive, highly polished wooden floor. But, you know, I was really short at the time, so. (all laughing)

HT: Makes me wonder, too. The garden conservancy just made it possible for us to digitize this enormous map of the Blithewood property that was from the Delafield collections. And it's four by ten. It's this huge map—

EW: Oh my goodness.

HT: And it's done in the 1930s. And the pool, the Blithewood pool, is on the map. Which was very helpful to me because it's not clear to me exactly when the pool was made but you were very tiny—you don't have any memories of going to the pool, do you?

EW: No. I did go to the pool in the sixties. By great fortune, I am friends with the Aldriches at Rokeby. Basically, Ricky Aldrich was the one who brought me to Blithewood as a teenager, really, and I had heard about Blithewood and it was discussed and, you know, 'this piece of furniture came from Blithewood' or 'x-y-z Blithewood'. But we didn't have pictures of Blithewood around the house or anything like that, so I didn't have really any sense of what Blithewood was other than a place that we didn't own anymore. So one time I was visiting for the weekend at Rokeby and Ricky said something about Blithewood and I said 'well I'd never seen it' and he said 'well get in the car' and we drove over and I was just astonished that we had ever had any connection with a place as fancy as that. Anyway, I don't know what the arrangement was—if you had to be a member or something, you had to have some special connection to Bard in order to use the pool—but Rosalind Aldrich and I came over a number of times when it was part of Bard. And my mother definitely used the pool. She talked about it and she talked about how Mrs. Aldrich senior decided that she didn't need a bathing suit, and she would go swimming in the pool in her underwear which my mother thought was really just not what she should be doing. (all laughing) And somebody else told me that when—this is a person that is a bit older than me, so maybe in his eighties now—that when he was a boy, Mrs. Zabriskie left the keys to the pool or the changing or whatever in a dish by the front door, and that if you were on her list of people who could use the pool, you could just come by and get the key. And sometimes she would be around and sometimes she wouldn't be, and you would just drop the key off again when you were done. I wouldn't say it was a community resource but it definitely was not sacrosanct as far as the Zabriskies were concerned.

HT: Oh, that's so interesting.

EW: My grandfather actually, Ted Jones, was a photographer, in addition to being a lawyer, and there's quite a wonderful picture that he did of the waterfall that I have.

HT: So with all of the talk of the families of the estates in the area—did you have any connection at all to the Delafields? There were a lot of parallels between the real estate, and the fact that they were lawyers, and the military connections—obviously, you know, it's a different generation, but the families may or may not have known each other over the years.

EW: I'm quite in the dark about that. My mother, as a young bride, and presumably as a girl friend before that, had a reasonable sort of Barrytown-Annandale-Rhinebeck social life. And she never mentioned the Delafields. She talked about the Aldriches—but she may have talked about them because I was friends with Rosalind. If I had known a Delafield child, she might have talked, but no. I really was not aware of the Delafields as neighbors or anything like that.

HT: Right. Right.



EW: But if they commissioned this huge map, it must have been something.

HT: Well, I don't know that John Ross Delafield commissioned the map. It was a [Frank] Teal map, I think it was one of the survey maps that were done at different points of time. And the one that happens to be there is just exquisite. But his journals mention Andrew Christian and Mrs. Zabriskie, you know, there were connections between the property owners. I mean, they shared the adjacent estates—

EW: Right.

HT: Across the Sawkill. So they were in touch. But this was a little before your time.

EW: Significantly. (HT laughs) So is that the map that was on display when we were up there in October?

HT: No, this is—

AP: Discovered later.

HT: Yeah. It was discovered later and we can send you a file of it. It's just enormous. Yeah.

EW: Garden conservancy had some—looked like a survey—that might have been done when the property was turned over to Christian in the thirties. The date was right for that. But that was not as big as what you were describing.

HT: Where was—at the library exhibit? Was this the library exhibit?

EW: No this was when—Sam and I were there in the fall and there were some things on easels and there was this—

AP: It was that. It was a scaled down version. That was just a digital version of the ten foot map. Yep.

EW: Oh okay, so it is the same thing.

AP: It is. Yep. Yep. We had just done it then. We had just found it and got it digitized after the summer and I just wanted to have it on display for people to see at that talk because we had just recently done it and that was simply a digital—a blown-up, digital version of it. Not quite, obviously, ten feet long.

EW: Right. I think, as I recall, the date on that was like 1936 or something.

AP: Right.

EW: And I think it did say 'Property of Christian'. Not Andrew Christian, not Frances.

HT: No. No. I thought, well—

EW: Anyway, you can take a look at it. I just remember being—one of the things I don't have a good sense of is Christian's management of the Blithewood property. That would have been a full-time job—just the payroll, and the decisions about repairs, and all of those kinds of things.

HT: Didn't interest him?

EW: He never—I don't ever remember him ever saying anything ever about Blithewood. My aunt Frances did and my grandfather from time to time. But it's all very fragmentary.

AP: Mhm. Mhm. Can I ask you, Elizabeth, about the property and what you remember about the garden specifically? Do you have specific colors or smells or flowers that you remember? Do you remember buildings? Out buildings? Or—

EW: I have a very overall sense of a large space and I do remember the walls and steps and the perimeter of the fountain and the—frankly, one of my memories is the buzzing of wasps and things around the fountain because—

AP: Interesting.

EW: Whoever was looking after me was always trying to move me away from whatever that was.

AP: Was there a fountain? Was there a spray in the middle of the fountain or was there—

EW: There was a little burble-y thing. It wasn't (moves hands in wide circles) you know.

AP: Okay.

EW: I mean it definitely was a fountain and not just a pool.

AP: Okay. Okay. There was like a center urn—

EW: Center something and (raises both hands and slowly shakes them) what form that was, I don't know. But it had a sound and it meant that you couldn't just go straight across. That was—

AP: Right, right, right. Gotcha.

EW: What interested me.

AP: Right. So your great grandmother was obviously an avid gardener, from what I've read. Are you a gardener? Are there other gardeners in your family?

EW: Well, interestingly, I am not a gardener. I am a very urban person. And I am very proud that I—when my daughter got married four years ago, we got these little myrtle topiary things for the centerpieces—I have been able to keep three of them alive for four years. So that is my gardening triumph. But I am very interested in gardens and my grandmother on Long Island had a quite beautiful garden. She loved roses and peonies in particular. And then she had a couple of people who worked on the property who planted vegetables and other things. The other thing in my gardening life: the school that I went to, here in the city, was very aware that they were a city school and so every year they had us plant tomato seeds. And we would get these milk cartons with tomato seedlings to take home, and theoretically, when we went to wherever our parents were taking us for the summer, we could plant these things and have this harvest. That didn't work in my family because my family decided to go to Cape Cod, and you didn't wanna go to Cape Cod right after Memorial Day. So every year, I would show up there with my milk carton of tomatoes at my grandmother's house and duly plant these things with her gardener. And then they would send me pictures of these and eat them themselves—(all laughing) so I never tasted a single one of these tomatoes. The other thing is that—this is a stretch, but I was thinking about it this morning—the name Powis comes from, as I said, from Wales. And there is a place there called Powis Castle, and Powis Castle—

AP: Oh I know it.

EW: has one of the most lovely terraced gardens in the world. So this is something that's in my consciousness from a number of different directions.

AP: So interesting. Yeah, I've been there. It's interesting to hear about your grandmother's garden because I bet she was probably influenced somewhat by her mother, correct? And maybe the roses and peonies—which I think were in Blithewood—

EW: No, this is two sides of the same coin. My—

AP: Oh the different—the other family—

EW: This is my mother's mother on Long Island has the roses that I grew up with.

AP: I see.

EW: I did find, in one of these scrapbooks, a program from something called the Annandale Rose Show? Have you ever heard of that?

AP: Hmm. (shakes head in disagreement) No.

HT: I don't think so. Although—how old was it?

EW: Apparently this was 1901 or 1902, I think it was in the scrapbook that also had the construction reports and so forth. This apparently was an annual thing. It coincided with the commencement from St. Stephen's college so it would've been in June. And there's a list of all of the leading ladies of the neighborhood and being on the committee and Frances Zabriskie is there. She gave eight dollars to provide prizes for window boxes. So this was, apparently—I googled it and came up with zero—but Red Hook Historical Society or whatever might have something on that. But anyway, it did sort of corroborate the idea that Mrs. Zabriskie was very interested in gardens and plants and participating.

AP: Interesting, well—

HT & AP: (overlapping dialogue)

AP: Oh, I'm sorry—

HT: Sorry.

AP: I was just gonna say—go ahead, Helene.

HT: Just to follow up on the Rose Show—I have come across references to some kind of a flower show around the commencements because Julia Barton Hunt and Louise Livingston Hunt, who were the interim family living at Montgomery Place, participated in that flower show, as well. But anyway, go ahead, Amy. I do hope you'll tell us more about the scrapbooks. I'm curious to know if any of those scrapbooks might be digitized some day.

EW: It's very interesting. Most of them are not really relevant to—I mean, first of all, there're not very many. There used to be—I'm sure a huge number. What I suspect happened was that when Blithewood was given to Bard, my mother and father and my aunt—I think maybe just my mother and father—came up and removed the furniture that they wanted and some of the paintings—and I

imagine most of the personal stuff—but I suspect that they didn't take all of the personal stuff. And they decided to destroy quite a bit. 'Cause these scrapbooks have—they're mainly obituaries of people that were important to Andrew Christian Zabriskie for some reason. And then there are—he had a box at the Metropolitan Opera—so there's opera programs and ticket stubs and that kind of thing. They're not—I haven't gone through rigorously the ones that didn't seem to have anything about Blithewood in them. There's one that's devoted to the place in Canada, on the island. There's one that's *all* obituaries of Andrew Christian Zabriskie. This was the time when, if there was an obituary in *The Times*, it got copied by lesser papers and reduced to a paragraph. And it was in the 'Kansas City *this*'—and I don't know how he got these things. You know, when I was working in the auction business, there was this thing called *Burrelle's Clipping Service* that would send you every mention of your—and I don't know if in those days you could subscribe to something like that. Because I can't imagine anybody went out and bought a copy of these papers and ordered it. (all laughing)

EW: To have this one-by-two little paragraph about how he died. But anyway, I think certainly they can be digitized. Whether you would want to do it in their entirety, or you do selected pages, I have no idea. Anyway, that's up to you. You're the archivist. But we can definitely make anything you're interested in available.

HT: Great.

AP: I was just gonna say about the Rose Show, as well, that there were—we know at the time, with the Delafields, from Montgomery Place—that the Dutchess County Fair had shows, as well, that you could win ribbons at. That was in the twenties and thirties, I believe? Not before. And so having the most beautiful flower did seem very societal—an important societal thing at the time. I was just trying to ask if you have memories of colors or the fountain itself, or buildings or even workers? Do you remember anyone else at the estate while you were there?

EW: Um—

AP: Some memories of—

EW: Some of the house staff actually came down to New York with Mrs. Zab—well, Mrs. Zabriskie had died—but when she had her apartment at 960, there was a couple. They were called Niche(?) and Mrs. Niche(?). And Mrs. Niche(?) was the cook and I believe Niche(?) was the chauffeur. I do remember that—of course Niche(?) came with a car because what else is he gonna do—and Mrs. Zabriskie periodically would be sort of—she'd apparently call up my mother and say 'We really need to have somebody go for a drive in this car.' So I do have a memory of getting in this car with this amazingly wonderful furry lap robe and being driven around. But again I was really, really small. Anyway, Niche and Mrs. Niche(?) continued to work for the

family, for Christian and Frances, after Mrs. Zabriskie died. And then there were two other women who I think must have come from Blithewood, but I don't know for sure. So there were these four people who had worked in the house. People who worked on the grounds I didn't get exposed to. I did read in some Bard publication about a man called Dick Bard who was the groundskeeper who was kind of transferred to Bard along with the property. I don't know if there were other people who worked on the property who were then employed by Bard to help keep it up.

HT: Yeah. Dick Bard.

AP: I don't know that name. Do you, Helene?

HT: I do, yeah. I do.

AP: Okay.

HT: And there are other Bards who are related to Dick Bard that we have—

EW: And he's apparently not related to John Bard—

HT: No. (shakes head)

EW: According to this interview that I read.

HT: Right. That's right, he's not. I don't know why—I mean, that's another question: how the Bard name stayed so local when our Bards, you know, their son died. That was it. They had three other daughters (laughs). So the name is from a different branch of the family, if they're related. But anyway, this is also well before your time and all of our times: the violets. There were violet houses on both the property at Blithewood and the larger Delafield holdings. But that was another flower that certainly had a very local history.

EW: Hm. Interesting.

HT: Yeah, but it would've—I don't know how long violets lasted. Do you know, Amy? I think probably through the twenties. I mean, this was the violet capitol of the world.

AP: Yeah. Yeah, I think it was a quick flash in the pan. It was probably a ten, twenty year thing—

HT: Victorian.

AP: What was that?

HT: It was Victorian, for sure, so it probably may not have even lasted through the twenties. I don't know.

AP: Oh, right, right, right. I remember them shipping them to New York City for a while. Battenfeld's did. Then it instantly faded. There was a whole exhibit in Rhinebeck about it. They have all this history about the Rhinebeck violet industry. It was so big! Everyone had a greenhouse in the backyard to grow violets. And if you do look around, there's just enough space in a lot of the houses in town to have a little greenhouse. So that must have been something, but yeah, it was certainly a big thing. I know Blithewood, though I'm not exactly sure of the time frame, had a very specialized grapery, that the gardener there was such a treasure of a gardener that he was recruited to then move down to Georgia and grow grapes down there. But that grapery, as well as all of the other estate plants, he took care of for a while. I don't have his name on the tip of my tongue. But the garden road that T's with Blithewood road—that's where the greenhouses were at one point. And that greenhouse where the grapery was was supposed to be one of the first ornate greenhouses in America. Like, it was the first greenhouse that actually was a beautiful space, not just a functional space. But there's just very little—there's actually a drawing of it—but there's very little other documentation of it. But the gardener was written-up and was supposed to be very talented. So I got the sense that the gardeners at Blithewood were recruited or brought because of their skill.

EW: Hm.

AP: The only other thing I know about the grounds and equipment was that there's some sort of path-edge-definer or path-definer that looked like an old-timey mower, maybe (laughs), that you push with handles and had a wheel, to keep the paths very groomed, perhaps? And it was said to be invented on the estate of Blithewood prior to Zabriskie ownership. But it was just another interesting tidbit about what kind of property maintenance types of things occurred on that estate. We also—I don't know if you know, Elizabeth, maybe you do—we found a 1947 aerial photograph of the property online. It showed the entire estate. It was a black and white. And it showed that the estate had three vistas. So, it currently has two: the big, wide, open one, and then the little one just immediately west of the garden, to the one side of the pavilion. But it showed a southern vista. You could see all the way to the river. And, in fact, at that time it was much more open. It wasn't all grown-in like it is now, with the woods. But it did show a distinct line from, perhaps, the front door of the estate—the southern door of the estate mansion, looking south. And we recently restored that vista with the help of New York State DEC and the Hudson River Estuary. It's a three-hundred foot swath that, last November, we cut in honor of this 1947 aerial. So we helped to restore this historic vista that we never knew was even there. But it makes a lot of

sense because of the three, usually three vistas that are on most estates that are all on the Hudson River. So now we have a third. For so long, we did not.

EW: That's very interesting.

AP: Do you remember the wide open space like that? Do you remember it being grown-up or wide open?

EW: I remember it being more open.

AP: Open. Mhm.

EW: But, you know, again, because I was so close to the ground, I—

AP: Right.

EW: I might not have been aware of the tree canopies in the way that you would be as a grown-up.

AP: Right.

EW: But definitely it was very lush and—you know, I only remember the sunshine (all laughing). I don't remember being here in the rain. I think my parents probably, if they'd been thinking about coming over and it was raining, they wouldn't have brought me because who knows what I would've gotten into. So, I think they were careful to be closeby Mrs. Zabriskie as she got older. And also my father was very devoted to his uncle, who basically was a father figure to him when he was growing up.

HT: Wonderful.

AP: We're about done. We're right at our time. Do you have a little bit more time, Elizabeth? Or do you—

EW: Yeah. No, I can keep going for another ten or fifteen minutes. That's fine.

AP: Okay, okay. Well, this is just an interesting thing for me to know but I wanted to talk about Sam White.

EW: (nods)



AP: Your husband. And he's also a consulting partner with an architectural firm in New York. And, I believe, as a practicing architect—I don't know exactly when you all met—but during that time frame, I know he's written some books. But I'm wondering, because of his family relations with Stanford White, some of which he's written about—does this relationship that you all have, does this strike you as unusual or coincidental or? You guys are Mr. and Mrs. Blithewood in my mind, so (all laughing).

EW: Well, it gives us a lot of pleasure, I will start with that. We were actually introduced by the Aldriches.

AP: Okay.

EW: Sam's grandmother and Mrs. Aldrich senior, Margaret Chandler Aldrich, were sisters.

AP: Okay, okay.

EW: Or sisters-in-law, maybe. No, I think they were sisters. Anyway, there is this sort of collateral cousin thing going on and the Aldriches are—and the Whites, to a lesser extent—but the Aldriches are very interested in all of these genealogical connections. So when Sam and I were end-of-highschool-early-college, we were introduced by Susan Aldrich, who is Ricky and Winty and Rosalind's mother. And so we knew each other then. And then eventually Sam became an architect. I got my degree in art history and I worked first at the Philadelphia Museum. When we got married, we had this sort of dual-focus of museum and architecture together. And I had a stint in the auction business. I worked for Sotheby's for ten years or so. And Sam was building his architecture practice. And then I left the auction business and went to work for Rizzoli. And I made friends with the architecture editor there and that's really when we were able to take advantage of our mutual interests. Sam was a practicing architect and I was publishing these books on architecture with my friend David Morton. And David Morton actually recruited Sam to do the first of the McKim, Mead, & White books: *The Houses of McKim, Mead, & White*. He's always been an "archi-tourist", I mean, he likes to go and see new things that have just been completed, and also things that have been preserved. And then we factor in, when we're picking a destination, we factor in an exhibition that might be at a museum that we had never been to before. That kind of thing. So it has been this synergy, if you will, of personal and professional shared interests. And so we are very interested in the detective work of discovering why Andrew Zabriskie hired Frances Hoppin. I mean, he could've hired anyone. Why did he pick Francis Hoppin? Who knows? Maybe we'll find out. Also, I'm not aware if Andrew Zabriskie—definitely built the house on Province Island— I mean that was a from-scratch house. And he built this house. As far as I know, he never built any buildings in New York. He just owned them and collected rents. So he wasn't a developer in that sense. There's a lot to discover about and I'm not aware—Sam showed that picture of a rendering that Hoppin had done of the garden at Box

Hill, which is not dissimilar to the layout of this garden. Although, there's nothing particularly unique about the layout of this garden. It's a pretty—I think openness at the end is unusual. So that gets us interested in Hoppin and his—it's a little bit of a chicken and egg thing. He was quoted with saying he designed this 'place of refuge'. Well, did he intend to do that from the very beginning, or did the garden come up later and so he invented this concept of the 'place of refuge', you know, to have something to talk about?

AP: Mhm. Mhm.

EW: This garden is more formal and established, you know, a place apart. There's not a garden like this at the other houses. There's something—there's a walled garden at the Vanderbilt house I think.

AP: That's right.

EW: But there isn't one at the Mills. The Astors didn't do it.

AP: Mhm.

EW: What was it about the Zabriskies that made them interested in this? There definitely wasn't anything like this on the island in Canada. So what was the trigger? And since we know that Zabriskie was not friends with Edith Wharton, it didn't come from there. So there's just a lot of unanswered questions and I'm really happy to have been exposed to this whole possibility of finding out more about Blithewood. And more about the Hudson Valley in general as this part of the world. And I, on the one hand, I think the family was really startled when Christian gave the property to Bard, but I think the stewardship of Bard has been really extraordinary and, as I have said before, I really like to come and I like to see the way that the grounds are used for all different kinds of things and different activities going on in the garden. So I'm hopeful that that will continue into the future.

AP: Well, perhaps Hoppin worked at Edith Wharton's, I believe.

EW: Yeah.

AP: And perhaps the influence of working there translated to Blithewood. Or, he was influenced in some way and brought that to Blithewood, perhaps.

EW: It's sort of a question of did the *client* suggest it, or did he suggest it—

AP: Right, yeah. Yes.

EW: And how sophisticated—did he think that Andrew Zabriskie would have been a very sophisticated client? So not easily swayed—

AP: Mhm. Mhm.

EW: By the idea of building an Italianate garden that he hadn't planned on (all laughing).

AP: Exactly. Right.

EW: It's interesting to think about. There was a reference in something that I read: the remaining furniture from the house being sold at Sotheby's or Parke Bernet in the fifties—I did get the date of that sale—and I'm interested to look at the catalog and see what was left that they didn't take.

AP: Absolutely. You know, I went to Sotheby's not too long ago, and I asked for an estimate of the statue that's in the garden now. The statue, I believe, originated with the house. And it was moved, within the last fifty years, down to the garden. The one little niche has a woman and—

EW: Yeah, right. And it's got a very bizarre inscription on the—

AP: Yes. Something about addresses. Neglected addresses—

EW: I feel like 'Addressee Unknown' or a very strange thing.

AP: Yes. I couldn't—I don't understand the inscription, for sure. But, right, Sotheby's was involved in that. Because we don't know what else is supposed to be in those niches. I read something about—maybe statues of the children, perhaps? At some point I thought it was supposed to be spring, summer, winter, fall statues. But the one that's there is certainly something that was just transferred from the house. And whether it originated from the house, I don't know. But transferred from the house to the garden because I think someone at the time—our Director of Buildings and Grounds—thought it would look good there (all laughing).

EW: Well, it looks fine. It's the right scale.

AP: Yes. Yes.

EW: There's not any other place really for it. One thing I was interested in: my father—when the Polshek office did the restoration of the house—they called up my father and asked him if he would give them his memories of the paint colors and how the furniture was arranged and where

the major paintings were and so forth. I have this series of five sketches in his hand, and he says that in the front hall there was white wicker seating furniture.

HT: Oh, wow.

EW: And I'm like, why? He had written it down twice, so I imagine that's what it was. And that does, again, speak to the idea of a summer house. And then the rest of the furniture, at least what I have seen of it, is all dark wood and pretty heavy, massive stuff. Supposedly, both Mrs. Zabriskie and Captain Zabriskie had desks in the living room which is surprising.

AP: Mhm. Mhm.

EW: Lots of bookcases. That's as close to a reconstruction of the interior—and he only got as far as the dining room. He did the hall, the dining room, this little playroom with little trains, the blue room, the room next to that was called the morning room, which I think is now called the elevator—

AP: (laughs) Okay.

EW: Apparently there was an elevator in the house, although not in the location that the one is currently. And then across the hall from that, the bathrooms now used to be another small room.

AP: Oh, wow. Okay. My only last question is, if I put my garden conservancy hat on and—you definitely described why Blithewood is personally important to you—I was wondering, just in general—what your feelings are on the preservation of Blithewood. And why you think it's a nationally important garden and why it's important, with a wider lens, to save and preserve this garden.

EW: Well, I think, with the passage of time, there are increasingly fewer real artifacts of the turn of the twentieth century. So, the most basic answer to the question is [that] this is still extant and salvageable, and should be, and is a document of the way that people lived—or some people—lived at that time. And this has been preserved in a very benign way. The use of it has not at all disturbed what was there originally. I think, as a garden design, it's very beautiful. It's unusual in the enclosure-openness aspect to it. It's unusual in the view out to water. That these kinds of—I haven't made a study of this at all—but my impression is that this kind of garden usually was more like what Edith Wharton did: it was at the base of a hill, it was set apart from the house, it did not have a function in the larger landscape to draw your attention to something in the distance—which is what this garden does. It's kind of an intermediate step between the house and the view. And I think that's a very wonderful solution. I worked on a book recently of houses in and around Santa Fe. And a lot of those houses—Santa Fe just has this immense landscape around

it—and there was a comment by the woman who wrote this book that one of the houses had very deliberately placed the windows to contain the landscape. That there was something quite intimidating about a big picture window looking out into this space. And I think there is something of that. Especially when the house is as close to the river as this one—not that this is up close but it's up high so you can see the river pretty easily. If you go to Rokeby, you have the sense that the river is in the far distance. Here, it seems much more immediate.

AP: Well, that idea of the picture window is historic to that—not this house, but the house before, I believe. It was framed as if it was a moving picture in the house.

EW: Right.

AP: And what strikes me about the garden—and this is just knowing a little bit of the history—is that it's such a formal garden. And it's really just sitting, plopped, in this really naturalistic landscape that was intentionally designed by Andrew Jackson Downing. One of the fathers of landscape architecture. And so, to me, it's such a juxtaposition of the two different, very different styles together. I think you can see both very easily, too. So, to me, that's one of the striking things about the landscape.

EW: Yes. No, that's one of the things that I had no idea about. The sort of reverence with which this property has been held for two hundred years. I mean, really. And that it was admired by Jackson and Andrew Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson and Downing.

AP: Yes.

EW: I mean, in a certain sense you would think that Hoppin would have been a little intimidated by that heritage. Anyway, Hoppin is this mystery figure. And he gave up practicing architecture sorta ten or twelve years after doing this house. I mean, his output was not huge.

AP: No. In fact, he was an artist himself, I believe.

EW: Right.

AP: And I read that he was in the National Guard himself.

EW: Yeah.

AP: So I don't know if there was overlap there. It's a lot of speculation.

EW: No, actually they did not—in timing and also in the regiments—it was completely different. I thought that myself. Now, I think it's more likely that Zabriskie knew Hoppin from Newport. His sister had a very big house on Rhode Island Avenue and I know that Andrew went there. I presume he went after he was married as well as before. That social life was pretty frenzied so anybody who was kind of part of it knew the other people involved so—

AP: Mhm. Excellent. Helene, anything else for now? Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us, Elizabeth, while we're on this, before we said goodbye for the day?

EW: I don't think so. It's been a pleasure.

AP: Yeah, thank you for taking us to—it sounds like you still have more memories to share.

EW: You know, I have opinions. I don't have memories specifically (all laughing).

AP: Okay, okay. Right.

EW: Next time I hope to be able to back up my opinions with some facts.

AP: (laughs) Okay, alright. Well, we'll take you up on that then.

EW: Okay. Very good.

AP: We'll wait a little while, though. But thank you. It's been a pleasure.

HT: Thank you so much. This was great. This was really fun.

AP: Yeah. Absolutely. It's been great to hear about it. You brought it alive so well, thank you. I appreciate learning more.

EW: Okay, well, Merry Christmas to everybody and we'll pick this up the next time.

AP: Okay. Sounds great. Thank you so much.

EW: Bye-bye.

HT: Bye.

AP: Bye.

*Transcribed by Helena Isabella Haid in the fall of 2022.*