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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Peggy Bacon, 1973 May 8

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Transcript

Interview

Interview with Peggy Bacon
Conducted by Paul Cummings
At the artist's home in Cape Porpoise, Maine
May 8, 1973

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Peggy Bacon on May 8, 1973. The interview took place inCape Porpoise, Maine, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

PAUL CUMMINGS: PAUL CUMMINGS
PEGGY BACON: PEGGY BACON

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's May 8, 1973, Paul Cummings talking to Peggy Bacon in her house in Cape Porpoise, Maine. You were born -- where? We go chronologically.

PEGGY BACON: May 2, 1895. In Ridgefield, Connecticut.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there brothers and sisters in your family?

PEGGY BACON: I was the first child. There were two little boys who died in infancy. So I was essentially an only child, brought up as an only child.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Both of your parents were painters -- right?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. They met at the Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

PEGGY BACON: My mother was born in Hart County, Kentucky, and was brought up in Louisville, Kentucky. Her father was the editor, or one of the editors -- I don't know -- of the Louisville "Courier-Journal." Mother came north, it must have been sometime in the 1880's -- let me see -- she was born just after the Civil War. She wanted to study to be an artist. She had already studied down in Louisville. At the Art Students League she met my father who was also a student there. They studied there for several years. I think she studied under Kenyon Cox. Then they went to Paris and studied for a year or so and came back and got married and settled for a while in Ridgefield, Connecticut.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they were students when the Art Students League was very young?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. But they were not of the founding fathers. They were very early in the game when the League was young, certainly. As I say, they studied there. They were professionals. Father was a landscape and figure painter. He had exhibitions in New York at the Fulton Gallery and at the Milch Gallery. We spent certain winters in New York when I was a child. He took me around to galleries. Then we lived in France for a couple of years, at Montreaux-sur-Mer in Picardy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When was that, about?

PEGGY BACON: That was when I was nine years old, nine to eleven. We lived in Paris for part of a summer and then my father and mother settled in part of a house in Picardy at Montreaux-sur-Mer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like going to France, you know, to Paris? Here was a whole new land and language.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, I loved it. But we'd moved around to a certain extent before that. We spent a winter in Nassau when I was seven. That was in 1902 before Nassau became such a wild resort. It was delightful. I adored it. I ran wild there. My poor dear mother contracted typhoid fever on the boat going down and was delirious when we got there. There was no one to take care of me. My father and grandmother quickly arrived but they were quarantined with Mother in the next room. So I really felt like a free spirit. I had always been carefully guarded, you know, with a governess holding my hand when we walked down the village street. And then I really

was an emancipated woman that winter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like as a child to grow up with two professional artists keeping track of you?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was absolutely delightful. I had the most charming and amusing parents. We led a very close life together. There was a great deal of reading aloud. They were both very well read.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things?

PEGGY BACON: They were passionate readers of Henry James as fast as his novels came out. Every evening there was reading aloud. Well, it was a lovely life, really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they entertain? Were there lots of people around?

PEGGY BACON: No, they were rather . . . . Well, Father was very gregarious. And there must have been a slight conflict there because Mother was extremely stay-at-home and anti-social. They had certain very intimate friends. Father loved to have a lot of people around. They struck a certain compromise: mother had an afternoon "at home" where people would drop in -- it was strictly tea and cake and sandwiches. There they were. They had delightful friends.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get to know any of those people? Or were you still so much of a child? Or did you get to know them later?

PEGGY BACON: No, I didn't. I really didn't know many of them later. I started going to art school when I was eighteen. I went to boarding school for four years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of schools did you go to, you know, with all this traveling around?

PEGGY BACON: Mother didn't believe in schools. I never went to school until I was fourteen. I had tutors wherever we went. And I suppose in those days tutors were not fabulously expensive. Mother and Father were never affluent. That's putting it mildly. As I recall, all my life we had an extraordinary amount of amenities and delicacies even and delights considering that they were poverty-stricken. The food was marvelous, very gourmet food. And there were quantities of books, endless books arriving. And a great deal of charm. They were people of taste. Father was very well-read in French. He spoke French so well that French people mistook him for a Frenchman. And yet he had no schooling from the age of ten. My grandfather, Oscar Bacon, killed himself -- well, not really -- well, he did sort of -- he died of drink. He was ruined financially. He was a marble importer in New York and it was the classic story of the partner who did him in. Then my two aunts and my grandmother Bacon were left with nothing except the endless energy and ability of my oldest aunt, Aunt Fanny. She was sixteen at the time and Father, who was the youngest of the three, was ten. He had little jobs as an errand boy at Tiffany's. They knew everybody. They were what I suppose in those days would be called well-placed socially. I mean their families were well-known and comfortably off and they knew a great many people and had a lot of that kind of backing and help. Aunt Fanny was a marvelous woman. From the age of sixteen she really supported them all and put my father through art school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's incredible. Well, you started school as a teenager then, really?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I had a tutor wherever we went.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that in all subjects? And in language, mathematics, and so on?

PEGGY BACON: No, only in what I liked. I studied Latin and Greek and mythology and the geography of the ancient world and a little bit of ancient history. That was all. Then when I went to boarding school at the age of fourteen I had to have a crash course in arithmetic so that I could study algebra with my class the next year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to go to a boarding school at that point?

PEGGY BACON: There were some rich friends of my parents who decided that Peggy really should have some solid education. Also, they thought I should have some young life. I lived entirely with my parents and many of their intimate friends had no children. So there were no children for me to play with except down in Nassau where it was a different story. And in France I made some friends at Montreaux. But I really had very little companionship. And so the Misses Stone, who were childless -- these two sisters in Ridgefield, Connecticut, who were wealthy, took a great interest in me. One of them, Miss Annie Stone, was an amateur painter. she thought I was talented. I had always drawn. So they put me up, so to speak, to boarding school, Kent Place School in Summit, New Jersey. And I loved it. Everybody thought I'd have an awful time because I led such a queer life. But I think I was very fortunate in my classmates. They were mostly Summit girls of a rather liberal point of view toward this oddity in their midst.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did any of them become great friends of yours for years and years?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Oh, I was friends with most of the class. I've seen practically nothing of any of them, since. I've seen two of them that I was very fond of -- Harriet Skidmore and Janet Wallace; I saw them later but not often. Our lives never converged. But I loved it while it lasted. And then I started going to art school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've just mentioned that you started drawing very early. How old were you about when you realized that you were drawing, would you say?

PEGGY BACON: They tell me that I used to draw all the time from the time I was about a year and a half old. And I do have an early recollection of sitting in my father's office. And I remember what he was wearing . . . I really didn't notice the people up there, you know, away up in the air; their faces were too far away for me to bother much. But I remember that he was wearing hound's tooth checked trousers. I didn't know then that they were hound's tooth checks but I do remember the checked pants. And I do remember that he would reach down and pick up these papers that I had drawn on and say, "Why, that's marvelous!" I didn't know what he was saying but I knew that I was being praised and that he was proud of me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did your parents encourage this?

PEGGY BACON: Oh yes! They did indeed. They praised me probably much more than was good for me and far more than the drawings deserved. Oh, yes, and I was always given the very finest materials. There was never a cheap paint box or poor brushes. I was given every advantage, the finest paper, the finest brushes, the finest Winsor Newton paints. So I was never frustrated by poor materials. They never allowed that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get any instruction from your parents at any point along the line?

PEGGY BACON: No. they just let me do exactly what I wanted to do, and they would encourage me, and give me the materials. That was all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It sounds like fun.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, I had a lovely childhood.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about Nassau? That was a special time being there?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, that was wonderful. That was a great experience. The only flaw in my early life was the fact that there was always a governess. And I didn't like most of the governesses until finally there was one that I loved very dearly. Her name was Edie. They were so inferior to my parents that I had a great contempt for them. I got an awfully snobbish, snarled up attitude toward anyone who was inferior to my parents. I didn't like their voices when they read aloud, I didn't like their looks, I didn't like to hold their hand as we walked down the village street. I was very annoyed by their constant presence. And down there in Nassau where my parents went without a governess and put up at this very attractive inn -- pension or whatever -- I suppose it was a boarding house -- then instantly, you see, I was on my own practically. At first Father was not quarantined. I remember he took me over to the beach on Hog Island. It was later on when they had been in too close contact with Mother that Father and Grandmother were quarantined. I remember we went swimming at the beach there. I remember being frightfully ashamed because he insisted on my wearing a little pair of striped trunks that he bought for me instead of something all over me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: An early bikini.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I remember the bright pink sand that twinkled. I loved that. Well then, when they were quarantined I began to live it up, so to speak. It was really wonderful. There was a chambermaid who was sort of told to take care of me, which she did very sketchily. I suppose she didn't have much time. She would help me dress -- I had never dressed myself before. She would help me to button my little black slippers or whatever it was and see that I brushed my hair and washed my face. And after that I was just turned loose. I ran all over the Island and went everywhere. Then finally I went out to -- it must have been some place quite far outside the town limits because it was sort of jungle-y and I fell in with a family of colored children. I remember the place they lived in was up on stilts and you climbed up a ladder. I'd go down there every day and play with all these little pickaninnies. I had a lovely time. When lunch time came or when we all got hungry the mother would take a banana and give one to each of us. Their occupation was begging. These little children went begging every day. Naturally I went begging with them. To get the picture I might describe what I wore: I had a sailor hat with streamers, probably a leghorn hat, and a little white ruffled dress, white muslin, and white socks and black kid slippers. We would run after the victorias as they drove in the dust down these white, white roads. I remember what we'd say: "Hey, Boss, let a penny come! Hey, Boss, let a penny come! No Ma, no Pa, let a penny come!" And then the pennies would be thrown out. Well, one day late in the game, about eleven weeks later it must have been, because I was told that that was when Mother was well enough to go out for the first time, we were

running after a victoria. Suddenly it stopped short. And my father reached out and scooped me up into the victoria and I never saw my little friends again. While it lasted I had a beautiful time. They were all so jolly and nice and there weren't any squabbles. It was a very placid, ideal relationship, as I recall it. Nobody fought. They were children of all ages. They seemed half-grown to me; I suppose they must have been nine or ten years old, maybe eleven, and there were little bits of ones; as I recall it, there were maybe a dozen of them. It was very nice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they figure out who got the pennies?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, I didn't know what a penny was. I mean anybody got my penny. I didn't care -- I'd never had any dealings with money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. After Kent Place School you went to the Art Students League first?

PEGGY BACON: No. I first went to the School of Fine and Applied Arts on the West Side.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you choose that school?

PEGGY BACON: No, I beg your pardon, the first school I went to was the School of Applied Design for Women. That was chosen for me. Oh, I should have said that my father killed himself in 1913. That was just after I graduated. It was in October 1813. That year -- well, Mother was absolutely devastated, of course. He was found dead in his studio in the Hobart Building in New York. He would go down there every now and then to get a model, paint from the model. Well, he didn't come back and he didn't come back. Of course there were no telephones. He was due back on Friday and he didn't show up. He didn't show up on Saturday. When Sunday came and he still didn't show up, a dear friend and relative of ours, Uncle Theodore Van Norden who lived up there in South Salem went down to New York and found that Father had been dead ever since he arrived. He had turned on the gas. He was subject to attacks of what was then called melancholia. He had been an alcoholic for a few years and had been cured by hypnotism. The cure was completely effective; that is he was cured of drink completely. He never touched a drop and hated the idea. But it left him with attacks of suicidal melancholia. His friends who were alerted to this watched him pretty carefully. But this time he went off in high spirits. I remember very well that he was in great shape. And he went down there that night and turned on the gas. So we were penniless and utterly lost without Father. We were up there in the country alone. Friends would come up. Finally the Van Nordens decided that they must get Mother and me out of this. They brought us to New York. Then Ernest de Shoteau, an old friend of Father's, a painter who did that drawing of him up there, gave us their house for the winter. They were going abroad or some place for the winter. We lived on the West Side. I'm not sure just who it was paid my tuition at the School of Applied Design for Women. I hated it very much. I disliked it so much that after a few weeks I wouldn't go. So then they moved me to the School of Fine and Applied Arts on the West Side. I studied in an illustration class with -- I can't remember the name of the illustrator. And I also studied in a fine arts class, a life class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember the name of the instructor?

PEGGY BACON: No, I can't remember the name. And I also had gone that summer of 1914 to study with Jonas Lee in his landscape class on Long Island. And the following winter I studied at the Art Students League and in Jonas Lee's private classes. He gave me my first one-man show in his studio in the spring.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You obviously liked the other school -- the School of Applied and Fine Arts?

PEGGY BACON: I liked it better than I did the School of Applied Design for Women. That was the prissiest, silliest place that ever was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the School of Applied and Fine Arts like? Do you remember any of the instructors you had there?

PEGGY BACON: The School of Applied and Fine Arts on West 83rd Street. I remember the looks of those two teachers that I had but I can't remember their names.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember any of the students there?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Dorothea Greenbaum, the sculptor. And Helen Stockman. Those two are still my friends. We had made friends first in Jonas Lee's class in the summer of 1914, the year the First World War broke out. We became great friends there in that winter when we studied at the School of Applied and Fine Arts, and later at the Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like Jonas Lee as an instructor, as a teacher?

PEGGY BACON: He was excellent. He was very kind. He had certain very simple ways of teaching beginners that

were very efficacious really. He would give us a problem each week. He was very strong on composition; he was very good at composition. He'd say: "Make six compositions in black and white, six different arrangements of a tree, a house and a road." Well, that is a very simplistic approach to composition. But it was quite a thing to arrange, actually, I mean six different arrangements of that. It was interesting. Each week there'd be something different. That was in addition to the regular instruction. The class was held out of doors, either at the beach or the sea . . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whereabouts was that?

PEGGY BACON: At Port Jefferson.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, on the north shore, yes.

PEGGY BACON: Near Belleterre.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many students in the classes?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, it was a large class, a flourishing class. And each summer after that I went to a summer art school as well as going to the Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it always with Lee? Or was it with other people in the summer?

PEGGY BACON: No, it was only one summer with Lee. I went to Provincetown in the summer of 1915 and 1916, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about? I mean how did you choose Provincetown?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, you know, art students talk to each other; they recommend things. They say,"Oh, we're going to such and such a place. Why don't you come along?" Then you go. I studied with Hawthorne which was beastly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Why?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, he was the most absurd creature.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? In what way? I mean I've never read anything about his teaching so I'm curious about him.

PEGGY BACON: Well, it was a class of about eighty and there was only one man in the class, a young man. Hawthorne was very autocratic. His criticism consisted of going around -- of course it was an enormous class -- and saying, "This is very well." "This is not so very well." "This is very well indeed." "This is no good." And this went on rapidly for a whole morning.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is that all he said about everything?

PEGGY BACON: That right. He never said anything. He never showed you anything except that you must use this enormous palette of -- God knows -- forty-four different colors or something like that. Then once a week he had general criticism. Oh, and another thing: You weren't allowed to work on the same canvas more than once. You had a canvas in the morning and another canvas in the afternoon. So for six days a week you had all these canvases.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a lot of canvases.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. And they couldn't be small canvases; they had to be fairly large canvases. You weren't allowed to paint any details. And there was always a model posed outdoors in the sunlight either on the beach or up in the dunes; not nude -- clothed, with a hat, probably. And you painted a flat tone against a flat tone. You were not allowed to paint the features or any details. And so you can imagine with eighty-odd students the Saturday morning criticism when they brought every canvas . . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: For the whole week? All ten, twelve canvases?

PEGGY BACON: For the whole week. Yes, ten or twelve canvases. Then, of course, he had two helpers which were absolutely necessary. He had a screen that was like this, a sort of A-shaped screen with shelves on both sides.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. So he could line them up.

PEGGY BACON: And the paintings were stacked up on one side and, while he was criticizing that side, they would

take down the paintings on the other side and a new stack was put up. This went on from eight o'clock in the morning until twelve-thirty or one in this hideously hot, stifling studio of his on top of the hill in the dunes. You sat on benches in the back. Every single Saturday one or two women would faint and they would be carried outdoors -- once I fainted -- and would sit in the sunlight with the flies buzzing around. It was an incredible performance. It went on for six or eight weeks. Twice during the summer he would give demonstrations on how to paint. He'd set up a still life with a dead fish and maybe some fruit or vegetables or something and he would paint. That was supposed to teach you how to paint. There was one great secret to Hawthorne's painting and that was he would never divulge his medium, which made a surface sort of like shined up linoleum. So the students really couldn't emulate him. That was his great professional secret.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did he make a whole point of this secret?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, yes. And he was absolutely incredibly dictatorial. He was dressed like a high priest in a white linen suit. He was a very tall, hefty man, as I recall, florid. He had a great long pointer with which he would point to each canvas and, of course, he'd say just the same old thing: "This is very good." "This is not so good." "This is very well." "This is very well indeed." "This is no good at all." This went on all morning long. If anyone stirred or rustled or whispered, he'd bang on the floor with this rod. "Quiet!" he'd say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So his criticisms on Saturday were not much different from during the week?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Except that everything was lined up.

PEGGY BACON: There was nothing illuminating about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But how had he been able to attract so many students? I mean that's an enormous class.

PEGGY BACON: Students are so damned gullible. They will swallow anything. And women, young women and old women, too, tend to fall in love with the instructor and then he can do no wrong. And it's perfectly repulsive. Then also there was the business of getting all the paraphernalia to the beach. All of these ladies, some of them quite old and most of them middle-aged, had to have some conveyance. So many of them got second-hand perambulators in which they put their easels and canvases and trappings. If the sun was very hot they'd have a big beach umbrella, and then they had to have their great big special sketch boxes loaded with these terribly expensive paints in big tubes. He wouldn't tolerate anybody squeezing a small amount of paint out on the palette.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It sounds as if he ran an art store.

PEGGY BACON: Well, he did!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

PEGGY BACON: He owned the art store. And his brother-in-law, who was one of the helpers, also sold in the art store; I don't know whether he owned stock in it or not. But certainly the materials were more expensive in that art store on Commercial Street in Provincetown than they were in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He really had a racket, didn't he?

PEGGY BACON: He had it made.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was the one man in that class; do you remember?

PEGGY BACON: His name was Bunny Brooks. He was a lackadaisical young man.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's incredible! You know, I've read about and I've heard so much about the huge classes Hawthorne had but nobody ever talked about his teaching. How could he have been so successful?

PEGGY BACON: Well, students go because they have friends that go. And Provincetown was a great place to go to. It was delightful and it was interesting. It was full of fun. And also students go because they like to get away from home and they feel they're having an adventure. It's part of rebellious youth. And also it's just delightful to go to someplace that you've never been to before with a lot of colleagues and some of them are already friends and you're all interested in the same thing, and you can jabber away about your paint and your media.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well you spent, what, two summers in Provincetown?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. But only one with Hawthorne. I was paid up in advance or I would have left. Then I studied

with Nordstrum. He was better, but not terribly stimulating. But Provincetown was stimulating. It was the days of Eugene O'Neill. The Provincetown Players had just started up in their theater on the wharf. There was a lot going on, and a lot more than we ever participated in as students but we saw it from the outside. We were like poor little match girls. Well, there was Max Eastman and all of the cast of the Provincetown Players, and John Reed, and D. H. Lawrence, and, you know, the woman -- Mabel Dodge. Those were all characters there. And Billy and Marguerite Zorach -- they were no longer fledglings, they were not well-known artists as they later became. But they were artists; they were not art students. They were there and they were very colorful. All these characters were an experience to art students just to see in the offing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just to know they were around. I always think that's a great deal more important than people think; you know, just sort of seeing somebody who is a playwright or something is meaningful to students.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It answers some strange question which maybe they don't even know but it's there.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. There was a restaurant -- I think the name was Kresko's -- and those people would be at the next table . . . "Oh, you know who that is!"

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was great. You went to Provincetown for a long time, didn't you?

PEGGY BACON: No, just for those two summers. Oh, I went back one summer in the mid-1940's to sketch for a few weeks. But I was really in Truro that summer visiting Edmund Duffy and his wife.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the Art Students League like in those days when you started there?

PEGGY BACON: It was much smaller than it is now, more intime.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it on 57th Street then?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, it was. We had a wonderful time at the Art Students League. I was there for six years. Alexander Brook, my ex-husband, was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who-all did you study with there?

PEGGY BACON: John Sloan, Kenneth Hayes Miller, George Bellows, and other people. And I went to their summer school up in Woodstock, New York. I studied with Andrew Dasburg there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was he as a teacher?

PEGGY BACON: He was very good. He was very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was Sloan as a teacher?

PEGGY BACON: He was wonderful. I went to his night class and I also went to his Saturday composition class. He was so witty and so amusing as a human being. He was fun and caustic and derisive and snarly and wonderful and delightful. And was awfully good at composition; really at composition in black and white he was good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting -- I often wonder about what the kind of commentary was in a class of his. What would he talk about as he was criticizing a painting? Do you remember the kind of things he would say, or artists he would tell students to look at or emulate?

PEGGY BACON: No, I really can't. It's such a long time ago, I can remember anything specific except that . . . I started doing drypoints in 1918 or 1919. They were all caricatures of everybody, you know, group scenes, many of them of art students.

PEGGY BACON: You did a lot from the various classes, didn't you?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I did one of the Sloan class, too. And one time in one of my drypoints there was one figure, one girl in it who really seemed quite pretty. And he said, "This is obviously a self-portrait of the artist because all the others are monsters and she is the one that is pretty." The funny part was that it wasn't I, it was Katherine Schmidt who married Kuniyoshi. But I thought: oh, dear, that's what he thinks of me. But I didn't have the nerve to go up and explain to him. And it was only in the late 1950's when he and Helen Sloan came down and spent the evening with me on 13th Street that I told him about that incident: that it was not I; that it was not a self-portrait. I had caricatured myself just as strongly as I had the others.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did he say to that, do you remember?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, he was very much amused.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. How was Bellows, for example, as an instructor?

PEGGY BACON: Bellows was another person altogether. Everyone liked him but I was an exception. I didn't like him very much. I studied with him only one year, which was considered negligible in those days, you know, to study with a person for one year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was never enough.

PEGGY BACON: It wasn't enough. Well, he was such a boastful man. It was always big I, little you. I remember one of his lectures that he gave at the League; he said, "You don't have to go abroad to study. I never went abroad and look at me." That was his whole point of view. But he was forceful and he did sort of jolt a lot of people into doing a little bit better than they might have done. But I remember he never gave me anything at all. He said to me, "Oh, why don't you quit? You'll never be an artist. You'll never be able to do anything." But then at the end of the year when we got out "Bad News," that paper, I suppose you've seen it or heard of it -- Edmund Duffy and Ann Rector and I really did most of the whole thing with a few other people. I remember I did a drypoint of the Bellows class with Bellows in the middle and I made prints of it. He said, "Who did this? That's wonderful. That's really fine. That's the best thing that's been done in this class all year." And he said, "I don't know the names of all these people but when I see that figure there I get a certain feeling that I get in that class that it was Mrs. Rabbi Wise." He was the father figure in the photograph. And he was very . . . I think he just sort of . . . he judged people. I think he was very good in some ways. He certainly had a dynamic way with him. I think it agreed with some students. It didn't agree with me. I didn't really like him too well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you also study with Bridgman at one point?

PEGGY BACON: No, never. No, I never did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So many people seem to have studied with him over the years.

PEGGY BACON: Almost everyone studied with Bridgman at some time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about Kenneth Hayes Miller?

PEGGY BACON: He was good in the way that he sent you to the Metropolitan Museum with recommendations to look at certain paintings by the old masters and study the old masters. He really for a lot of us opened our eyes to the old masters. We had the habit of going to the Metropolitan Museum every Sunday afternoon. A certain group that I knew very well at the League led a very intensive life as art students. I studied in a morning class, in an afternoon class, in a night class, and in between the afternoon and the night class I was so avid I would go to the free afternoon sketch class. I bitterly resented the fact that the Art Students League was closed on Saturday afternoons. But, on the other hand, a group of us every Saturday afternoon went to all the exhibitions in town. In those days there weren't so many galleries and you could cover all of them. And Sundays we spent at the Metropolitan.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were some of the students in this little group?

PEGGY BACON: Edmund Duffy, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Alexander Brook, Dick Lahey, Henry Schnakenberg, Ann Rector, Katherine Schmidt, Isabel Bishop, Reggie Marsh. Helen Stockman studied there but she really didn't participate very much; she came in from Englewood and went back. Dorothea Greenbaum came a little later. And a lot of people you wouldn't hear of now like Dick Dyer. And, oh, I can't remember. There was quite a crowd of us.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you ever copy at the Metropolitan?

PEGGY BACON: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You just went and looked at things and talked about them?

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were some of the artists that Miller recommended you look at? And did he give reasons why you should look at them?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, I suppose he did, but I don't remember now. Oh, of course, the old masters: Tintoretto, Titian, all of them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there ever any discussion about the Armory Show? That had happened not long before.

PEGGY BACON: My father took me to the Armory Show. That was in 1913. He took me there shortly before he killed himself. Oh, yes, there was a great deal of discussion about it. And it was soon after that that Alfred Stieglitz started his gallery -- 291 Fifth Avenue, wasn't it? Wasn't that in 1921 or 1922 that he started that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It had different names . . . .

PEGGY BACON: I studied there at the League until 1920 and then Alex Brook and I got married.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that's always interested me about Kenneth Hayes Miller, you know, is what he would say to his students in criticizing things?

PEGGY BACON: "What are you thinking?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is that what he said?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. He was full of Freud in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? I never heard that.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, yes. Oh, I really didn't like Kenneth Hayes Miller. The only one I liked as an instructor was John Sloan. Well, Miller had a certain instructive thing about techniques. He really told you more than any of the others. The others really were critics and not instructors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He would tell you about mixing colors and glazes?

PEGGY BACON: He would tell you things about glazes and making a veil over the canvas. There was a certain amount that he really told you. He was very intellectual himself, very dry, and in many ways very stuffy, and very pleased with himself, a very conceited man; and with a very precious kind of attitude. I think his own work was very bad. I think he should have been a scientist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you say that?

PEGGY BACON: He had an excellent mind. He had an intellect. His feeling for painting was entirely intellectualized.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was no physical . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: There was no actual palette for the tactile, or color, or form. It was all so built up architecturally in his head that it turned out to be utterly sterile as he operated himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was finally an illustration of a rather well-conceived idea.

PEGGY BACON: That's right. I'm not expressing it properly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you start making prints at the League? Whose class was that with?

PEGGY BACON: There wasn't any class at all. But there was an old printing press. A couple of us -- Ann Rector (who ultimately married Edmund Duffy) and I got the idea that we'd like to do some drypoints. We just heard the word drypoint and there was this press and somebody said, "Well, there's the press; you can use it." I don't know how it came to be there. There was no class in etching in those days and there was no one teaching it. There was nobody to supervise anything we did. Ann and I got ourselves sheets of zinc and what is called a "needle" and began to gouge it; and then printed. I did a great many of them that first year. I got started on those in black and white and I stuck with it for a long, long time before I went back to color. I became more interested in black and white than in color in 1918.

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE I
TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Side 2. I'm curious about what you said about your interest in black and white and how you got involved with that and stayed with that before you went back to color. What was it that appealed to you? Or was it the making of the prints?

PEGGY BACON: No. Process work doesn't appeal to me. That's why I like drypoint and not just an etching. I've done only twenty-five bitten etchings in my life because I don't care for all that business that goes on that gets between you and the work. I love drypoint and I think that actually it gives you the same wonderful satisfaction that carving in stone must give to a person. You're really making something with great effort. And I think that effort is very important in the production of any work of art. If it's too easy, if you're just gliding around on a wax

surface and then biting it in acid, it doesn't give you that sensation of making something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The craft work.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. That wonderful feeling that you have for the material and the real strength that you have to employ to get the line the right depth and richness and to do the cross-hatching so that the metal doesn't break down but still you get a rich black. It gives you, oh, a great sensation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Don't you find drypoint a problem because you can really pull so few proofs?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, but I devised a way where I got about seventy-five prints from the plate before it wore out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

PEGGY BACON: I trained myself to hold the needle upright so that there was as little burr as possible, or an equal amount.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Almost at a ninety degree angle straight up . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: As close to that as possible. You really can't make it directly to ninety degrees, but, if you hold it so that you don't raise a big burr on one side and none on the other, then the plate doesn't wear down, you see. And I have had enormous editions considering -- I mean not like the editions that you get from a bitten etching naturally because that is almost indestructible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you can steel face those and they just go on forever.

PEGGY BACON: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, usually it's a dozen or twenty or something.

PEGGY BACON: They think it's pretty good if they get a dozen prints from a drypoint.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do all your own printing through the years?

PEGGY BACON: For the years that I was at the League I did. Then I went down to Peter Platt on Murray Street. I wrote about that phase of my life; it came out in the "Yale Review" in 1947, a piece called "Etcher's Heaven."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I couldn't find that. How long did you stay then just doing that? Were you making drawings at the same time? Or painting?

PEGGY BACON: Oh, I drew constantly. I never was without a sketchbook. I did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of drawings. Oh, yes, I just drew all the time. And I used the drawings in my drypoint. In fact, I never drew directly on the plate without a drawing first.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, so you would make drawings and then make the etching or drypoint after the drawing?

PEGGY BACON: I'd compose various drawings -- this is the way I've always worked anyway no matter what medium -- I'd use drawings that were done from actuality and the immediate quality of a drawing is very important, it seems to me, a drawing that is done from life or from a scene. I've sketched everywhere. I sketched a lot -- well, I'd sketch going along on buses or on seeing something that was happening. I much preferred that to doing the static thing where a model is posed or a still life is arranged. I think the things that are worth drawing and painting are the things that are happening rather than posing. So I did that. And Reggie Marsh did that too. He did a lot of that. He came to the Art Students League later; he came about the time that I left. I knew him. Oh, you asked me earlier who was at the League when I was. Bess Burroughs, who is the daughter of Bryson Burroughs, was there. And Molly Luce.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've always gotten the feeling from talking to friends of mine who have gone to the League, oh, in the last, say, twenty years as opposed to people who went there before 1940, that the people who went before 1940 have always remained very close to each other in some way. Do you think that's an accurate appraisal?

PEGGY BACON: I think so. I think it has been so. The years at the Art Students League were a very important chunk of life to me and very exhilarating. It was the first time in my life, of course, that I had met and gotten to know familiarly a group of young people who were all headed the same way with the same interests. In fact it was practically parochial. And the oblivion of the art student in those days to current events or to the outside world was abysmal viewed from one standpoint. But it was very nourishing to the individual artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just a few minutes ago you mentioned that on Saturday afternoons you'd go to the galleries to see the exhibitions. There were Duveen's and the Montross and galleries like that, Daniel gallery and Stieglitz. Did you go to all the galleries? Did you see old paintings? Contemporary paintings? Modern things?

PEGGY BACON: I'm sure we saw every exhibition of any importance and everything that came along. I don't mean that we went . . . . There must have been galleries that we didn't hit. But generally we just pranced around from gallery to gallery trying to see everything, talking it all over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've always been curious about Kenneth Hayes Miller's interest in old master paintings which everybody who studied with him seems to stress. Did he ever talk about contemporary painting? Or French painting? Or American painting?

PEGGY BACON: No, not so much. He was very averse, I would say, to a good many of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists that I feel very strongly about. He had a very contemptuous attitude toward some of them, such as Lautrec. That was completely alien to him. The structural and studied build-up of canvases was all that interested him. And if it wasn't there he could analyze it into the picture so that you would almost begin to see it as he described it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really? As I once heard a professor describe a very early Mondrian landscape, he said, "Well, if you look at the way those trees are, you can see the verticals and then the horizontals." It was a long time before Mondrian ever thought of those. It's really astounding.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, it's wonderful how spellbinding certain notions can be even if they're completely invalid.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You met Alex Brook at the League, right?

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What year was that, do you remember?

PEGGY BACON: I think I must have met him there around 1916. He was just floating around. He was a very attractive, skinny young man with a lot of hair that I used to say looked like a chrysanthemum. I guess we were in the Miller class together. I never knew him very well until 1918. Then I go to know him. We studied in the summer school up in Woodstock with Dasburg. That's where we fell in love and became engaged. We married in 1920. So it was 1919 that we were up in Woodstock; that was the only summer that we studied there.

PEGGY BACON: I'm just trying to remember -- Dasburg at that time was doing work which had a slight kind of Cubist influence.

PEGGY BACON: He was married to Ida Rau at that time, the actress. I think she had been married to Max Eastman.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't remember.

PEGGY BACON: Well, my chronology gets all mixed up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, as I remember, Dasburg was doing these things that had a Cubist quality. Was that of interest to you then? Or to people you knew?

PEGGY BACON: No, Cubism never interested me until later. Of course I never participated in the movement at all. I was just interested in doing caricatures and making compositions and drawings and sketching in black and white. I didn't do much ratiocination, I guess. I just went around "doing my thing," as they say now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the caricatures start? Was it something you had done for years and years?

PEGGY BACON: I started in the Bellows class making caricatures of everybody in the class. It was a wonderfully funny group of people. And Bellows himself with that egg-shaped head, that hard-boiled egg of a head. I made a great big painting of him, a caricature, which he thought was very good. And he didn't know it was I who had done it. I did that. That's the year -- 1918 -- when I got to doing the caricatures. Oh, there are heaps of them in "Bad News." Did you ever see "Bad News?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: I saw one copy somewhere not very long ago.

PEGGY BACON: Well, I've got a copy all signed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, with all the people?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. All those caricatures of people, you know, all along the top. They were all people, I mean definite characters. There were a pair of sissy young fellows whom I called Flora and Fauna and it turned out that when I got up to Ogunquit there they were running the -- what is it called? Not the Dragon Seed -- that restaurant in Ogunquit -- it's very well-known. A Japanese staff. You don't know it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Well, in the 1920's you started exhibiting then quite soon, didn't you?

PEGGY BACON: Jonas Lee gave me the first one-man show I had. That was in 1915. Then after we were married and came back from abroad in 1922 Joseph Brummer gave us a joint show in his gallery on 57th Street. I had a room of drypoints and Alex had a room of his paintings. Then I guess I had a show almost every year for a long, long time; oh, two or three at Montross, two or three at Weyhe's, a number at the Downtown Gallery when it was on West 13th Street. Then later at Rehn; I had three shows at Rehn. Then I moved to Associated American Artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, for the prints.

PEGGY BACON: I didn't stay there long. I had a show there. I can't remember -- well, altogether counting this last show at Kraushaar's this past fall, I think I've had twenty-six one-man shows in New York and a lot elsewhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find the exhibitions with the various dealers? I mean, you've been through so many over the years and they were all important galleries.

PEGGY BACON: Frank Rehn was very, very nice. And of course I think Antoinette Kraushaar is just one of the nicest people in the whole world. I'm devoted to her. I've been with her I guess for twenty or twenty-five years -- I can't remember. I didn't have a show with her until I'd been with her for two or three years. I think the first show was in 1953. Then I didn't have another one until 1961, eight years later; then one in 1969 and one in 1972.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about the early galleries -- well, say, Edith Halpert's, for example, when she was on 13th Street. What was her gallery like in those days?

PEGGY BACON: It was an awfully nice gallery. I can't say nice things about Edith Halpert.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's difficult.

PEGGY BACON: I think she was a very unpleasant person. But she got together a very good group of artists. And it was a nice gallery. Mrs. Goldschmidt, who was Leon Kroll's sister, was her colleague when he started. She put up the money for Edith to start that gallery. What was her first name?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I can't think of it.

PEGGY BACON: She was a dear, dear woman, just as nice as she could be, a sweet woman. Edith treated her very badly, shabbily, as she did a good many other people. A good many people disliked Edith. She was a very able gal nonetheless.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She did a lot of work for some of her people; and some she didn't do much for.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. She's done quite well by a great many, I imagine. That was a very nice gallery. You never saw it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not the one on 13th Street. No.

PEGGY BACON: It was a very attractive gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You lived on 13th Street for a long time, didn't you?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I lived at 20 East 13th Street for twenty years, just before I moved up here. I moved up here in December 1961.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There were lots of artists who lived in that building too on 13th Street, weren't there?

PEGGY BACON: Not in my building, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Next to it? Or . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: On West 13th Street, you know, there's a building where a good many . . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, 8 West 13th Street.

PEGGY BACON: At 8 West 13th, yes. I think originally there were artists in that building, 20 East 13th Street. I think Kuniyoshi lived there at one time. But when I moved in in 1941 I don't think there were any artists there. There was a famous typographer whose name I can't remember. And Jose Limon, the dancer, and his wife lived there. They had the apartment next to mine at that time. Those were the war years and he was away in the service. They continued to live there for a year or so after he was demobilized. But I don't think there were any painters there when I was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a building on 14th Street where there were studios, too.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, yes. That was where Kenneth Hayes Miller had his studio. And Alex had his studio on 14th Street. We used to live . . . oh, we've lived in various places.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you go to those little teas that Miller used to have there?

PEGGY BACON: When he pestered me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was little enthusiasm.

PEGGY BACON: Those terrible little teas with tea and little social tea biscuits that were slightly damp. Oh, everything about it was terrible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think he did that? It always sounded to me a little pretentious or something.

PEGGY BACON: Well, he was pretentious. He was very pretentious in every way. He'd say things just to show how eccentric and individual and piquant his ideas were. He'd say things like, "I hate flowers; you know, I really don't like flowers." I mean something that would be completely not just anti-social but inhuman. Oh, he was a very strange person. And yet he had an idea of devotion to his friends. He was very nice to me always. I never was able to live up to this idea of friendship, this ideal friendship that Kenneth wished to promote, you know, this very intense feeling. But he was so nice in that way as a friend that you felt ashamed of your lack of being fascinated by him. He was very exact . . . . Well, he had these passionate interests all of a sudden. One was the dentures of mammoth mastodons. He went to the most enormous trouble to borrow great tomes on the teeth of these extinct mammals from the Museum of Natural History where he had an "in" because of this searching interest, this intense interest. That was one thing. Then he decided one time -- this was after I knew him -- that he was going to read every poem in the English language, every poem that had ever been written in English and published. So he did. He went right through it all. And then he would come . . . he came to see me about once a week. That was another thing, you see -- it was an exact thing. He would telephone me that he was coming if I was in. And then he would talk about these poems. He started with the earliest poems and went right through. It wasn't just a matter of reading the Oxford Book of English Verse. It was every damned thing he could lay his hands on. Then he got the desire to instruct himself in music. So he went into Beethoven; he plunged into Beethoven with that same assiduity and intensity that he directed at every object of his current interest.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How strange. It was sort of passionless things.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. And it was a passionless passion, too. It was entirely intellectualized. Everything was. And in the same way he was . . . I hope this is never going to be . . . I'm just laying my ancient friends on the operating table. It's awful; it's terrible. But he's the only man I ever knew who used to talk about his mistresses. He had the same pride in his mistresses that an archaeologist must feel when he digs up a broken jug maybe dating from about 2000 B.C. He once said something to me which is really incredible. He said, leaning toward me with his big long nose, "You know, Peggy dear, I admire you more than anyone but, you know, I am not in love with you," when I was expecting and waiting for some amatory avowal from this old geezer. Oh, dear. Well, I think a lot of this should be expurgated before it gets into the wrong hands.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'd like to go back to the 1920's and talk about that period. We've gotten sidetracked here. You were married in May, 1920. What were the 1920's like for you? You know, you were married, the children came along, you started having exhibitions and all this was going on. It was a very hectic time.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, yes, it was very exhilarating. Also, it was very rowdy. I think the 1920's were terribly rowdy in the group that we belonged to. I think it was a deplorable time, really. We had fun but it was a matter of too much drinking and too much carrying on, generally. I don't think we were very well behaved.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was Prohibition, wasn't it?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Everybody had to boast about how drunk they were the night before. For a while I was considered a great prig because I wouldn't drink. I never had a drop to drink until after Sandy was two years old. I had the two children. Well, I started. Nobody likes their liquor more than I do and always have.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've always been curious about what -- how can I say it? -- about what people did and what they thought about. What would you discuss with the other artists who were friends of yours or whom you would see regularly?

PEGGY BACON: Well, we still talked a lot about art. You know, art talk goes on among artists. We had a great many artist friends. It was the days of the Whitney Club and then the Whitney Gallery. Alex was made Director of the Whitney Gallery under Mrs. Juliana Force who, again, was under Mrs. Whitney. They were very lively years. Those shows were very important to us and very exciting. There was a great deal of social life surrounding the Gallery. Mrs. Force threw lavish parties. She did an enormous amount for young American artists. This is generally known, there's nothing new about that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that affect your life with you being an artist and the children and your husband being an artist and also involved with the Whitney? You know, how did you sort of piece all those things together? How did you find time to work? Did you have a schedule?

PEGGY BACON: In those days it was not so difficult to get a part-time maid. I generally had a colored woman who would come in and help do the heavy cleaning and the laundry. But of course I did work awfully hard. There's no doubt about that. I turned out an awful lot of work. And I also had a lot of commercial work to do in those days. In those days the magazines hadn't started using photographs almost entirely so that I did a good deal of rather bad commercial drawing, headings and stuff. They weren't bad intentionally. I mean they were not very good because I wasn't a very good commercial artist. Other people thought the stuff was good. And then I did a lot of . . . after Off With their Heads! came out, which was in the 1930's -- 1934, then I did a lot of caricatures for magazines like "Stage" magazine, "American Mercury," the "New Republic," and others.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the commercial work start?

PEGGY BACON: Because magazines at that time wanted to get artists instead of just the usual sort of hack commercial stuff that had been going on for years. They got the idea that it would be a little livelier or maybe a little more trendy to get artists who were not just trained illustrators but who had made some name for themselves as artists rather than just illustrators. Like the stuff that continued to come out for years in "The Saturday Evening Post." I mean before it had been that kind of stuff that prevailed in magazines in the 1920's. I suppose "Vanity Fair" and "Vogue" really started that trend to get a different kind of work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did things for "Vanity Fair" too, didn't you?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, I did. And I wrote things. Oh, I wrote a review and earned two lifelong enemies -- Clare Booth Luce and Henry Luce for writing a review of The Women in verse.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That's marvelous.

PEGGY BACON: It was a double page spread on The Women.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Women has just been revived, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, I know. I can't remember what I wrote but it went on and on; I just remember one couplet: "The dialogue is bright but stale like half a glass of ginger ale left over from another day," or something like that. No, it wasn't marvelous. But I did a lot of that. And then I was writing children's books in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they start -- the children's books? There were so many, I mean all the books you worked on.

PEGGY BACON: Well, the first children's book I did was . . . it happened because . . . . Did you every hear of Ernestine Evans?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Vaguely.

PEGGY BACON: She was a literary agent and sometimes an editor for various publishing houses and sort of a free-lance literary critic whose stuff came out in the "Herald Tribune" and the "Times" and various publications. She was in our apartment one evening when Sandy was about two-and-a-half years old. I was putting him to bed. It was my custom to tell him a story every night, a different story. She was present while I was telling this story because that's what he expected every night. She said, "Peggy, that's a wonderful story! Write it down. Have you got any others that you've told him?" I said, "Yes, I have others." She said, "Write them all down and I'll type them and I'm sure that MacMillan will publish them." She typed them. And so they did publish them. It was The Lion-hearted Kitten. I had written it down a year or two years before it was published. I think Macmillan actually published it in 1926. It sold from the year it came out all through the 1950's and the early 1960's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That long?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. It brought me in royalties steadily. A couple of generations of children were brought up on The Lion-hearted Kitten. Then the next year I did a book called Mercy and the Mouse. The year after that I did the Ballad of Tangle Street. Then I did two books for Harcourt Brace. In those days I had illustrated books for Harcourt Brace. I illustrated a lot of books.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like illustrating books? You did Tom Sawyer and others.

PEGGY BACON: I loved illustrating. I always did love illustrating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How would you work on a book like that? Would they tell you want they wanted?

PEGGY BACON: They always gave me carte blanche. I couldn't work with people telling me what to do. They would say how much they would pay, and I would decide just what I would do; or they would say that they wanted them done in pen and ink for line cuts; or they were to be half tones, or something like that. And they'd give me the size of the format to work from. All together I've illustrated sixty-six or sixty-seven books.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That includes your own?

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a lot of books. But your own books have done very well for you, have they not?

PEGGY BACON: Very Well. Very well. Especially the ones that Little, Brown brought out. And Viking Press did awfully well. I still get royalties from the Viking Press. Little, Brown and Viking Press are the ones that have done well. I did a book for Pantheon I guess in 1961 or 1962 but that didn't do well at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you had an agent for those over the years? Or do people just come to you?

PEGGY BACON: I didn't start out with an agent. Later I did get an agent; I don't know when it was. Curtis Brown is my agent. They've been my agent, for, oh, a good many years now, twenty-five or thirty years, I guess. But I didn't have an agent to start with. Of course, I never had an agent for the illustrating. That just came to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are there favorite books that you've illustrated? That you feel are the best?

PEGGY BACON: I think what I did for the Viking Press in 1947, I think that's one of the good illustrating jobs that I did. Then I like very much the illustrating job I did for Little, Brown for my book The Ghost of Uncle Remus, which came out in 196-_ -- I can't remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find that your association with the publishing world has changed much over the years?

PEGGY BACON: I haven't had any illustrating jobs in the last few years. It's changed to that extent. But, no . . . . And I've never had any unpleasant relationships with any of them. It seems to me that publishers are awfully nice. The editors are awfully nice. I like editors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're less difficult than art dealers.

PEGGY BACON: Well, I've never had any trouble certainly . . . I've never had anything but the most delightful relationship with Antoinette Kraushaar.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to go with her gallery?

PEGGY BACON: Let me see, how did that happen? Well, Rehn didn't do well with my prints. I moved to Associated American Artists. I wasn't pleased there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lewenthal was there then, wasn't he?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. He's all right. But I didn't like the place. I didn't think they were doing well with my prints either; my only reason for moving there was because I thought they would. I think it was then that I went to Antoinette Kraushaar and asked if she would take me on. She came down to my studio apartment on East 13th Street and looked over the work I had there and said she would take me on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a man who wrote a book about you called William Morell . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: William Morell Fisher. He's dead now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was he and what . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: He was an Englishman who came to this country, oh, I don't know when. He lived in Woodstock.

When Alex and I were students there, we got to know him and a great friend of his, Harold Ward. Oh, I remember -- Bill Fisher had been a custodian of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum. He worked down in the basement. He had contracted TB and was not given long to live. He was told that he must get out of the city and live in the mountains, so he went up to Woodstock. The Metropolitan Museum gave him some munificent sum of . . . . He'd been working for them for a number of years and they gave him some terrific sum like twenty dollars a month pension, something very generous . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

PEGGY BACON: . . . for a dying person for all his life thinking that he had only two years to live, you see. Otherwise they probably wouldn't . . . . Well, anyway, he lived and lived and lived. I think he died two years ago. But when we were in Woodstock in 1919 we got to know Bill Fisher. He brought out two little art books in the American Artists Series. Oh, he brought out more than that. He brought out one on Alex, one on Kuniyoshi, and on various young artists. I guess the series was called Younger American Artists. He brought out one on me but I haven't got a copy. I don't know what happened to it. He was a delightful person, very amusing, quite witty. But I think he was one of those writers that expend themselves in conversation. He just never produced anything. He never finished anything. He did finally write one little book that got into print. It was called The History of Toadyism. It was a little bit of a thing. After that he was always working something, on some book, but it never transpired until the Whitney Museum came along and gave him the job of collecting and writing about the History of American Cartoons and Caricature.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, yes. Right.

PEGGY BACON: And that came out in two volumes. Really it's very little more than a catalogue. But it had all these reproductions and was very well brought out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, his name pops up. When I was doing research for this I saw the little book on you and the series.

PEGGY BACON: You did!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

PEGGY BACON: I wish I could find a copy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I found it in the library of the Metropolitan or the Frick or someplace.

PEGGY BACON: I haven't got a copy. I haven't had it for years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're hard to find. You don't see them around very much.

PEGGY BACON: No, you don't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had an exhibition with Stieglitz in 1928. Charles Demuth wrote the foreword for the catalogue. How did that come about? Had you known him? Or did Stieglitz arrange that?

PEGGY BACON: Stieglitz invited me to have a show. I had done these pastel caricatures. Well, wait a minute -- maybe I took them to him. How would he have seen them? I don't remember. Anyway, he gave me that show. There were seven of them. He was very enthusiastic about them, so much so that, though nobody bought any he bought five of them at the close of the show. I believe that he gave them to the Philadelphia Museum. But perhaps with museums doing what they do now they've ended up in the town dump.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well -- I don't know -- I think they're still there.

PEGGY BACON: Anyway, they were caricatures of -- let me see? Louis Bouche, Charles Sheeler, Louis Pelstrom -- I can't remember the other two.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did Demuth come to write the essay that's in the catalogue?

PEGGY BACON: I don't know. And I haven't got a copy of it. I wish I had. I don't know. And he wrote a wonderful thing about The Lion-hearted Kitten, too. Now what did that come out in? All that stuff must be up in Syracuse. And then I had another show at Stieglitz.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? That was when?

PEGGY BACON: I don't remember. The next year, I guess. I can't remember.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find him? Was he accessible?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, he'd talk you to death. Oh, certainly, he was accessible. He was a very show-offish person. He was very enthusiastic about what he backed or he wouldn't have bought these things that nobody else wanted. Certainly nobody ever wanted one of themselves. There's one in the Ogunquit Museum -- no, in the Hamilton Easter Field Collection at the Barn Gallery in Ogunquit. The Hamilton Easter Field Foundation bought pictures every now and then. They bought the one of Marsden Hartley, the caricature of Marsden Hartley. It's there in their permanent gallery. It's about this big.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do these caricatures from the people? Were they from photographs?

PEGGY BACON: I did drawings of them. No, I never worked from photographs for anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean as you went on in the book of all the politicians and the public figures?

PEGGY BACON: The "New Republic" sent me down to sketch the New Deal-ers. That was after Off With Their heads! came out. The "New Republic" sent me down and I did a series for them. And then I did quite a series for "Stage" magazine. It was in 1935, 1936, 1937 that I was doing those caricatures. Then I got tired of it. I didn't do any more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you sort of . . . . You did With Malice Toward Some in 193- . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: Well, that was just an illustrating job. These, you know, were big things, drawings in charcoal or black pastel. Big drawings. I did Gertrude Stein for the "New Republic." I did Noel Coward for "Stage." And they were all with writing and written descriptions. But the first ones that I did were shown at the Stieglitz Gallery. That was before Off With their Heads!.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's fascinating! I was looking through some of these in the libraries and museums -- you caught a likeness but you also were able to do things and really make caricatures. Did you do many, many drawings of one person before you could . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: I did that. I wasn't like Covarubias. Covarubias was so gifted a caricaturist that . . . . Once he was sitting with us and Katie Sheeler passed through the room. One summer, believe it or not, we lived in the Whitney Museum -- or rather the Whitney Gallery which became the Whitney Museum on 8th Street. We rented it for a nominal sum of something like fifty dollars a month from Mrs. Juliana Force. We had the two kids; this was when they were little. We were spending the summer in New York so Mrs. Force let us have this place, a palatial place to live in. Of course it had an excellent kitchen and bath and there were these two floors. The Sheelers lived upstairs on the top floor of that building, 10 East 8th Street. They had rented the whole top floor. That was the year that Covarubias was in New York for the first time. Alex had given him a show, his first show. He was sitting with us, talking. And Katie Sheeler came down this flight of stairs. Maybe you never saw her; she was very, very fat and roseate, wore a dashing kind of picture hat. She just walked through and said "Hello" and out and down into the back garden. Covarubias made a drawing of her that was the spitting image of her. I have a little drawing he did of me, a caricature. It's hanging in the upstairs hall. It was a laborious thing for me to do a caricature. I'd sketch the person from different angles. It wasn't like the stuff I did at the Art Students League which was quick. This was a determined sublimation -- or perhaps that isn't quite the word -- degradation. Or an intensification of the personality of the person as I saw it. And then I'd write a description which helped. The written description often made the whole series of sketches come together in my mind's eye.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So that was written, when? Before you were finished? Or while you were . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: No, while I was doing it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you'd make all little lines, phrases . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: I'd make jottings of the description of what the person looked like.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, terrific. Why did you stop doing those? It seems that they were such a success.

PEGGY BACON: I got so choked up with doing them. An I'd often be sent to do somebody that it didn't interest me to draw, somebody who happened to be in the news at the time, a person who to me was uninteresting as a subject, not as a personality but as a subject for a caricature. And it would be very difficult to do an extremely handsome person like, for instance, Rex Tugwell, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Why?

PEGGY BACON: He's so conventionally good looking as a young person in a museum. It was very hard for me to do Rexford Tugwell. And then sometimes it would be a perfectly blank, rather banal-looking person. And then

anyway there's something extremely nerve-racking about having an appointment with a very well-known person who hasn't much time and perhaps cannot pose at all but says, "Yes, you can come in and sit there while I am interviewing So-and-So or while I am doing something else and I'll give you twenty-minutes, or something." And you have to get all your material in the length of time that he has allotted you. And some of them really were too busy. I did get into a press conference with Franklin Roosevelt but I worked under great difficulty. There was a mob of reporters around me. I was at Roosevelt's side and, while he was very nice and courteous about it, and everyone else was too -- I was given this seat while everyone else was standing -- but there was this tension of realizing that this was the moment in time when I had to get it all or never.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a lot of pressure.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Well, that sort of thing got very fatiguing for me. And also I got just plain tired of doing caricatures. I got fed up with it.

[END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE I]
[SIDE 3, TAPE 2]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is Side 3 - May 9, 1973.

PEGGY BACON: I think it probably isn't very fair to talk about a person that you've been married to for so long, and also who is still alive and working. And obviously I cared a great deal for him or I wouldn't have been married to him for so many years. So I don't think that there's anything much to say unless there are facts that you want.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I'm just curious what it was like, you know, being married to another artist.

PEGGY BACON: It was very helpful. We helped each other a great deal in our work and I think we contributed a great deal to each other's work. I think it's fair to say that of both of us. We did do very good teamwork for a great many years. I mean we worked together and we pooled our resources and we brought up the kids together. He was an excellent father when the children were young and a very devoted family man. I can say all that without being prejudicial at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many years was he involved with the Whitney? Was that for very long?

PEGGY BACON: Are you going to interview him?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

PEGGY BACON: Well, then, why don't you find out those details from him? My memory is very faulty and always has been and actual chronological facts always elude me. I would say perhaps two or three years, but I'm not sure. I know it was at least two. But I think you should check those things with him if you're going to interview him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I'm always curious about artists who are married to other artists. So many of them seem to have a very rich relationship, and others don't want to have a competitive artist around.

PEGGY BACON: Well, I think that that is true. I've known cases where the competition was so great that it really wrecked one member of the team, so to speak. But in our case it certainly did not. I think we augmented each other's careers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Terrific. But after the separation you stayed on in New York, didn't you, until you came up here?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, I did. Of course with trips away, mostly visits to Cape Cod and other place. But really my headquarters was in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you traveled a great deal through the years?

PEGGY BACON: No. I've never been anywhere out of the States really except to go to Bermuda, from 1931 when I went abroad with Alex on his Guggenheim Fellowship until this winter when I went to Mexico. So I really have been a stick-in-the-mud.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you come to go to Mexico this year?

PEGGY BACON: Doctor's orders. He said that I must go to some place that was dry and warm; and my stipulation was that it should be cheap. So I chose Mexico.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like it?

PEGGY BACON: I thought Oaxaca was very interesting and lovely in many ways. The food is bad. I think that the noise is almost insupportable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? In what way?

PEGGY BACON: They don't use mufflers on their cars. They throw them away. And they love to make as much noise as possible with their newly-found mechanical appliances. And the motorcyclists are absolutely horrifying. They get everything they can out of their motorcycles in the way of racket. And they do things like this: There's a perfectly delightful little park not far away from the Mansion Imperiale where I was staying. In addition to the great big park that's right in front, there's this lovely secluded park about three blocks away. It's really the most deserted place, usually quiet and lovely. So one day I went there. I thought: here I can escape the racket and I will sit down and sketch in peace and there are no children to come up and peek over my shoulder. Well, a motorcyclist, a youth on a motorcycle, appeared and he went around and around that park making as much racket as he could for three-quarters of an hour. He never stopped. He had no destination. He was just having a wonderful time for himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a race track.

PEGGY BACON: Anyway, I think the Mexicans love to make a lot of noise. I don't think I'm alone in this comment at all. If they can't get enough out of the traffic racket they will sing and shout and shriek and scream and carry on and blow whistles. And also the military make as much noise as they can too. They shoot off guns and they have bands and they prowl around with their brass band. And it's cacophonous; really it's not nice military music; it's bang, bang, bang just like artillery fire.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And this is just a day-to-day kind of occurrence.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. And then they have these constant fiestas. I'm not ever very fun-loving; I don't enter into the spirit of a fiesta at all. So this is all from my personal point of view, you see. I didn't enjoy that aspect of life in Mexico. On the other hand, the crafts in Oaxaca are fascinating in and around all that countryside. And the Mexicans themselves I think from what I saw of them are perfectly charming and friendly and helpful and they go out of their way to try to understand everything you say. Even if you do speak a little fractured Spanish, they really try to understand you. And if you want directions to some place, they'll walk blocks to show you in particular where you want to go. Oh, I think they're lovable, charming, delightful people; just my experiences with them. Of course, they stab each other; they carry on just like the rest of the criminal human race. But they're fun.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. Will you go back there again in the winter, do you think?

PEGGY BACON: Not if I can find some other place that is dry and hot. Really because of the noise. They've never heard of the slogan, "Silence is Golden." They revel in their machines. And they're not very good at machines, you know, Everything breaks down. Whatever you buy in the way of a mechanical contrivance is soon descompesto. Things fall to pieces and cannot be mended. This is all just a very . . . personal little bit of an experience, you know, and probably is not true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, for you it was.

PEGGY BACON: It was for me. That's all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I would like to talk a little more about the books that you did. There are sixty-some titles that you either wrote and illustrated, or just illustrated. In all of those things did you use images from drawings and sketches and prints and things you had made? Or did you kind of find new things for each book?

PEGGY BACON: The compositions of the illustrations were more generally entirely out of my head because, of course, they had to fit the text. But the material that went into them in large part I would say was taken from my sketchbooks, from actuality, from sketches of children. I have a big portfolio with hundreds of drawings of children in it, and then another big portfolio with many hundreds of drawings of outdoor scenes, sketches of landscapes and city scenes and things that can be used as background material. And I have a portfolio of sketches done in Europe. And then sketches of beach scenes and of bathers and swimmers and stuff of that sort that has accumulated. Then there's a portfolio full of interiors, house furnishings and interiors. So that if I wanted material I would shuffle through the right portfolio and pluck from it whatever scene was appropriate for the particular book that I happened to be illustrating. And then there's one of animals and birds, beasts, things like that. Well, I had to separate them. Otherwise I would have had a horrible time looking for things. It takes quite a long time anyway to accumulate the background material to illustrate a book. I will spend a day or so going through my portfolios and picking out the things that are suitable for the sort of book that I have to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would you make notes as you read through a text?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. On a sheet of paper I would write down the page and mark in the manuscript the paragraph that I had an idea to . . . I would try to arrange the book in such a way that I had illustrations fairly evenly spaced throughout the text so that they wouldn't bunch in one part, and up to the limit of the number that the publisher had designated.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. So it would take a lot of time to read something and think about it and go through sketchbooks and make drawings.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. The first thing is the reading and the marking of the passages that interest me to illustrate. And then the next step would be to collect the material. And after that to make rough sketches of the composition which I would generally submit to the publisher for approval before I made the final tracing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was lots of work.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, you know, it wouldn't take too long. Depending on the number of illustrations -- say I had twenty-five illustrations -- I would probably have them all done in a couple of months. That would sort of be the outside. Once I get everything settled in my head about what I'm going to do, I work very quickly. I've always drawn very quickly. But the thinking it out and the preparation for it is . . . I don't know how other illustrators work. Possibly this is more or less just the way everybody works.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You started teaching in -- what? 1933? At the League, or had you taught before then?

PEGGY BACON: I think I taught at the Fieldston School for five years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that before the League?

PEGGY BACON: Goodness me! I should be able to know; I should be able to answer these questions. Oh, yes, that was before the League. It was much later than that when I started teaching at the League. Was it in the 1940's or 1950's? I taught at a good many places. I taught for five years at Fieldston; I think I started there in 1933 or 1934. I'd have to check with the school itself to find out. I taught at the Art Students League for four or five years, I think. I taught at The New School for Social Research for several years. I taught for one season -- on year -- at Stella Elkins Tyler. During the war I taught for two years at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, and for one or two years at Hunter College. And, let me see now, where else? I taught in two summer camps. And also, after I moved up here, I taught art for three summers at a summer music school up at Stowe, Vermont. It was called the School of Music and Art. It was run by Leona Paulsen. She and I were the people. She imported her whole harp class -- well, it was not a class exactly; they were her private pupils -- from the Oranges in New Jersey. She brought them all up. They were young people all headed to be harpists. It was a very professional school in that respect. Most of them were very serious musicians, young people from children up to sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Since they were teenagers she wanted to keep them employed and they couldn't play the harp day and night. So she got me to come and give them art lessons in sketching, drawing and what not, every day. She and I had known each other at one of these summer camps that we'd gone to on Martha's Vineyard. When she decided to do this, she wrote me and asked if I would go in with her. Of course, I was delighted to do this. We were good friends; we liked each other and got along very well. She is a very charming woman, a very dedicated harpist with a very fine reputation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like teaching those students?

PEGGY BACON: I used to enjoy teaching in a way. I can't say that I'm a very good teacher. But the students that were serious I was able to interest intensely. I know that. Wherever I taught, the serious students that I had I think were very pleased with my teaching and got a lot out of it. I wasn't the kind of teacher who could captivate or engage the attention and interest of the luke-warm.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find a great deal of difference between students at, say, the Art Students League, or the Corcoran, or The New School?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, I did, of course. At The New School you get retired people and old people many of whom have been told by their psychiatrist to get out and do something with their hands. And then you also get a few young people that are doing it for other purposes, perhaps to pile up credits. You don't get the dedicated art students that you very often find at a real art school. And then of course in Washington at the Corcoran it was wartime and I got soldiers and sailors and government workers who were outsiders to Washington but who were there temporarily and who were either occupying their time in that way simply to have something else to do. Many of the government workers were such complete outsiders to Washington life that they had no social life and no place to go and nothing to occupy themselves if they didn't take a course, or a class, in something. So that was a very different kind of teaching. Perhaps there would be one or two in the group that were serious

about painting. But most of them were not. At Hunter College I found that most of the students were getting credit; they were just simply in the class to get credit. They were not really serious.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the Art Students League? After all, you'd been a student there and now you came back to be a teacher. How did you like that, looking at it from a different point of view?

PEGGY BACON: Well, I don't know. The Art Students League had changed enormously from my day, of course, from 1920 when I left. I think it was in the 1950's that I taught at the League -- I'm not sure. It had changed a lot. There were some loafers, but there always had been. My classes were not enormous and they were not terribly popular. There again, I had a few dedicated students. But I don't think that my approach to the person who was not dedicated was ever a very healthy one. I disapproved so of a person who would try to take art in a lackadaisical way and without any actual commitment that I was impatient and I imagine I was a pretty irritating personality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the school in Philadelphia -- the Stella Elkins Tyler? There's a college affiliation there, isn't there?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Well, I was there only one year. I disliked their method intensely. I thought they spread the student's interest too thin. They insisted on achieving a small amount in every possible department of the arts so that I felt they were harassed; they were hounded from one pursuit to another and never had much chance to really get into anything deeply enough. I felt a great impatience with the management -- Boris Bly. I don't know if he's still in charge there or not. I disliked him personally. I found him very tiresome in his whole point of view and -- I don't know -- aggressive and self-seeking.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How much do you think you can teach a student, a young art student? And what can you do for them?

PEGGY BACON: Not a great deal unless they themselves are deeply involved. You can teach them the mechanical things, how to prepare the work, how to take care of your brushes and your paints, and what sort of paper or canvas to get; how to do. One of those things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Housekeeping of materials and things like that.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. How to be sure that the brushes are clean and wash them properly so they don't get stiff. Oh, just stupid little baby talk stuff. The practical things which we ourselves were never told in art school in my day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

PEGGY BACON: No. We picked them up from each other, if at all. The instructors at the Art Students League in our day really didn't teach you; they made very little pretense of teaching you anything mechanical, most of them, I would say. I thought that if you do that first, that is the first important step, after all. It's kindergarten but it's still important. And then other than that you try to enlighten them as to composition and color. And I always tried -- but very seldom succeeded -- to get the student to carry a sketchbook and sketch from actuality and to have it part of his daily life, not just simply sitting down in a studio and drawing from a posed model or a still life, which is a stultifying practice in itself if it isn't accompanied by other activity. And also it's habit-forming so that many artists go on through life unable to work or paint or draw at all unless they have a model there in front of them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, that's true. It's amazing how people can fall into habits like that, and other people seem to spend a certain number of years just drawing a figure and they never really use a model.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. Well, I think that the liveliest thing, the thing that keeps any artist's work alive and healthy, is the constant observation and recording that should be part of his daily life like breathing, and, if that is pursued actively all the time and not abandoned after art school days, say, why the person not only has a backlog of material and need never say to himself, "I have nothing to paint today. What shall I do?" But he also has this aptitude for giving his pictures a blood transfusion.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Bring them more into every day life. New changing images.

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, you've mentioned so often making sketches and things. Do you make sketches continually like that?

PEGGY BACON: Absolutely. Until February of this year when my eyes gave out when I went out in the park in Mexico and I couldn't see what was over there and I couldn't see what I was drawing. My eyes have gone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it was so quickly that that happened.

PEGGY BACON: No, it has gone on for two years now. But it got to that point where I could no longer see. I had struggled to sketch from the time I got down to Mexico and I had been able to see forms, shapes, and things like trees and mountains and roughly. But my sketches did not have the spirited details that gave them their liveliest look because I couldn't see that well. Finally it got to the point where I just couldn't see at all. Now, for instance, you are sitting there and I can see the shape and I can see that you're there and I wouldn't stumble over the coffee table if I got up, but I can't see your face; I can't see your features from here. You'd have to come up to about here before I could see you. So naturally as my interest is in drawing the people, the characters . . . . Oh, I would have so loved to have been able to draw the hippies and the odd-looking couples and the ridiculous people I saw down there in the cafes and walking along the street. But you can't go up to them close, an eye away, with your sketchbook and draw them. Sketching of that sort always has to be fairly subterfugeous anyway. You can't attract attention to yourself. Or otherwise everybody jumps up and looks at what you're doing and either gets angry or too interested or runs away like a startled rabbit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In making sketches like that over the years, are these small? What sort of size sketch pad do you use?

PEGGY BACON: I believe everyone sees things at a different sight size. I have noticed that. I mean some peoples' sketches are large and they tend to do large things. I have always worked more easily on a sketchbook that was about nine by twelve, or twelve by fifteen, or something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A fairly portable size.

PEGGY BACON: A portable size and also the sight size for me; I mean I don't sketch easily in large. For that reason I never do large preliminary drawings of illustrations. I do the illustration the size of the format to fit the page size that the publisher has given me, instead of twice as big, as some people do. But the drypoints, etchings, lithographs, drawings, and the material that goes into a painting of mine are all the natural sight size for me. Which is small. Which is one reason why this is very baffling, this kind of eye trouble that I have, which is incurable and inoperative and progressive. So I'm very much afraid that my days for painting are doomed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrible after all this time.

PEGGY BACON: Well, it's awful. It is awful. But pinch a person in one place and they bubble out in another. You never can tell.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right. Right. You won a Guggenheim award -- right? In 1942?

PEGGY BACON: No, no, it was in 1934. 1933 or 1934.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, 1934, right. How did you come to apply for that?

PEGGY BACON: I don't remember. I suppose -- well, Alex had won one in 1931 and had gone abroad. I didn't go abroad when I won that; I was the first person who didn't wish to go abroad on a Guggenheim. I had the idea for doing my book Off With Their Heads!. I had the material for it and I also had the publisher who wanted me to do it -- R. M . McBride & Company. So what I had in mind was to stay at home in Cross River and finish this book, do this book. Which I did. So I was the first one that they allowed to do that. Before that it had been explicit that a Guggenheim was to be used for foreign travel or something like that. In 1941 or 1942 I won an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. It must have been 1941, or was it 1942? Oh, I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's all written down somewhere.

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've won a number of awards like this over the years?

PEGGY BACON: No . . . I can't remember anything else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a bronze medal or something in Philadelphia.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, that. I was practically humiliated when I got that medal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that sort of comments on what it meant to you, doesn't it?

PEGGY BACON: No, I've never . . . . Oh, I won a first prize for drypoint but I don't remember when or where.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The prizes never interested you very much because you can't pursue them, you know, if one

wants to submit work to exhibitions and things like that.

PEGGY BACON: Well, I don't know -- I suppose I would have been just as gratified as anybody else. Alex was a great prize winner in those days, in the 1930's. I guess he started winning prizes in the late 1920's. He had tremendous success. Well, I don't know, I always just went my own way. But I don't think I was sufficiently outstanding to win a lot of prizes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You became a member of the National Academy of Design at one point, did you not?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. But I've never gone to a meeting or never paid any dues and I pay no attention to it at all. It was John Taylor Arms who very kindly insisted on my becoming a member. But I was never interested in the National Academy. I think their shows are not very good. Maybe they're different now. I think I am a member but I'm certainly not . . . . If I'm still a member -- I guess I am because I get all these notices from them -- I certainly am not in good standing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know Arms very well?

PEGGY BACON: No. But he was very attentive and kind, took an interest in my work. He was a very kindly person. No, I never knew him well. I just had a very friendly relationship with him. I suppose we must have met at the printer's.

PEGGY BACON: Who was that?

PEGGY BACON: It may have been way back when Peter Platt was alive. Peter Platt was the great printer for artists. He had a workroom down on Murray Street and all the etchers went to him to get their editions printed. He was a wonderful old fellow. Well, if you want to know about him you should read my piece "Etcher's Heaven" in the Yale Review.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One name which I was thinking about last night after yesterday and listening to some of the tapes was Lloyd Goodrich whom we haven't mentioned. Have you known him well? Or for a long time?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, he was at the Art Students League with me at the same time. Yes, indeed. Yes, I knew him slightly for years and years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm always had the feeling that he was a great -- what's the word? -- a great fan of Kenneth Hayes Miller in a way.

PEGGY BACON: That I can't tell you. He never was an artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. But he studied at the League.

PEGGY BACON: Yes, he did. Yes, I remember him at the League. He used to go around with Duf -- Edmund Duffy -- somewhat. But, well, I don't know. I don't think he . . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there any other people who printed editions besides Platt that you've used.

PEGGY BACON: He was the person until his death. Then Charles White took over. He was an excellent printer of the same type only he didn't have as many irons in the fire, really. He didn't print everything and anything the way Peter Platt did. But he was equally expert, equally a professional printer, for artists up to the time of his death. That must have been in the early 1950's. After that I never did any more prints. The last prints I made were in 1953. There was a great gap. I for one did not know where to get things printed. Now, of course, I do know. There is a very good printer or an outfit in Boston who I am told is very good. Also there are people in New York now. But now on account of my eyes I simply couldn't possibly do a plate.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have old plates that you make prints from? Or would you do a whole edition at one time?

PEGGY BACON: In the old days when I went to Peter Platt and when printing was not so expensive I would get him to do a whole edition. When I went to Charles White prices had gone up enormously. You see, I didn't do any prints for some years after Platt died. And then in 1952 and 1953 I did a whole flock; I did thirty-five plates -- five lithographs and thirty drypoints. These were exhibited in my first show at Kraushaar's along with a lot of gouaches that I had made. The prints had gone up so in price, and I was too poor to have a whole edition taken, so I would have eight or ten of each plate done. And whether or not those plates are still any good, I don't know. They are all done up down in the cellar and probably have deteriorated in the years since 1953. I don't know whether prints could be made from them or not. I've never investigated.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So those prints really were made in rather small editions then?

PEGGY BACON: The later ones. The 1953 ones were small editions. I've never numbered my prints. They aren't limited.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What would be the average edition, would you say, over the years? Would it vary a great deal?

PEGGY BACON: It varied a great deal. Of course the drypoints that Peter Platt took -- he would take a perfect edition of a plate really pretty nearly identical as to the result in each case, in each print. But the number depended on whether I liked the plate enough, and if I liked it a lot I'd have a whole edition taken, as much as the plate would stand. Which would be, I would say in those days, maybe there'd be forty or fifty to seventy-five from a drypoint. I never cared too much for my bitten etchings so that I never had as many taken. I don't remember how many. I couldn't tell you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the lithographs?

PEGGY BACON: I suppose George Miller's heirs, whoever they are . . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: His son runs it now.

PEGGY BACON: His son? Yes, I think Antoinette told me -- she wrote me and said she thought probably it was his son who had the place. I imagine he has those plates. They were transferred, you know; I never made a lithograph in stone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did them with tusche on paper and transferred . . . ?

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I did it on very, very thin -- the thinnest bond paper -- and then they were transferred to zinc plates. And I think those are practically unkillable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can do quite large editions, then.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. I think they would probably survive. They're probably there. I've even thought of getting in touch with that place and getting a few more of some of them, like of Heywood Broun. I did a lithograph of Heywood Broun. I have all of my prints now except the ones that I have saved for Sandy. They're in the closet in there. But it isn't the complete collection as the original collection was because I couldn't locate all the things that were lost. I gave Sandy a complete collection all boxed but in their various removals apparently that collection got left behind. It would be worth a small fortune now. But I think that, when his wife packed up, perhaps they had been put away some place in an attic or a room, you know, and were just forgotten.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They might turn up. Your prints were very successful for you, weren't they?

PEGGY BACON: Yes, they were in the old days. And now they are again. When I was at the downtown Gallery Edith Halpert sold my prints very well indeed. They were going fine. Then when I broke with her and went to the Rehn Gallery as I think I've mentioned -- he was not geared to sell prints. Then afterwards I went to the Associated American Artists and I didn't think they were handling them very well. Now Antoinette Kraushaar is selling them very well indeed and has for several years. There's been some kind of mild resurgence of interest in my work in the last few years, too. So that my work has been supporting me entirely, the sale of my work, instead of my earning my living in other ways.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's always nice when the work really does that.

PEGGY BACON: It's a surprise too in your old age when there's a renewal of interest after a long lapse of time when you seem to have been forgotten, well, not entirely forgotten because a few things have always sold, but still far from popular.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's delightful that it's come around again.

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing I was going to ask you about are cats, which have appeared in drawings and prints and things for years nad years and years. Are they just favorite models? Or do you like cats?

PEGGY BACON: I love cats. I was brought up with cats. My parents were very fond of cats. We always had dynasties of cats around home when I was growing up. I think every child loves pets. Cats were the only pets I had. I drew them constantly. I loved them dearly and enjoyed them as personalities and as models.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In looking through books and catalogues I noticed there are some marvelous views of cats which obviously show they were drawn by somebody who had watched them for a long time.

PEGGY BACON: Oh, yes. Well, I grew up with them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you had any particular collectors at any point over the years at various periods that have been important collectors of your work from your point of view?

PEGGY BACON: I don't know. You know, I hardly know who owns my work. I don't ask Antoinette who has bought things. And, unless it happens to be one of those rare occasions when a museum buys a picture, I don't know about it. I could find out. And you could find out from Antoinette who owns my things and if there is a special person who is interested. And I think there are; I think there are a few people who have more or less collected things of mine. But I really don't know who they are.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sometimes, you know, an artist will have one or two people who at a certain point will show a great interest in his work.

PEGGY BACON: I know, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there's such a variety, I guess. Well, are there any kind of incidents or activities that you think are pertinent that we haven't talked about or discussed?

PEGGY BACON: I suppose there must be heaps. But I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You moved up here to Maine -- when? What year was it?

PEGGY BACON: In December 1961.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's been about a dozen years?

PEGGY BACON: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick this place to come to?

PEGGY BACON: That's easy -- Sandy was here, you see. And I knew the area. I had come up before. And back in the 1930's and early 1940's I had been in Ogunquit for three successive summers. And then when Sandy moved up in 1958 or 1959 -- I guess it was 1959 -- I had come up to visit them for a while. Also, I had a little job which came out of the blue simultaneously with Sandy's removal here. Edith Barry, who was actually a patron up here in Kennebunk, had started an art workshop in connection with The Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk. She wrote me . . . . She didn't know that Sandy was here or that he was any relation to me. But she wrote to me in New York asking if I would consider coming up for a couple of months that summer and teach drawing, painting and composition at the Workshop. I wrote back promptly that I would be very glad to indeed because Sandy was here. So I got a room in Kennebunk and taught there. The classes were small. I taught there for two months. And again the next summer I taught for a couple of months. I got another room in a different place in Kennebunk that second summer. And then when Sandy bought the house over here on Paddy's Creek they had moved in and gotten settled. In 1961 I found that I had to get out of my apartment in New York. The landlord told me that he wanted to live in that apartment himself. He had been living in Yonkers and commuting to his business in lower Manhattan for years and years and now he had heart trouble or a stroke or something, and his wife was frail. My apartment was one flight up, quiet, and comfortable and in a building that he owned -- 20 East 13th Street. So I would have to get out when my lease expired. I didn't even have a lease by that time. Just drifted along.

PEGGY BACON: Statutory tenant.

PEGGY BACON: Yes. So I had to get out. I knew very well that I could never possibly find a place that would suit me as well as that in New York for any price that I could pay. Rents had gone up. The rent had been frozen in the early days of rent control so that I paid only $63.25 a month for this perfectly beautiful apartment. It was really beautiful with hardwood floors, fourteen-foot ceilings, a lovely sixteen by twenty-two foot living room, a beautiful big bedroom, a fireplace, plenty of heat and hot water, a very good bathroom, and a real kitchen such as it was, and another room -- a dining room big enough for a bedroom and dining room, and closet space. I could never have found anything to equal that, you know, a beautiful old building, beautiful old rooms for, I suppose, anything less than $200.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Even more now.

PEGGY BACON: And I wouldn't have been able to find anything with the quiet and charm of this place. There was never a sound. It was one of those old buildings that was so solidly built that you didn't hear any sounds from the other apartments in the building, or from the apartment next door which Jose Limon and his wife had. So I decided that, rather than be demoted to something inferior and unacceptable from my point of view, I would move lock, stock and barrel up to Maine and be near Sandy and my grandchildren and my daughter-in-law, of

whom I was then extremely fond. So I did that. In order to finance this removal -- because of course I never had enough money ahead in those days to plunk down $500 to get out of the city with all my belongings -- I went to Weyhe and sold back a few art books from which I realized the $500 necessary. There were seven books, seven volumes, for which I got $500. I regretted the Toulouse-Lautrec book which was in two volumes, a large paperback French book with beautiful, absolutely magnificent reproductions. That was a very valuable book indeed. I can't remember what the other books were but they were very valuable books for which Weyhe paid me . . . . Well, I guess Weyhe was dead by that time but the man in charge paid -- I'm not sure whether Weyhe was dead at that time . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: He died only about two years ago.

PEGGY BACON: Well, then it was he who paid me a good sum, a goodly sum, for these books which had come from him originally. Which was fine. So I got up here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *May 19, 2003*