



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Transcript of interview with Herman Rusch

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Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with Herman Rusch

at the Artist's Home in Cochrane, Wisconsin

May 17, 1975

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "theirselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "cause," was transcribed as "because," "fore" as "before," "yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "____" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

Interview

HR: Herman Rusch

WV: Willem Volkersz

[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. R1-1] [45-minute tape side]

WV: [Reading from a plaque on the back of a self-portrait bust in sculpture garden:] [Herman—WV] A. Rusch born in a log cabin in 1885 near Arcadia, Wisconsin. An outdoor man all his life. A lover and student of nature. Farmed 40 years, then sells farm to his son. Always helping him in busy times and, at the same time, started this venture when 71 years old and did all the work himself, in building and on the grounds. A good way to kill old-age boredom.

[Interruption in taping]

[At least the first portion of the tape is noisy [wind noise—WV].—Ed.]

WV: . . . been doing this for quite a while?

HR: Since '71. No.

WV: Since you were. . . .

HR: '50. . . . '67. But I was 71 years old when I started this project. [He may have meant to say 1957, since 1967 would give him a birthdate of 1896.—Ed.]

WV: Uh huh. Was it after you sold your farm, and. . . .

HR: Yeah. Yeah. Boy moved to California. He had a, wife's sister lived there, and they coaxed him out there.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: Well, he was a little tired of the farming, and right then the prices wasn't too good either. He had a few chickens, and 20 cents a dozen is what he got; you know, you can't. . . . And hogs were around 14 cents. I got that once a long time ago, 14 cents. That must be fifty. . . .

WV: Long time ago.

HR: About fifty years ago. But that was just once at that time, yeah. Yeah!

WV: So then you decided you needed something to do and. . . .

HR: Pardon?

WV: Then you decided you needed something to do after you didn't have the farm anymore?

HR: Yeah, my wife was agin it. I guess she didn't know, you know. . . . I didn't know myself that it'd look like this. That's a fact!

WV: Sure.

HR: Of course you gotta have it in you, you know.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: By golly, I believe that there's something to it, you know. There's. . . . You can read and—about people, you know. My, one of my main studies is almost humanity—people, you know.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: And by golly, you know, you can learn a lot about 'em. What is blueberry pie for one is rank poison for another.

WV: That's right.

HR: You can see that in Vietnam, and all over. Gee, they'd rather leave house and home, you know. And I don't know, and all different ideas. There's so many differences in people. And there's talkers, and some of them only have the mouths for eating, you know. No, I like to talk. (chuckles)

WV: (laughs) Good for you.

HR: And then, quit farming, Mrs. said, "Help the boy on the farm." Well, if that's all that I had, would have in for myself, after I farmed 40 years. . . .

WV: Yeah.

HR: . . . on the farm all my life. . . .

WV: You need something else.

HR: . . . I should start something else. So I got the notion of a museum like on the inside.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: And then there was no place available. I was retired four years, you know. And I got the crazy idea in my head. And then I didn't know where to locate, but this was a former dance pavilion.

WV: Huh. In this building?

HR: Yeah. [Hoopie] John used to play here at times.

WV: Huh.

HR: Good hardwood floor in there, only the '65 flood kind of spoiled it. The water even went in there.

WV: Oh really?

HR: Yeah.

WV: Boy, that's amazing.

HR: So, we rented it, and I went to work, you know. Ten years rented. The dancers kind of quit—the country dancers. I don't know, with this road business and a lot of cars, they might look in. I guess nothing doing _____, they might go to Lacrosse, even. But they used to have good crowds, you know, before the traffic was. . . .

WV: Yeah.

HR: . . . wasn't as good as it was today.

WV: And I guess there's different kinds of entertainment, like a lot of TV now, and that kind of stuff.

HR: Yeah.

WV: That might have something to do with it.

HR: But anyhow, [we] had it rented. Then we buy it. He wanted to sell, that fella. He come from [our] home town, Arcadia. Okay, his price wasn't too bad, and we buy it, and I comes out here and look. "Gee whiz," I says, "that's a kind of a big parking place." And it looked so empty.

WV: Oh, this used to be a parking lot.

HR: Yeah. Cut it with a tractor mower the first year. (chuckles) "By golly," I says, "Why not put a little something out here?" I built that planter there, you know, with the _____ in there, where those pots are hanging on. Those are old car lamps, you know.

WV: Oh, is that what they. . . . Oh, now I see it. Yeah, I recognize them.

HR: Yeah.

WV: Oh, wonderful idea.

HR: Yeah! (chuckles)

WV: You painted them.

HR: And, shucks, I thought it looked lonely; I built a little bigger one. It has a little bigger round, then it has one extra round [tier—WV]. To put the smaller one on the lower end, that's like when they stand a smaller man on the lower side. . . .

WV: Right.

HR: . . . and the tall man on the upper side, you know. That doesn't. . . .

WV: Um hmm. No balance, huh?

HR: No balance. So I did that. By golly I gets the idea, you know. And I had sometimes two, three projects ahead [noise]. And I kept right on until it looked like it looks today. But that heavy work, you know, I. . . . See, up there was the hardest and the heaviest.

WV: That tower?

HR: In the corner, yeah.

WV: That's a big one.

HR: Yeah. Lot of stones in there, and wall is that thick.

WV: Oh boy. Do you remember now. . . . You must have some idea in mind before you start out _____.

HR: Yeah, you gotta have a blueprint. Ya, and you got to look at. . . .

WV: The blueprint's in your mind though, right?

HR: Ya, that's right. Sometimes I run up against the obstacle, you know, but then I can figure out, you know, in how to get around that, you know.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: And those rock are set—it's a little different type of rock there, than those. [pointing] These rock are native here as far as the bluffs and the valleys.

WV: You just find them up here?

HR: Yeah.

WV: They're real beautiful.

HR: In dry runs, and they really originate in red soil.

WV: Huh!

HR: Chert, I guess, is the technical name.

WV: I like the rock on the bear, too.

HR: Yeah, they are hard. And every rock is shaped different, and you got to treat them like a jigsaw puzzle, you know, and that's what takes the time. Now like when I built that thing, if I leave them rocks flat, it'd look too much like an old barn wall, you know.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: This looks a little more artistic.

WV: Right.

HR: Yeah.

WV: Do you have plans to build anything more? Do you keep on going? Or is it _____?

HR: Well, I tell you. . . . In October, I'll be 90 years old, and my trouble, all it is, I am too fiery, and then I knock myself out.

WV: Ahh, yeah.

HR: I don't get tired, after I get broke in, and then—on the farm too, and I never know when to quit. [noise] As long as there is work.

WV: Ahh. So you've got to be careful.

HR: And that's my trouble. Now that guy that bought our farm, he runs three farms. He's already from the farm, his dad. There now, see it's not too big a place, but on our farm, there's quite a bit of land. And by golly, you know, that man really went to work, I guess. He'd. . . .

WV: Three farms, boy!

HR: He'd maybe. . . . Work all night, pret near. And then his ticker went haywire, you know.

WV: Sure, it would!

HR: Yah? Yeah, you see, you can. . . .

WV: You can't do too much, that's. . . .

HR: Work don't hurt anybody, but, by golly, you know, you gotta know when to quit, too.

WV: You've gotta sleep sometime.

HR: A person is just like a car or a piece of machinery or anything else.

WV: It'll break down.

HR: Yeah. But his ticker, the doctor says, "Slow down, Mister, slow down!" (chuckles)

WV: (laughs) You mean, like once you've started on a piece, you just go right through it and finish it, probably, right?

HR: Yeah.

WV: _____ get through it.

HR: As much. . . . Of course I get interrupted, but when I start something I. . . . Yeah.

WV: How long does it take you to build certain pieces? Like in the back there, those tall pieces?

HR: Those high ones?

WV: Yeah.

HR: By golly, that's hard to tell. Not too long.

WV: Weeks? Months?

HR: They were easier to build. That tall one there is lined with pebbles like this is. Thousands of pebbles in there.

WV: Oh, yeah.

HR: That, of course, you gotta board up [make a form—WV]

WV: Oh, I see.

HR: Then it's perpendicular, like this. You gotta start in the shiplap [wood forms—WV]. You lay around, you know, you fill that in. And then that holds your pebbles on the side.

WV: Right.

HR: Else you could never do a smooth job like this.

WV: Sure.

HR: And when the mortar is loose, you know, when it's slanted like that, you put a stone in there, it'd fall right out. By golly, you run up agin a lot of obstacles when [you monkey] with cement. So that [points—Ed.] I had a box clear up to there, but that one [another one—Ed.], you see it tapers. I only needed three round[s] of boards. I bet if I bought the boards, and boarded it up, _____ it up, I could have sawed up a hundred dollars worth of lumber there, you know, all the pieces in it. But it tapers. I only had about three rounds, I think, of boards. Then, by the time you get the upper one full and the lower one is dry, you know, you can take that away, and re-saw it, or refit it, and set it on the top.

WV: Right, of course!

HR: And that's the _____.

WV: That's a very good idea. So you didn't spend very much money on that?

HR: Yeah.

WV: That's good.

HR: Yeah, it worked out good.

WV: But you think you worked on that for maybe a couple of months?

HR: Oh, no! I could easily do a round a day—a round of boards, you know—or more than that. And I think there's some 19, 20 around.

WV: I see.

HR: Yeah. So that would give you pretty close.

WV: Somewhat of an idea, yeah. I really like this arch here.

HR: Yeah, yeah.

WV: This is a really nice one; I really like it.

HR: Of course, that thing. . . . You know, it's like a fencepost: you can't set a fencepost on top of the ground, you know.

WV: Of course. You've gotta go down.

HR: Yeah. It depends on how much footing you got. Now, I built a post— did you see that post up there, like a fencepost up there? At Minneapolis [Naives and Visionaries exhibition—WV]?

WV: Oh, yeah! Right.

HR: That's the post that I made. They wanted a replica of that fencepost, you know. (laughs)

WV: That's real nice, yeah.

HR: So I sold it to them, rather than to bring it back. I had no use for it.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: And I tell you, sometimes, you know, I guess pret near anybody would like to be successful, you know, except maybe a bum; he never thinks of that, you know. He only thinks where he's gonna pry open the next door, you know. But where I got the idea for the fence—and this all is a good lesson in how to be successful, too—I had them two posts there and one arch. I says to my brother-in-law, "By golly, if I built a third post"—those three middle ones—"only one more post, I could add an arch." Well, after I had that done, you know, then I see there was one arch that would go over the top.

WV: Right, and then you just. . . .

HR: But when I told him that, if I should build another post, he says, "That's good enough." But I tell you, I can't quite, I couldn't quite understand why I should quit with good enough on a place like this when I can make it better.

WV: Better, of course.

HR: You see, you get the idea?

WV: Good for you! I sure do.

HR: Yeah. So then I had them three posts and three arches. A few years later I looks at it. "By golly, I think, if I put a post there, and one there, and add them seven top arches. . . ." Now that's filled out.

WV: Ahh.

HR: Now, you see, that's quite a design.

WV: Yeah.

HR: All was uniform and taper and everything.

WV: So it took you a couple of years to develop that whole idea then?

HR: Ya, it. . . .

WV: That's okay. That's real nice.

HR: But I did say when I had them three posts, "Wouldn't that make a nice fence," but I thought it was too much work. I had old buggy ____ come around here ____, buggy ____.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: By golly, you know, one fall, ____, after all the work was done, you know, and a guy like me, you know, with a plenty, lot of energy yet, ____ fellow _____. Those two gateposts were in. And mind you, that was a warm fall. October—I started the last week in October by the gate there and I worked this way [toward HR—Ed.], and I could work three weeks in November. . . .

WV: Oh boy!

HR: I put in 15 posts. But they wasn't nowheres near all complete. There wasn't. . . . They wasn't pointed out, you know. It was just a bare post. And I put in fifteen posts in those three or four weeks.

WV: Whew! That's amazing.

HR: And then those points and small things I made down cellar in the winter, see.

WV: Oh, I see. You mean, you put. . . .

HR: But the next year, besides all the work that I did here, and plant and cut the lawns and take care of the visitors—of course, there wasn't too many at that time—and help my son on the farm, but when it got to that time, like the fall before when I started, I had that fence done. Those points and ____ _____. [Description of a long decorative fence with concrete decorations on the posts and arches between posts.—WV]

WV: That's beautiful.

HR: Ya.

WV: Did you make all the points in the basement during the winter?

HR: Yeah, yeah.

WV: Did you. . . . You didn't use a mold for them, right?

HR: Um hmm.

WV: Oh, you did.

HR: Yeah. Flower pot.

WV: Flower pot!

HR: But the point, you had a. . . . Well, my son-in-law, he found those drinking cups, and they tapered; they come to a point. And by golly, they just fit on there.

WV: Oh, of course! The ones that fit in a little plastic base.

HR: Yeah, that's right. ____ ____.

WV: I know those.

HR: And then I put a nail in on the top, you know, those sharp ones. Keeps the birds off, keep it nice and clean. They can't really sit on the point of a nail, you know. (both chuckle)

WV: Right. It's a little hard to do.

HR: Yeah.

WV: I see. Oh, now I notice that several. . . . You have that point on this other piece in front here, too.

HR: Yeah. Oh, by golly, that's pretty, ____ these flowers. It's been such a cold spring, you know.

WV: Yeah.

HR: I only planted a few. Some of that seed is quite finicky, you know.

WV: Yeah.

HR: If it's too cold, by golly, they'll rot on you. Like I planted here petunias one year. Nothing comes up. I guessed the seeds is no good, I thinks. By golly, later, about a week or two later, I plants again. By gee, they all come. So it really don't pay to plant flowers too early.

WV: I'd really like to come back in the summertime sometime, later in the. . . .

HR: Yeah, around the first of August, September, I tell you. I plant those flowers that bloom till the frost kills them. And then you got flowers all summer, if you plant it. . . . If I planted like tulips, they'd be darn pretty for a few weeks.

WV: Oh. Sure. Yeah, I bet that [unintelligible phrase]

HR: Then you'd have nothing but green brush the rest of the year.

WV: Right, that's very true.

HR: Of course, I tell the. . . I like to tell this to the women, you know. A flower is something like a lady, you know: she's prettier when she's sweet sixteen and ____ ____.

WV: (laughs)

HR: Now, those flowers, a lot of them they'll get ripe, you know. Of course you pick those off, and then new fruits come in, branches and. . . But you pick the old ones off, makes it look better, and it gives it more of a encouragement to throw out sprouts, you know, sprouts.

WV: Right.

HR: So that's the. . . (laughs) But that's a fact. Lot of them would be shriveled up. They aren't as pretty in the later part of September or nearer October as what they are in early parts of September, but nevertheless, they're there.

WV: You get a lot of visitors during the summer?

HR: Quite a few! It's picking up slow. Yeah, I don't know. There's a place down here, about ____ central Wisconsin, what they call the House on the Rock [probably a reference to Fred Smith's "Wisconsin Concrete Park" and "Rock Tavern"—WV]. Of course it's on a good highway, but, gee, there's a lot of people crowd there. And then yesterday—I never questioned anybody on that—yesterday I says to a guy, "Ya, I seen it. I like this better." [unintelligible sentence] They charge three and a half, and I charge 75 cents and 25. (laughs)

WV: That's fair. Very fair.

HR: Now there's kind of a recession, you know, and I don't figure on raising it, either.

WV: That's nice. Are you able to sustain being here from the charges that you. . .

HR: Yeah, it cover my expenses, a little better. Now, and then, of course, I get a little money from, few cents interest.

WV: Right.

HR: But I get minimum off the. . . What they are, the heck you call that?

WV: Social security?

HR: Social security, yeah. Yep, I get the minimum.

WV: Huh.

HR: There's one thing about me; I'm used to living on practically nothing, and, I tell you, I can live, I bet you, on half of the money that a lot of people. . .

WV: That's real good. Do you have a good garden in back there?

HR: Yeah. Yeah, a garden there. Everbearing strawberries, and the raspberries look good this year. And grapes. And I plant potatoes.

WV: Oh boy.

HR: And there's all kinds of wild asparagus [charmingly pronounces it as-par-a-grass—Tran.] growing around. By golly, I picked it.

WV: Yeah, we picked some a few days ago in Iowa, too.

HR: Oh? Yeah?

WV: I really [liked] it.

HR: They taste something like green peas, don't they?

WV: Yeah, real nice and sweet. I really like 'em.

HR: And if you get them when they're soft enough, by golly, they. . . . I think they're healthy.

WV: Sure are. There's a lot of things that grow in the wild that are good to eat.

HR: Yeah, and I go there and catch myself some bullheads. (chuckles)

WV: Yeah, you don't have very far to go.

HR: Nice long ones. One bullhead, two meals. Yeah. Otherwise you live where?

WV: Kansas City.

HR: Oh.

WV: I teach there, in an art school.

HR: Missouri?

WV: Yep. Kansas City, Missouri. You ever been there?

HR: Big town. No. It's a big town. [A train goes by, providing the illusion that the conversation is accompanied by appropriate sound effects!—Trans.]

WV: It's a big city.

HR: Yeah, I just sold a guy—he's a teacher from Chicago—I sold him. . . . I had made a caveman club, you know, that _____ with a good knot on the end, you know, and. . . .

WV: (laughs)

HR: And I said, "I hear Chicago's getting pretty rough. You gotta put that over your shoulder and go through the back alley and nobody will bother you." (laughter)

WV: It's a good idea.

HR: Yeah.

WV: Did you ever have a chance to go to Minneapolis and see that exhibition at the Walker [Naives and Visionaries—WV]?

HR: Yeah, I. . . . There was a young guy, he's acquainted up there. He's been in New York and all over, from _____ City. And he went up and I went along with him.

WV: Oh, that's wonderful.

HR: You know, at my age and in a strange cities, I don't care to drive there, you know.

WV: Oh, I know what you mean.

HR: I don't know. . . . I tell you, old people they hardly—as old as I am—they hardly fit into this modern economy. With all this gadgetry, you know, and. . . .

WV: Yeah.

HR: . . . why, [I] don't understand it. And some of those guys, you know. . . . Of course, I never had no trouble driving a car, you know. Everybody isn't cut out for a musician or a doctor or a preacher, but everybody drives a car, you see. . . .

WV: That's right.

HR: . . . and in some of those places, by golly, you'd think they were driving an ox team. They'll turn in, you know, no _____ . . .

WV: I know.

HR: Without looking, you know. You know that. That's _____.

WV: Now you have to almost grow up in that to really, to be able to do that.

HR: Yeah, I guess that's. . . .

WV: Did you enjoy seeing that exhibition at the Walker?

HR: Yeah. _____.

WV: What do you think about your work being in an art museum?

HR: (giggles)

WV: Did you enjoy that?

HR: I never thought I'd get that far!

WV: You did.

HR: Well, I made myself here, you see. [self-portrait—Ed.]

WV: Yeah. When did you do that? That's a real nice piece.

HR: Oh [hang], that's quite a while ago.

WV: I recognize you from it.

HR: I tell people I put him there when he's around no more, and I can still see what goes on. He can convey the message to me.

WV: Uh huh. I really like, yeah, the way you look over all your work.

HR: Yeah?

WV: Good positioning. Do you know, do you remember that guy in that exhibition who paints all those signs? His name is Jesse Howard? Had a whole room full at the Walker, where he had all these hand-painted signs, in one room, do you remember that?

HR: Signs?

WV: Yeah. They were all hand-lettered.

HR: By golly, I don't. . . .

WV: Yeah. I know him.

HR: I'm kinda interested in that. What's his name?

WV: Jesse Howard.

HR: Oh.

WV: I've been. . . . I know him, and. . . .

HR: He isn't one of the eight men [in Naives and Visionaries exhibition— WV], though, is he?

WV: In the exhibition?

HR: Yeah.

WV: Yeah.

HR: Oh, he's one of the eight?

WV: Yeah.

HR: Yeah, he had all kinds of writing in that book, you know, they put out of, that the book [catalogue by the same title—WV].

WV: Right. That's him.

HR: The book. . . .

WV: The catalogue? That's right.

HR: Yeah. Yeah.

WV: He's in there.

HR: Oh, he is?

WV: And I've been. . . . He's not from Kansas City. I go out and talk to him once in a while.

HR: Oh, is that right?

WV: He's a real nice man. He's 94!

HR: Whee!

WV: You're just a whippersnapper! (laughs) And he's still working away, you know. He's got little sheds that he built all over. . . . He's got eight acres. Little sheds. And he fills them all with his signs. They're all filled up. When he gets more signs, he builds another shed.

HR: Ay, ay, ay, ay. You know, that show, is just something altogether different, you know.

WV: I know.

HR: It started in with them doggone old fanatic idea, you know, and then—what they think up themselves, you know. They didn't learn it or anything.

WV: That's right.

HR: It's just in the person, you know.

WV: Totally unique.

HR: Yeah. It is unique.

WV: Yeah, and totally personal.

HR: Yeah, that's right. It's altogether different than any other show, you know. Professional painters and sculptors and all that kind of stuff, but this is altogether unique, with all those ideas. That guy that built those towers, you know, in California. . . .

WV: Yeah. The Watts Towers.

HR: . . . you monkey with cement, mister, and I tell you you got a job on your hands. I don't know how he got along with all those. . . .

WV: I've been to see those two times.

HR: Putting that stuff into that, how he kept it.

WV: Did it all by himself, too, you know.

HR: You can do that if you lay it down. Make one half, turn it around do the other half, so that your work is down, see.

WV: Right.

HR: And then maybe that would be pretty heavy, you know, for him to. . . . Then it has to fit. Like you see those handles on that vase [giant vase/planter HR built—WV].

WV: Right, right.

HR: You see they taper out.

WV: Right.

HR: You couldn't put no mortar there, unless you have—well, this here, what you call it. . . . Mason's mortar.

WV: Right.

HR: That have a little more adhesive in it, you know. That sticks maybe a little better. But even then, you'd have to have pretty shallow rock. The weight of the rock would fall out. So I left. . . . Up on top wasn't, I left a little depression. There is a [wire—WV] rope cable in there for reinforcing.

WV: Ah, that's what you used.

HR: It's that thick with three strands.

WV: Sure.

HR: And you can unwind those. That's the way I made those animals, too. And then you can. . . .

WV: Work around ____.

HR: Usually I take a cardboard, you know. Not cardboard. . . . Plywood.

WV: Plywood, uh huh.

HR: Four by eight. Mark the outside on there, the outside line. The outline is always the most important, you know. Now when you want to make a bear, you see, it's gotta have the shape of a bear, and not like a cow or a horse.

WV: That's right.

HR: That's just the idea.

WV: Does that have an armature inside of it?

HR: Huh?

WV: Does the bear and the polar bear have an armature inside of it, or some kind of. . . .

HR: Yeah.

WV: What'd you use for that?

HR: Oh, that. . . . Then you gotta use those [wire rope cables], you can unwind those, you know, and they are rough and they're kind of twisty. It makes darn good reinforcement.

WV: The cable is, yeah.

HR: You see, if you wouldn't reinforce both sides together, you can auger holes through there, or I left openings that big [____—Ed.], you know, as long as it didn't interfere with that outline.

WV: That's right.

HR: Then, you see, that's all locked together. or else each half could fall off away from that.

WV: That's right.

HR: So you've gotta have. . . . But then I made. . . . I left a hole in that vase, the lower, then you know you can't bend that anymore.

WV: Right.

HR: Now that hook on the top, and then that's gotta fit there. Well, I made a kind of a design, you know, first, and then I laid it on there and built that according to the shape of that design, see. And, by golly, that upper one there, I had to press like heck, you know, to get. . . . It was a little below the hole.

WV: Oh, I see.

HR: And maybe about a half an inch out of the way.

WV: That's a long ways to force it.

HR: So I push, you know, and that cable, that'll bend that cable, and that cable forced some of those pebbles off, you know.

WV: Oh-oh, yeah.

HR: Then I had to repatch that.

WV: Sure.

HR: But that's the way that cement work is, you know. You can't. . . . These here, of course, I set the arches in there first, those steel rings, you know, from _____.

WV: Right.

HR: And then you plaster over there.

WV: Are they from wagon wheels? The rims?

HR: Grain bin.

WV: Oh.

HR: From [cedar wheels]. You leave a hole in the post of the fence the same way, about two inches. Then you stick that, cut that about in the middle of that, then it'll make two.

WV: Two, of course. Equal ones.

[WV had a cold [bronchitis!!—WV] and coughed throughout the interview, but somewhere about here it got worse, sometimes obscuring HR's words. In addition, wind noise increasingly obscured conversation, to nearly the end of the tape—Ed.]

HR: And then you stick in that hole and then you _____ that hole there, and then you can stretch that about ten inches, and stick her in there. It's on the [round end], too, but it would be a bigger circle.

WV: Right.

HR: But that enabled me to make each post about ten inches apart [probably meant around—Ed.]. Each post is exactly six feet apart. Then they are three feet in the ground. They're as big in the ground as what the biggest part there. . . .

WV: That's a hummingbird, huh.

HR: Chipping sparrow.

WV: Oh, I saw a hummingbird, just going right there.

HR: Oh?

WV: Yeah. You've got hummingbirds.

HR: Yeah, I have a few here. In the ground they're bigger about that far; that keeps those straight, you know.

WV: How far down do you go, into the ground?

HR: About three feet.

WV: Boy, that's a lot of concrete.

HR: But then, it leaves a flange there, you see, so when you cut with the lawnmower, you see that? See this?

WV: Yeah, sure. Good idea.

HR: Then you cut it clean; you don't have any [noise]. [unintelligible sentence]

WV: Uh huh.

HR: You'd have a day's work. (chuckles)

WV: More than a day, probably.

HR: "Where'd I get all the ideas?" they tell me up there [in Minneapolis], too. I says, "Right outa here. You don't wanta carry that thing around on top of your shoulders just as a hat rack!" (chuckles)

WV: (laughs)

HR: So that guy is 94 years old? What's the name again?

WV: Jesse Howard.

HR: Ya, ya, I remember him.

WV: You've got that book.

HR: Ya, ya, I. . . . It just so happened that I kinda forgot his name.

WV: Yeah. He's. . . .

HR: Simon [Rodia, Radilla] is the one that. . . .

WV: In California.

HR: . . . made those towers, yeah. And then I guess there's from Washington.

WV: Yeah, Jake. . . .

HR: I think one guy from New York.

WV: Yeah.

HR: That guy up here in Wisconsin, I know him, that. . . .

WV: Yeah, we're going up there to look at him, up at Phillips?

HR: At Phillips.

WV: Fred Smith.

HR: Fred Smith.

WV: Did you know him?

HR: Yeah!

WV: How did you know him?

HR: Well, the Mrs. and I drives there, a-purpose. I've stopped in all such places, you know. I like. . . .

WV: Around the state or around. . . .

HR: And of course, he had the mandolin there, and he played that mandolin, and then he put some of these jingle bells on his. . . . And as he kept time, you know, by golly, he had a one-man band!

WV: Oh, that's beautiful. (chuckles)

HR: Then he had a violin there. He used to be a logger, you know, and I played the violin. "By golly," he says, "you are the best fiddler that ever stopped here!"

WV: Oh, that's great.

HR: (chuckles) Yeah.

WV: How often have you been up there?

HR: Well, I was there twice now. But he wouldn't know me, you know, because so many people coming, I don't even remember.

WV: Yeah. He's in a nursing home, I read.

HR: Yeah, they gave him too big a job. I think that's what caused it.

WV: Huh.

HR: Here he goes to work, and he builds a five-team [concrete sculpture of the Budweiser Clydesdales—
WV]. . . . The last two aren't even hitched up, ____ brewery ____.

WV: Yeah.

HR: Five teams! That's ten horses.

WV: Awful lot of work.

HR: And then a wagon. For an old guy like that. And when I was up there, you know, he was a _____ like that. [all bent over?]

WV: Oh, really.

HR: He has arthritis, you know. [noise] (chuckles)

WV: Phew! Extraordinary.

HR: Too bad. No, he wouldn't know me, but, anyhow, if you wanta tell him, you could say hello to him, that I say hello. You can tell him that I'm that good fiddler, what he had thought was a good fiddler.

WV: Good. He _____.

HR: And he took us in the house, and he put those bells around [unintelligible]. But he's in a wheelchair. . . . But I think, an old guy like that, making all those horses like that, he [unintelligible]. You know, even if you—old people—should have more of a quiet mind, they shouldn't have such a high hurdle to jump over. If you were confronted with a high hurdle, you kinda, it kinda works on you, you know.

WV: Burns you up, yeah.

HR: And what you've got in here, you'd be surprised what an effect it has on your system.

WV: Yeah. Yeah.

HR: That was too much. I think he [unintelligible].

WV: Well, he's getting pretty old, I think, too.

HR: He's my age. [unintelligible]

WV: Oh, I see, right.

HR: Or younger, I don't know.

WV: Were you born around here?

HR: Twenty miles [through the] straight.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: Near Arcadia, Wisconsin.

WV: Were your parents immigrants? How far back?

HR: Yeah, yeah. Oh [unintelligible]. My oldest sister was born in Germany.

WV: Ah. What part of Germany were you. . . .

HR: I was born in _____ony, in a loghouse.

WV: Oh, that's. . . .

HR: Of course my folks [unintelligible]. My mother's brother moved out here. [But, What] they come back _____. [unintelligible]

WV: My family came. . . .

HR: Now, people want everything, you know, with music, you know. With music, everything music, you know, and jubilee.

WV: (chuckles)

HR: [unintelligible] why then [unintelligible] centennial year, and we can't afford to go into a depression. How in the hang could we celebrate if we really dropped into a depression?

WV: I think we are in a depression.

HR: Yeah, it's. . . . The peculiar part of it is, those people where they both work and earn good money, they're okay, but the young guy that starts out, has a few young ones, and then he loses his job.

WV: Yeah, and nothing saved up.

HR: And the house rent is due, like it says in the paper. And the house rent is due, and the payment on the car is due, and the missis is seven months pregnant. How you like that and no job? (laughs)

WV: I know, and it happens a lot.

HR: You bet you! That's altogether different story. Now, like my son, he works for a big department-house concern, you know, and he runs a sweeper in parking places and I guess the streets around. I don't think [unintelligible]; he's a little handy with the machinery, and they like it, you know. And he isn't going to be laid off. And the kids are now big enough—they got six of them.

WV: Wow.

HR: And can take care of themselves. I mean, you don't have to be _____, you know. There's all of the. . . . The younger one, I guess, must be twenty years old. So, and she works in the hospital, in the office as a admitting clerk.

WV: Uh huh.

HR: Well now, the only way she could run out of job is when the people quit getting sick.

WV: Yeah, that won't happen. Not very likely.

HR: No. That and eating. (chuckles)

WV: Right.

HR: Yeah, that's the way it is. So, they're sitting pretty, but. . . . Those depressions that I see—1893, after World War I—in reality, you know, from nineteen hundred [1900—Ed.] to 1944, there was only four years high prices, and that was in World War I. By golly, then we made little money. But then, after that. . . .

WV: Yeah.

HR: . . . farmers were getting about. . . . Hogs always were around four or five cents—live weight, you know, a pound.

WV: Um hmm.

HR: And, by golly, during the war there, they got up to 20 and 23 cents.

WV: Whew!

HR: And then a guy over our way, he buys a big farm, you know. I guess he thought it was going to stay like that.

WV: Yeah. Boy.

HR: By golly, the economy dropped down about 75 percent. Then he couldn't make it, and a lot of other ones.

WV: Yeah.

HR: Bankers they loaned out a lot of money, and then they didn't come in the banks went busted. And everybody, all the neighborhood—and near Arcadia there—the only activity that I remember, our neighbors drilled a well—in ten years! Not no house, no board, nor anything nailed up, in town.

WV: Um hmm.

HR: That was tough.

WV: Boy.

HR: Everything was down. And in the Depression in the thirties is the same thing again. Everything went way down. But this time, one part of the economy is up, and the other part's down. I never seen it ____.

WV: Yeah, it's very hard to know what's up next.

HR: Yeah. Yeah, that's one thing about, I don't know. . . . This country I guess might be the best country in the world, but that what, but the fluctuation in the economy and the prices. . . . Now in the thirties, now you sell milk off of the farm for one cent a quart. How much money are you going to make, you know, for this, fiddle around, and pay your debts. And your ____, your oil, insurance, and the taxes, and your hired help, and if you get sick, you know, and there's no end to it. But that's all we got there, for awhile, one cent a quart.

WV: Huh, that's amazing.

HR: . . . cent and a half. I sold cows for ten dollars a head.

WV: Did you survive just because you lived on a farm and you always had your own food and milk, things like that?

HR: Yeah.

WV: Farmers could usually make it, I guess.

HR: Yeah.

WV: They weren't too big.

HR: Yeah, they never would go hungry, no.

WV: Yeah, that's very important.

HR: But it's hard on old people. When I worked out, you know—years ago—\$30 a month, on the farm. And \$210 for seven months. Shucks, now they earn that in a few days.

WV: Boy.

HR: And then I buy the horse when I starts farming—just tell you how hard it was—I taught that horse, you know, he was big enough to work, and he had a little speed. I liked that horse, but he was a wild son of a gun. Too wild. But I got him broke [unintelligible]. I paid \$225 for that horse. Well, then you had a bare horse: no harness, nothing to hitch him to. And that took that whole summer's wages, you know, to buy that horse. But I bought it.

WV: Boy.

HR: Come up slow. 'Course I was twenty-nine years old, you know, or twenty, or thirty. [unintelligible passage] ____ I bummed away a little money, and buys myself a motorcycle.

WV: Ahh.

HR: That cost a couple hundred.

WV: (chuckles)

HR: And that was the whole summer's wages.

WV: It was worth it though, probably, right?

HR: Yeah.

WV: That's kind of fun.

HR: Yeah, sure was. Well, I seen some older guy riding on a nice balmy day: "ch, ch, ch, ahhhh," he says. "That's wonderful."

WV: (chuckles) Nice fresh air. You think I could take your picture with some of your work?

HR: Yeah.

WV: I'd really like to.

HR: You mean here?

[Interruption in taping; recording quality is greatly improved]

HR: [Discussing some of his tall "Sun Spires":] . . . a round hoop, a round circle, and then put a star in there. And paint those, you know, maybe a different color, in between there. And then have some agates in there.

WV: Right.

HR: I could imbed those agates, and then that star, you know, with those agates, make it pretty valuable, if that ever would be sold. How'd you like that, did you see that turtle in there, that tree?

WV: Oh, yeah, I did.

HR: Now that's an oddity.

WV: It really is.

HR: Yeah.

WV: Four in the [pound, pond] turtle.

HR: Yeah.

WV: Yeah, you have a lot nice things in there. I really enjoyed it.

HR: Yeah, I have some odd things that you don't see ____.

WV: You just been picking up things?

HR: But there's one stone in there that nature sculptured. Did you notice that?

WV: Those round ones?

HR: No! A human head.

WV: I didn't see that one.

[Interruption in taping]

WV: Ohhh. [looking at the head in the museum—Ed.]

HR: I ask people if they ever met their uncle from outer space. Now, that's a natural stone. To be real honest, that [gestures—Ed.] I put on there and chiseled a little behind [the ear]. That's absolutely all. See the mouth was there, too.

WV: That's beautiful. Ohh.

HR: That oughta be worth a few bucks.

WV: Oh, it's beautiful.

HR: It isn't that good on the other side.

WV: Uh huh, that's why you turn it.

HR: [noise] Yeah. I had ____ . . .

WV: Where did. . . Did you find that rock yourself?

HR: Pardon?

WV: Did you find that rock yourself?

HR: Yeah, on the old farm on ____ Bluff.

WV: There's his hat. (laughter) Oh, that's wonderful.

HR: That looks like his hat. That could have come from the same piece.

WV: Oh, that's beautiful.

HR: Yessir. That come from the same area.

WV: Beautiful.

HR: _____ I scratched with a nail, or something like a _____ _____. Then I show you a [wine] down here, too. Found most of these over there on our farm. Indians used to _____ the _____ in the houses with me.

WV: Huh.

[End of interview]