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# Oral history interview with Agnes Abbot, 1981 August 25-1982 January 15

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## Transcript

### Interview

Interview with Agnes Abbot
Conducted by Robert Brown
At Harvard, Massachusetts
1981 Aug. 25 and 1982 Jan. 15

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Agnes Abbot on August 25, 1981 and January 15, 1982. The interview took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

August 25, 1981

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Agnes Abbot, Robert Brown, the interviewer, in Harvard, Massachusetts, August 25, 1981.

Ms. Abbot, why don't we talk first about your earlier years, which I gather were not only spent in Germany, you were actually born in Potsdam.

AGNES ABBOT: Yes. In Potsdam.

MR. BROWN: Where your father was.

MS. ABBOT: We lived in Potsdam for quite a number of years, although his practice was in Berlin. He was one of the considerable number of American dentists who, for a while, were considered the only really first-rate dentists in Europe because for some peculiar reason, that branch of medicine had not progressed in Europe to the degree that it had done in Europe - in America, I mean.

MR. BROWN: And your father had been trained here at -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. He went to Harvard Dental School. And at that point, he met my mother. But he himself was born in Germany because his father was one of the very first of these American dentists. And the strange circumstance was that he was a terrible sufferer from a particular form of asthma, which was more comfortable living in Berlin than any other place than my grandfather had tried, including Egypt and the Southwest and I've forgotten where else.

And so Grandpa was established there as a dentist. And then my father, of course, grew up there. And he then came over to study at Harvard Dental School, in the course of which he met my mother, who was of a New England family. And I think there was - it was through a cousin. There was a cousin who was also a cousin of the Abbot family.

MR. BROWN: Was your father's - excuse me. Were they both from New England families?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. My Grandfather Abbot was born, I think, in Portland, in Portland, Maine. And his father lived most of the time near Bangor in a place called Glenburn, I think about 10 miles north of Bangor. The painting over the mantlepiece in my living room is of the house that he built there, partly of fieldstone. And I believe it's still standing. When we last passed that way, it was still standing.

But his father was president of Exeter Academy for 50 years. And there's a portrait of him on the stairs there, and so that Dr. Benjamin Abbot, who's one of our principal - one of our most important ancestors, you might say, his son Charles Benjamin was a farmer and was farming in that area north of Bangor. I'm not sure what else he did besides farming.

MR. BROWN: But his son became a dentist and went to Germany, your grandfather?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And then your father as well?

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes. Yes. I don't know how all that worked. I mean, there's a lot that I can't document at all. My father did spend I think one winter, at least, with his grandfather in the house in Glenburn and -

MR. BROWN: And by the 1890s, he was - your father was established in Germany as a dentist?

MS. ABBOT: I should think so, yes. Yeah. Must have been.

MR. BROWN: And so you were born in Potsdam.

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh.

MR. BROWN: And what was life like there for you?

MS. ABBOT: Well, it was a very comfortable, sizeable Victorian house with a sizeable garden, in which I ran around and played and had a good time. And it was during the beginning of the automobile, and I can remember being so excited trying to get to the gate in time to see a car disappear in a cloud of dust around the corner. I even lost my rubbers running to the gate. And if I attempted to do any such thing nowadays, why, I wouldn't have a chance to do anything else, of course.

Well, we moved to Berlin in - let me see - some time around 1909, I think, because the commuting became too much for my father. And we lived there on *Korpersendam* [phonetic] 54 to begin with, an apartment, a very pleasant apartment; and then later to an apartment a little closer to the center of town. In fact, it was very near that ruined church which became a symbol of the horrors of war, really.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, which as a matter of fact also was the church that I was later confirmed in. And we lived there until 1917.

MR. BROWN: Were you in school in German schools? You weren't in -

MS. ABBOT: I was in what was known as a *privat circle* [phonetic], and that was a small group of - oh, how many were we? I guess perhaps only half a dozen to begin with. And they were all Germans. And then it grew somewhat bigger, and it met in the house of one of the members. The father was a German officer. He was a major, I think. And they had a very pleasant whole house, not an apartment but a whole house with a small garden, even, not far from Lutsoplatz [phonetic], if that means anything to you. I don't know why it would.

MR. BROWN: Now, this would be - you would have just one teacher or several teachers or a small group?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, quite a number of teachers, who were members of - who taught at various gymnasia, you know. And it was very good teaching, certainly.

MR. BROWN: So these were assignments they had in addition to their regular teaching in the gymnasia?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. This must have been an extra. It was run by - I don't know whether Fraulein Huebner [phonetic] taught in a *gymnasium* herself. But one of the ones who was an important person on the staff was a daughter of Theodore Mommsen, the classical scholar, you know, authority on Rome. And she taught both mathematics and Biblical history. And then there were several men who also came, one doing history and then someone doing Latin and - oh yes, chemistry, Dr. Marsh. I remember his -

MR. BROWN: Was it quite a demanding curriculum?

MS. ABBOT: Why, I guess so. I know that I was not terribly well part of the time, and they took me out of the Latin class after - I guess I didn't really [inaudible], and my father didn't see why a girl should have to know Latin. He was a little old-fashioned in that respect.

MR. BROWN: But other than that, you and the boys in the school had the same courses? I mean, you had the same education as the boys?

MS. ABBOT: I think it was supposed to correspond quite closely to it. And I think one or two of them did enter one or another *gymnasium* when we got into the latter teens. But in my case, I had gotten very interested in drawing

and painting in the meantime. We did have a drawing instructor. I've forgotten the name of the first one, but -

MR. BROWN: And when did that begin? When you were 10 years old or even younger?

MS. ABBOT: Well, no. Not any younger, I'm sure. But I was always trying to paint. And my father himself enjoyed just drawing most anything. Particularly, you know, if we went to drive, after they got home, why, he'd sit down and just sketch something from memory. And that, of course, fascinated me. I watched avidly and so forth.

MR. BROWN: You were encouraged by your father?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. And my mother, too, although she didn't do anything herself along those lines. And he had never had any training. But he had a good sense of perspective. He did pretty well on - when there was anything architectural, for instance, though he was more apt to, you know, focus on landscape bits that pleased him and so forth.

And so this went along with very little change until the matter of my brother's schooling became important.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] This was an older brother?

MS. ABBOT: Well, two.

MR. BROWN: Two older brothers?

MS. ABBOT: Two older brothers. I was the youngest. My sister was the oldest, my sister Mary, and then Frank and Ben were both older than I. But I think I'm five years younger than Ben, who is the Colorado one.

But my father, having been to school himself in a German *gymnasium*, did not want his sons to grow up as Germans. So I think he must have had a kind of sixth sense about the militaristic background, and he most particularly didn't want his sons to, you know, be in danger of having to serve in the German army and so forth. So around 1900 or 1901, my brother Frank was sent over here to boarding school, first of all to a school which no longer exists in Newport, Rhode Island, the Cloyne School. And my brother Ben then a year or two later joined there, too.

Then the school went to pieces because of a personality conflict, really, between the - Dr. Huntington, who ran the school, and the very able, undoubtedly, principal instructor, who was a strange man and cantankerous in many ways. And it was a blowup, and one of the boys hit him. [Laughs.] The thing just broke up. And then, in the meantime, my brother Frank went to Harvard. He graduated from Harvard in 1911. And Ben left and went to Milton Academy, and he graduated from Harvard in 1914.

MR. BROWN: Did you come over yourself, or were you -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes, we did. I think 1905 was the first time that my aunt, my mother's sister, made arrangements for us to rent a house in South Yarmouth on Cape Cod. And that South Yarmouth chapter went from 1905 to 1913. The first summer we were in a house that I think belonged to a family called Hause [phonetic]. I don't know who they were exactly. But -

MR. BROWN: But you were there simply in the summers?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. But that summer, my parents liked it so much and thought it was such a good idea that they purchased a house not far away, just a little further down the river. This was on Bass River, which you may or may not have ever -

MR. BROWN: And was that - did you enjoy it very much, too?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, very much, yes. I loved it, absolutely.

MR. BROWN: At that -

MS. ABBOT: I paddled around, you know, fooling with, oh, horseshoe crabs and scallops and -

MR. BROWN: Were you quite a high-spirited child?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, heavens, I don't know. I didn't [laughing] - I don't know that I was. I was lively, I know that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Did you do any sketching or painting when you were -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes. On a gradually larger scale. And then we commuted, so to speak, those seven or eight years between 1905 and 1913. And of course, as I grew older, then, I had a little more instruction in art. There

was a woman who was one of the instructors at the school of the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin, which was an excellent institution. You may remember that - something of the - you know, quite a rich collection of decorative arts, of course, rather than just painting such as, of course, the Kaiser Friedrich Museum was.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Oh, I should have mentioned. One of the girls in this *privat circle* thing was Ilse Bode, a daughter of Wilhelm Bode, Wilhelm von Bode as he became -

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes.

MS. ABBOT: - who was, you know, director of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum for so many years. And I'm not sure whether she's still living or not. I think all the other girls that I used to know, any ones that I kept in touch with are gone now.

MR. BROWN: Were you - did you become close friends with some of them, some of the German girls?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, yes, enough so that we kept on corresponding quite a bit. And the one in whose house the school was during most of the time - of course, there was the gap during the Second World War. And then after the Second World War, we picked that up again. I can't remember exactly how that - I must have written to the old address or - I don't know how we happened to get in touch again.

MR. BROWN: Well, what was the -

MS. ABBOT: They were, I think, unquestionably sincere anti-Nazis, and they had - well, they were so anxious to keep their two sons from growing up, you know, in the Hitler Youth and that kind of thing, that they left Berlin and moved to a little - a little village in Westfalia called - well, I've forgotten its name.

MR. BROWN: Did they succeed in that?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And apparently in this place that they - where they took refuge, so to speak, there was a sub rosa school where quite a number of like-minded people kind of surreptitiously sent their children to school. And they were very seriously on their uppers by the end of the war. And when we did get in touch, we sent parcels over to them. They were - you know, they were running out of clothes, for instance, completely. And -

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But when you remembered them when you were a girl, they were very prosperous?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Very prosperous. Really affluent, I would say.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And the father was a military officer?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Well, of course, he and his wife had died in the meantime.

MR. BROWN: Well, did you continue in this *privat circle* till you came back to the United States? I mean, did you continue into teenage in this private school, this tutorial arrangement?

MS. ABBOT: No. No, I went right to art school when we came back in 1917.

MR. BROWN: But while you were still in Berlin, you stayed in that same arrangement?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Although that sort of dispersed because of some of the members doing other things in the meantime. And I just went on with various art instructors.

MR. BROWN: Now, who were - you mentioned the art instructor from the Kunstgewerbe.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was that instruction like?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she was a person who was - she wasn't - it was representational, although she was very aware, I know, of the modern movement and what went on and so forth. But it was training in expressive drawing and careful observation.

MR. BROWN: Drawing from memory? From observation -

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: - but also from memory as well?

MS. ABBOT: I don't know that I remember any -

MR. BROWN: What was the teacher's name?

MS. ABBOT: Frau Marx. Let me see. What was her first name?

MR. BROWN: But she was an artist in her own right?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And a designer, I think, as well as an artist. She was a lively and interesting person, a very plain-spoken person. And I've forgotten how it happened that the Bodes got off her somehow or other and - I mean, for a while, Ilse and I had private instruction from her at the Bodes' house, partly at the Bodes' house and partly at her apartment, I guess it was. But then for some reason or other - maybe she said something that the Excellence took exception to, and they ditched her. And I remember my parents thought it - and I myself thought it was an awful pity because we liked her, and I'd been enjoying her.

And Ilse joined a class that was conducted by a man called Court Angtel [phonetic], who had - I think he wasn't nearly as high class a person as Frau Marx. It was much more of - I think his teaching - well, his teaching began by copying, for instance. And I wasn't terribly happy about that. But there was a question as to we should break away, but then -

MR. BROWN: Did you -

MS. ABBOT: - then we decided to go along with - and I went with Ilse to this place.

MR. BROWN: That must have been boring because you'd already been drawing for some time, hadn't you?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah, it was. But then he didn't keep me on the copy for long, so that was -

MR. BROWN: Did your parents think you would become an artist or - you were meanwhile continuing your other schoolwork, weren't you?

MS. ABBOT: Well, no. I really wasn't going to school any more at that point. Of course, I was reading and writing and that kind of thing, but not going on to anything corresponding to graduate work at all.

MR. BROWN: But you thought you would become an artist?

MS. ABBOT: I think I always wanted to, yes. My idea was that - I knew I had the idea, you know, I would be an important artist, but that I would at least be able to do something in the nature of commercial art if I needed to.

MR. BROWN: Before you came back to the United States in 1917, do you remember going to exhibitions in Germany? Were there any?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: Or going to art galleries?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: Can you describe some of the things you saw?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, one of the more modern tendency painters was Couraint [phonetic]. I remember some of his shows. But - and my father had had several rather academic painters as patients, such as Franz Skarbina. And we still have quite a number of things by Skarbina, though we don't have many left any more. Franz Skarbina and Hans Herrmann. Well, downstairs, there's one of each of them represented. And my father had the general plan of allowing them to pay him by letting him pick out a picture, you see, that kind of thing. Oh, yes, and Paul Meyerheim. The tiger at the head of the stairs is his, Paul Meyerheim.

MR. BROWN: Was that your taste, too, would you say? Was your taste, did it lie with those academic painters or -

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes. Yes. Definitely. Of course, my father was a rather conserve man, and I don't think he was terribly keen on Couraint, for instance. And I don't remember very much about his - about exhibitions of his.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to meet any of these artists?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, Skarbina often came to dinner, and he was quite a charming person. And actually, the Busch-Reisinger thought enough of him so that they were willing to accept some things of his. You see, Hans Herrmann, did I even offer them? I don't think I had one that I wanted to give them. Paul Meyerheim, I think Mr. -

oh, heavens. I thought I wouldn't forget his name, the one who was head of -

MR. BROWN: The Busch-Reisinger?

MS. ABBOT: - Busch-Reisinger, who -

MR. BROWN: Charles Kuhn?

MS. ABBOT: Huh?

MR. BROWN: Mr. Kuhn.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Kuhn, Charles Kuhn.

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But they unquestionably were the primary influences.

MR. BROWN: What were -

MS. ABBOT: And Hans Herrmann we didn't know quite so well. He painted mostly in Holland, and my brother has a painting of his over in his house. And I have a watercolor sketch of the harbor of Antwerp that's in our living room.

MR. BROWN: What in their work or in their conversation particularly influenced you?

MS. ABBOT: Gosh, I don't think I -

MR. BROWN: Representational art? Or did you study or look at their technique? Did you discuss these things with them when you were a young woman? For example, with Skarbina, did you ever discuss things like that?

MS. ABBOT: I have no particular recollection here. I don't think I was sophisticated enough. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: What would he talk about? Would he talk about art when he was at dinner at your home?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes. Undoubtedly. And I just listened, that's all. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Also, this was a time - and you were there right into World War I. And how did that affect you and your family?

MS. ABBOT: Well, 1913 was the last summer that we went the regular routine of -

MR. BROWN: To Cape Cod and back?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. And in the meantime, my brother Frank and my sister Mary, who was a great gardener, always had been, she in the meantime, beginning in 1907, had attended a school in Groton called Lowthorpe School of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture.

MR. BROWN: The Lowthrop School?

MS. ABBOT: Lowthorpe.

MR. BROWN: Lowthorpe.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. It was a Mrs. Low - I've forgotten, other than the word "thorpe" means smart or something or other. Anyhow, the Lowthorpe School. She went for a couple of years, and then later to the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women in Ambler, Pennsylvania. So she already was over here, along with Frank and Ben, who of course stayed over there except for - let's see. 1907, my brother Frank wasn't very well. I think he had scarlet fever and I've forgotten what else. He did come over and spend part of the winter with us there.

But of course, so much of the point of their being sent to boarding school over there was to keep out of the way of the military. And what did happen at the appropriate age - I can't say exactly when - somebody would come around and inquire about Charlie and Benjamin Abbot, and where was he, you know. And Francis Peabody, which means Peabody, Abbot, which was Frank. And then all my mother needed to say was, well, they are both in America, and that was it.

MR. BROWN: Even though you were American citizens, they might have been subject to -

MS. ABBOT: I think they would because the whole subject came up in connection with my father's own status when he was a young man, you see, having been born in Berlin. And I think, according to what I recollect, he even spent a while at the American Embassy while his case was being decided, I mean, whether he could opt for being an American citizen and escape serving in the German army.

But for another generation, that wouldn't have been possible, I'm sure, so that my parents felt the only thing to do was for them to stay away.

MR. BROWN: So militarism, was it apparent to you as well, the militaristic set of German society?

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes, pretty much. Of course, the kind of jingoistic writing in newspapers and so forth, and of course in Potsdam, where we lived, the military was pretty obvious, you know. Some regiment or something with a fascinating band would come with very well-played music down Grosse Weinmaster Strasse where we lived. And of course, that was a case where we ran to the fence to have a look at them and all that, often very gorgeous uniforms, guard de corps with their brass cuirasses and helmets and all that kind of business.

Oh, yes. And of course, it - and one caught glimpses of the royal family at one point or another. I remember the first time I - the first opera I ever went to, *Don Giovanni*, why, the Emperor and the Empress and their daughter Viktoria Luise were up in the box there. And -

MR. BROWN: Did your family, though, make it known to you that you were American and that their sympathies were not with German - Germany?

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes. I know that - I guess I can't remember a time when I didn't feel that, you know, we were American. And of course, we spoke English in the family entirely, but German to the servants and to everybody else, of course. And then, of course, in the summer of 1914, it was the whole business of the assassination of the Archduke.

As it happened, my father had not meant to come back to this country that summer anyhow. We were thinking of spending maybe a few weeks in England. Strange to say, the place that we had thought we might stay was Whitby on the northeast coast, which almost immediately was one of the first places that got shelled [laughs] by the German Navy. Scarborough and Whitby were mentioned in the news then. By that time, that plan had been scotched because they - the matter of the Archduke had happened, you see, in July, and it was August when - that we had intended to go over there.

MR. BROWN: So you stayed in Germany that summer?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. We stayed entirely in Germany that summer, and didn't return at all during the war.

MR. BROWN: Did you sense a changed feeling on the part of your German friends?

MS. ABBOT: Not to begin with, but pretty soon. Pretty soon, when there were gatherings of this little *privat circle* thing, and I'd have to watch my step about saying anything. And, well, to begin with, my parents felt rather sympathetic to Germany. It was made to sound, you know, that they had been - well, anyhow, their sympathies were, to begin with - but then when they went through Belgium, that put the lid on it, so to speak, from that time on.

MR. BROWN: You knew they were aggressive and unnecessarily aggressive?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. Sure. But I remember bits of the dialogue at some of those school meetings. They were all inveighing against how unfortunate it was how (speaks German) the various countries seemed to be. And I said, "Well, how about - Sweden is very friendly to Germany, isn't it?" And the answer was, "Oh, yes, Sweden is the only really neutral country." [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: So you really just stuck to your knitting, so to speak?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I mean, these were tense - those three years during the war that you stayed in Germany?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Well, I was involved once or twice in meetings with - of the - let me see. How did that happen? Of course, there was an American soup kitchen that was started up for poor people in Berlin, and I went down and helped with that a number of times. And then this business where we worked on uniforms. My brother and I ran across a letter that I wrote my sister about this business of working on something to do with those uniforms. I think we decided to keep that letter, but I don't know where it got to.

MR. BROWN: This was an American effort to help?

MS. ABBOT: No. This was - I was still sufficiently a part of that *privat circle* crowd so that I got roped in through them to come and help with this thing. And what was it? Some kind of reserves uniforms. What did we - something to do with the epaulets or - I don't know what it was. But it was taking part in that war effort in a very minor kind of way.

MR. BROWN: But otherwise, you simply stuck to your studies and your lessons -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: - with Frau Marx and -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And drawing so much as I co.

MR. BROWN: Were you painting as well? Were you getting instruction?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Painting a bit, too. Oh, yes. I was interested in painting at an early stage. And of course, the sketchbooks of those days, they all burned up in the fire that we had in 1921 in the house which preceded this house on this piece of land. My brother and sister used to - as I think I said, had, by the autumn of - by the summer of 1913 were already established here and engaged in apple-growing. And -

MR. BROWN: So when you -

MS. ABBOT: In 1917, though, my parents bought the adjacent farm. The original farm was the Lee farm, where - that's the yellow house.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Just north.

MS. ABBOT: And on this land, there was a small house where the sundial, which you may or may not have noticed stood.

MR. BROWN: To this south of this house.

MS. ABBOT: And this house is built on the barn cellar of the Filbrook place, which it seemed to dovetail interest the - the two farms seemed to supplement each other, I would say.

MR. BROWN: But your whole family, or rather your parents and you, left Germany in 1917?

MS. ABBOT: We left on the train which took the embassy out. My father happened to be at the embassy on some kind of business just when they received the notice of the breaking off of relations. I've forgotten whether it was February 15th or - maybe February 15th was the day we left. Anyhow, it was February 1917.

MR. BROWN: Was this [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: And the Germans had declared the unrestricted submarine war. Of course, a number of Americans had been lost in sinkings of different ships, and we had been uncertain for some time as to whether to get out or not. I remember in the spring of 1916, the sinking of the Sussex was a crisis. And Wilson wrote a note, and -

MR. BROWN: Did this make -

MS. ABBOT: - you know, protesting about it.

MR. BROWN: By then were things getting fairly tense for you with your schoolmates?

MS. ABBOT: Well, they were very decent. And, I mean, I was never - nobody was ever disagreeable, so to speak. But -

MR. BROWN: So when you did leave in February of 1917, had you prepared to leave for quite a while, your family?

MS. ABBOT: Well, in the spring of '16, the trunks had been brought down from the attic and were partially packed and never quite unpacked, and stood around until we really did go. And then my father's secretary, who was a very trustworthy person, she was left with the job of putting some furniture in storage and disposing of everything else, which was a big job because that last apartment we had, there was an awful lot of furniture in it. And there are a few of those things that are downstairs in my living room now.

MR. BROWN: So you did leave, then, with as much as - your trunks and all, on a train?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. It went down to Switzerland. I remember particularly - well, of course, it was jammed. The train

was absolutely jammed. And we were distributed around in different compartments. I was with my mother, finally. I think - I've forgotten whether we were put in separate ones or not But my father was in a different one, And of course, everybody was exhausted, you know, from the business of getting away and all that.

And it was routed, goodness knows how, in a southerly direction. I remember particularly - my mother and I both were together in a compartment which - there was only one other person, and I've forgotten whether she slept or whether she moved to somewhere else. But it was a wonderful moonlight night. The train passed - crawled, you might say, rather slowly up the - over the [inaudible], which was an area that we had gotten to know quite well. My father was a golfer, and there was a nice golf links in Oberhof in Thuringen. And so we knew the route, and we - it still stands out very vividly in my mind, watching that beautiful snow-covered landscape that wonderful moonlit night. And then, of course, after Oberhof the train went much faster and down.

And I guess it - I've forgotten whether it went through Munich or not. I would think it would have had to. The next particular recollection of it is Schaffhausen. We were, you know, on the - within sight of the walls of Schaffhausen. And of course, everybody was all agog what was going to happen at the frontier because there had been uncomfortable frontier examinations and things of that sort. And of course, we were, from that point of view, very fortunate to have been on the embassy train.

What happened was a very snappy looking [inaudible] came, you know, down the train and inquired in very polite English whether we had any military maps with us. [Laughs.] We laughed about this afterwards. And my mother said, "No. Oh, no, we don't. But I have some chocolate." [Laughs.] And she was thinking she ought to give up anything in the way of food. And he said, "Well, that's very nice." Everybody laughed, and they went on. It was just a formality there.

And we got off the train. I think a good many people stayed on the train and went on to Berne. But we got off at Zurich and spent the night there, and then the next day went on to Berne and spent pretty nearly a week there. And of course, the French were not very keep on our going on to Paris. That was the route. The route went on to Paris.

MR. BROWN: Why weren't they? Why weren't the -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, we'd just been in Germany, so long, you see. And when we got to [inaudible] - well, anyhow, I'm getting ahead of the game a little bit there. When we got to the frontier between Switzerland and France, we were told to get off the train, and then marched of in the pitch dark to a little hotel, along with quite a number of other people. We couldn't see who they were entirely.

And that was a rather uncomfortable experience. My father was terribly worried. He was, of course, dead tired, as you can imagine, after having, you know, liquidated all the business of a lifetime. But with a very extensive German background, several times he'd say, "Oh, they will never let us through." But the next afternoon, the French authorities interviewed both my father and mother separately. They didn't brother with me. There was, in the meantime -

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MS. ABBOT: And in the meantime, I was there while there was a customs official that went through the luggage very carefully. But my parents, of course, had agreed no matter how unfortunate it might seem, we had to tell strictly the truth as to all the different family connections. One uncomfortable thing was that a cousin, the son of my father's sister, had turned more German than the Germans. And he was educated, you know, conventionally in Germany and served in the army and was in the medical corps, and served in the war as an army doctor.

Well, you see, this all emerged in the course of this. And that was one of the things that -

MR. BROWN: It worried your father, I suppose?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Worried.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But they passed the examination?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, they did, because they never tried to hide anything of that sort as they sometimes - they asked my father whether he'd been asked to do - find out any information, for instance, through some of his high-up military patients, that kind of thing. And he of course said, "Absolutely not." And - well, anyhow, we did get by. But then my father became quite ill in Paris, and we were not able to go on, but had kind of a frantic time because our passport had been stamped "*Au touristes traversez la France sans arrêt*."

And my father, because of the fact that the - there were so many American dentists in Europe, and he was a member of the American Dental Society of Europe, and there were, well, a minimum of three American dentists

in Paris who were good friends of his, and they helped us to get a *permit de sejours* so that we were able to stay during his illness. And we - actually, we were there from whatever date it was in February until May, and then came home on the [inaudible] through the submarine zone. The embassy went down to Spain to avoid the submarine zone, but by that time we didn't care. We were willing to take a chance on submarines because everything one heard about the Spanish boats sounded awful.

[Laughter.]

MR. BROWN: So you arrived back in New England.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. In May.

MR. BROWN: In May.

MS. ABBOT: May 1917. And the other day, when I drove past the Back Bay Station and saw that it's practically down - did you know it was practically down?

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. ABBOT: I thought of some of those momentous occasions such as when we landed there, you know, after not having seen the family for four years, must have been.

MR. BROWN: The family met you in Boston?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes, my aunt, and Frank and Mary both, of course. And my brother Ben had a job - I've forgotten whether it was Bridgeport where he was working or some - he was an engineer. And he got on the train probably at Bridgeport or Naugatuck - no, couldn't have been Naugatuck.

MR. BROWN: So did you live then in - did your family stay in Boston then for a while after their return?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Well, of course, one - well, the fortunate thing that had happened, I don't know whether you - one thing, and this sounds brutal to say this, but it was very fortunate that my Grandfather Olney [phonetic] had died in April because - this is probably something I didn't mention earlier, that he - although he liked my father very much and invited him to the house and all that, when they got married, my grandfather suddenly in a fit of jealousy decided he didn't want to have anything to do with my mother any more.

So this was announced to my grandmother, who, having a great deal of spirit herself, probably said to him, "If that's the way you feel, I can't do anything about it. But I'm not going to be affected by what you say at all." And so that during the years in South Yarmouth, they used to - Grandma and my Aunt Agnes Meinard [phonetic], they used to drive over from Falmouth, where my grandfather had a summer place. They used to drive over and visit.

MR. BROWN: But your grandfather never did?

MS. ABBOT: And he never did. I'm sure he regretted that kink of his, oh, many, many, many times.

MR. BROWN: Had your father and mother met in Germany or in - over here?

MS. ABBOT: No. They met while my father was studying at the Harvard Dental School, through Cousin Mary Gorham, I think. Cousin Mary Gorham was a first cousin of my grandmother. My grandmother was a Thomas, I think I told you once, a descendant of old Isaiah, the printer.

MR. BROWN: When you - so your grandfather just died when you came - shortly before you came back and -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. So this made it possible for my Grandmother Olney to take us all in, 56 Fenway, which was a handsome big apartment right near the Fenway Gate. Afterwards it became an industrial school for girls or some stuff or other. But it was providential, you see, that she could take us in, which she did. And of course, we all adored her. She was a lovely, lovely person. And I don't know whether you knew who my grandfather was.

MR. BROWN: Richard Olney?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, that's it, who was, of course, secretary of state as well as attorney general under Cleveland, but incidentally, also a successful corporation lawyer, which is why we have, you know, enough to live comfortably, more than enough to live comfortably. Because when he died, I remember what a comfort that was to my father. He did leave - first of all, it established my aunt, Mrs. George Maynard, as the life tenant. And at the time of her death, the estate was to be divided equally among the five remainderment. That was the term for us, which included my aunt's son, Frank Maynard, and the four of us. And then in the end, of course, the four of us

ultimately were well provided for. And my father would say, "Oh, that's a marvelous relief," because he was an anxious man, you know.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MS. ABBOT: And he worked hard all his life and invested carefully and so forth. But we were, you know, people of modest means.

MR. BROWN: But of course, he'd just lost a great deal when he - in 1917.

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: So did he begin to practice dentistry in Boston? Did he resume his career here?

MS. ABBOT: A friend who was a dentist who had an office at Haddon Hall, Dr. Paine [phonetic], he had known him for some years. And Dr. Paine invited him to come and practice with him, which he very soon did. And as a matter of fact, he practiced there until 1923, when he died of heart trouble. And as a matter of fact, he did some - saw some patients in that office, actually, the day before he died. He was - you see, he was 61, or in his 61st year; I've forgotten which. But there was too much wear and tear of all those years. It made a tremendous difference.

MR. BROWN: What state of mind were you in when you got back in 1917? Were you probably the least affected of your family by this forced leaving?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I was just simply tickled to pieces. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: To be back?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I certainly was.

MR. BROWN: It had probably been quite a strain, even on -

MS. ABBOT: Of course, one ridiculous circumstance was on board ship on the way back, my mother came down - oh, no, in Paris before we ever left. She came down with German measles in Paris during the First World War, of all things, and it was I that caught it from her, that developed German measles on the boat, and was put through a most uncomfortable treatment by the French doctor, who was a nice little old man. And he seemed to think one of the things that would help to clear up my rather awful complexion and eyeballs that were bright red rather than anything else, so he prescribed a large dose of castor oil on a morning when the boat was due to go -

[Laughter.]

MR. BROWN: That didn't help your constitution, did it?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, dear. My poor mother was lying on the berth opposite me, swearing to herself softly.

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: Because she just had fits over having gotten the German measles to begin with, which complicated our lives at the Hotel Majestic, where we were staying by that time.

MR. BROWN: By the time you got back here, you were well, though?

MS. ABBOT: Well, my complexion had cleared up enough so that I got past the immigration. I didn't feel very well for quite a number of days after that. I remember I just couldn't sleep. The night at the Biltmore after we got to New York, I just hardly slept at all, for some reason or other, just tossed and turned, and also at the Fenway. But of course, this was just -

MR. BROWN: How soon did you begin to think what you were going to do? Did you think of going - having more art instruction or -

MS. ABBOT: Well, just getting reacquainted with Harvard and all that, of course, which I had seen very little of, only just the summer of 1913. I'd seen very little of it then, but -

MR. BROWN: So at first you didn't quite know what - you were just getting your bearings? You weren't thinking in terms of -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Oh, I did an awful lot of drawing and painting that summer.

MR. BROWN: Did you?

MS. ABBOT: That's all burned up, of course, except for I think one little watercolor.

MR. BROWN: Most of those things burned up here [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: Well, my aunt was a great influence on my painting. She had worked with Childe Hassam for a while -

MR. BROWN: This is - Mrs. Maynard, this was?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Ross Turner to begin with, I think, and then with Childe Hassam. And she invited me down to spend quite a lot of time that summer of 1917 in Falmouth with her. And she was great about finding me things and places that would be nice to paint, you know, and all that kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: Were you mainly painting in watercolors or in oil?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. I didn't - I didn't pick up oil until quite a number of years later. When did I begin oil? I think, yeah, before - I must have started painting in oil quite a bit before I worked with Hibbard. He was the first one that I really studied painting with.

MR. BROWN: That was somewhat later, though, was it? Was that in the '30s or so?

MS. ABBOT: The first summer with Hibbard was the summer before my father died. It must have been summer of '22. And then I worked with him again in the summer of '23, and then later at Woodbury. Those two were the strongest influences.

MR. BROWN: Then it was in - not too long after your return, and you were staying at your grandmother's, that you enrolled in the Child-Walker School?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And one of the people who influenced us in that direction was a friend of my mother, Catherine Guilde [phonetic]. She was a niece of Charles Hilliard. Her mother was a sister of Charles Hilliard, and Miss Guilde had worked with Woodbury and was, you know, always interested in art and so forth. And she felt that this was the more forward-looking school, the more interesting school at that point. The Museum School, which would have been perhaps the most natural place for me to go, had a kind of a stuffy reputation at that point, you know, too much class drawing and things like that. And I think, of course, Woodbury was not inclined for -

MR. BROWN: Toward that sort of thing?

MS. ABBOT: Whether he at that point had advised Miss Guilde or just on general principle, she had heard more about the Child-Walker School. So we went -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: So how then did you finally choose to go to Child-Walker School? Did you say your mother took you to -

MS. ABBOT: Well, my parents thought it sounded as if this was a good thing to do. So we went up, and I took along some of the sketches, both sketchbooks and watercolors that I had done the previous summer, 1917, and showed them to Miss Child. Catherine B. Child, a marvelous person.

MR. BROWN: Was she?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was she like?

MS. ABBOT: An original character. Oh, mercy. That's a whole chapter itself. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Well, let's hear.

MS. ABBOT: And she looked through them and she decided I'd better come. So I started in there, and it was there that I met my sister-in-law later on, the one that's in Colorado. And we became friends fairly early in the game.

MR. BROWN: She was a fellow student?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. We were both freshmen. She had been there since falls, and she was a Canadian. She's

still living. I don't want to put her in the past. But -

MR. BROWN: Well, what was Miss Child like? Could you describe her a bit?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, gracious. That's a tall order, really. Full of energy. Full of energy.

MR. BROWN: Was she opinionated?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, in some respects. With a very unconventional way of saying things.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really?

MS. ABBOT: And of course, she herself - I wouldn't say exactly at what stage, why, I acquired this information. But she often said, "I'm not an artist. I'm an art promoter." But she also - at the same time, she was an artist, much more than she was willing to admit. She was - she had a fine sense of design and had worked for Lewis Day. Does Lewis Day ring a bell? The English designer who wrote at least, I think, three books, *Nature in Ornament, Pattern Design* - I've forgotten what they were. But an absolutely first-rate artist in that field.

And she and Mr. Walker both had taught at the Museum School and had gotten kind of disgusted with so much class drawing business, and set up a school of their own. And Miss Child was a very dynamic sort of person, rather short, rather squat, rather kind of - well, I know my sister-in-law has called it - would speak of her purple complexion.

MR. BROWN: Her purple?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. A very ruddy sort of complexion, and very keen blue eyes. And Charles Hopkinson painted a portrait of her, which I think is excellent except that it makes her eyes look a little dreamy, which I don't think they ever were, although in a way it would be appropriate for them to be a little dreamy because she was an idealist -

MR. BROWN: Was she?

MS. ABBOT: - and a dreamer in that sense. Absolute enthusiast for art, and Italian art.

MR. BROWN: Italian art?

MS. ABBOT: Most particularly. Later on she took a group of art students in the summers to Italy. And as I think I've described in that little pamphlet that the Wesley Museum got out, she was the person with whom I first went to Italy. And I knew by that time that anything that she planned for us to do was going to be worth doing and not, you know, going off on any foolishness that wasn't oriented toward art.

MR. BROWN: So right away, did you get this feeling that she was very genuine and very - did she look out for the interests of the students? Was she very interested in your progress?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. She had prejudices, and I know some people - I know my sister-in-law had considerable reservations about her. They tended to clash a little bit later on. But her enthusiasm for art was infectious. There was no doubt about that.

MR. BROWN: Wherein did her prejudices lie? Towards a certain way of drawing or painting? A certain type of person?

MS. ABBOT: No. No, I would say she was broad-minded so far as that's concerned.

MR. BROWN: Were her prejudices towards certain personalities?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think so. I think that would be it more.

MR. BROWN: Was she your principal teacher in the beginning?

MS. ABBOT: Well, Mr. Walker used to go the rounds, I think, with Miss Child, and so that - she always gave him a chance to see what everybody was doing, I think. And of course, he spent more time with some people than with others, for instance. There was also an excellent instructor, Frank Robinson, who taught at MIT, MIT architecture. And I think I owe my interest and enthusiasm for watercolorist himself. And he was - Miss Child took him and his family along in - now I can't remember whether it was '27 or '28 that I went that summer for the first time -

MR. BROWN: To Italy?

MS. ABBOT: - with her group to Italy.

MR. BROWN: What did Frank Robinson teach you? What was -

MS. ABBOT: Well, watercolor.

MR. BROWN: Watercolor.

MS. ABBOT: Watercolor particularly.

MR. BROWN: And Miss Child taught drawing and design?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she just, you know, did everything, pretty much.

MR. BROWN: And what did Mr. Walker do? What was his role at the school?

MS. ABBOT: Well, critic who can wipe the floor with you if he thought that you -

MR. BROWN: But he didn't teach?

MS. ABBOT: Well, he came and lectured on occasion on the development of architectural ornament. That was part of it, and which he related to architectural structure, of course, very excellently. It was worth taking notes on his lectures, though I never was a good note-taker. I haven't got anything, really -

MR. BROWN: Was this -

MS. ABBOT: [Inaudible.]

MR. BROWN: So this study of architecture or architectural ornament was part of the curriculum at the school?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Not the first year that we were there but I think maybe even in the sophomore year, they participated in some of those *beaux arts* programs. Work was sent down to New York, and people sometimes got mentioned. And I got one or two mentions, I think, if I remember right - did I get one on that first - well -

MR. BROWN: This was part of - this was architectural design you did, or ornament?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I've got to stop and think about how those programs were worked out. And they were supposed to be - it was supposed to be a layout, where the first one was emphasizing classical ornament.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And you would have had some instruction in rendering such ornament?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Was Mr. Walker very enthusiastic, too, the way as was Miss Child? Was he -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And sometimes enthusiastic about jumping all over everything.

MR. BROWN: He could be very severe?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. But he could also on occasion be very kind. It was one problem that I - that was supposed to have been toward the end of sophomore year, I think. I messed that up terribly by picking the wrong kind of pigments in a wash, and the darned thing settled out so that my very careful drawing underneath was practically obliterated. And he came along and he sponged all the pigments off and gave me a little bit of a boost toward completing the thing, so that I was - of course, I learned an awful lot, of course, just from the mistake and for what he did.

MR. BROWN: So he could be kind?

MS. ABBOT: Hmm?

MR. BROWN: He could be kind and [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Oh, he could.

MR. BROWN: What did he look like? What did he -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, he was tall, quite good-sized, a heavy man. He had a bit of a pot belly. And he had a ruddy complexion and kind of a bristly moustache and bright blue eyes [inaudible]. And he could - I mentioned that he had quite a temper. And Miss Child on occasion didn't agree with him at all, I know, [inaudible] safe to say, because she was sufficiently alerted to the emphasis on design which was basic to a lot of the modern

movement and the getting away from illustration in the sense of, you know, late 19th century paintings and that kind of thing. But he was pretty dead set about most everything modern. If it was really modern, why, he didn't think much of it. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Did either of them encourage you to go look at exhibitions?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes, Miss Child particularly.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember some you saw?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, in a very conventional direction, go to Boston Artists. Never any more dreamed I could ever be a member of it, of course, in those days. Oh, well, it was a very lively time. And of course, I painted like anything every summer in between. And, oh, Howard Smith, because I was in life class, too, and Howard Smith was the instructor there.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MS. ABBOT: And I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

MR. BROWN: No. What was -

MS. ABBOT: But he was an academically trained man and a member of the guild and an excellent portrait painter. That portrait of Isabella Lee - no, Isabella Lee Jackson, I guess her name was, who was one of the students in the school. We all were very interested, of course, when he did her portrait. And I was interested one time when I - the first time I ever noticed it at de Cordova that the portrait of Mr. de Cordova was by Howard Smith.

MR. BROWN: Now, was he quite a good teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think he was. In addition to the criticisms in life class and later on in painting as well as drawing, there was a weekly composition class that was principally charcoal. And he was an illustrator, and later on I think went in for etching more. He moved to California, and I think his last years - I'm pretty sure his last years were spent there. And I saw - one of the last times that I was at Don Richards', I was interested that they had quite a batch of his etchings of horses, which seemed to me excellent although I'm not an expert in that line. He's dead now, I know. I saw that he died. But he - of course, he used to go to Rockport, also, and of course -

MR. BROWN: Did you go there when you were a student, or was that much later you went to Rockport, or somewhat later?

MS. ABBOT: Well, not much later. As I say, the summer of '22 was my -

MR. BROWN: When you began?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. '22-'23. Right about that time, there was quite a scandal brewing with regard to Hibbard and Howard Smith's wife, in which we all, of course -

MR. BROWN: Were very interested in?

MS. ABBOT: [Laughs.] Were very interested in.

MR. BROWN: Well, had Hibbard had anything to do with the Child-Walker School?

MS. ABBOT: No.

MR. BROWN: Oh, this was in Rockport where this -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. It was entirely in Rockport.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: We're continuing our taped interview on September 23, 1971 (sic).

We've been talking about your having left the Child-Walker School and going to Rockport, where you first studied with Aldro T. Hibbard. This is 1922.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: It's a good place to begin. Perhaps you could describe why you went to him and -

MS. ABBOT: Well, I had always been interested in landscape painting since I was very little. And I know that he had a fine reputation as a landscape painter, and I had heard that he was an excellent teacher. And it just seemed a very natural thing to do. And also, one of the people whom I knew best at art school, Grace Baron - I'm not sure whether you ever heard of her -

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. ABBOT: - but she was one of the - I think really one of the most talented people at the school. And she was going, and several others were going to live partly under the chaperonage, so to speak, of Grace Baron's mother, who was an interesting person. She had been a singer, and interested in the arts generally. She was a Canadian. And so she rented this house for Grace, for herself and Grace and several other people whose names perhaps I won't go into, except there was one Swedish girl who turned out to be quite a handful later on.

MR. BROWN: She had been an art student, too, in Boston?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. She was an art student at the school, too, one of the more rambunctious of the students. But -

MR. BROWN: Did she become an artist herself? Not really?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I've lost track of her altogether. I really don't know.

MR. BROWN: But you went up there -

MS. ABBOT: But she was talented.

MR. BROWN: But you went to stay with Grace Baron, her mother, and these other women?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So that was the setup there.

MS. ABBOT: Did you have to send work in advance to Mr. Hibbard for him to decide -

MS. ABBOT: I don't remember that we did. I think it may be that - I don't remember whether Howard Smith recommended us, perhaps, as being, you know, serious, more or less serious students.

MR. BROWN: But all you remember is -

MS. ABBOT: He did know -

MR. BROWN: - you simply had to enroll or just appear there?

MS. ABBOT: I just don't remember that part of it.

MR. BROWN: When was the beginning? June?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I'm not too sure of that, either. I would think it began - let's see. We were already installed by the Fourth of July? I really couldn't say. I don't remember any particular Fourth of July excitement down there. I may have been just at home during June, or we may have gone very -

MR. BROWN: Well, did you begin -

MS. ABBOT: - very nearly right away.

MR. BROWN: Did you begin by going to his studio? Or did he lecture to you in the beginning?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think he gave us probably a rather brief kind of talk. But I remember more particularly his going around and giving individual criticism, particularly advising slight - well, if he thought that we were - we had embarked on a rather hopeless kind of subject, why, he would tell us so, and then occasionally make a positive suggestion as to something that he thought we would have more benefit from studying.

But a great deal of the teaching was at the end of the week, when everybody would bring stuff in. And there would be racks, you know, where everything was set up. And he would comment very - well, with different degrees of emphasis on one thing or another. Sometimes he'd want to bring out some special point. I'm not sure whether he always said something about every single thing that was put up or whether he included some of the work which had similar tendencies, which we spoke about that.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. ABBOT: But he definitely - fairly early in the summer, I think - am I still supposed to be talking about the first summer?

MR. BROWN: Either one [inaudible].

MS. ABBOT: I don't think it really worthwhile because it did get a little bit stereotyped. Well, we did progress from fairly small-scale things to larger canvases, which were canvas mounted on a rather - rather heavy beaver border.

MR. BROWN: Something like Masonite? A beaver board?

MS. ABBOT: No, not as heavy as Masonite. You can see what it was. I don't remember just how the mechanics of the business of materials was handled.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel that first summer your work became stereotyped? Or you don't remember very much progress being made?

MS. ABBOT: Well, oh, yes, I think I made some progress because of a tendency, which was always fairly clearcut, for him to emphasize a consistency of light, for instance, and to try to steer us into a choice of subject matter that we would really get some benefit from. There were some, I think one or two, people who sort of started out trying to make panoramic views who were told to, you know, draw in their horns, so to speak, and, you know, focus.

MR. BROWN: He felt that they would be overwhelmed by details of -

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Well, just something that was altogether too much to bite off, so to speak.

MR. BROWN: He wanted you to focus on light, then, as you observed it, and to be consistent throughout?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. I think that that was always true. And on going out particularly, well, watching the weather and noticing the kind of day and what times of day were more interesting or less interesting. I think he felt that both mornings and afternoons were more interesting than, you know, just the middle of the day, which of course is pretty obvious. But it wasn't necessarily obvious to all the people in the class.

MR. BROWN: Did you think he meant there were stronger contrasts of light and dark -

MS. ABBOT: Well, it -

MR. BROWN: - and a greater range of color [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: The quality - the quality of light was apt to be far more interesting toward either the beginning or the latter part of the day.

MR. BROWN: At midday, the quality would be less? You mean less range of color and light?

MS. ABBOT: More - well, he wasn't too didactic about it. But I think he was perfectly right, of course, as I always have continued to feel that the middle of the day is not a particularly rewarding time to set out and - unless, you know, under unusual circumstances, when you -

MR. BROWN: There's no choice.

MS. ABBOT: - something is so interesting that you've got to cope with it if there's no other time to do it.

MR. BROWN: I sense that he was not around all that much, was he? He didn't come around and rather regularly talk to you and critique your work, did he?

MS. ABBOT: Well, he did circulate around among people who were put out on the various wharfs. But of course, we also went out and did a lot of painting just on our own, and that was what we brought in then, not the things that we had worked on under his supervision so much as things that we had done on our own.

MR. BROWN: Did you after that first summer feel that you had made some progress beyond what you -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: Do you think a good deal was owing to his teaching, or simply because you had already by then had some years of schooling and experience yourself?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think - I think it was certainly partly his teaching. I think his advice made sense for the most part. And I felt that he was being critical in ways that were perfectly just. And I've forgotten where it was - yes. I think probably it was that first summer that I - one particular subject that I was working on, I - well it drifted in the direction of making the color a little bit too pretty, so to speak, you know, just the lights a little more yellow and the shadows a little bit more violet.

And he said, "Oh," he said, "you know enough not to do that. And it's the relationship that matters. And this has the effect of false color that you should stay away from." And of course, I could see perfectly well what he meant when I actually went back to the subject and had another go at it. I really repainted the whole thing, I think, after that criticism.

MR. BROWN: This sketch we're looking at here, which is rather greyish, but this is an example, isn't it, where you had the relationships right? There's not -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: You're not stepping back and adding and enhancing the lights with false color.

MS. ABBOT: I don't know why - I don't remember any comment he ever made about that particular one. I think it did get put up in some sort of a general student show that they had later on. The fact that I had tacked a molding around the outside, I think, indicates that - I don't know whether just I myself had thought that I liked it better than some of the rest, or whether he had made a favorable comment on it or not. I don't know.

MR. BROWN: But this is a case where the relationships were right?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes. Sure. It just is an awfully dully little picture, that's all, from my present point of view.

MR. BROWN: But as you've said, earlier -

MS. ABBOT: But it was in a fog. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: It could have been, right, the weather, the fog.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Well -

MR. BROWN: It could have muted everything.

MS. ABBOT: And of course, the relationship of different forms in a fog can often be very interesting. And I do not claim that this couldn't have been made a lot more interesting than I succeeded in doing.

MR. BROWN: Well, much of this first summer you were probably making studies, weren't you? Simply sitting yourself down and doing what you saw?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes. Sure.

MR. BROWN: You weren't overly concerned with simplifying composition or things of that sort?

MS. ABBOT: No. Well, of course, I had had enough talk about composition during the years at the school so that I was always interested in the relationship of different areas to one another.

MR. BROWN: But you'd never before had such extensive schooling out in the open area?

MS. ABBOT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: And that's what sort of thing you were getting from Mr. Hibbard.

MS. ABBOT: Sure. Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Then the year following that first summer, did you go back to school, or what were you doing?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I -

MR. BROWN: Were you continuing at Child-Walker?

MS. ABBOT: I joined the class again. I had actually graduated from the school officially, so to speak, in the spring of '21, you see. It was following graduation that -

MR. BROWN: So during the years, except for - what were you doing in the winters?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I was already teaching at Wellesley, as a matter of fact.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you were?

MS. ABBOT: Because Miss Brown, the chairman of the department -

MR. BROWN: Alice Van Vechten Brown?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Alice Van Vechten Brown. She was - she painted new -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. ABBOT: She was - she apparently knew Miss Child quite well. And they - the two ladies had a good deal in common. And so Miss Child had recommended me to - as a candidate for being an assistant in some of the classes that Miss Brown was involved in at Wellesley. And so I remember very well my first interview with Miss Brown, who was a little frightening to me, of course, at that point. I think almost everybody was a little bit frightened of her to begin with. Well, she was a lady of the old school, and very much - she was a very kindly person, but - I've forgotten one person who also was at the school for a while but had graduated from Wellesley a few years before and knew her. She characterized her as a very kindly, queer person, I think. [Laughs.] She wasn't really that queer, but she had impressed Rachel in that way.

Is it raining again?

MR. BROWN: What did they mean? What do you suppose she meant by that she was a little queer?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, that's a whole other chapter altogether. Miss Brown had been appointed to Wellesley to start a department of the history of art in 1897, the year that I was born, after having done some teaching that interested a great many people at the Norwich Art School. It apparently was quite famous in its time.

And one of her interests was in teaching at Wellesley, that people studying the history of art ought to have at least attempted to draw and paint for a better understanding of the art that they were looking at. And so she instituted this general procedure of what she quite cleverly called laboratory work to equate it with the laboratory work done in the sciences, which of course it was the same intention of making people understand better what it was all about.

And this she did by means of drawing, and also to some degree there were modeling classes. She had found someone whose name I at the moment can't think of, but who taught clay modeling in a way to make people visualize a good deal better what was really happening in the third dimension. And this was part of the laboratory work, too, as well as the drawing, which was for the most part making a linear analysis of, well, both paintings and sculpture, partly in the round, partly in relief.

Some of the drawings were oriented particularly towards analyzing the composition, how what one could say about the part of the eye, so to speak, around from one form to another, and then at the same time indicating by variations of strength of line the contrasts of adjacent forms to one another. I don't know that I've put that very well, but that was really rather what it amounted to. And this was sometimes - this sometimes followed shadow, the contours of shadow areas. But in other cases, it strove to emphasize the degree of clarity of one -

MR. BROWN: One form?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, of one form against another. It was perhaps a not too consistent sort of method, but I can - I could find a couple of old drawings that I discovered in the course of my rooting around there that would give you a little more the idea of that type of drawing. We should probably save that for when you want to focus more on the work of the department.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Otherwise, we'll get a little bit too mixed up, I think.

MR. BROWN: Yes. So those years, then, you were beginning your teaching?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Why don't we just now, then, return to that second summer -

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: - that you had with Mr. Hibbard in Rockport.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: That was 1923.

MS. ABBOT: That's it, 1923.

MR. BROWN: And what did you accomplish that summer?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I would say we loosened up a whole lot. And I think you can see that just by comparing this and that. Of course, this is a sunny day and that isn't. But what he wanted us to do with this one, of course, was not done in Rockport, but after I got home. That was one that I tackled, just looking west from the end of the lane down into the pasture.

But he just said very frankly that he thought that we were missing out on qualities of light and color, and he wanted us to experiment with an underpainting, which was - in which the lights were - well, I've forgotten whether he used the words orange or red, and the shadows red-violet. He felt that this would produce a foundation on which we could then proceed, observing more closely the actual color, and at the same time not obliterating entirely the underpainting. And I think this one he considered to be a good example of that, and that's one reason where I kind of thought myself [laughs] that it had worked quite successfully, looking over towards - it was set somewhere on Pigeon Cove, and it is looking out toward the water there. And if you look at it close, one reason that I thought it was unimportant to look at them from a distance, that you can see the underpainting still showing.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: And of course, what it amounts to, really, is broken color, with the underpainting showing through and certainly providing an awful lot more pep to the ultimate result.

MR. BROWN: Were these colors, orange and red-violet, were they conventional underpainting colors, say, among the Impressionists?

MS. ABBOT: I don't think they necessarily were, but - in fact, I don't remember having heard that they were.

MR. BROWN: So you think Hibbard chose them because they did give pep?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: They had warmth to them?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Give warmth to the rather cool and dull unduly neutral tendencies, which he thought we had, you know, established rather dull color habits. And I think that this - although I painted, I think, a little more solidly, and probably especially in the distance -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: - I covered it over more there than I did in other places, you can see that it does pick up in the foreground.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And a good deal of this effect is realized when you're looking at it up close because the underpainting sits back. It's sort of a glow underneath.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. And I think this was a very helpful thing, which made me continue to paint in a more lively fashion than I had before.

MR. BROWN: You took to this new method, do you recall?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. And of course, one thing also: I had gotten away from my tendency to paint very thinly, as you could see it in those - for instance, the pine tree painting that I showed you that was also of probably the same summer when I was working with him. That, I don't think, has any of that hot underpainting, as I recollect. If so, I think I must have blocked out most of it.

MR. BROWN: If it does, it's very little.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Yeah, it certainly isn't - no, I don't think I'd been through that then.

MR. BROWN: It even enhances the feeling of volume and space, the underpainting, doesn't it?

MS. ABBOT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yes. Yes, I think so. Definitely.

MR. BROWN: So that was a device, then, that he pushed?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: That was a way - but to continue, your chief interest still was in observing the landscape?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You were trying to, what, convey the feeling you had, or the way it looked, or what? Trying to give a feeling of the appearance to you?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think - I don't think he made any bones about that. I mean, of course, he himself was a very definitely representational painter. I think he was more influenced by the broken color of much Impressionistic painting in his earlier work than he became towards the end of his life. And I personally have always felt that the sense of - well, call it sparkle, perhaps, of a snow service - snow surface in some of his earlier paintings personally appeared to me more than some of the rather smoothly applied continuous surfaces of his later work, which just personally didn't interest me quite as much as some of the earlier ones.

MR. BROWN: Well, after your second summer with him, was that the extent of your study with him?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And you then went into your third year of teaching at Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And in that third year, let me see, yes. I'm trying to think. Yes. It was because of Ms. Straight's absence that I was offered - I guess I was offered that right away.

MR. BROWN: What was that?

MS. ABBOT: Well, a course in watercolor and a course in - well, it wasn't a whole course. The watercolor section of a course which worked - it went through the year. The first half of the first semester emphasized watercolor. Then Miss Brown took them on for charcoal drawing, which was entirely from casts. But she had a rather special method of teaching that cast drawing which I think was rather superior to a lot of cast drawing, and some of the examples of it were - had a good deal of life.

MR. BROWN: What was it that made her way of teaching superior?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think because she was against rubbing. It was a fine stippling sort of technique, which of course was laborious in a good many ways. But it did have a sense of - well, the paper which counted through between the strokes, you see, gave it a sort of life which I have always missed in a good deal of charcoal drawing which was, you know, just rubbed and smoothed and rubbed and smoothed some more.

MR. BROWN: Did she and you - did you two talk over teaching methods? Did she discuss how to teach with you?

MS. ABBOT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Once she hired you, you were on your own?

MS. ABBOT: Well, no. That isn't strictly true, either. She did offer considerable direction with regard to the handling of line, for instance, in those line drawings that I was speaking of there. And she emphasized also, and I got - I was involved with that I guess already during that first year, when I only - it's true.

Come to think of it, I began - in the fall of 1920, I went out a couple of days a week and started teaching under her while I was still in my last year at art school. I don't think I made that clear. It was an overlapping of the two kinds of things there. And the drawing that I did there was - I mean, the teaching that I did there was entirely of drawing, partly from photographs of the material being studied in the classes.

MR. BROWN: In art history?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. In art history.

MR. BROWN: Was she the principal art history teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Well -

MR. BROWN: Or were there others?

MS. ABBOT: - not strictly speaking. There was already Miss Myrtilla Avery, who later became chairman, a medievalist. And also Mrs. Rogers, who at that point was Eliza Newkirk, who was an architect. She was an MIT School of Architecture graduate, and she taught the - taught several history of art courses oriented particularly to architecture. And then right away, the first year or two, I guess, was Mrs. Hawes, who was a classicist, Greek and particularly - yeah, well, the emphasis was primarily Greek. She was an archeologist and had excavated in Crete, for instance, and a most stimulating, interesting person, so that there were three - there was a minimum of those three art historians who participated in the teaching of the history of art. Let me see. Is there anybody more that I've forgotten about there?

MR. BROWN: Were you and Miss Brown given equal status? I mean -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, mercy, no.

MR. BROWN: - did the college - what was the attitude toward the laboratory and the studio courses?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I wasn't in the studio courses at all that first year. But the second year, the person who taught both watercolor and a different course which she called design, which was more like design that I had grown up with at the art school, at Miss Child's, she decided to take a year off and I was asked - I was invited to take on the watercolor in what I might as well call 103. That was a year course that was first of all watercolor, then charcoal, then in the second semester clay modeling, and ended up with Miss Brown teaching the oil painting in the - at the end of the second semester.

Miss Brown had - she was not merely an art historian but had grown up as a student in the Art Students League. And it was, I think, after the long illness of some relative that - where she had to interrupt her study of art in the studio, she decided that she'd better not attempt to go on with that. I think she felt that she'd lost too much momentum - that might be a good way of putting it - and went instead into emphasizing the history of art, and became a specialist in Italian painting primarily, and in collaboration with a gentleman called William Rankin wrote a book entitled *A Short History of Italian Painting*, which is still a mighty good little book, although a lot of people would, you know, high hat it nowadays.

But in connection with her work on that, she drew to her ideas as promulgated at the Norwich School and these same ideas that she was introducing at Wellesley, went to Italy and spent I'm not quite sure just how much time learning the technique of tempera painting from the ground up, that is, preparation of panels and gilding and all that kind of business that early Italian paintings are involved with.

MR. BROWN: Did she teach something about it at Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: And - well, not for a while. But she was always kind of working in that direction. And, well, actually, she never actually in the end did. But she got me going in that direction, and we had one or two honor students who did that kind of work under mostly combined direction of Miss Brown and - me on the technical end of it and she on the art historical end of it.

But she worked with a remarkable character who lived in Siena and who was, well, slightly controversial inasmuch as some people thought that he could be accused of forgery; whereas - Daniel P. Thompson, who is not an unknown character to you, who also worked with Ioni, felt that this was an unfair way of putting it. And he pointed out to me when I talked over with him one time the article that I wrote for the - what do you call it, the *Notable Women in American Art*, the subject being Miss Brown. I used an expression quoting from Edward Forbes, really, that Dan Thompson disagreed with. He felt that Forbes was accusing him of participating in forgery, so to speak, and he considered that no fair. And of course -

MR. BROWN: What did he feel -

MS. ABBOT: - drawing the line between the two, you know. I could see -

MR. BROWN: It was rather difficult?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Not so terribly easy to draw the line. But anyhow, she knew the techniques through somebody who was an expert.

MR. BROWN: Through Ioni? Through Ioni, wasn't it, in Siena?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Sure. Frederico Ioni, who seems to have been a very picturesque character. However [laughs] -

MR. BROWN: Well, how was - as a teacher, was Miss Brown fairly authoritarian, or what was she like?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. You might say gently authoritarian. But I think people were often puzzled by her comments, but came to realize that she knew what she was talking about. And certainly a very interesting person to work with.

MR. BROWN: Could you give any examples of her comments that were puzzling at first?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, mercy. I have to think back a little bit.

MR. BROWN: Such an expression might be what? An example?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she sometimes resorted to terms that we wouldn't have thought of in connection with these particularly impressive monuments, one as having a comfortable atmosphere, and the other one, San Marco, being really rather cozy. [Laughs.] I have been in both, and I don't know that I would have thought of applying either term to them. But if you think of the terms as being an indication of a sense of well-being, why, I suppose you can think of it in that way, both the spaciousness, for instance, of Hagia Sophia and - the coziness of St. Marks, I don't know.

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: I don't know that I could analyze that exactly. But she was a very contemplative sort of person. She was deeply religious. She was a member of that organization called the - wait a minute. Have I got - I thought I knew that by heart.

MR. BROWN: What was - the group was -

MS. ABBOT: The Companions - wasn't [inaudible] in that? The Companions of the Holy Cross. It was a small group founded to help a friend who was severely handicapped and an invalid whose name was Adeline. And Adeline Road is the location in South Byfield. I think the name is probably still attached to it for this Companions of the Holy Cross.

MR. BROWN: She was unto herself, then, quite a bit of the time? I mean, she would be withdrawn [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: I think rather, yes. I know it was one of - that occasionally withdrawn-ness that made it a little scary for a green young assistant who just wanted to know something about what she should do, you know. And if Miss Brown was in one of those rather contemplative moods - I'm doing this because this is sort of one of the attitudes that she would get into sometimes, with her fingers like this.

MR. BROWN: Propped together sort of almost like in prayer?

MS. ABBOT: Sometimes she'd be sort of softly whistling to herself, but with no discernible tune at all.

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: When she was picking out slides in the slide room, for instance.

MR. BROWN: Did she become one of your closer acquaintances at Wellesley or were there others?

MS. ABBOT: Well, in the course of - well, about ten years we were associated there and really got to be very good friends. And she was very kind and very understanding in many ways, and you really got to know her. She sometimes would - she could be quite grim if there was - I can't remember exactly what incident it was. She got mad at me about something or other. I did or didn't do something, and - but she could speak very sharply sometimes.

MR. BROWN: But were you all this time, your first years of teaching, were you gaining confidence?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, I think so. By the end of the second year, I think, I felt a little more confident. And by that time there were several younger people. And it sort of - it got to be my role to sort of try to interpret Miss Brown to still younger people than I, you know, who were finding out that she was a bit scary [laughs], or could be scary at times.

MR. BROWN: You said earlier that - what was the college's feeling of the status of studio art as opposed to art history?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, the offerings were quite limited in the early days. There were really only - let me see -

MR. BROWN: Not very many?

MS. ABBOT: Well, a year and a half of studio was counted for the degree if a corresponding amount of the work in the history of art was also taken.

MR. BROWN: But did the college president feel that studio art was worthy of a college, or was there -

MS. ABBOT: Well, Miss Brown enjoyed the confidence of - the president who appointed her was Mrs. Irvine, Mrs. Julia Irvine. She was the one that preceded Miss Hazard. And she succeeded in - partly because of this whole idea of making use of drawing and that kind of thing as laboratory work, you know, corresponding to the laboratory in the sciences, she succeeded in selling that to the faculty as a perfectly respectable credit,

And that continued right along because she did keep, you know, high standards and was obviously a person of great integrity and seriousness, and a very intellectual woman, actually.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: Now, in terms of your own painting and study of painting, you mentioned already that that second summer, 1923, with Mr. Hibbard was a very fruitful one.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Then some time thereafter, within a few years, you went to another prominent painter, didn't you?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. There was at least one summer in between - that would be the summer of '24 - when my sister-in-law, who had developed tuberculosis, my Colorado brother's wife, I mean, she was in Saranac. And the other day I ran across some paintings that I did in Saranac which were, of course - they were - I think I did entirely oil painting then, too. They were small. They couldn't have been very big because I don't think I had the use of a car then.

MR. BROWN: Did the oils -

MS. ABBOT: I'm trying to remember how I managed to get around as much as I did there. But I did do a few Adirondack paintings while I was visiting Hazel that time.

MR. BROWN: And oil was your medium, certainly?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And then the summer of '25, did I already go to Woodbury then, or was that '26?

MR. BROWN: Now, Woodbury was someone - Charles Woodbury.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Was he someone whose work you knew?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Of course, he was a member of the Guild of Boston artists. And then one of my mother's friends is Catherine Guilde, whom I think I have mentioned because she recommended the -

MR. BROWN: Child-Walker School?

MS. ABBOT: - the Child-Walker School or the School of Fine Arts, Crafts, and Decorative Design, as it was really called. But she had worked with Woodbury and knew him and was interested in his work so that, for that reason, I focused rather on him. And in the meantime also, Mrs. Elizabeth Ward Perkins had been working with him on such writings as that *The Art of Seeing*, which I believe I loaned you -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: - and you very conscientiously returned to me. And they together organized a course that began with drawing, development of - well, on the general idea of *The Art of Seeing* and development of observation and so forth, which had several sessions in Woodbury's studio in the Fenway. And then the oil works moved onto Ogunquit. I'm not sure whether it did so at all in '25. The summer of '25 I seem to be awfully vague about.

MR. BROWN: But you began by going to these courses in his studio? You began by going there?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. There was quite a mob of people, and some who were artists. Some were kindergarten teachers and, oh, everybody under the sun, more or less.

MR. BROWN: Who was Mrs. Perkins?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she was a great friend of Mr. Woodbury, as I think you have heard, probably. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: And she was interested in Mr. Woodbury -

MS. ABBOT: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. BROWN: - and secondarily in art, I suppose?

MS. ABBOT: A very lively, interesting woman, really. A tremendous talker. Too much of a talker, really, for her own good, I think, perhaps. But a great enthusiast. She and - her husband was an invalid. They had a house in Jamaica Plain, right on Jamaica Pond, and some of the sessions were at her house, come to think of it.

MR. BROWN: But did she do any of the teaching herself, or was it mostly simply Woodbury?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she did some of the teaching herself, too, and really pretty effectively, I suppose, that's concerned, though, as I say, she was the kind of person who was a little bit overpowering on occasion.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, did this make sense to you, these new courses you were taking?

MS. ABBOT: Well -

MR. BROWN: Because you'd already by now been teaching as well.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was it - what did they -

MS. ABBOT: But the emphasis was that there wasn't enough - one of the things that they didn't think there was enough of was the development of memory, of memory drawing. I remember we did quite a lot in the way of memory sequences. That is, one of the schemes was to decide on a common subject and describe it, kind of pool information as to this - what this creature was like. I think a lobster was one of the first things we started on. And then people did a drawing based on what they could remember about it, and then we were actually shown a lobster and we all drew from the actual thing, and then did a second memory, which in many cases was better than, you know, either the first memory or the memory directly from the -

MR. BROWN: And was the purpose of this to show the role of memory in the imagination?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And I think probably under the influence of so much dependence on memory that you get in Oriental artists, of course. Rather than going out from nature most of the time, they don't. They contemplate to know it, and then there's sort of an amalgamation of direct observation and what they thought about in connection with the subject.

But that - it must have been - it was a really important summer. I don't know that I went to Ogunquit in '25 at all or not, but I certainly did in '26. And the system which he had, under which he taught there - I've got a batch of panels - I think he may have been teaching for quite some time on this same basis of developing these what he called not paintings at all, but color relation panels.

And we were - I've forgotten how much there may have been about preliminary talk there. But we were given several assignments early in the game, and we were encouraged to get a lot of panels of this dimension, whatever it is -

MR. BROWN: Pretty small, about 8 by 10.

MS. ABBOT: - whether it's 6 by 8 or something. I've forgotten. Well, anyhow, which had a surface like the one on the back to keep the paint from sinking.

MR. BROWN: A rather rough surface in the [inaudible].

MS. ABBOT: Yes, soaking in completely.

MR. BROWN: But you worked in oils?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Working in oil.

MR. BROWN: And you blocked out the main color areas -

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: - and the main areas of light and shade. But you did it all in color, it looks like.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. But severely simplifying what we saw. The emphasis on simplification was really paramount rather than working on one area and taking any time, you know, to indicate detail and that kind of thing. It was a

matter of summing up averages of tone and relating those to the other primary areas within the composition; and in, I think he used to say, 20 minutes - it happened to be a half an hour, let's say - making a statement of that just in simple flat tones without any modeling, and for everybody to pick out a subject that appealed to them. And I happened to like this kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: The rocks? The grass?

MS. ABBOT: The rocks and the junipers.

MR. BROWN: And the tree, junipers in the back.

MS. ABBOT: So we did that. Well, I think you were supposed to do a minimum of six a day or something, and keep that up for about a week.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MS. ABBOT: And I tell you, it was strenuous.

MR. BROWN: So you did it - you were getting different times of day and different lighting -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Different times of day.

MR. BROWN: - and clouds and sun?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And what do you think it taught you?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think it taught me consistency of lighting, to realize that everything was changing all the time and that you'd better decide on a - I mean, if you were really going to do a serious painting of a subject, to decide on a kind of lighting and stick to it rather what a lot of people, if they don't know much about painting tend to do, is to just keep on painting and keep changing things according - you know, so that part of the subject may be, well, what it would look like at 8:00 in the morning, and some of the rest of it would be around 12:00 or something of that kind.

MR. BROWN: You also seem to have been told to outline the general form.

MS. ABBOT: And of course, one could sort of use that to help define the form, too. I mean, it got to be a little bit - it was a little bit of a substitute for modeling there, actually.

MR. BROWN: You developed shortcuts, I expect.

MS. ABBOT: Hmm?

MR. BROWN: I expect you developed shortcuts, didn't you?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, sure, to some degree.

MR. BROWN: It became a little too routine after a while.

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: But it was useful in the beginning?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, very. Very much so. No, that first strenuous week was very much worth it?

MR. BROWN: And then what did you move into?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I've forgotten whether this was the second week when I had to pick this -

MR. BROWN: In the second week, what did you do? Do you recall?

MS. ABBOT: Well, we kept on doing the same kind of thing for quite a long time, I have to admit, but with gradually more freedom. And there were a couple of not-quite-so-stereotyped ones. This woman here, she was another member of the class that I decided to do something with on that basis.

And then the next - I don't remember exactly how soon it was that he gave us another assignment of painting a house with an orange awning. This again was a little bit the same idea as Hibbard's shaking us out of our rather

dull color habits. But painting a house with an orange awning and, you know, really stepping on the color, so to speak, and not attempting to be gentle or sweet about it or something like that. I don't have my series. He kept them. He kept my series of six, and these were two extra ones.

MR. BROWN: To do what? Illustrate his points?

MS. ABBOT: This was the - it was actually the building where the art supplies were, commonly known as the Threadneedle Shop on Featherbed Lane, which I always thought was charming, a charming address for it.

[Laughter.]

MR. BROWN: So at least with this brilliant awning, you had to use one patch of very bright color?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. You certainly did.

MR. BROWN: But then you would see it more muted in a cloudy day?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Yeah. Well, and later on -

MR. BROWN: Did you also have to study how to keep that orange within the composition so that it wouldn't overwhelm everything else? Or was -

MS. ABBOT: No. I don't think he emphasized that at all.

MR. BROWN: It's simply not to be afraid of bright color?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] your fellow students rather cautious and he was trying to shake them up?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I'm trying to think of a lady who amused me. She taught art at BU for a while. She was a very - I had noticed her during a period when I commuted back and forth to Wellesley by train from Brookline. We lived on Babcock Street, Brookline for a while during the '20s there. And this lady - I think she must have been living at Fine Manor or something.

MR. BROWN: And you remembered how she was painting in the class. You were describing -

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Well, this brings me to mention of one characteristic of Woodbury. I think he had a fine faculty for saying us the sort of thing that would drive the individual student to a frenzy, more or less. And - Blanche Colwyn [phonetic]. Did you ever hear of her?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Well, anyhow, after she and - one day, and I think it was just while we were in the middle of this orange awning business, we were walking on the rocks or something and we were talking about the classes and all that. And she said, "He said my color was tentative. I'll show him." She stands [inaudible]. [Laughs.] And she did do one perfectly riotous one, at least, of the orange awning building. If you ever met her, you'll remember that there was nothing tentative about her. She was a very definite character.

MR. BROWN: Well, how was Woodbury himself? Was he very - what was he like as a teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Well, when he had succeeded in rousing somebody to a frenzy, why, he would sort of chuckle over it. And he could make quite sharp remarks, too, I know. But I remember in my own case he was coming along. He came along and had a look while I was working at one of my most lurid of the orange awning paintings. It was a deep blue sky, a large clump of most poisonous poison ivy, you know, that had bright yellow-green [inaudible], the orange awning, the brown building, and so forth. And he kind of chuckled and he said, "Well, isn't it great for a discreet little person like you to do a raucous thing like this?"

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: So of course, to be called a discreet little person made me feel angry. Better step on it most of the time.

Well, here are some other ones later on that summer. That was looking at Perkins Cove. And then this one I remember because he that summer had an addition built onto his studio, and -

MR. BROWN: Historic yellow?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. The shingles were new, you know, and so that was quite bright orange. And it struck me as rather an interesting study in the relationships between those - the different planes with the sunlight and shadow on them.

MR. BROWN: You were definitely meant to simplify because there's no hint of shingling or anything so detailed at all.

MS. ABBOT: No. Oh, absolutely. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: So as you look back on that summer, was that - that was quite useful to you, too, wasn't it?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, tremendously.

MR. BROWN: To begin to see -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: - the more fundamental relationships?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And the emphasis on simplification was very salutory, no doubt about that.

MR. BROWN: Did you have - study with him any more after that summer?

MS. ABBOT: Well, after that summer I did go back and I - it was on a little bit different basis. I worked pretty much on myself and brought stuff in.

MR. BROWN: In Ogunquit?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. In Ogunquit. And he was very nice and, you know, very -

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know very many other artists up there? Because in the '20s, there were quite a few prominent artists summering there.

MS. ABBOT: I don't think I really did. I don't remember particularly anything.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember looking - did you look much at his work, his own work, while you were there?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, gosh. There was a lot of fascinating things in his studio. Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was it about his work that fascinated you?

MS. ABBOT: Well, again, the color in the sense of light and of course the sense of movement in any of his water subjects. That sense of water which - I mean, that sense of movement which he got by not trying to imitate precise shapes of ocean spray or something, but the sense of how it really worked fundamentally.

MR. BROWN: So would you say Woodbury had quite a strong effect on you?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. I think, on the whole, stronger than Hibbard, even.

MR. BROWN: Did you become friends of his ever?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Because he - what happened next? Let me see. That's '26. Then in '27, I went abroad, as I think you - that date is in my little pamphlet that you have there. I went abroad with Miss Child and the group from the art school. And at that time, of course, on that trip it became much more practical to work in watercolor. And that brings me to mentioning someone who - in a way I think it was too bad I haven't mentioned before.

Frank Robinson, who was an architect and also taught at MIT Architecture School, who was an excellent watercolorist himself, and he came along as instructor to this group from the art school. I've forgotten how many. There must have been about ten of us, I think. I think I was the oldest except for Minna Allweits [phonetic], who was another person probably a little older than I. But it started out in Florence.

Miss Child, I guess, had taken some of these groups several times before. But that summer it seemed to be just the thing for me to do to have - to broaden my background. Particularly, you see, by that time I had been teaching at Wellesley for several years and being constantly introduced to more and more Italian art particularly since that was one of Miss Brown's standing grants, and also Myrtilla Avery, a medievalist, worked very much in that field, too. And so -

MR. BROWN: What then principally did you get out of your trip to Italy in 1927?

MS. ABBOT: Well, we painted like mad a good part of the time. And I've still got some of that stuff, too. I don't know whether to drag that out at this point or not.

MR. BROWN: In that painting, did you make -

MS. ABBOT: Hmm?

MR. BROWN: Were there breakthroughs there or were you probably applying what you'd learned the preceding summer from Woodbury?

MS. ABBOT: Well, it all came together, so to speak.

MR. BROWN: And you were doing watercolors there?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I was doing watercolors. And of course, I had been used to doing watercolor before.

MR. BROWN: By and large, did you - did watercolors after that tend to predominate?

MS. ABBOT: Well, Woodbury himself rather advised me to stick to watercolor for a while. He thought I was making more progress. And I did take his advice, and of course have done more of that ever since. So I did continue to do some oil painting. But one thing that soon became obvious to me, that whereas I never did succeed in getting an oil painting past a jury, I mean, other than just for student shows, that I immediately did begin to get watercolors past juries. The first watercolors I ever showed were in a Copley Society show, which actually was at the art museum one year. And you see, I might be able to [inaudible] before I was exhibiting watercolors after that.

MR. BROWN: Was the Copley Society a rather prestigious place to exhibit at that time in Boston?

MS. ABBOT: Was it a rather what?

MR. BROWN: Prestigious place to exhibit?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I don't know that I should say that. According to my recollection, it later on wasn't prestigious at all, and a lot of painters snooted it, frankly. And then in just recent years, it seems to have gotten prestigious again. [Laughs.] I don't quite know why, but it definitely is true.

MR. BROWN: But by this exhibit, which was at the Museum of Fine Arts, did you get some reaction from friends and from the public? Were people becoming more interested in your work?

MS. ABBOT: I think so. I think so. It certainly encouraged me. And one of the - I'm still fond of orange and red, as you can see.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Here's the trolley car.

MS. ABBOT: That's Coolidge Corner. I remember I had the nerve to park my car here to I could see the trolley cars as they approached. [Laughs.] I think this one got into a Philadelphia watercolor show.

MR. BROWN: And that would be one of the 1920s?

MS. ABBOT: I have an idea that this one did.

MR. BROWN: The one here of these [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, that would be a little later.

MR. BROWN: But the one of the trolley cars from the '20s?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think it must be.

MR. BROWN: Now, that's much less - that's much looser and more dramatic than the ones from your Italian trip.

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Oh, of course. I was -

MR. BROWN: They're much more records, records of buildings.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Oh, yes. And much more tight.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: So during the school year, would you paint quite a lot while you were teaching and in the evenings?

MS. ABBOT: Well, weekends, certainly. And I had a lot of energy in those days, which I have much less of nowadays. I can't seem to get any painting done at all in the regular routines. By the way, what time is it?

MR. BROWN: You were again in Italy in 1932 and '33?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And after a poor start, I finally did paint quite a lot, and had a show containing most of those paintings in the Wellesley art building. And this was sufficiently highly thought of that I'm sure it had a lot to do with my being promoted to assistant professor the following year.

MR. BROWN: In '33 or so?

MS. ABBOT: One other point. One other summer I should have mentioned sooner, though, was 1929. That was the summer I went both to Colorado and, in the fall, went on a painting trip to Martha's Vineyard with my friend Grace Baron, whom I've already mentioned, and one of my other friends who was Wellesley graduate. And that was a summer I painted like mad [laughs], more than almost any other time.

MR. BROWN: Painting from nature? Painting waterfronts?

MS. ABBOT: Everything.

MR. BROWN: Anything?

MS. ABBOT: Anything that came handy. Of course, I mean, the trolley car, for instance, is probably from that same period of - I think that - there were a number of the [inaudible] pictures, the Martha's Vineyard ones as well as the Colorado ones, that I showed in Philadelphia, I think, the following fall.

MR. BROWN: At the watercolor club there?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Did you find in general that if you can paint continuously and with - really get into it, that the results are better?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course. I think that's almost -

MR. BROWN: You have to sustain a momentum, do you?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Well, I think it certainly helps.

MR. BROWN: And you were able to - much of the time you were able to sustain that momentum, were you? Although I guess teaching, did you sometimes ever resent teaching because it took you away?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. [Laughs.] It was often difficult.

MR. BROWN: And why did you stay with teaching at Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I guess line of least resistance, and the necessity - after all, I felt I should be doing what I could to earn my own living. Of course - well, from a financial point of view, there are a lot of things that we didn't have then that, owing to my grandfather's designating my brothers and me as the remainderment - I think that's the proper term - of his estate, that of course made a huge difference. We were much better off then.

MR. BROWN: But that wasn't till somewhat later.

MS. ABBOT: Not until the '40s.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. The faculty in the late 1920s at Wellesley, isn't that when Alfred Barr taught there briefly?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was he like as a teacher? He was only there for a year or so, wasn't he?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Well, yes, I know that the year that he actually taught there - it was not more than one, I think. I think he was appointed but then was given a leave immediately or something or other. But it was 1928-

MR. BROWN: And did he teach contemporary art?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, modern.

MR. BROWN: Was that quite a -

MS. ABBOT: Well, there was also one - what was that called? That was where he devised a sort of laboratory work of his own. I'm very hazy about that.

MR. BROWN: Was it at all shocking, the teaching of modern art?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, it was fascinating. I mean -

MR. BROWN: There had been none other [inaudible], had there?

MS. ABBOT: No. It was definitely the first, the first course of modern art that was ever given there. And it was carried on very - quite interestingly by someone who worked under him for a bit. But that's - I don't know. I think I'd better stay away from that, rather, because there was some kind of unhappy things in connection with that. But it was someone who worked under him, who certainly was influenced by him, that - and a very able person in her own right - who did a good job in developing it, of course.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember who that was, that developed that?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. She was a Southerner. She came first, and she was unmarried to begin with. Helen Hamilton was her maiden name. And then she married a man who was a candidate for a PhD in science, Nicholas Wertherson [phonetic]. And then in the meantime, she has a third husband - no, that would be the second husband, wouldn't he, Warren Wheelwright [phonetic]. She lives in [inaudible], as a matter of fact. Unfortunately, I've lost touch with her, rather. But she did a very able job in teaching.

MR. BROWN: The modern -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah, I'd rather steer clear of that.

MR. BROWN: Wellesley was a very - why? Because there was a lot of controversy about the teaching of it at that time?

MS. ABBOT: Well, no. I don't think there were any - I think the teaching that they - that Alfred did in general, and the way Helen carried it on, was really accepted or perfect -

MR. BROWN: Were you ever tempted to flirt with European modernism in your work?

MS. ABBOT: Well, it certainly never got beyond flirtation. I don't know. I am too much interested in the real look of things. I just don't want to be abstract. I tried being sort of semi-abstract on several occasions, but it always seemed to me it didn't really quite click. I think I have one or two of those -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

January 15, 1982

MR. BROWN: - interview January 15, 1982 with Agnes Abbot in Harvard, Massachusetts, Bob Brown interviewing.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes. We've talked a bit about teaching and beginning at Wellesley. But I think this morning we want to say a bit more. And you wanted, I think, to begin by talking about the importance of the laboratory in art teaching.

MS. ABBOT: Yes, which Miss Brown succeeded in establishing as worthy of credit in the academic program. She originally had made her proposal think that of course they would turn it down. And then when this was accepted, why, then she felt that she had to play ball and accept the appointment as director of the department.

MR. BROWN: Would that have been in the - about when was that? When did she become -

MS. ABBOT: 1897, the year that I was born.

MR. BROWN: So very early she'd begun this?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And she'd had prior experience, you said?

MS. ABBOT: She had established this method at the Norwich School in Connecticut, and with great success, apparently. And this had come to the notice of the president of Wellesley, Mrs. Irvine, who was a very independent-minded, forward-looking woman. And so that was the beginning of the art department as a department of the history of art.

But Miss Brown had been trained at the Art Students League. She had worked with various well-known people at the Art Students League, and then had given up the idea of a creative career because there was some kind of a long illness in her family. After she had been through that period, she felt that something different was appropriate for her to do. So she specialized from then on in the field of Italian painting as an art historian. And you may know her book, *A Short History of Italian Painting*, which was a very useful book way back when there wasn't such a volume of material on the subject.

And in the teaching of the department, as I said, there was - there were classical - there were courses in the classical field which were taught by a professor of Latin as a part of her program. And then by the time I came, there was not only Miss Brown with her emphasis on Italian painting, but Miss Myrtilla Avery, who was a medievalist. And also, the medieval period from the point of view of architecture was very well represented by Eliza J. Newkirk, Eliza Newkirk Rogers as she became afterwards. She married late in life to a man who was an important instructor at Phillips Exeter. But those were the three principal people when I came.

MR. BROWN: Now, did Miss Brown continue to teach into the - how late did she teach at Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: Well, she retired gradually, so to speak. And the last year or two, I think the very last was probably 1930, when she gave up also the directorship of the museum. And the directorship of the museum had been vested, I think is the proper word, in the chairmanship of the department. And the two, of course, were very closely related.

MR. BROWN: Was the museum - what was its nature at that time, the museum?

MS. ABBOT: Well, it was a lot of - an accumulation of old pictures, most of which Miss Brown banished to various storage basements.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MS. ABBOT: Because she didn't think much of them. [Laughs.] She didn't think they were of museum quality. That's what it amounted to. But there were some well-known paintings. I'm not sure what's happened to it in the meantime. Elihu Vedder's *The Cumaean Sybil* [1876], that was one of the best-known. I think in the meantime John McAndrew, not being particularly partial to Vedder, swapped it in for something else. But there were several other important things.

One early panel that she acquired, on the advice of Bernard Berenson, is still one of the choicest items in the museum. It has - it's divided into two subjects, the ascent to the cross, not the descent from the cross but the ascent to the cross, and the death of Saint Clare in the lower panel. And no one knows exactly what it is, but it is a very early 12th century - no, wait a minute. No, I think 13th century, but very, very early.

MR. BROWN: Now, were you -

MS. ABBOT: I shouldn't try to establish dates because I'm always - I always get them wrong.

MR. BROWN: Were you director - were you occasional chairman of the department and director -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, not for ages.

MR. BROWN: No?

MS. ABBOT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Not at that time. You mentioned earlier a Miss Walton, who -

MS. ABBOT: Well, Miss Walton just taught a course in Greek art and Greek sculpture primarily.

MR. BROWN: Was that beginning in the 1920s or -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. She was doing that when I arrived. I began my teaching there while I was still at art school,

and -

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I remember.

MS. ABBOT: That was the fall of 1920. The academic year 1920-21 was my first year as an assistant there, while I was still in art school. And I graduated from art school in '21, and then was asked to take on a studio - part of a studio course.

MR. BROWN: Right. Yes. Well, that you went over, you talked about our previous time. You talked about your teaching.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: Now, Miss Walton, what was her first name?

MS. ABBOT: Alice.

MR. BROWN: Alice Walton.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And did she stay on teaching Greek art for some time after you were there?

MS. ABBOT: No. No, she didn't. I can't remember what it was that Miss Brown appointed Harriet Boyd Hawes, the archeologist who excavated in Crete, for instance; Guernea [phonetic] was the principal site of her excavation. She was the wife of - oh, what was his name - Mr. Hawes, who was assistant director of the art museum for a while. And Mrs. Hawes was a Smith graduate and a remarkably stimulating and interesting woman.

MR. BROWN: Was she?

MS. ABBOT: You know, you heard, of course, of Phyllis Williams Lehmann.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: And she always says that it was really her course with Mrs. Hawes that stimulated her to go on into that.

MR. BROWN: Into what? The Greek -

MS. ABBOT: Into the Greek field.

MR. BROWN: You'd said Miss Walton had acquired for the college an important piece of sculpture?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. A Polykleitan figure, an athlete. And he is still a focus of the various objects in the sculpture court in the present building.

MR. BROWN: So the aim of Miss Brown and the rest was to have very high quality objects?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't merely to be - it was to be a teaching museum -

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: - modeled more or less like the Fogg, I suppose.

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But not to stint on quality.

MS. ABBOT: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did they have ample funds for purchases, or were they able to call upon -

MS. ABBOT: No. Very - hardly any. They had nothing at all.

MR. BROWN: So how did they - how were they able to get things through [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: [Laughs.] Well, somebody would give something, somebody who was interested. And of course, the

whole picture changed completely when John McAndrew joined the department.

MR. BROWN: And when did he come on?

MS. ABBOT: 1945.

MR. BROWN: And was he about the first man in the department?

MS. ABBOT: No. Alfred Barr was the first man in the department, and that was in the late '20s. It was a little complicated. I can't say exactly which year because he had a leave of absence and then went off for that and then came back. He and I overlapped in the department during 1928 and '29. During the summer of 1929, he was appointed director of the - that is, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art.

MR. BROWN: But what had he taught at Wellesley? Do you remember?

MS. ABBOT: Well, he taught - gosh, I can't remember exactly what his program was, whether he did any of the first grade work. I think not. There was one course in which he was introducing his own form of laboratory work. But I think he must have taught a course that was actually called Modern Art. I've forgotten. I don't think that he would have exempted it [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: If he had, was that at the first time that contemporary art was taught at Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yes. He introduced it. And of course, there had been also a museum course, a print course, way back. Let me see. There was a print course that was taught by Arthur Sachs, who came out, you know, as a very young man before he became director of the Fogg Museum.

MR. BROWN: You mean Paul Sachs?

MS. ABBOT: But Miss Brown was always interested in people who are outstanding in their field. And she managed to corral a number of people while they were still young and less well-known because she had quite a sense of the quality of personalities, I think. And she also - with regard to the two studio courses which were given, she for instance got Mr. Woodbury to teach -

MR. BROWN: Charles Woodbury?

MS. ABBOT: - at least, yes, one - at least one course in painting there. And also, there was a lady - there was a Miss Lukers [phonetic] who taught modeling because Miss Brown felt very strongly the importance of people actually dealing with the three dimensions, the importance of that and its influence on the expression of form in painting, for instance.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember talking with Mr. Woodbury while he was teaching there?

MS. ABBOT: Well, he had gone by the time -

MR. BROWN: The time you came?

MS. ABBOT: - that I came, yes.

MR. BROWN: What about Alfred Barr? Did you get to know him a bit?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. I got to know him.

MR. BROWN: What was he like then?

MS. ABBOT: Well [laughs], always very stimulating, of course. And it was fun to know him, definitely.

MR. BROWN: Was he contentious at all?

MS. ABBOT: Yes, rather. Rather. And sometimes he didn't show too much sense, I think, in - for instance, grading his students under a truly devastating scale, which caused a great deal of heartbreak to one or two people.

MR. BROWN: I'll bet it did.

MS. ABBOT: And I think Miss Brown felt that, you know, he sort of had a little more sense than to do that. But he certainly was very - an interesting member of the department, and obviously would have stayed on if this golden opportunity of the modern museum - I mean, it was just made for him, practically. And so Miss Avery, of course, at once released him from his commitment to return to Wellesley.

MR. BROWN: She was the chairman at that time, Miss Avery?

MS. ABBOT: Miss Avery, who was chairman.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. ABBOT: If not regular chairman, she was acting chairman. I think she probably was the regular chairman by that time.

MR. BROWN: Could Miss Brown be quite persuasive in getting people to come and teach?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think she must have been. I think she must have been.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Did you keep up your contacts with her after her retirement?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes, I did. Yes, I was, like many of the younger people, scared to death of her at first, and she was a person who was very reserved and could be quite frightening at times. But in the first year or two, we established a I think rather satisfactory rapport so that I spent part of my time in the subsequent years trying to interpret her to some of the next young assistants who came, who also were scared to death of her for a while.

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: But as to the development of things in the department, the growth of the department, it very shortly expanded in quite a number of different directions. And under Miss Avery, of course, one of the first people that she appointed was Sandy Campbell, the archeologist who excavated at Antioch.

Miss Avery had many contacts with Princeton, and we were quite Princeton-influenced with both Sandy Campbell and then Bernard Hyle [phonetic], who was chairman for quite a time, and Tom Jeffrey, who was also a Princeton man. They came around along in the - oh, it was in the later '20s and very early '30s. And the expansion was in the direction of developing such courses as Baroque. For instance, Tom Jeffrey taught a Baroque architecture course, and Bernard Heil was always primarily interested in the Baroque and in the - of course, also in aesthetics. And there was one third grade course in aesthetics in relation to art criticism. And I don't know if you know any of his writing, but there's one of his books there.

MR. BROWN: Was that quite an effective course?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think it was. Of course, he was never a spectacular lecturer or anything of that kind. But I think students did find it distinctly helpful, and so that there was always, you know, a fair election at the third grade level. And of course, there were various more specialized medieval courses. Miss Avery, for instance, taught one herself, which had to do with early Italian painting, both manuscript illumination and - well, principally manuscript illumination, I think. And then the course she became quite well-known for her work on such subjects as Santa Maria Antiqua in the Roman Forum, so that I think some people - her nickname became Santa Myrtilla Antiqua.

[Laughter.]

MS. ABBOT: And that was - she worked under Charles Rufus Morey -

MR. BROWN: In Princeton.

MS. ABBOT: - toward her PhD, and of course Byrd Friend [phonetic]. And it was through her contacts that, for instance, Marion Lawrence, who later became head of Barnard Art Department, she was in the department for a year. She and Miss Brown didn't get along awfully well, and I don't think Marion was there for more than a year, actually.

MR. BROWN: Was Miss Avery a stimulating teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, very. Very. And she was a stimulating teacher both in her own specialty, but also she taught the so-called senior art course -

MR. BROWN: Senior?

MS. ABBOT: - which was really a survey of the history of art for seniors who weren't taking any other art in the department. And I know it became really quite famous.

MR. BROWN: It was called the senior what?

MS. ABBOT: Senior art.

MR. BROWN: Oh, senior art course.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. And she interested a great many people in continuing who had never intended to go in that direction at all. And it was considered a most valuable course, and anybody going abroad, if they'd had senior art, why, they had some idea what everything -

MR. BROWN: They were well set up.

MS. ABBOT: - what it was all about.

MR. BROWN: As you look back, as men began being brought into the department, did that create any changes because of it?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course inevitably it was likely. And of course, it was, I suppose, during the '30s when Sandy Campbell, Bernard Hyle, John Jeffrey, they were all three there, department meetings were always very stimulating because of divergent points of view. And another thing which was interesting, and I think I may have mentioned, I had an earlier point. I've forgotten whether it started more with Miss Avery or Miss Brown.

There was a tie-up with one of the colleges in the South, Sophie Newcomb, which was an art college related to Tulane University. And it was a Miss Troy who was director of it. And she suggested - she put up to either Miss Brown or Miss Avery or both that it might be useful for some of her students to come to Wellesley, do a part-time teaching in the laboratories in which they had had a good deal of training, take history of art courses, and work towards a masters degree in the history of art.

And there were three of those people who came. Helen Hamilton, who was one of the first, and oh, she came already when Alfred Barr was there. And as a matter of fact, she was the person who later took on the modern art course and made a very great success of it, developing the laboratory very strongly in connection with it so that her students had to deal with problems in cubism, for instance. And a lot of people felt that those who had had that course of hers really understood more of what cubism was all about than some of the people who only had dealt with it, you know, on a talking, talking, et cetera, basis.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, what course - you were giving laboratory courses, too, weren't you, throughout this time?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I wasn't giving - yes. Well, I was giving - I was doing work in the studios, which we differentiated from the laboratory work.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you did?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. There weren't any actual laboratory courses at that point. It was laboratory in connection with a history of art course, or it was - there were a small number of studio courses.

MR. BROWN: Ah, you were in that sector?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I did both.

MR. BROWN: You did both?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I was very much in both because I began, of course, in the purely laboratory work.

MR. BROWN: Right. Right.

MS. ABBOT: And then that first year that I lived in Wellesley, the year 1921-22, I taught watercolor in the watercolor part of the studio course in which Miss Brown taught part of it, the oil painting. And I think - let me see. Hazel Jackson, who is a member of the Guild of Boston Artists, she taught the sculpture end of it. It divided into four sections. It was strange, in a way. First it was half a semester of watercolor. Then Miss Brown took them over herself in charcoal drawing. Then the second semester was half sculpture, and then ended up with Miss Brown and oil painting. I don't think there's probably ever been a course exactly like it. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Were you - did some of your pupils go on to become artists at that time?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I don't know that there's ever been tremendously distinguished ones. Well, one person who of course I think is very well-known in the Boston field is Barbara Swan. And she was a graduate, a very talented person to begin with. It would be nice if they wouldn't take much credit for her development.

MR. BROWN: No. But the -

MS. ABBOT: But she was an important one. And then, well, Judith Rothschild. I think you know her. She was later. Of course, she was once influenced in the modern direction. Well, but - and of course, you probably never heard of her, but Katie - Kathryn Albin Hodgman. She went to establish a department of art at Kalamazoo College after she graduated, and kept on painting and doing quite a lot of portrait painting, which I was really quite impressed with, what little I saw of it, and is still painting quite enthusiastically.

MR. BROWN: So they were serious students, were they?

MS. ABBOT: Hmm?

MR. BROWN: They were by and large quite serious students?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you see any changes during the 1930s? Were any changes in the new phases of the development - or the 1940s?

MS. ABBOT: Well, in the 1930s, there already were some additional third grade courses such as the Baroque architecture that I've spoken of there.

MR. BROWN: That must have been very unusual anywhere at that time because Baroque was not very fashionable, was it?

MS. ABBOT: No. I think it was.

MR. BROWN: That was rather daring on someone's part.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. It was a little bit surprising at that point. But then one thing that happened - let's see. I've forgotten what would be the first year, whether late '29 or early '30 - the advent of a very interesting person who became chairman, ultimately, for about nine years, and that is Sarah P. Dernisessian [phonetic], who Miss Avery had heard about through her Princeton friends. And she - they kept saying, "You ought to get that Miss Dernisessian over." She is Armenian, of course, as you may have gathered.

But she'd been a refugee through - up through Switzerland to Paris, and was working at acquiring various French degrees in the history of art, and was secretary for a while of Gabriel Millier [phonetic], the Byzantine expert; and so that owing to the connection with - or Mr. Millier with Princeton art historians, they became aware of her as a rather outstanding person, so that one time when Miss Avery was - happened to be in Paris, she decided, just to keep those Princeton people quiet, she'd have a look at this person.

And she was absolutely charmed [laughs], both charmed and impressed, and felt sure that she was going to be an invaluable person in the department, and made the arrangements for her appointment ultimately. Miss Pendleton, of course, was still president then. And so she -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. BROWN: What was it that Miss Dernisessian - as you saw her for nine years at Wellesley, did you agree that she was an asset to have?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, heavens, yes. She really was - well, she's still living in Paris. Unfortunately, her sister, to whom she's devoted, has Parkinson's disease and she's been having an awfully tough time looking at her and trying to finish a book.

MR. BROWN: Well, what did she teach at Wellesley when she -

MS. ABBOT: Well, Byzantine, Byzantine art, but also lots else. I mean, the second grade history of art course. Second grade introductory course we had to -

MR. BROWN: What do you mean by second grade and first? We'd better -

MS. ABBOT: Well, Art 101 was the - you know, the first -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: - history of art, introductory course. And then 205 took it on through the Medieval and Renaissance.

MR. BROWN: And so that meant - that was the second grade?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MS. ABBOT: And then there was a third grade course that specialized in Italian painting or in, you know, architecture or what.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And she taught into the 1930s, Miss Dernisessian?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, she kept on until Dumbarton Oaks caught onto her and snagged her. And I've forgotten just what the first year was that she went down there. They sort of snagged her on trial, so to speak. And then, of course, they found out how good she was and so they kept her. So she was director down there for a while. And she was finally completely gone - what was that - in the '40s. Let me see. Did she overlap a little with John McAndrew? He came in '45, in the second semester of '45.

And there was a lot of confusion because of the uncertainty for some years of whether Sandy Campbell would be at Wellesley only for the first semester and go to Antioch to dig in the second semester, or whether he would teach entirely at Wellesley. And of course Miss Avery was so interested and so anxious to have him have this directorship of that Antioch dig that she did an extraordinary job of managing to [laughs] - to finagle things around so as to make it possible for him.

Of course, it was Charles Rufus Morey who was, you know, one of the most influential people in managing the dig.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: It was a committee, of course, actually.

MR. BROWN: But did Mr. Campbell then - he taught off and on, did he, into the 1940s?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What happened during World War II? Was there a -

MS. ABBOT: Well, World War II, he left and went into OSS, and then became after that an oil man. But the question as to whether he would ever come back was a rather disrupting situation. And Miss Dernisessian came back for a semester to try and help straighten this out, so to speak. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: And then John McAndrew was brought on?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Who was -

MS. ABBOT: But Bernard Hyle, in the meantime, had become chairman because - let's see. That fateful year of 1946-47 - wait a minute now. Have I got that right?

MR. BROWN: But about that time. What made it so fateful?

MS. ABBOT: Because I was sort of pitchforked into the chairmanship for the first time.

MR. BROWN: By whom? By the president?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I just seemed to be the natural choice. Of course, Mrs. Horton at that time - let me see, she was still Miss McAfee. And so that that - she was - she hadn't gone into the WAVES at that point. But that makes me realize that I should mention the advent of another important person to the department, and that was Sidney Friedberg [phonetic]. That was - '46-'47 must have been his first year. John McAndrew came - had come the year before, and he was one of the people that pushed hard for getting Sidney Friedberg into the department. And Sidney was chairman - no, Sidney was never chairman. But -

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But can I ask about John McAndrew? Why was he brought in? Who had gotten him to come to Wellesley?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think Bernard Hyle was the person who felt that he would be a most important addition.

MR. BROWN: In what way?

MS. ABBOT: And of course, he was a great friend of Alfred Barr. And Alfred Barr gave a couple of shows in that

direction.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. What was he - what gap was he to fill, was McAndrew to fill?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, modern architecture. It was not a gap, actually, but he established a course. And also, he taught the course in modern painting. That had been given earlier. Let me see. Was it Lorraine Bongiorno [phonetic] who taught that to begin with? I think it must have been. Anyhow, I know John did teach that. He did an enormous amount of boning up for it, I remember, because he wasn't particularly - he didn't have a particular background in that.

MR. BROWN: Well, did he turn out to be quite a fine teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. And most - of course, a most stimulating teacher and most imaginative in, you know, thinking up things that would just make things stick forever, such as his famous grapefruit with two oranges manner of explaining the dolmen pendentives. Cut the top off the grapefruit and slice off - slice it off around the four sides, and that gave them the basis of the dolmen pendentives.

MR. BROWN: And the oranges were sliced to become the pendentives?

MS. ABBOT: Well, no. I guess the oranges weren't really important, anyhow.

MR. BROWN: So he could present things very graphically?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Very graphically.

MR. BROWN: And what of Sidney Friedberg? Why was he brought in, or to fill what - was he a specialist in certain areas?

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes. Specialist in the high Renaissance and Baroque, which of course had become much more fashionable by then. One other fairly well-known person, very well-known person who taught the print course, was Otto Bennett. I don't think we had him more than one year.

MR. BROWN: Otto Bennett. And this was in the 1940s, perhaps?

MS. ABBOT: I should think so, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, then you became chairman, you think, about 1946-'47?

MS. ABBOT: Well, this was just one year. Bernard took over again when he was back from his semester's leave. And he kept on being chairman - let me see. I'm trying to think when I first became regular chairman. I don't -

MR. BROWN: Well, you must have been regular chairman by the early 1950s.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes, I was. It was, I know, after Miss Clapp became president.

MR. BROWN: Did she appoint you, or how was this done? By vote of - the department would vote?

MS. ABBOT: Well, yes. A department vote, yes. But it was a bit chore. Mercy.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MS. ABBOT: What a job. And it was -

MR. BROWN: What were some of the chores you had?

MS. ABBOT: Well, to try to interpret how a - peculiar ways of doing things to the president who - I think she felt the art department was a little bit, you know, too demanding. Of course, almost every department is thought to be too demanding.

MR. BROWN: What were some of the things the department was very insistent about that you recall? Were you particularly insistent about certain things?

MS. ABBOT: Well, the teaching hours were of course some of the chief things that were -

MR. BROWN: You mean several of the faculty wanted to have their teaching hours only in certain times?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And, of course, one thing that was - quite a bone of contention was the directorship of the museum as a part of the program. Miss Clapp felt that the top salaries, you know, should be diverted strictly to

teaching. And this was - John McAndrew considered the museum such an important part of our teaching that he - that this was a distinction that he disagreed with quite emphatically.

MR. BROWN: He felt that a senior person, well-salaried, should be director of the museum?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Whereas Miss Clapp thought it could be a more junior member?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I don't know if I would put it exactly that way, but -

MR. BROWN: Well, what was, would you say, the role of the art museum, before the Jewett Art Center was created, beforehand? Had it become quite important -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: - say, by the early 1950s?

MS. ABBOT: It certainly had, yes.

MR. BROWN: Was it separately housed? Did it have its own -

MS. ABBOT: No. No. It was still in good old Farnsworth. And it was just, you know, rather limited as to what could be shown at a time.

MR. BROWN: Was it considered quite a distinguished college museum?

MS. ABBOT: It is now, certainly.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But was it then considered -

MS. ABBOT: Well, it began to be - well, as soon as John took it over.

MR. BROWN: Oh, he took it over?

MS. ABBOT: It had made - it had made distinct advances before that time. The various donors had become sufficiently interested to provide funds for important acquisitions, and so -

MR. BROWN: Do some of those acquisitions, say of the 1940s, early '50s, stand out? Can you remember some of the important ones?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think that some of the gifts made by Mrs. Steinard [phonetic] were particularly important. There was, for instance, a Lanebrook [phonetic] bust that she gave. And let me see. What were some of the others? I ought to be able to come up with -

MS. ABBOT: Well, did Mr. McAndrew take on the museum shortly after he came?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I'm trying to think just exactly when he did become -

MR. BROWN: But he did take a very active interest in it, didn't he?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: Had he had museum training with some experience and -

MS. ABBOT: Well, he had, of course, worked with Alfred Barr in the Museum of Modern Art, you see. And I don't know whether he had had any work of that time when he taught at Vassar. He taught at Vassar before he came to us. And of course, he had been a lecturer in architecture in Mexico City. And of course, one of his - one of his most important works is a book about Mexican architecture.

MR. BROWN: Yes, indeed.

MS. ABBOT: I've forgotten the exact title of it, of the period.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes. And that continued to be an important interest, didn't it, of his?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. And of course, his last work on Venetian architecture was published posthumously. His wife, with the help of various people, saw to its completion. It's Venetian architecture, Venetian Renaissance

architecture. I've forgotten just what the limiting dates are. He was a very remarkable man, no question about that.

MR. BROWN: Well, as chairman, then, you had to deal with, say, Mr. McAndrew's interest in having the art museum given more prominence.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Sure.

MR. BROWN: What were some of the other problems you had -

MS. ABBOT: Well -

MR. BROWN: - or opportunities?

MS. ABBOT: [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: I suppose the principal thing was planning for the new arts center.

MS. ABBOT: Well, that, of course -

MR. BROWN: How did that come about?

MS. ABBOT: Well, this was - I remember that was '54 that this gift was announced. Of course, Mrs. Jewett, as she then was - now she's remarried in the meantime, remarried an old family friend - but Mrs. Jewett was an alumna herself. Her mother was an alumna. Her daughter was an alumna.

MR. BROWN: There was a great deal of built-in loyalty.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. And her daughter was - had been a student in - I think only in the so-called senior art course, which by that point I think was given by Theresa Frisch [phonetic], who is an Austrian refugee who came to the Department and also became dean of students, as a matter of fact, which was an extraordinary thing for a foreigner to be dean of students. But it was Miss Clapp who appointed her for that. And she did a remarkable job as dean of students. She's retired now.

MR. BROWN: Had the faculty, the art faculty, suggested to Mrs. Jewett that a new facility was needed? Or had the Jewetts -

MS. ABBOT: Well, there had been talk about a new building for a long, long time.

MR. BROWN: Oh, there had? The old building was considered inadequate?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Well, we were sort of bursting out of our -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. ABBOT: Miss Brown had pushed back into all the cracks and crannies of the basement, which is often referred to as the catacombs. And the sculpture, of course, went on down there. And there was a course that I took over from Miss Avery. She kind of dragooned me into taking over the small Medieval course in Italian painting. But my various experiments with mosaic and fresco and that kind of thing were in connection with, you know, trying to build up.

MR. BROWN: And these things you had to - you were crowded for space to carry out these things?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: So then in 1954, did Mrs. Jewett come to you, or how did this begin?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I don't know. I think we were just suddenly told that they had decided to make this gift. And it was, of course, an extraordinary excitement at the time. And the discussions as to who should be architect were - of course, took a little while. And of course, John McAndrew was quite rightly influential in selecting Paul Rudolph. And of course, we were influenced by him, but we also could see that this was a good choice, and so on.

MR. BROWN: What was it in Rudolph's work that appealed to you people?

MS. ABBOT: Well, he was imaginative, certainly. And yet one gathered that he was not ready to impose any set plan on an unwilling terrain. He was - you know, was interested of taking account of the existing buildings, which he certainly carried out in terms of the material, which was brick, and also scale, reasonable scale. But of course,

the meetings about the building were, of course, a large part of my job during those years, and -

MR. BROWN: Was there very much tension at those meetings?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Part of the time there certainly was [laughs].

MR. BROWN: There was opposition? But mainly from in terms of who would get the most space and -

MS. ABBOT: I rather inevitably became a buffer between, well, McAndrew and Rudolph as some of the ideas diverged more and more.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you mean he and Rudolph didn't have the same idea of -

MS. ABBOT: Well, there were some pretty contentious meetings there. I don't think any point going into all of that. But just to keep the whole thing under control in terms of correspondence, I mean, I would have to write letters protesting some things that they wanted to do that we didn't want them to, and there would have to be nine copies - one for the president, one for the head of the building committee, trustee building committee, one for the department of grounds, and so forth. Well, anyhow, fortunately I had a very good typist.

MR. BROWN: How was Paul Rudolph to work with?

MS. ABBOT: Well, at times quite obstinate. But I remember one of the earlier bones of contention was that he had an idea that the top floor wasn't going to have any windows at all, the top floor in which studio and labs were to be. And I just simply couldn't see that for us, and had the support of the other principal studio and lab teacher, who - both of us claimed that not to be able to look out, even just from the point of view of our teaching and, say, such an example as if somebody was doing a drawing of a tree, why, we could look out and tell him to observe how a tree grew out of the ground. [Laughs.] You know, that's just about [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: But he had certain design things that he wanted, certain items of appearance that he tried to insist upon, such as no windows?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: One curious feature of the building is that you approach it by a sweeping staircase under a bridge, and then you have to sweep back up to get into the building.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: How did that come about? It looks like the Spanish Steps brought to New England.

MS. ABBOT: [Laughs.] I don't think anybody objected violently enough about that so that that ever really was -

MR. BROWN: It was merely the approach, after all, wasn't it?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] It made an interesting approach, certainly. Of course, on a windy day, it's really one of the most effective wind tunnels that you could imagine. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: But by and large, did the various segments take their place fairly reasonably?

MS. ABBOT: Well, let me see. Of course, there was a change in the Jewett - a change in the direction of expanding the whole proposition into an arts center rather than merely an art building. When it was first announced, they thought of art alone. But in the course of that summer, I think, the addition of music and theater to form an actual arts center, that became developed. And by the fall of '54, I think that had happened. And it went through a lot of different stages.

One point that I've, for various, partly funny, circumstances can pinpoint as to date was the day on which the general layout of the present scheme was agreed upon, which was March 17, 1956, which was - it was the day after a terrific blizzard which immobilized most of Boston. And the trustees had met the day before - this had been [inaudible] - and the president and assorted trustees, of which Miss Dernisessian was then one. She was - she had become a trustee by then, although she wasn't connected with the college any more.

They were all stuck in a taxi in Brookline. The car of one of the trustees broke down, and she had to abandon it. But fortunately, there was a taxi came along and they holed up in that for a while. And then they ended up walking - I think it must have been really quite a walk - uphill, High Street and Brookline Village, to the home of Dr. John Graham, who happens to be my headache specialist, but whose wife was an alumna and a classmate of the trustee whose car had broken down.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MS. ABBOT: And they all spent the night there.

MR. BROWN: And at this point, this is when they approved the final approval?

MS. ABBOT: Well, the next day. The next day was the meeting. And we all wondered whether Rudolph was going to be able to come out. But he did get there.

MR. BROWN: He was - was he based in Boston at that time?

MS. ABBOT: Boston or Cambridge.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I'm not sure. But [laughs] - and we didn't - the president's sister was worried about where she was. And nobody knew where anybody was.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. ABBOT: And when I was leaving Horton House for breakfast that morning, somebody said, "There's a phone call for you." And I said, "Oh?" And he said, "Dr. Graham wants to speak to you." And I thought, for heaven's sake, how come he wanted to speak to me. And he called up and he said, "Miss Dernisessian would like to speak to you on the telephone." [Laughs.] And she was one of the people who had spent the night there. They'd put them up on all kinds of, you know, makeshift ways.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. ABBOT: One change, which of course wasn't so awfully important but which we were kind of irritated about, was that after the acceptance of the plan, Rudolph decided to make an angle on the end of the building, which gave it the effect of a prow, so to speak.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You mean [inaudible]?

MS. ABBOT: It really was an awful - I think it must architecturally have been quite a bother. But if you look at the building from the parking place, you see the prow [laughs].

MR. BROWN: It slants out?

MS. ABBOT: No. Just instead of being -

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. A flat wall -

MS. ABBOT: - a flat wall.

MR. BROWN: And no structural or practical reason for it, was there?

MS. ABBOT: Well, except that he had established the idea of this angle in the ground plan - for instance, in the parking lot it shows up. But we didn't quite see why that was important. But anyhow, he felt that people were conscious of these things whether they were, you know, seen or not.

MR. BROWN: He thought it might be more interesting?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I suppose so. Anyhow -

MR. BROWN: It sounds as though he was fairly difficult to work with.

MS. ABBOT: Well -

MR. BROWN: Do you think he took very adequately into account your practical needs, or did that usually require a lot of thrashing out with him?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. It really - it tended to. And of course, I think John McAndrew was invaluable to us in various ways. He squelched some of the less practical ideas, I'm sure.

MR. BROWN: And he was able to speak Rudolph's language?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Oh, he -

MR. BROWN: And Rudolph was aware that McAndrew knew a good deal of what he was about?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. Oh, he must have been. He must have been.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. ABBOT: No question.

MR. BROWN: Well, with the opening - the opening occurred which year, of the arts center? What year did it -

MS. ABBOT: It was dedicated in October 1958. And the move from Farnsworth into Jewett was August. They were very anxious to get us moved into the new building so that the old one could be torn down because of its very closeness to the new one. And it really kind of impinged on the view of the new building, you see.

MR. BROWN: Was there much sentiment to keep Farnsworth?

MS. ABBOT: No. No. I think -

MR. BROWN: No? You all were thoroughly through with it?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But that was a summer that I'm sometimes surprised that I survived that summer because that move was really something.

MR. BROWN: Well, how, in your opinion, did the building, the new building, work? With what success?

MS. ABBOT: Well, one thing that did not work well was the placing of the slide room, which turned out to be a terribly hot room. And I think in relation to the heating arrangements, that probably could have been avoided. I don't know. I don't know enough to [inaudible]. But that was - the heat of the slide room was one of the principal subjects of squawks from just about everybody.

MR. BROWN: What about the faculty offices? They're rather small, cubicle-like, aren't they, and with limited windows?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I don't think they were really [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: And finally, what about the art museum, the gallery itself? How did that -

MS. ABBOT: Well, there was controversy about the lighting, of course. And they did succeed in keeping to the idea of daylight, which now has changed. It's closed. But to begin with, it was daylight, and a very lovely light.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. ABBOT: Supplemented by I think it was Sylvania lighting. And they [inaudible] the business of partitions. The partitions, there was a lot of controversy about them. And there was an over-estimate by the collaborating architects at one point as to how many we needed. But I remember that was one of the things I had to [inaudible] during that summer.

MR. BROWN: Was the idea of the - were the partitions to be movable?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: To give you great flexibility?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Were some of the earlier, older objects of the collection, were they to be kept sort of permanently installed, as they are, at one end of the building?

MS. ABBOT: No. I don't think that was ever -

MR. BROWN: No? They were - everything was to be manipulable?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yes. Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: How did it affect - probably very indirectly, but how did it affect the art program at Wellesley, the new building, the new arts center? Did you observe any change? Even changes in attitude on the part of

students and faculty?

MS. ABBOT: Well, of course, it did mean that we became more [inaudible] because of contact with the music department, and that was very -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. ABBOT: - very pleasant and very fortunate. I wouldn't have gotten to know Hubert Lamb as well as I finally did there. There was a symposium the winter of 1959, you know, right after the first two months of occupancy, and those were interesting meetings as regards to the choice of speakers and all that kind of thing. And I think it was a very interesting symposium. I had sciatica during most of it, but I managed to survive [laughs].

MR. BROWN: So bringing the various arts together was an improvement?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did Curtis Schall [phonetic] come in about that time, or had he been on the faculty?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, Curtis had been - oh, dear. I haven't mentioned Curtis at all so far.

MR. BROWN: But he was there all that time that we've spoken of?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. He must have been - he was in on most of the building discussions.

MR. BROWN: Had he been brought in by you as a teacher?

MS. ABBOT: Did I appoint him? I'm trying to think [laughs].

MR. BROWN: But what was - what was he brought in to do?

MS. ABBOT: Well, Italian painting, of course. I think it was probably around the time we lost Sidney Friedberg. Of course, they grabbed him, you know.

MR. BROWN: Was Friedberg quite a good teacher for undergraduates?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Of course, a little bit over-elaborate in language.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. ABBOT: I think a lot of people felt that. But nevertheless, he had very stimulating ideas. And one thing that I of course liked about him was that he was very sympathetic towards the laboratory work and felt much could be learned by paying attention to it.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Now, this laboratory setup that you and Miss Avery and all worked out and inherited from Miss Brown, what is your evaluation of it? Do you feel it was extremely important?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I still feel so. But we had a kind of a reward, as you might say, on the part of one of the later studio instructors, and probably more than one. But my last sabbatical was in the fall - it was the year - fall of '59, and the second semester was early '60. And various - I think there were some tactical errors made in - one or two people such as, I think, Theresa Frisch, who was a great enthusiast towards the laboratory, tried to suggest that this should be introduced - that such a laboratory should be introduced with courses in the Baroque also.

But in the meantime, one of the people who was very much liked as a teacher and a very excellent teacher, I think, had come to feel that he was a little too much held down in the laboratories, that he wanted to do things and not necessarily in cooperation with the history of art teacher and so on and so forth, so that when I was - when I came back in the fall of - let me see, that must have in the fall of '60 - there was quite a bit of contention about the laboratory.

And that was carried over into the reactions of the students to some degree, you know. I think that there may have been a little agitation of that sort there. And of course, the growing sense of students feeling that they ought to have a say in almost everything was kind of more or less going up in those - during those same years, so that it wasn't long after I had left that the students attended department meetings and so forth, you know.

And Curtis Schall, who I used to think was more sympathetic to the labs than he was in the end, under his chairmanship the more specialized laboratories in connection with the third grade courses in architecture, sculpture, painting, were eliminated. And they still had the first grade lab, and then a general - I've forgotten

whether they now call it a laboratory course or not, which was supposed to supply, and being more economical or [inaudible] and all that kind of thing. On the other hand, I have a feeling that there was probably some loss in the context there.

MR. BROWN: Why? What would you have said - what did the laboratory accomplish, say, for third level courses? What did it -

MS. ABBOT: Well, it could really definitely tie in different technical features.

MR. BROWN: For example, in architecture, would they maybe make little models of various layouts?

MS. ABBOT: They never got into very complicated models at all, but there was that kind of thing. And of course, in the sculpture, you know, one person who made what I thought was [inaudible], that was when I was still teaching some of the sculpture laboratories. The use of the drill in sculpture, for instance, we required one or two of the old-fashioned drills, you know [laughs], both the pumped drill and the more elongated - oh, dear, what's the other name for that?

MR. BROWN: You mean -

MS. ABBOT: It's the same principle of a -

MR. BROWN: But you mean as a means of carving stone?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: A drill for stone-carving?

MS. ABBOT: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: To illustrate how that was done? They could get an idea?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Yes. And I think that was a loss. Of course, we couldn't use - for the most part we couldn't use real stone anyhow. But, you see, it was cattle salt, quite heavy blocks.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think Curtis Schall was, in the end, against continuing those studios?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think he probably was bothered by students fussing about their not seeing why they had to do it and that kind of thing. And I think also the climate of student opinion was more contentious, and that the people who liked the lab least didn't realize how much they needed it because they were people of the wrong - well, what one of my friends called high verbal types, you know, that were very talky-talky. And those people would be apt to have a wider influence among the student body generally.

So I think it was probably inevitable that -

MR. BROWN: That that happened?

MS. ABBOT: - something like that should have happened. I'm glad - I'm just glad - that they haven't swept the whole thing completely away. At present, they have a much larger studio faculty. I don't know how many of them are at all connected with the lab. It may be that quite a number of them still are. I have been awfully out of touch, so after years, I really don't know quite what's going on.

MR. BROWN: But by and large in your career, there was a good deal of continuity, wasn't there?

MS. ABBOT: Yes. I think so.

MR. BROWN: And did you - as a faculty member, did you often stand for continuity? You pushed for continuing things, not simply changing when pressures came to change?

MS. ABBOT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You didn't simply - you didn't cave in to pressures of that sort?

MS. ABBOT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: In your own work, in your painting, as you look - and we talked a good deal about it, but as you look back on it, do you think there's a continual growth in it, a [inaudible] growth?

MS. ABBOT: Oh, I don't know. I'm much too close to it to judge [laughs]. I know that I never - although I

experimented now and then with abstract things, abstract composition, it wasn't - I always knew it wasn't really what I wanted to do. And I certainly welcomed retirement from the point of view of really being able to tackle some of the difficult things that I had hoped to be able to, not that they ever made an enormous name for me. But I certainly got a great deal of enjoyment from them.

MR. BROWN: Right. Would you say you've always known pretty much what you wanted to do in terms of painting or teaching or -

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Of course, from the time of watching my father do some sketching in his odd moments, it was always the thing that interested me most.

MR. BROWN: And you were encouraged to go to art school.

MS. ABBOT: Yes. Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: You wanted to do it and you did it.

MS. ABBOT: And I think I mentioned my aunt, too, Aunt Agnes Meinard, who painted herself. Had studied with Childe Hassam and Ross Turner, I think, in both - both of them.

MR. BROWN: Did you know either of those men?

MS. ABBOT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Now, teaching, as you look back, do you think you should have gone into teaching as you did? Or do you think you might better have continued simply to paint and be an artist? Or do you see teaching as an enlargement of your interests?

MS. ABBOT: Well, I think so. I don't have any profound regrets. It kind of all worked in together. Of course, some - I think my family thought that I was giving too much time to the teaching and so forth, but -

MR. BROWN: Really? You mean they thought -

MS. ABBOT: - it kept getting more interesting rather than less, is the way that I would put it.

MR. BROWN: That's wonderful.

MS. ABBOT: I think that probably a lot of people thought that I showed very initiative to have stuck right at Wellesley, but the department certainly did develop in ways that were more interesting rather than the interest being diminished at all, so that - it's all been fun in some ways. Not always equally much fun [laughs]. Sometimes pretty frantic. Some of those years of the development of the building were the most frantic of all. Of course, the art department always has been a very complicated department, not only because of the museum but the relationship, of course, of the laboratories to the history of art and the fact that it had a building to itself, so that there was always that kind of thing to have bother about.

MR. BROWN: But don't you think that perhaps one reason you enjoyed teaching more and more was that continually newer and other equally strong-minded people were brought on the faculty? That probably was -

MS. ABBOT: Oh, yes. I think so. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: You didn't bring people in just because they'd go along, did you?

MS. ABBOT: No, no. Definitely not [laughs].

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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