

Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association

Oral History Project

February 6, 2021

Narrator:

DENNY HELLESVIG

Interviewed by:

ALEX BROKAW

KATE THORNHILL

(recorded using *Zoom*, a telephone web conferencing tool)

NARRATOR

Denny Hellesvig, also known as Dennis, was a long-term board member of the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association. Denny has lived in Eugene, Oregon since 1948 and is a product of Eugene schools and the University of Oregon where he graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1960. Soon after, in 1964, he became a licensed architect. Denny is married to Lynne Hellesvig, and together they have three children and numerous grand- and great-grandchildren.

Between 1956 and 1991 Denny worked in architectural practices, producing building designs in many parts of Oregon. Between 1991 and 2001 he worked for the City of Eugene Building and Permit services department and soon became the City Building Official. Upon retirement, he was invited to join the EMCA board and served from 2001 until 2018, in numerous positions as Vice President, Treasurer, and Archivist. He was also the project manager for many of the EMCA cemetery restoration projects.

About the transcript

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited and approved by the narrator.

Brokaw: This oral history interview is part of the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association's Oral History project. This interview will be conducted by Alex Brokaw, an EMCA board member with assistance from Kate Thornhill, an EMCA digital archives volunteer, and with technical advisor Carolina Hernandez, an EMCA digital archives volunteer. Today's interview is with Dennis, or as we call him Denny Hellesvig, on February 6, 2021 taking place over the telephone on *Zoom*, a web conferencing tool. The recordings will be made available for research and educational purposes for future EMCA boards, staff and the general public.

Denny, do you agree to be recorded for this project and do you give your permission for EMCA to preserve and make available your recorded and transcribed interviews?

Hellesvig: Yes, I do.

Brokaw: Thank you. Our interview today is with Denny Hellesvig or Dennis, but we all call him Denny, long term board member of the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association. Denny has lived in Eugene [Oregon] since 1948 and is a product of Eugene schools and the University of Oregon, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1960, and became a licensed architect in 1964.

He is married to Lynne [Hellesvig], and they have three children and numerous grand and great-grandchildren. Between 1956 and 1991, Denny worked in architectural practices, producing building designs in many parts of Oregon. Between 1991 and 2001, he worked for the City of Eugene Building and Permit services department and soon became the City Building Official. Upon retirement, he was invited to join the EMCA board and served from 2001 until 2018 in numerous positions as vice president, treasurer and archivist, and he was the project manager for many of our cemetery restoration projects.

Brokaw: Good morning, Denny.

Hellesvig: Good Morning.

Brokaw: First, I'd like to start off with where were you born?

Hellesvig: I was born in Duluth, Minnesota in 1936, at kind of the pit of the depression.

Brokaw: Did you grow up there, or did you move to Eugene while you were still in school?

Hellesvig: Well yes, and no. We lived in Duluth until I was about eight, and this would be 1944, and for reasons never clear to me, my parents—I was the only child—we packed it up and moved to Portland. Took the train and arrived in Portland

where we already had relatives and my father had acquired a job at a shipyard. He was a professional chef. So he was cooking for liberty ship construction crews, and going off on commissioning trips on the ships and that worked pretty well.

Brokaw: That was during the war so—

Hellesvig: Yeah, the end of the war, and Portland was kind of interesting at the time, because it was a place where it was pretty hard to find a place to live. We finally found a house (we lived with one of my aunts for a brief time), and it was kind of a rundown place, but you got what you could get in World War II. And in about 1947, the owner liked what we had done so much in fixing up the house that he evicted us and we ended up having to move to Vanport [Oregon].

Brokaw: Oh! and Vanport is a famous place.

Hellesvig: It's a very famous place and—

Brokaw: Can you tell me about it?

Hellesvig: There is an astounding event. On Memorial Day 1948, the dike broke, and the entire city flooded in about two hours, and we became homeless. So somehow my dad got a job at the Eugene Hotel in Eugene and like with Duluth we packed it up and moved to Eugene and I've been here ever since.

Brokaw: Vanport, as I remember, it never came back from that.

Hellesvig: Well, there was nothing left. It was temporary Kaiser shipyard housing; it peaked out at the second largest city in the state during the war at 49,000 people. But at the time of the flood, it was only about 18,000. And all the houses were all temporary so they just floated along like arks in the great flood and ended up being trashed. And the myth is that they got moved to Eugene for the Amazon housing project [near the Amazon Creek], but that wasn't true, they were burned on site.

Brokaw: Okay, so when did you decide to become an architect?

Hellesvig: Well, I was in ninth grade in junior high. We had a vocation section in social living, and I got the idea that this was a life decision I had to make right then and there. So I was trying to choose between mathematics and physics and architecture. I don't know how architecture got in there, but that was what I did and stayed with that decision and, well, still doing it.

Thornhill: I just want to ask, around what year or what decade were you making this decision?

Hellesvig: It would be 1950, 9th grade, and from that point on, I took drafting classes in high school and then got accepted to the university straight out of high school. I spent six years there and graduated with a degree, and also with four years of office experience by then. I just made it my life's work.

Brokaw: And you have enjoyed that? That was the right decision for you then?

Hellesvig: Yeah, it combined my interest in science and combined—what I didn't realize then—was a very aesthetic interest as well.

Brokaw: Good, that's great. I wanted to kind of swing around to talking about the cemetery a little bit. Were you even aware of the cemetery at that time, did you see it or walk on the paths? Because it had been for many, many years, a derelict type of place. Did you live near the cemetery to do that?

Hellesvig: Well for most of my life in Eugene I didn't really, wasn't even aware of the cemetery. But starting in about 1979 Lynne and I moved into south Eugene, and from 1979 to the present day we have lived within four blocks of the cemetery. So I became very aware of it and its derelict condition and all of that sort of thing. I didn't have a very keen interest; I was pretty busy working and family and all that kind of stuff. Lynn, likewise, was working as a teacher, so we had a busy life with the kids in college and just—

Brokaw: So why would you want to go visit a derelict cemetery? (laughs)

Hellesvig: When I was working for the city, a good friend of mine was the Historic Planner for the City of Eugene.

Brokaw: And who was that?

Hellesvig: Ken Guzowski.

Brokaw: Oh, I remember his name, yes.

Hellesvig: Ken was one of the original board members of the cemetery, and was delegated by the City Parks Department head guy—who later became City Manager—to do something about that derelict cemetery. The city had been called upon to get on with it, and he was an early board member and instigated the organization's construction with Kay [Holbo – founder of the EMCA board] and others. And in working with him I became more aware of it as a historic object that was being improved. And when it came time for me to retire in 2001, he said, "Have I got a job for you!" I'd been wondering what to do with retirement. Planning retirement seemed kind of odd, but how do you plan to plan to do nothing? But I needed to have something that was substantial, so he invited me to join the board, and I did.

Thornhill: What year did you retire?

Hellesvig: 2001. And the formation of the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association really began in 1993 and was formalized in '95.

Brokaw: Yes, and you mentioned Kay, and I want to say for the record that that would be Kay Holbo. She was really the instigator, the founder, whatever you want to call it, she was the driving force.

Hellesvig: Absolutely.

Brokaw: So this board, it's different from many of the other boards that I've been on. I think most people [understand] that it doesn't have an executive director. What did that mean to you, not having an executive director for the board?

Hellesvig: Interesting to ask that question. I had never been on a board before and so it didn't even occur to me that not having an executive director was odd. It was a board that did all the work. We did have an administrator who took care of burying people, selling lots, that sort of thing. But it was a working board as opposed to one that delegated all that to a director. And I thought that was normal, and so everybody dug in and did their part.

Brokaw: How much time do you think you spent—especially during the early years—on the board, per week? I mean, did you spend a day or two, or just about every waking hour?

Hellesvig: I think for me, because I was really into it, it was more like a half-time job. I never kept records of my involvement in time and hours, but at different at times doing different jobs—sometimes multiple jobs—that it just, it really, filled my time and filled it very productively.

Brokaw: Your professional background prepared you to manage a lot of the projects, especially the larger ones. What was your first project that you remember?

Hellesvig: Well, there were kind of two first projects, but 1998, I think it was, a friend of mine who was a contractor and did most of the work at the cemetery over the years (general contractor), called me and asked if I would meet him up there. I was working for the city at the time, but we were good friends, so he got me up on the roof of the mausoleum [Hope Abbey] and we discussed flashing details around the edge of the roof because it was getting a new roof put on and I helped him make recommendations to the board that we change the metal flashing around the edge. That was my first involvement, and obviously not the last, but the first.

Brokaw: Could I interrupt here, why did you need a new roof on that building?

Hellesvig: Because it was the original 1912 roof, and the roof leaked almost as badly as the walls that were buried in the ground. And this was an effort, early effort, to dry

out the building so it could be used. Before that it would be raining outside and raining inside, water on the ground outside, water on the floor inside. Back when it was first occupied, or first opened up, people thought it had a dirt floor, it turned out to be two inches of mud.

Brokaw: What was the floor underneath?

Hellesvig: Terrazzo, a beautiful hundred-year-old terrazzo, but that's another project too. And so the first project I actually took on as a board member was stained glass windows restoration. And I surveyed every one of the—at that time—destroyed stained glass windows. There were eighty-one of them in the building [see addendum at end of interview], and there was not a single window that had escaped damage. There was only one frame that we could actually reglaze and we salvaged enough glass, out of all those windows, to just reglaze one of them and used it as a demonstration piece. Then we started working with John Rose [Eugene glass artist] on how to restore the windows. It turned out, nothing could be reused so he started from scratch. He got materials from the original makers of the window framing and the glass. And ultimately seventy-seven windows were reconstructed, replicated. Two of them are interesting because there was no record of what they looked like. These were four-foot by eight-foot ceiling lites [correct spelling], windows of stained glass. And John and I worked out the design. They look like they were meant to be there.

So that started in 2001 and we basically finished constructing and installing the last window in 2015. We've sold them over the years as memorials which has funded almost the total cost of doing all the work. And incidentally, I think there are about a half-dozen windows that could be sold for memorials still, so there's cash, cash waiting there to be collected.

Thornhill: You mentioned these two projects, how much did they cost and where did the money come from?

Hellesvig: The window project as a whole cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000. The money came from the sales of the windows as memorials. Some of it came from grants from various agencies as we went along. We did additional windows whenever we had enough cash together to do them. The cost, for instance, of a two-foot square memorial window is \$500. The actual cost of putting that window in was probably half of that so it was a [cash] generator.

Brokaw: Would you tell us who John Rose is?

Hellesvig: John's a remarkable guy, a glass expert, and for those who are familiar with the Hult Center [for the Performing Arts] one of his early projects was doing the fused glass work around the ticket windows. Beautiful layers [of colored glass] and then fused together. When the current library was built, he was

commissioned on that project to do two huge two-story high stained-glass windows, one at each end of the reading rooms.

Thornhill: And that's the Eugene Public Library?

Hellesvig: Yes, the one that's newest, but 20 years old now, downtown. He has had a business and part of his business was doing restorations of Tiffany type lamps. Just about all kinds of beautiful stained-glass repair and new windows for private customers.

Brokaw: And I remember that he did the glass work at the new downtown bus station also, the arches I believe.

Hellesvig: Oh, that's one I didn't know about.

Brokaw: So those windows made all the difference didn't they, because they provided light to the building. What was in there before the windows were there?

Hellesvig: Well originally the windows that were there, they got vandalized and that was followed up with concrete block and brick, so it was totally dark inside. Our friendly family contractor, I previously mentioned, one of his people got up on the roof with a sixteen-pound sledge hammer, literally, and bashed all the infill of those windows into the building onto the floor, where plywood was laid. And you can imagine just the physical nature of blasting probably sixty windows, full of brick. That gave us then these clean openings, and after we had repainted the ceiling areas in the mausoleum, we then went in and started putting in a safety window [Lexan plastic] on the outside to protect the windows when they were finally installed. Then John and his cohort, Pete Lavelle, installed the windows from the inside, so they're fully protected from both weather and from vandalism.

Brokaw: I didn't realize that extra [plastic] glass window was there.

Hellesvig: Yeah, that's saved a lot of damage because we did have vandalism on one window. Somebody who was trying to get at the copper frames of the windows, broke out the safety window and started taking the stained-glass window apart. I don't know if he got scared off or if it was just more work than it was worth, [but that] left half the window destroyed. Very nicely, John Rose replaced it for us.

Brokaw: And I think I heard he did all this work for a very reasonable rate.

Hellesvig: Yeah, very reasonable. Often, fortunately for him, not all the time, but every so often, he would just knock out a few windows for us, and give them to us.

Brokaw: Oh, my goodness.

Hellesvig: He was a very generous man; he is a very generous man.

Brokaw: Would you like to talk about any of your other projects that you managed? I can think of quite a few, but I'll let you talk about it.

Hellesvig: I was trying to kind of recount them in my head and it's hard to keep track of all of them. The mausoleum projects, we had quite a few, the window project was the longest running one we ever had. In the mausoleum, early on, the front porch to the mausoleum was broken and not safe. The building wasn't accessible to people with disabilities. And so we embarked on a project to replace the porch with something safe, and incorporated into that design wheelchair ramps so that the building could be fully accessible.

That was another McKenzie Commercial Construction project. A good example of their gifts to us, after pressing my friend about the real cost of doing that [porch] job, it was twice what we paid him, so they contributed a great deal over the years. And, along with that, we also repaired some marble on the north wing of the mausoleum as this was apparently falling off the wall. In the course of doing that work, we widened the door into what was a former janitor's closet, restroom, so that it would be equally accessible by wheelchairs. And then we took the door that was twenty-eight inches wide and widened it to three feet. We saved the historic door and made a three-foot wide door out of it. That was another project.

Thornhill: How did you convince friends and colleagues to contribute their time and their labor and their professional services?

Hellesvig: It didn't take much convincing; these were people that saw the historic value of the cemetery and were actually proud and quite willing to give. I think sometimes people gave labor, to their detriment almost.

Another project that we did, and it's in that vein, was to build a small building called the garden cottage. Ken Guzowski was still on the board, he got a grant from the city to help defray the cost when he was still working for the city, and on our board, both. It paid for half the cost of this cottage. The total cost at the end was about \$32,000.

Brokaw: Why did you need a cottage?

Hellesvig: Oh, that's a story in itself too. We wanted to make the mausoleum useful, and at that point it was being used as a store room for equipment for doing the yard work, mowers and shovels and other trash just sitting around in there. So we had to have some place for it to go because there was no storage on the site. I designed the building and worked with Guzowski to make sure it was historically appropriate for the site. Then McKenzie Commercial did the rough construction for us. I remember John Bredesen and I helped strip the foundation forms in the winter, nasty job, mud up to our knees. Then during the construction of that we—

Thornhill: Can you tell us who John Bredesen is?

Hellesvig: John Bredesen was an early board member too, started a year after I did in 2002. He professionally was a retired broadcast engineer, and well equipped for dealing with a lot of utility type stuff too. He got involved in it as the construction of the mausoleum—I mean the garden cottage— was going on. I ended up having some serious medical issues, and he filled in for me and took care of all the ongoing construction during the early stages. He and I did a lot of projects together. John was also the president of the organization for about nine years, somewhere like that.

When it came to the garden cottage, he was there and I was there, we all painted, we did the finish work on the inside, the paneling (the entire inside), built in furniture, counters, desks and that sort of thing. So that was a project that went on for probably, in its refinement, about three years before it was fully occupied. Freed up the mausoleum so we could clear out the dirt and the stuff in there, as we were also making it dry. A lot of this stuff was so totally interwoven, one project became part of another project. But the philosophy we used was, “never do something you will have to undo at the next project.”

Other kinds of projects that were done was a new entrance gate that was based on an early document that was done by a woman named Charmaine Landing, who was an early site manager, doing a graduate degree in landscape architecture, historic preservation, I guess too.

The last project I worked on was about a \$33,000 fencing project to enclose the north and northeast ends of the cemetery. That was aimed at getting rid of drug dealing, camping, and a whole lot of other destructive and inappropriate activity.

One of my favorites—back to the mausoleum—was finding somebody that could polish this hundred-year-old terrazzo floor. We got a gift from an individual that [helped fund the project]. They came in with special grinding equipment, floor grinding equipment, and polished all this really ratty stained nasty-looking terrazzo to like-new condition. It just makes for a fabulous floor.

We did marble restoration. The list just goes on and on.

Brokaw: There is something I think you left out—and it’s important to me—are the steles, and you might even want to say what a stele is.

Hellesvig: That was a multi-faceted project. I wrote a grant request to the Oregon Community Foundation for that one. I think we requested ten or fifteen thousand dollars. It turned out to be about a \$25,000 dollar project overall. One of the early developments before my time was a scatter garden perched on the northeast area of the cemetery on a hill. And that was running out of room for plaques memorializing people whose ashes are interred in that area. So we were

working on ideas, ideas for ways to memorialize people's interments, and I came up with the idea of the stele.

It goes back to Egyptian architecture and also Aztec architecture, you'll find these vertical stone slabs that are engraved, some of them describing a famous battle or some other sort of thing like that. And taking that idea, I designed a concrete vertical, slightly bent, slab six feet high and about three feet wide with little recesses for mounting two-inch by six-inch bronze plaques. The total of the two steles that went into our memorial gardens where ashes are interred will hold about 200 plaques. That was just part of a design of creating a second memorial garden, including basalt column seating.

[As part of the project] we regraded and revised the whole entrance area, ultimately with stone curbing on all the bottom of the hill drives. It included a new entrance marker, a bronze plaque on an upright basalt slab, new plantings, irrigation, all kinds of stuff, all wrapped into this one project and that's where the steles— Now it took a long time to get enough burials, but last time I looked, both steles started having plaques installed. There are little six by twelve-inch niches, and each one holds six plaques. I think there's about half a dozen in there now, and you know it's looking right.

There was also some special funding that we got from two different entities, I can't remember now who they were. Oh, one was the Masonic Lodge, [they] gave us money for one of them, and a donor-advised fund gave us money for the other one, and they have a major plaque at the very top, recognizing those donations. So we use it for a lot of things. They [sales of plaques] raise funds, they continue to raise funds by the purchase and installation of more plaques over the years and, it's a small, but fruitful profit center as we call it.

Thornhill: With all of these projects going on, you did mention that the window project was the longest one, and so my question is—rough estimate, I know it depends on projects—but how long typically did these projects take to complete?

Hellesvig: Some of them were really short lived. If you look at the mausoleum as a project, the restoration started in 1997 and it's still going on today. There's a project being started now to finish the restoration of some cast stone elements [sixteen pilasters] that are in there; they had been vandalized.

One of the shortest projects I handled was a cast iron fence around a specific burial plot, a twenty-foot square plot, and the cast iron fence posts, there's sixteen of them and eleven of them had been broken off at the bottom by vandalism and other things. I found a welder who's capable of welding cast iron, which was very difficult, and he came up with his portable electrical generator and laid down on the ground and put that stuff all back together. It was just marvelous to watch it happen.

John Bredesen, our administrator Sally Dietrich, [board member] Jenny Peterson and I refinished all the cast iron with fresh shiny black paint. That took about a week.

Very early in the process, our former administrator [Mary Ellen Rodgers] and I rehabbed what's called the "Whiteaker crypt" [John Whiteaker was the first governor of Oregon]. It's not really a crypt but that's what we called it. That involved pressure washing the whole thing, putting waterproof coatings on it and then painting it. Because the thing was constructed in 1902, I think, and had suffered a lot of damage over the years. We kind of brought it back to what it was probably like in about 1976, it was in pretty good condition and we restored it to that level. There's hardly a place in the cemetery that didn't have something done to it. (laughs)

Brokaw: You mentioned a while ago that you wrote a grant [request] for a project. Did you write many grants [requests]? Did you raise your hand at a meeting and say, "well, I can do that!" [In other words] you start at the beginning—you write a grant request, you get the grant and you manage the project [too]. About how many grant requests did you write?

Hellesvig: I think it was in the range of seven or eight, maybe nine.

Brokaw: Did you have previous experience with this?

Hellesvig: No, I got the application for the grant, I read it, I followed the instructions. I did a sparing job of not filling it full of B.S. And it worked!

Brokaw: Great!

Hellesvig: At one point, I remembered my grant success record was five out of five, or something like that.

Thornhill: Wow, that's very impressive! You mentioned a number of grants. Who was giving the money for these grants, who were those organizations?

Hellesvig: Well, counting some I didn't write, I think we had three grants from the City of Eugene Neighborhood [Association] matching grant [program]. We had one from—at least one from the Oregon Community Foundation. We had another one from the Oregon Cultural Trust. From the state, affiliated with the State Parks Department, there's heritage grants and their historic cemetery grants and we had several of those. And it's almost like a grant, but we also had some substantial gifts from the Masonic Lodge. This was as a result of having a good relationship with them, but they granted us money, and with that we did some really major projects.

That fencing project I mentioned was largely funded by that. The rest of that came from, interestingly, from a former board president, early on, he was president in 2001 when I came on. He and another man offered a challenge grant to get the fencing done, and they offered \$4,000 if we could match it.

Brokaw: What was his name?

Hellesvig: Hugh Prichard was the president, and I'm trying to remember the name of the other man, it's escaping me, but we ended up with gifts that came as a match with over \$11,000. These were from neighbors and some board members and—

Brokaw: That's wonderful.

Hellesvig: Yeah, it was just the thing that kept us going, years of steady flow of surplus income that we could then put to restoration.

Brokaw: Besides your work managing projects, you were also the treasurer for many years and the archivist for many years. What were some of the challenges with those two jobs?

Hellesvig: I think the biggest challenge with those two jobs was I had never done either one before. The former treasurer, Jim Luckey, really wanted to get out of it because he was ready to move on, he was getting old. And so, to become treasurer he gave me a banker's box full of papers. And he said here you go.

So, I learned how to be a treasurer by doing it, and had the more than wonderful help of our bookkeeping service. So we had a bookkeeper who managed to keep track of all the income and expenses for us. But we gradually initiated a lot of investments, and we had one very major gift at one time of \$100,000 to start an endowment fund. And dealing with the finances for the cemetery was really pretty easy. The bills come in, you pay the bills, the money comes in. One of the early financial things that Kay Holbo did was to discover that this [rehabilitation of cemetery] was not going to go anywhere unless we sold burial lots. Originally the cemetery was going to look more like an arboretum, but in a very, very few short months, she discovered that an income stream needed to be there. So, we started selling lots, and we did a contract with Temple Beth Israel for Jewish burials, and all of that just gave us a steady income. And I don't know what the net worth of the cemetery is today, but it's, you know, it's in seven figures, I think, and it started out with \$15,000 and a derelict everything.

Brokaw: And I've been told that we have never been in the red.

Hellesvig: That's right, we have never ever failed to repay a loan or pay the bills on time. We asked for one loan from the city and one loan from the Masonic Lodge, but those were promptly repaid. And I think the folks at the State Parks Department, who are also the historic cemetery people for the state, recognize EMCA is

probably the best run historic cemetery in the state and that we always made it work.

Brokaw: That's interesting. I didn't know that either.

Hellesvig: The archivist job that was—in architectural practice I did a lot of filing, you always had to write a report about whatever you did and put it in the file. And that always paid off at the end when everybody sued everybody and used the architects' files to do the suing. That happened more than once. So getting stuff in order—I had a predecessor for the archives, and she had organized it really quite well. And I did it for about seven or eight, nine years—I don't know what—and expanded the files and we created a physical archive in the garden cottage which was subsequently moved.

Brokaw: And did you start an index system or was that already in place?

Hellesvig: That was in place, but I tried to make it a little more interactive. It never was a searchable index, and I hope someday that that could happen. But I got it more organized in chronological order and it's been very useful, on occasions, finding stuff.

Brokaw: Yes, I agree since I'm now the archivist. [laughs]

Thornhill: You mentioned that the archives used to be in the cottage. Could you talk about, why the cottage, how did it get moved, where is it now?

Hellesvig: The archives were scattered prior to building the cottage so people had stuff at home. I think my predecessor in the archives had a lot of that stuff at her home, or I don't know where it all was actually.

So we built a cottage, we had one whole wall that was made into shelving and all the stuff was put into topical notebooks, and organized chronologically, and put on the shelves. While that building, you know if that ever burned, it'd be the end of it. So I think just probably right after I left the board, space was found in a downtown building basement that has a fire protection system. And it's all concrete so it's pretty safe, and that's where it is today. It doesn't have the accessibility that it used to have because then it was just in the cottage where anybody and everybody could see it and get at it. Now you have to make an appointment with Alex [Brokaw] to go see it.

Thornhill: And I was wondering, where is it located, what is the address?

Brokaw: It's at 1203 Willamette Street.

Hellesvig: It used to be a furniture store that was converted by Brokaw Architects into all kinds of shops, what, about five years ago, three years ago?

Brokaw: Yes, shops and then businesses above, and let's make that Rowell Brokaw. [John Rowell and Greg Brokaw]

Hellesvig: Rowell okay.

Brokaw: I don't want his partner to feel left out!

Denny, this question is regarding cleaning headstones. I don't remember when you started doing that, but you kind of headed up that project. Can you tell us about that?

Hellesvig: I took a class from Sally Donovan, who had a business of servicing needs of historic cemeteries. She and her husband taught a class up in Scio or Jefferson [Oregon], I can't remember which, probably in about 2005. It demonstrated cleaning and restoring and setting upright and straightening all the different aspects of tombstone repair.

And they later came to Eugene and did another class like that, at the Masonic Cemetery that I think Kay Holbo arranged, so I just got some training and just worked at some of that. A few other people got involved in that too, but it never really got going until about two or three years ago. And that was much more organized, and it moved forward. I think it's still going on.

Brokaw: Yes it is, and it's probably a very important project to continue with.

Hellesvig: So the site committee is still doing them, yes?

Brokaw: Yes.

Thornhill: What year did that start?

Hellesvig: The cleaning?

Thornhill: You said around 2005?

Hellesvig: Well in my involvement, yes. Prior to my involvement at the cemetery there was some restoration done by a hired person. I don't know anything about what that was, but some of those methods didn't work too well. Probably one of those small events, not that small, but I had a neighbor who was a grad student in historic preservation who lived across the street from me. And I was trying to do something with one stone and since he had education in this area, I asked him about doing something. I can't remember what the actual topic was, [but] he ended up doing his master's thesis restoring forty tombstones at the cemetery.

Thornhill: I've read that master's thesis. It's available in the University of Oregon's digital archive scholar's bank.

Hellesvig: The archives has a paper copy of that with the photographs of all of the tombstones he worked on, too. So it's been a varied project.

Not too long ago, I guess it was after I left the board, folks in Albany [Oregon]—the successors to the Sally Donovan firm—uprighted fallen tombstones, about twenty-five of them I think, so that was another contracted out job. So there's kind of different ways of going at it depending on the needs. That [project] needed some really high-end professional skill and equipment, because they had a way to lift tombstones that weighed a thousand pounds or more. So that was another very successful event.

Brokaw: How did you feel when you cleaned a headstone, I mean from the way it was and then see it with stuff off of it, did it give you great pleasure?

Hellesvig: It did, and it was often the lichen and the moss and the dirt, mostly dirt on them, obscured what they really were. I have a story about that too.

At the top of the hill near the public square there's a family group of headstones, I don't remember the family name. But a bunch of us were up there cleaning, and I was working on one that was dark and ugly, and didn't seem to have much going for it. As I was starting to get the grime off of it, it turned out to be a highly veined marble stone, of veins of blue and white marble, it was just beautiful. And the more I scrubbed the more veining came out. But the real kicker was, as I was scrubbing the face of it, as what I thought was a smooth vertical face an image started showing up. It was a very shallow bas-relief image of a steam engine. And the person that was buried there had worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad as a fireman.

Brokaw: How about that.

Hellesvig: It was spectacular, you know, you almost had to have the sun at just the exact right angle to really see that bas-relief. If you look at it just straight on, it's very, very hard to see. Another thing that helps is getting it wet; the image shows up a little better.

Brokaw: As you know, my husband cleaned a few stones and he remembers one that meant so much to him. It turned out to be a girl who had been about fifteen and who had died, and there was no way to see any of that beforehand. He said "I almost felt like crying, it was almost like bringing her back in a way."

Brokaw: And I would imagine that would happen to most of the people who are cleaning the stones.

Hellesvig: Yeah, there's all kinds of discoveries. At the time that David Espinosa was doing his master's thesis, I was walking around looking for the home for a finial, the thing that goes on top of the tombstone. And I finally found the tombstone that needed that finial—it fit perfectly—so I collared David to help me restore that one. So we ended up cleaning it first of all; it was marble, like an obelisk, that was black with a hint of red in it. It turned out that was all lichen and fungus and stuff, and when I cleaned it, it was bright white marble. And it had this broken off top with a bronze rod sticking out, while this finial I had—which was a vase that was draped in a fabric—fit perfectly on top, but there was a section in the middle, that was missing. So he epoxied the finial back on, the only thing that would hold it together, and then reconstructed the missing piece out of white mortar, and it was really successful. It was kind of thrilling to have something come out that well.

Brokaw: Can you tell us what some of your best memories are of being on the board and were there any bumps in the road that were challenges for you? Either way.

Hellesvig: My memories of the board are that—and part of the reason why I was on the board as long as I was—it was such a collegial group. A week before the board meetings, we had an executive committee meeting. And for about nine years they were held in my living room, and it was sort of amazing that most of the time, most of the board showed up for the exec meeting and that's where we got a lot of the discussion and the project planning, and all that kind of stuff [discussed] before taking it to the board the next week for final decisions. But all of that was just done with a great deal of ease. We got a lot done; there was a lot of cooperation. It was, as one of our board members [Karen Seidel] liked to say about working on our board because most people think it's deadly, she said, “we have fun.” And we did.

Brokaw: I attended a lot of those meetings.

Hellesvig: Yeah, by the way, I'm going to send a bill for the coffee for all those—

Brokaw: Gallons and gallons!

Hellesvig: Bumps in the road? Sometimes there was disagreement on the direction we were heading, and I think probably the bumpiest place was in some of the early, very early planning, in documenting the cemetery. The intent seemed to be that it was a natural place, without much credit given to the fact that it was a cemetery. And I think over the years, through a lot of effort and contention, we finally changed that direction. I remember the walkthrough meeting we had in about 2014 where we really started to focus on what to do about the plant material in the cemetery, so that the monuments, the tombstones could become more visible. Most of the time they were buried in all kinds of large brush type things, and so we started taking out a lot of the brush, and opening visual vistas and expressing the organization of the cemetery, the physical organization.

The cemetery is laid out like a city, and all the blocks in the city are twenty feet square. And there's eight feet of streets and alleys on all sides, so it's like a city plan only miniaturized. And now I think if you walk up there, you can begin to really see that organization of space, which I think is important, [because] it was the original layout. And then in that you see a vast amount of native material, and you see literally hundreds or maybe thousands of tombstones, and they go together.

Brokaw: A mix of the really old, which I love, and then we have the modern new tombstones, those are beautiful too. We have a local tombstone designer, and she's done some beautiful work up there.

Hellesvig: Yes, she has. One of my favorites of hers is one that she did for her mother.

Brokaw: And it's a gorgeous one.

Thornhill: What is this person's name?

Hellesvig: I think I have her business card; I don't know where.

Thornhill: That's more than okay.

Hellesvig: Posner? No, close. [Lisa Ponder, gravestone designer and carver]

Brokaw: Anyway, she does beautiful work. I don't know if she's doing it anymore. Denny, those are basically the questions I have. I asked you my last question a while ago, and that was on how much work you put in. I said, be honest here, and I think you were because I saw you at the cemetery all the time. That was your second home.

Hellesvig: Yeah it was, sometimes it was a tossup, but I've spent my whole life working. I like to work, let me put it that way. And also I like to do public service, so the two going together when I retired—I needed a job that could accomplish both, and so I was very happy to sign on to do what I did. It was kind of a natural extension. I'm not big on hobbies. Probably the best thing that Lynne and I did, in addition to working (she works too, same way), is we got to travel the world, but we fitted in all of that stuff together and work was a focus and I just enjoyed it.

Brokaw: That's good, that's just great! Well, we're so happy that you agreed to do this interview, it's been so interesting, and I want to thank you for that. Do you have anything to say, Kate?

Thornhill: Thank you so much for sharing your stories with us.

Hellesvig: Well it was truly my pleasure, I really, I have enjoyed this.

Brokaw: I think anyone that listens to this in later years will get a good grasp of how some of these projects came to be and that's what we needed to know.

End of interview.

Addendum:

**Number of Original Stained Glass "Golden" Windows
in Hope Abbey Mausoleum**

Clerestory windows in lobby	19
Clerestory windows in south wing	20
Clerestory windows in north wing	20
Clerestories above ceiling lite windows	4 (seen only from outside, from up the hill)
Total Clerestory windows	63
Medium windows in east wing	5
Large windows in north & south wings	2
Medium windows in north wing	2
Medium windows in south wing	2
Ceiling lite windows	2
Medium window in the storage closet	1
Total Medium & Large windows	14
Total Replicated Windows	77
Clerestories above ceiling lite windows	4 (not visible, so not replicated)
Total Original Windows in Hope Abbey	81