City of Alexandria

Office of Historic Alexandria

Alexandria Legacies

Oral History Program

Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies – City Preservation Movement*

Title: *Interview with Marian Van Landingham*

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Interviewer: *Alice Reid*

Transcriber: *Alice Reid*

Abstract: Marian Van Landingham, an Alexandria artist, is a founder of Alexandria's Torpedo Factory Art Center and former Delegate to the Virginia General Assembly, where she represented Alexandria for 24 years, from 1982 to 2006. She talks about how the Art Center was established and its' early years, when there was little heat and no air-conditioning for the artists. She also talks about her years in the Assembly, where she was one of the few female delegates.

Table of Contents/Index

Tape: *Tape 1*
Side: *Side 1*

Marian Van Landingham in her studio at the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 2007 (Photo by Alice Reid)

Introductions	
Alice Reid:	Hi, this is Alice Reid. It is November 1, 2007, and I'm interviewing Marian Van Landingham at her studio at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Virginia. Marian, could you please state your full name.
Marian Van Landingham:	Marian Amelia Van Landingham.
A.R.:	A very pretty name!
Marian Van Landingham:	Thank you.
A.R.:	And can you tell me where you were born and when?
Marian Van Landingham:	Albany, Georgia, September 10, 1937.
Early Years in Alexandria	
A.R.:	Okay. And when did you come to Alexandria?
Marian Van Landingham:	Well I moved to Northern Virginia in 1967. I moved down into Alexandria in about 1972 from Shirlington where I lived initially.
A.R.:	And what brought you to this area?
Marian Van Landingham:	Well I moved...I had come up temporarily with something called the Task Force on Environmental Health. I was loaned from the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta. I was part of their PR staff.

	And the idea was to try to find out what the federal government was doing in the environmental area. This was before the EPA. And I was loaned to this task force and went around to federal agencies trying to find out what they were doing in the environmental area. I decided to transfer up here at that point. And I initially went into the National Air Pollution Agency, which was part of the U.S. Public Health Service at that time.
A.R.:	Were you an artist at the time? Were you painting?
Marian Van Landingham:	Oh yes, I'd been painting since right after college.
A.R.:	Did you major in art?
Marian Van Landingham:	No, I majored...have a master's in political science.
A.R.:	Oh, well good! And where did you go to college?
Marian Van Landingham:	Emory University in Atlanta. And then I had come up here to the Washington area as part of what was called the Washington semester at American University the spring of my senior year in college. So I had had a taste of the Washington area before.
A.R.:	And liked it.
Marian Van Landingham:	Right.
A.R.:	And did you then move from the environmental work you were doing into a job on the Hill? Was that how it went?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yes, I went to work as a press aid for Congressman Phil Landrum of Georgia, and I stayed with him three or four years full-time and got tired of writing speeches for the same person.
A.R.:	Okay. And when did you stop working for him?
Marian Van Landingham:	About 1973 I guess it was. I continued working part-time for him. But I got where, I'd moved to Old Town in the meantime, and I hated to leave here. I decided to see if I could freelance and stay here. And shortly I got a job part time with the Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, which sounded interesting, and I could walk from where I was living at Cameron and North Pitt at that point. And I still did newsletters and things and occasional speeches for Mr. Landrum and made the transition that way.
The Art League and Old Town	
A.R.:	And at that time you had begun to paint more and more?
Marian Van Landingham:	I was painting a lot, and I was very active in the Art League. And the Art League in the meantime had moved from Parkington, which is now Ballston in Arlington, and had moved to Alexandria and was there on Cameron Street, 315 Cameron, and I was very active in the Art League about this time and, as I said, I hated to leave Alexandria every day.
A.R.:	Tell me a little bit about the art scene in Old Town at that time. There was the Art League, and I remember where it was at 315 Cameron Street. Was it a magnet for people to come and work in this neighborhood? Artists?

Marian Van Landingham:	I don't think so. We had the gallery, and we began having classes in the basement there and later rented space at Cameron and St. Asaph, where Senior Services later was. We rented that for additional classroom space, and we had classes upstairs at 315 Cameron, and also a few studios in the smaller rooms. There was an art supply store on King Street, in the 200 block of King Street. But there wasn't a lot otherwise. But as our lease ran out on the 315 Cameron St. area, and the landlord was going to go up on the price, sharply on the rent, I started looking—I was president of the Art League at the time—I started looking for space in every pigeon-filled loft in Old Town, and I was really kind of convinced that the way things were going, we would be priced out of Old Town.
A.R.:	So it was more or less the Art League that was the impetus for finding the Torpedo Factory, not a collection of artists who were paying low rents.
The Torpedo Factory Becomes an Art Center	
Marian Van Landingham:	No, it was really the Art League. So when I—as I said, I was looking for space, and I was discouraged. One day I went into the Bicentennial office, and I was talking about this, and I was afraid the artists were going to be priced out of Old Town. And the chairman of the Commission at that time was Jim Coldsmith, And he said, "Why not the Torpedo Factory? The city doesn't know what to do with it, you know." And I went away and thought, well maybe we could make this work, because there were examples—Chelsea Court in Georgetown at this point and certainly Colonial Williamsburg—and other places where craftsmen worked in public. It's not exactly a unique concept. I had not heard of it being done for painters and sculptors, etc., but it seemed like if we gave some kind of protection, it would work. And, as I say, we had experimented with a few studios on the second floor of 315 Cameron. And so I came back with this plan to the Bicentennial Commission where it would really be a 3-year experiment that the city could try and that we would be a very low-cost renovation, and we could see if it could work.
A.R.:	How was the Bicentennial Commission connected to the Torpedo Factory? Did it happen under their aegis?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yes, because I asked them to. I was their staff. We were trying to do things about history in Alexandria, but we were also looking at what is the future of Alexandria. So this sort of fit into the future. And having the Art League already having a need with its need for school space, need for gallery space, its large membership, and also that I could go to Art League members and say, "Would you rent a studio space if it's available?" That was my first source of people for the studios.
A.R.:	And how many people were in the Art League?

Marian Van Landingham:	Oh, I would say 400 or so. It was originally called the Art League of Northern Virginia. It had been in existence 25 years at that point. In fact when we had our 25th birthday here, it was the 50th birthday for the Art League, the same year. So the Art League was a going concern, and it needed space. So then what I did was go to individual members and say, "Would you rent space if it were available?" and also I went to other organizations like The Enamellists Guild of Washington, Scope Gallery (which is now run by the Kiln Club of Washington), and the Ceramics Guild of Bethesda—other existing organizations—and said, "Would you rent space in the Torpedo Factory for a juried show gallery?" We were able to do this. So there were preexisting organizations I was able to pull together to fill the building, plus the artists' contacts. And of course once it was known that this might happen, then a lot of people came to us, and we began jurying then.
A.R.:	The fun part.
Marian Van Landingham:	The fun part. Well, we had to use outside judges who would come in.
A.R.:	And at that point the federal government had said, this is surplus property?
Marian Van Landingham:	The city had bought it from the federal government 3 or 4 years earlier. In fact, there were three city blocks of it. And basically the city had no plans for it. I think the city thought they would probably just be torn down and be green space because it was early 20th-century industrial and didn't fit the image they were trying to create. So one of the reasons that I chose the building that I did for the Art Center was, one, it was connected to King Street, and, two, it only looked like two stories, and not four stories like the others. And I thought it was therefore less vulnerable for being torn down.
Opposition to the Torpedo Factory Art Center	
A.R.:	What was the biggest hurdle at that time to make this thing work? Was it politics? Was it neighbors?
Marian Van Landingham:	It was neighbors. Actually the City Council stuck with us totally, completely, and was led of course by Chuck Beatley, who was mayor and who could say more good about the concept than I could the first time I mentioned it to him. He was very supportive. Bev Beidler was very supportive. Wiley Mitchell went along. You know. Nora Lambourne and Mel Bergheim supported it. All of those people supported it. But there was a major campaign against us that spring—you may remember it—of people in the neighborhood who wanted all these buildings torn down and wanted parkland all along the river. And so one of the other major issues—we ran counter-petitions of course, and we suggested there were other areas they could make into parkland, one of them being where they hadn't planned a high-rise, just north of the Torpedo Factory buildings. And the city had just

	traded....
A.R.:	Now Founders Park?
Marian Van Landingham:	I named Founders Park, incidentally. Because that was Oronoco Street there, where the first tobacco warehouse was. So I said, "Why don't you call that Founders Park?" We also knew that Virginia Concrete wasn't going to be here forever, behind the Strand, so now that of course is Waterfront Park. There were not parks along there at that point, but there was the possibility. There would be other open space, and we didn't have to have a green strip the whole way along there. Although there were some people in the community who said, "Oh, it was a shame that a few selfish artists were going to have studios here by the river." And of course, more public comes through here than anywhere. And they do come along the docks behind us. So you don't need a pasture along the whole waterfront. But you do need some green spots. Some park areas, and public access. Anyway, there was a lot of opposition that spring. But we opposed it.
A.R.:	Do you remember who led the opposition?
Marian Van Landingham:	Oh yes.
A.R.:	Who?
Marian Van Landingham:	You remember Mrs. Lynch from down on South Lee Street?
A.R.:	Barbara?
Marian Van Landingham:	Barbara. Yes.
A.R.:	I remember Barbara, but I didn't remember that she led the opposition.
Marian Van Landingham:	And one of our supporters was Pete Schumeier who was president of The Old Town Civic Association at that time. I remember hearing that somebody was circulating petitions against us and putting them on doorsteps throughout Old Town, and Pete was dispatching his family to go and pick up the petitions.
A.R.:	And he had three children, so...!
Marian Van Landingham:	Yes. (laughs) So it was very competitive there for a little while. But the Council stuck with us completely, because we only asked for $140,000 initially for a three-year experiment and with the understanding that the city could eliminate it after three years or modify it. And that plus the low cost and the fact that they did want to dress up the waterfront a little bit for the Bicentennial was the reason the Council went along with it, because it was pretty decayed looking along here if you remember.
Early Years of the Art Center	
Marian Van Landingham:	And so the idea that we would do something that would attract visitors, be interesting, and that would be low cost to the city, and the artists would be willing to get in and clean it up and paint it and, as I say, the initial renovation was one coat of paint on the outside of the building—harvest gold if you remember—and cold water sinks and

	the walls didn't go to the ceiling, But along the hallways, defining the hallways, the artists had to subdivide it. It was all we had initially, basically.
A.R.:	Partitions.
Marian Van Landingham:	Yeah. Well, it was just the hallway partitions. So the divisions between the studios had to be built by the artists. And that stayed for nine years that way as it turned out.
A.R.:	From 1974 to...?
Marian Van Landingham:	About 1982 or [198]3, you know [19]82 and [198]3, when the renovation took place. And then the city spent $3 million on it then but out of bond money. It was a permanent renovation. They replaced the windows. They took away from us the King Street corner and made that a commercial area. They put in some extra mezzanine in what was remaining of the building, which had not been in the original building.
A.R.:	The second floor.
Marian Van Landingham:	Yeah that had not been in there originally. There was a second floor only in the King Street end. And of course new bathrooms, new heating system, air conditioning, which we didn't have initially. You know all of these amenities that we, trying to keep at low cost, had not had initially.
A.R.:	Well, your book, *On Target*, describes a lot about what conditions were here at that period when there wasn't any air conditioning, etc., and the pigeons had been shooed out and probably came back to roost. But can you reprise a little bit how it felt to work here, in the winter, and the summer—what it looked like?
Marian Van Landingham:	Well it was pretty scruffy. We painted walls brightly, and we covered a lot. We had three 16-foot extension poles and a lot of volunteers. And every couple of days I went and bought another 15 gallons of antique white paint. And the city eventually reimbursed me. But we had to get it done! We had volunteers to paint, and so we had to keep going. We covered the dirty green government green with the rat tracks on the columns and things and got it cleaned up and then Ann Laddon, who I made design czar—she was a good designer and silk screen printer—and Ann designed our logo and then did super graphics on the walls and the hallways which were really wonderful. And I still wish we had the super graphics over what was done in the later renovation. And so we made it cheerful. If you looked at it closely and saw the old wooden-block floors, they were pretty ratty looking. And it was cold in the winter, because we could only turn on the heating system once a day with an engineer standing over it. And it had to be turned off at 5 o'clock at night.
A.R.:	And did you have many visitors?
Marian Van Landingham:	Oh yes. We had a lot of visitors—almost from the beginning—

	because they hadn't really seen anything quite like it. And it was easily the largest attraction for the city, almost from the beginning. So I think the merchants on King Street who initially opposed it, along with the citizens, didn't really realize we were bringing them customers and not competing with them. At first they thought we would be competition. So a lot of the artists started wearing target buttons so when we shopped or ate on King Street, we were bringing them business. One of the funnier things along those lines was there was a lady who had a flower shop. Some of our people bought flowers to make their studios look better. And some of the potters put some of those plants in little hanging things in their studios. She walked into the factory one day and saw these plants and thought we were competing with her. Most of them had been bought from her, of course. So then I had to make a rule that the potters could not sell a pot if—any plant in one of these pots had to be put in a baggie—and then later I saw this same lady at an Old Town Civic meeting in which we were asked to talk about the Factory, and I described it being a place where artists worked. And she looked at me and said, "Oh, I didn't know it was an artists' colony!" And she'd been fighting us for months, and she was three or four doors up King Street.
A.R.:	What was King Street like? You mention in your book Tony Gee and the Snack Bar. But can you talk a little bit about what lower King Street consisted of at that point?
Marian Van Landingham:	The two stores this side of The Snack Bar was Lindsay's Tires and they stored tires, rubber tires, that were for sale there. The family still owns those buildings. And across the street there had been Dockside in about four of the buildings on South Union Street at the corner of South Union and King. That was the main attraction. It was sort of like Pier One. And the Seaport Restaurant, which was not very good but had been there forever, was there on the corner where now the coffee shop is and several other shops and the Thai restaurant and what not. So most of the development didn't start until the 200 block. And you had The Bees Knees and you had the Market Square Shop and several others that are still in there. And some that are not. The Unique Shop was in there. And there was a little gallery that sold art supplies, which is one of the reasons we didn't sell art supplies to the public in the Torpedo Factory. We now have art supplies, but sold only to the members, within the Factory and members of the Art League School, not to members of the general public.
A.R.:	Do you remember how many artists came into the Torpedo Factory, initially, when it opened?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yeah. About 140 when we opened.
A.R.:	And how many do you have today?
Marian Van Landingham:	Not too many more than that—160 to 165. It varies, in the studios.

	But the Art League, which has the juried show galleries, and the school. The school has 2,000 students, And the gallery, probably, there's 700 members or so—I've forgotten, it goes up and down—that can enter a show once a month, That would be a juried show. In fact, all the galleries operate juried shows. They're run by organizations of artists. That's one of the rules. The rules of the galleries are that they are juried show galleries. The studios have individuals, or groups of artists in certain studios. They have to have certain hours and it not like you can hire salespeople to run a shop. They are working studios.
A.R.:	It's important for the public to be able to see art being made.
Marian Van Landingham:	Not that the public always understands that. They come in, and they're used to a mall. They're not used to an Art Center. So they tend to think, so they'll say, "Can we see your shop?" And we correct them and say, "It's a studio." That's a constant battle just because people are not used to this kind of place. They're used to shops.
A.R.:	Do you think that's changing a bit. The Museum of American Art, the one that's just reopened, has an upstairs conservators area that is open, at least through glass, to see work being done.
Marian Van Landingham:	I know it is, and I made my great foray there a few months ago, before I broke my hip. And I never did get to that top floor, and I wanted to go back to see it. Actually, as I say, it not a unique experiment, and actually, since we've done this, many others—there are sort of "children" and "grandchildren" of the Torpedo Factory all around the country, and in fact all around the world. And they all do it a little bit differently, according to their community of artists, their buildings, and what structures they can get. And different rules. But as I say, the concept was not all that unique to start with because it had actually been done with crafts quite some time before. There are various levels for how open it is to where people can work. We have our door and window arrangement so somebody can see them with the door closed, being watched through the window. But I think almost all the artists do open the doors when they're working, though we tend to separate the work area from the kind of "gallery" area.
A.R.:	And is that the case here [in your studio]?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yeah.
A.R.:	So the paintings hanging outside this little area are considered to be hanging in the gallery?
Marian Van Landingham:	Sort of like a little gallery, but that's our own setup. It makes it a little bit easier for people to look around. But we welcome them to come on back here and see more because we're both very productive and we keep producing stuff and it's stacked around. And sometimes people want to see a lot of your work. They don't want to see just one or two things that are hanging out front. And occasionally someone

	really wants to come in and see what you are doing. And watch you. And some artists are nervous about that. But most of us are kind of oblivious when we are working. And we'll even back into people. And most of the time the public is pretty polite. Occasionally you'll get somebody who's kind of obnoxious, but it's pretty rare, actually. It works much better than you'd think it would work, is I guess what I'm trying to say.
The Torpedo Factory Today	
A.R.:	Has the kind of art and activity that goes on here today...is it very different from its original cast of characters and type of art?
Marian Van Landingham:	No, it's...actually there's a hard core—I haven't counted them lately. There may be 25 members or so who were here originally. At the same time, given the neighborhood and where we are, there's been a lot of turnover too. And every year we have outside jurors choose from among those who are applying to come into space, so we have new people continuously too. And we've never had inside jurors. And one of the things that's kind of nice is that people apply and, without inside politics, they may or may not get in. But they can apply as many times as they want to, because art is not an exacting science. And there are tastes involved. But what it means is that the people here have been chosen by a wide range of judges, over a period of time, so there's not one aesthetic that's dominant here. And I tell people, you'll find—almost everyone will find—something they like and something they hate here. You know. It's just according to your own aesthetic taste.
A.R.:	Do you think that the art being shown here reflects changes in art and taste over a couple of decades?
Marian Van Landingham:	Well it may. We have representative things of just about every style. And most of them are good. But it's hard to compare apples and oranges stylistically. And people grow and change here too. We have a couple of potters here who have become painters that have gone on into other media. And I've changed media myself a couple of times. I was initially a painter but then I did a lot of silkscreen printing for a number of years, and then I did fire-enameling for a while, and now I've moved back to painting, because there are fewer occupational health hazards, and I can work on a large scale that I like better. So anyway, we do change. And we try to be flexible and let people change once they're in here. And they can stay as long they maintain the rules of the Art Center, which is to do the work here and to be here for a certain number of hours in a week, and that depends on how many people are in the studio for some—and to pay their rent and this sort of thing. And the Art Center is now run as a turnkey operation by the city at this point.
A.R.:	It is run by the city?

Marian Van Landingham:	No, at this point it is run by the artists' association, which includes the individual artists, the organizations that are part of it, and the city archaeologist, who participate in the meetings since they're here, and the Art League School. And they all are part of the artists' association. Caroline [Heald] here in the studio is the secretary of the Torpedo Factory Artists' Association. That association collects the rent, manages the building, and sends the city a check every month. That's actually how it's run now.
A.R.:	And the city assumed the responsibility of redoing this with bond money, and they're paying off the bond. What about the rents that the artists are charged? Are you trying to keep them reasonable?
Marian Van Landingham:	The rents are almost $10 a square foot a year now. They started out as $3 a square foot a year in the [19]70s but that includes what we pay to the city, plus the added cost of the management of the building, and the utilities and this sort of thing. We do have a little staff, which we really hardly had in the old days. I was part-time and my assistant was part-time, and we had one janitor. Now it's considerably better than that. And so that is all covered in that rent. Then the city, of course, gets, in addition to that, sales tax and business licenses. Every individual artist has a business license. And some other ancillary income. And we think that because we attract visitors here and because they eat lunch on King Street, the city gets a restaurant tax, or a hotel tax.
A.R.:	And so we think that the Torpedo Factory pays for itself?
Marian Van Landingham:	Oh yeah. I think so. If you add in all the ancillary—the multiplier effect—it more than pays for itself, and I've had City Council members tell me when they go to the National League of Cities meeting, wherever it is in the country, and they say they're from Alexandria, the thing that people know about Alexandria is the Torpedo Factory. So that's always good to hear them come back and say that. And we are now part of the planning for the new water taxies to come across from National Harbor. Because we think they're going to be disgorged down there behind the Chart House [Restaurant]. [Interruption in the tape; it picks up with a repeat of lost material about what life was like for the artists in the early days of the Torpedo Factory when its only improvements were those the artists had made themselves, and when winter heat was iffy and summer air-conditioning was nonexistent. Many artists made do with pretty basic facilities.]
More About the Early Days	
A.R.:	Let's talk about when it was so cold and nasty.
Marian Van Landingham:	The tape probably doesn't have the Pat Monk story either.
A.R.:	No it doesn't. So let's talk about Pat Monk and his problem-solving.
Marian Van Landingham:	One of our artists from then, and he's still with us, was Pat Monk,

	who was a research engineer/physicist, before he came as a sculptor to the Torpedo Factory in retirement. And Pat could help solve a lot of problems. I can still remember the city plumber at that point, coming into my office one morning and pulling himself up to his full height and saying, "The audacity!" And I said, "What's the problem, Syl?" "The audacity! One of your artists..." And I followed him back as he strode back through the factory until he got to the furnace, the boiler. And coming out of the side of the boiler was a bright copper pipe, and it went through the wall to Pat's studio, and Pat had gotten himself hot water. There was no hot water in the building otherwise. And I said, "I guess you're going to have to cut it, aren't you?" And he said, "Yes, I'm going to have to cut it!" And I never said anything to Pat about it, until several days later when I was standing beside Pat at something, and I said to him quietly, "How long were you without hot water?" And he said, "About 24 hours." Pat also solved a leak problem. We'd had a leak from the second-floor restrooms, I think, down to the first-floor sculpture section for a while. And one day I came in and there was a large metal trash can under the leak and welded near the base of the trash can was a faucet and attached to the faucet was a hose. And the hose went across the floor and out the door into Union Street. So he solved that problem. It was sort of practicality. You sort of survived as best you could. It was cold. We bundled ourselves up continuously, because the windows didn't fit very well, and there wasn't much of a heating system. The potters had little coffee pots that they heated water in to dip their hands in occasionally while they were working so their hands didn't freeze. And then in the summer, it was very hot, and we all wore shorts and everything. But the public came to see things. It was fun. It was probably more ad hoc than it is now in many ways. People felt comfortable. In some ways the sculptors did better than they do now because they had a floor to ceiling wall to contain their noise. They could work on the old rotten dock, and get outside, and so we had more sculptors than we have today because the space was kind of more appropriate to the mess that they create and how they could work. And we had an informal sculpture garden on the rotten dock out back that Pat Monk edged with a hand-made fence. Despite the fence, vandals occasionally threw sculpture in the river, and the sculptors had to fish it out. But now with all the visitors and the rehabbed dock [sculptors don't work or exhibit on the dock], you wouldn't do that. It was a funny but kind of a free place that people seemed to enjoy, even in its roughshod look. And we all endured, because it was a great space to work in.
A.R.:	And the city even had its boat house back there, right?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yes, it was at the end of the pier. The T.C. Williams rowing facility. They didn't do too much with it. There was another shed kind of

	thing along the dock, where we had a blacksmith for awhile. And we tried putting kilns out there, but the potters didn't feel comfortable staying out there all night with the kilns I don't think. We had to allow potters to take their things out to the gas kilns at their homes or wherever. We couldn't, from a fire standpoint, have gas kilns in the factory.
A.R.:	But now you can?
Marian Van Landingham:	No. We still have to take things out for firing. They can't use gas kilns. They have electric kilns. But most potters seem to prefer firing in gas kilns where you don't have oxygen present. It affects the glazes they use.
Election as State Assembly Delegate	
A.R.:	Oh, I see. Moving along a bit, to your own career. Did the Torpedo Factory, and your experience in getting that underway, did that whet your appetite for City Council? I know you did run for City Council.
Marian Van Landingham:	Well, of course I had been involved in politics before. That was my education—a master's in political science. I had worked for a congressman, this sort of thing. And I still think sometimes the Torpedo Factory, for me at least, was more a political accomplishment than it was an artistic one. Because I had to use the knowledge and skills to get it to work and to get the support of the city and the community in doing it. And I guess one of my initial reasons for wanting to run for office was to get some leverage over the situation because there was still opposition to the Art Center. I was director the first five years. That was [19]79 when I ran for Council but it wasn't until [19]81 that the decision was made to make it permanent. And there was great controversy, you may remember, over the form of how it would continue as part of the redevelopment of the whole Torpedo Factory complex. Its future was not guaranteed at that point, in [19]79.
A.R.:	And the main outlines of that were they wanted to squash the artists together in one little, smaller place?
Marian Van Landingham:	There was even one discussion maybe they'd put us on the second floor of the building across the street, or something of this order. So we didn't really know how it was going to come out. While there was still a lot of political support for it, we had a mayor then—Mayor Mann—who was not our friend, and so I decided to run for City Council. I had become active in the Democratic Party at that point. And Mayor Mann got the Council to pass a resolution that a city employee could not run for office. So I had to resign the directorship of the factory just to make the run. And I won in the primary, beat Nick Colasanto, but lost in the general election—by, I don't know, 400 votes or something like that. I continued being active here, and two years later, the Democratic elected officials asked me to run for

	state delegate, which I was successful in. And in a way that turned out better because while I wasn't directly related to the Factory, and I was able to do other things, and was certainly interested in pushing the city and its state issues, I still had some leverage over what happened here, because the city was also dependent on me for carrying their bills and helping them get money for their projects, particularly after I got on the Appropriations Committee down there. So it was actually rather nice in that sense. I didn't have to push when there was something of concern, such as the time there was a scheme or a suggestion to build glass houses on the dock that would have obscured our first floor windows and been very impractical, given the heat off the river and the sun off the river in the mornings. As anybody knows, we always have to let our shades down, it's so intense. But they were thinking of those at Faneuil Hall in Boston, and what a success that was, and I had to get to city manager Vola Lawson and say, "You know this isn't practical. They'll have nothing but cactuses out there. If they try to do that. The dock area is narrow. It would restrict where people could walk, it'll block the windows into the Factory. And it's just not going to be a good idea. And so she had General Services actually build a temporary structure out of wood to show just what it would block. And the result was that idea went down the drain. The things like that we were able to call attention to and I guess as I say, it worked, without having to be a heavy, I was able to still kind of help protect the Art Center.
A.R.:	And Virginia being the Dillon Rule state that it is, people don't realize that in Richmond there's more power some time than there is right here in town.
Marian Van Landingham:	Exactly. And actually it was better. Because I sometimes said that it was the best thing that ever happened to me—though I didn't think it at the time—was losing that first election because you know you can't go to the grocery and not be pounced on if you're on City Council. But people don't really pay that much attention to what happens in Richmond.
A.R.:	Richmond, right, where so much happens.
Marian Van Landingham:	And too, there, spending years building seniority really made a difference. Here nobody but Del Pepper could manage to stay on Council 24 years. Here they usually run two or three terms and quit. You don't gain anything unless you get to be mayor.
A.R.:	You don't gain power by seniority. It's just a vote.
Marian Van Landingham:	It's just a vote. And they finally get tired of being pounced on continuously, or their families do, or whatever, and they finally quit.
A.R.:	Now you were elected to the legislature in what year?
Marian Van Landingham:	Fall of [19]81, and I took office in [19]82.
A.R.:	And so you served for 24 years.

Marian Van Landingham:	Right.
Women in the State Legislature	
A.R.:	When you first went to the legislature in [19]82, were there many women at that point?
Marian Van Landingham:	No, I'm trying to remember. There were maybe six or eight. And there're still not very many. There are 15 or 16 now.
A.R.:	And the ladies room was infamously stuck off somewhere?
Marian Van Landingham:	It was down the hall. We had to go out the chamber doors, but it was only about 35 or 40 feet down the hall. And it was small, but we didn't need much space. Actually I was treated well and never felt I was discriminated against. And there were several senior women who were very helpful. And I think it was Dorothy McDiarmid who was Chairman of Appropriations, and she and Mary Marshall helped get me on Appropriations. Mary Marshall was the delegate from North Arlington and Dorothy McDiarmid was from Vienna. They were very helpful from the beginning. And, as I say, there weren't many of us. Vivian Watts was elected at the same time I was. Then, after going off to the Baliles administration to be the Secretary of Transportation, 10 years later she came back and is still down there, still as a state delegate.
A.R.:	And how about Mary Margaret Whipple?
Marian Van Landingham:	Mary Margaret is in the Senate. There was a time there were no Democratic [women] senators. There are seven or eight now. Mary Margaret is actually chair of the Democratic Caucus in the Senate. Patsy Ticer is also part of that Senate coalition. Actually, they have a good group. Janet Howell from Reston is there, and she's very good. When I first knew Janet, she was legislative aide to Ken Plum in the House. Ken was a good buddy of mine. We sat next to each other for years and said the old town and the new town voted pretty much the same. At that time, he had one of the two reliable Democratic parts of Fairfax County.
A.R.:	When you were elected, Democrats were in control.
Marian Van Landingham:	They were in control until 1999. And that was a big help to me, of course. While many of the Democrats were much more conservative, never mind, they were the majority party. And so it helped me in my initial appointments and gave me a lot of generalized support. And before the changeover, I became actually Chair of Privileges and Elections, the first woman chair of that, which deals with election law and constitutional law. And I was chair of several appropriation subcommittees, transportation, and then public education when the Republicans came over, I lost those chairmanships, but remained on the committees. They did take me off the Education Committee, but it turned out I stayed on the public ed subcommittee of the appropriations, which was what mattered. And actually after the

	Republicans took over, I was chair of that, at that time when there was a division—not quite a majority. So the year they took me off education, I stayed as chair of the public education subcommittee of appropriations. So for a couple of years, I was able to continue that. But anyway, I guess before I left, with the Republicans taking total control, and seeing their freshmen come in and have no respect even for their own senior members. With the redistricting there, there were a lot of them elected. And losing my own chairmanships...it was not as much fun. Let's put it that way.
Legislative Accomplishments	
A.R.:	What do you consider your main legislative accomplishment in the house?
Marian Van Landingham:	Probably more of it was funding issues and trying to fund things that I thought were important in education and health and human services and that sort of thing.
A.R.:	For instance?
Marian Van Landingham:	Yeah, the Arlandria clinic. Initially that was funded with a federal grant that was running out. The Health Department thought that they were going to have to close it, probably. There was a meeting, and I remember it was over at the Campagna Center, and everyone was saying, "What can we do?" And I said, maybe if we can get a third of the funding from the state, and the city can put up another third, well maybe we can raise privately a third, and we can manage it that way. I was able to get the $100,000 in the next budget from the state end. Immediately the city put in a hundred. And then they did raise private monies. And they raise a lot more in private, And they have, like, a million dollar or two million dollar budget now. And the state funding has gone up, but only so much. The city has put in a lot more. But that would not have happened. They would not have continued probably if I'd not been able to get the funding. Practically everything in Alexandria I got funding for at one point or another. And that was a big issue. But the statewide things. For instance, we began having an ESL [English as a second language] problem here fairly early, and I was able to get into the budget—I didn't do this through legislation but through a budget formula—that there would be special money assigned by a formula for ESL—English as a second language—teachers that would bring extra money to the Alexandria school system or to those that needed it.
A.R.:	Arlington and Alexandria particularly?
Marian Van Landingham:	But it turned out that almost every school system in the state needed it, and even then more needed it than realized. For instance, even back then Harrisonburg needed it and Norfolk needed it, even back then, and their legislators didn't realize it. Anyhow that sort of thing really became a major issue. One of things about legislation in

	Virginia is that we have strict rules of germaneness. You can't do what they do in Congress of making an omnibus bill and folding everything in the world into it.
A.R.:	No Christmas tree?
Marian Van Landingham:	No Christmas tree. In other words, you amend a particular section of the code and whatever you amend into that has to relate to that section of the code, which means that we have thousands of bills, but they're small bills. You don't get the omnibus bills very much. I did have something called the Omnibus Education Bill of 1995 that provided a number of things, all in the education area. But generally speaking you'll end up with 100 bills as your legacy, but they are not earth-shattering. They're not really large bills, but they tackle one problem at a time. And then your name's never on it afterwards, of course. Somebody's gonna go along and amend it afterwards and change the rules again. People have said, "You're known more for the Factory." And I say, Well, the Factory is a big concrete thing. People visit it and see it. But they don't know where in the code of Virginia I made some change that helps somebody. An example would be legislation to require visual smoke alarms for the deaf in motels. I got that through. But nobody that's deaf knows that. And certainly the public doesn't know. They just assume that's something that everybody has.
A.R.:	You were mentioning that when you got down there, you had a little bit more clout over the city—as far as the Torpedo Factory and the interests of the artists [were concerned].
Marian Van Landingham:	I usually didn't have to do anything.
A.R.:	I was wondering if you'd ever had a sort of nose to nose...
Marian Van Landingham:	I didn't. I didn't ever have to.
A.R.:	They just knew, Marian's there.
Marian Van Landingham:	And they knew my interests. And too I think they very soon found out in the early days that the Factory was very popular, and it was a major attraction. It was one of the things, for instance, in the 1980s when the city got the All-American City Award, the Art Center was one of the things that they got it based on. There was a meeting in San Antonio. I remember joining [city officials] for it. So I didn't have to be a heavy. I didn't have to fight with them over it. There was clearly an interest, and I think it helped.
A.R.:	True, it must have. And when you first got down there, what was the biggest challenge in the early [19]80s. You were one of little more than a handful of women. It's kind of an arcane place in some ways.
Marian Van Landingham:	Not all that unfamiliar. I grew up in Georgia after all.
A.R.:	You knew the landscape.
Marian Van Landingham:	The landscape was a little different but not that different. And so it was to work within the system as best one could.

A.R.:	And you were a Southern woman.
Marian Van Landingham:	That's right. And so they generally accepted me. They knew I was representing a Northern Virginia jurisdiction, and they're always suspicious of what's going to be the Alexandria charter bill. And things like that. Because sometimes they see things they say it's like multiflora roses. They plant by the highways, and the multiflora roses end up in pastures. This sort of thing. If something gets passed in the Alexandria charter bill, somebody may come back the next year like requiring dead-bolt locks on apartments, that somebody will want to pass a general law with the next year.
A.R.:	So you had to be alert for those things and figure out who was going to fight what?
Marian Van Landingham:	And sometimes it was tough.
A.R.:	What's the nastiest thing you ever had to deal with in the House of Delegates. [Tape is interrupted and starts again.] Let's begin recording here. You were there when [House Speaker] Vance Wilkins went down?
Marian Van Landingham:	…He was a very right-wing type...I can't describe it. But he had worked very hard to build a Republican majority. He took Gingrich's plan. He went out and recruited a lot of these people to run, and then helped them raise money. And they were obligated to him then. They had to vote for him for Speaker even though they knew he was not very good. I'd had to deal with him when I was Chair of Privileges and Elections because he was on the committee and was always bringing up bad bills, so to speak, and I'd have to try and circumvent him. But I was pleased when he did lose the Speakership because of sexual harassment. And I will say the present Speaker—although I disagree with the Republican caucus's positions—Bill Howell is a decent man. In fact he grew up in Alexandria and had very good Democratic parents, and his father worked for the World Bank. And it's a shame that he ended up where he is. He was friends with some good Democratic friends I have here. But I think if he didn't go along with that caucus at this particular point, he would be deposed as Speaker. And he knows it.
More About Women in the Legislature	
A.R.:	Do you remember when you first went down there. Given we're doing oral history. What was it like among the women delegates. There were only six or eight of you. Did you get together once a week for dinner or anything like that?
Marian Van Landingham:	We often did see each other. We didn't have a regular session, but we did meet for dinner. In fact, when Gerry Baliles was governor, Dorothy McDiarmid was Chairman of Appropriations, she actually arranged so that every week we had a member of the administration

	talk to us, and we met with them about something, an issue, because she obviously had the clout as Chairman of Appropriations and that was very nice. Later when there were more Republican women elected, and it became more of a half and half situation, the unity sort of disintegrated. I can still remember Gladys Keating, from Fairfax County, who by that time was Chair of Corporations, Insurance, and Banking, and she introduced some legislation that would have required dry cleaners to charge the same thing for men's shirts and women's blouses—the only difference being that the buttons go in different directions. And there were Republican women that stood up and killed that legislation on the floor of the House. And I turned to whoever was sitting next to me—I've forgotten now whether it was Ken Plum or who it was—and I said, "There goes the women's caucus."
A.R.:	No more dinners.
Marian Van Landingham:	It's just not worth it. And actually when Gladys retired, and I became the senior Democrat, I gave up trying to do the women's caucus meetings once a week during session, because I couldn't figure we were going to agree on very much at that point. And we were all busy. We had so many committees and subcommittees meeting that go on kind of simultaneously, that it just never seemed like it was worthwhile bothering again—once we were 50 percent conservative.
Final Thoughts	
A.R.:	Is there anything that we haven't covered that you feel we should talk about today? As far as the Torpedo Factory is concerned? Or Richmond? Or Alexandria politics?
Marian Van Landingham:	Well, the main thing I would say is I was fortunate in having a very supportive community. Alexandria is a good place to represent. I never felt that I was out of sinc with what my community wanted. They weren't pouncing on me. And I can still remember a friend who represented the Blacksburg area, Joan Munford, who was there, was elected, when I was and stayed around for about 15 years or more—maybe 20, when she retired. And Joan wanted to vote on a bill, I guess it was the one gun a month legislation that passed during the Wilder administration, and she told me that she would have liked to have voted for that, but she knew she couldn't with her constituents.
A.R.:	That might have changed now.
Marian Van Landingham:	It might have at this particular point. But I'm sure Joan was right at the time. So she was with us almost always on most things, and a very nice person, But that was a case where she couldn't vote her conscience, or what she thought was the best thing, because of the nature of her constituency at the time. I can't remember having a...
A.R.:	So you feel you were fortunate in that way. Anything about the Torpedo Factory? One thing we may have missed was your

	description of having wool tunics made for you when it was so cold.
Marian Van Landingham:	Oh yeah. Somewhere I had bought a wool overblouse that fitted over turtle necks and other things, you know. I liked the design. So I had a dressmaker at the time make me three or four others with different materials, different colors, It was a good style for me. It was long and I'm short-waisted. But it was just so cold! I guess I eventually sold them or gave them away.
A.R.:	Well if you don't have anything to add, I think we've covered a lot. I think we'll conclude the interview. Thank you very much.
Marian Van Landingham:	Thank you. [End]