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Oral history interview with William Barrow Floyd, 1981 July 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with William Barrow Floyd on July 28, 1981. The interview took place in Lexington, Kentucky, and was conducted by Estill Curtis Pennington for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: This is Buck Pennington of the Archives of American Art, and interviewing William Barrow Floyd in Lexington, Kentucky, today, July 28, 1981. Let's start by talking about your background, Bill. You are a Kentuckian. You grew up in Lexington?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: Yes. Yes, I was born in Lexington and grew up here, and went to private schools here until I went away to boarding school at Carver Military Academy, and then later graduated from the department of art and archaeology at Princeton, and have done subsequent graduate work at the University of Kentucky, and at George Washington University.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: What sparked your first interest in art? When did you first become interested in art and art historical concerns?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: That is rather hard to pinpoint without thinking of it very carefully. I would say, probably, when I was just barely eight years old, and my grandmother took me to her father's home in Louisiana, which was one of the famous houses of the South, Afton Villa, and I was so intrigued by that house and its grounds that it immediately started me into research. I started writing, at the age of eight, to my grandmother's first cousin, who was the family historian, who was, at that time, I think, in her 70s. I started collecting family pictures and information, and then—perhaps that is the beginning of my interest in architecture and things of beauty, and active interest in history.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: What um—who were some of the earliest artists and figures that you were interested in? [00:02:03] You had mentioned to me, in earlier conversations, Ferris. But who were some of the other earlier figures you were interested in?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: Well again, as a child, I was very interested in American history, and particularly George Washington, who was, in my mind's eye, a hero in the then-concept of heroes, which no longer seems to exist in America. But because of my interest in Washington, I naturally became interested in pictures of him. So obviously, Gilbert Stuart was a name that I learned early, as the [Charles Willson] Peales, and other lesser-known artists who painted Washington. And being interested in American social history, the Ferris paintings of American history were fascinating to me. And when I was nine or 10, I was taken—it was in the middle of World War II—I was taken to Washington to go to see Mount Vernon, and to see the Ferris pictures. We had to get special permission for a reservation of the Willard Hotel, because that was taken over by the army, but my father knew the manager. So my mother and I went up, and it was a lovely experience to go to Mount Vernon at that time, because there were no tourists there. It was just as though the Washingtons had walked out and we had walked in. So I had a great experience spending the day there, and then visiting the curatorial offices of the Smithsonian. I had corresponded previously with a Mr. Graff [ph], who was in charge of the Ferris paintings at the Smithsonian, and went to see him, and was deeply interested in them. Later on, as time went on, I became interested in artists that had worked in Kentucky and were portraitists, primarily, such as Matthew Jouett and Joseph Bush. [00:04:07] Particularly, Bush interested me, because he had painted a great many members of my family in the past. He, I recognized, was one of Kentucky's most important artists, who had more or less been forgotten.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: So you could say, then, that the ambience and the era of the late 18th and early 19th centuries are the times that have appealed the strongest to you, both for reasons of family history and your own personal aesthetics?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I would say that's largely true. I wouldn't say just the late 18th century. I would say, perhaps, the earlier part of the 18th century, and also, again, going back to childhood, I was very much interested in the settlement of Plymouth, and the pilgrims, and that whole milieu. So I would say early American history, up until the time of the Reconstruction. That has been my greatest interest.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: I understand that you were working on your first book as early as 19, working on researching it and writing it. What was this—what did this concern? Bill Seale has said that this work was one of the most precocious and fine undertakings of research by anyone that age that he has ever seen. What was the work on?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: Well, I suppose you mean the book I wrote on the Barrow family, which is called *The Barrow Family of Old Louisiana*, but that was started when I was eight, literally. That's when the research began, rather than 19. I mean, it was not, obviously, from eight on, a yearly compendium of vast notes, but I did a tremendous amount of research in collecting of documents, papers, pictures, locating pieces of furniture and paintings, and portraits, and things that had been in the family, literally from that time of eight, when I went to the ancestral plantation home. [00:06:15] It intrigued me, the whole ambience of that, and the world of which that was a part. So that opened many doors to me, and it interested me. And architecture—eventually, at Princeton, I wrote my thesis on the architecture of West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, of which—or where Afton Villa was located, and where so many of the Barrow family homes were. So, literally, that first trip sort of set the pace for a number of interests that later developed into the decorative arts, into architectural history, the fine arts as well. But the book on the Barrow family was published in 1963. The business of putting it all together was primarily the work of a year or two years prior to that, but I had been assembling the material, literally, since the age of eight.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: When did you begin your research and your work on the Jouett, Bush, and Frazer book, and why did these particular artists appeal to you?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I started the work on Jouett, Bush, and Frazer as a master's thesis at the University of Kentucky, being interested in early Kentucky painting, and realizing that there was a tremendous gap in the history of Kentucky art. In fact, there was practically nothing written. A few monographs, and a few published things, but most of it was related to the historical ambience of painting, rather than any artistic interpretation and approach to it. [00:08:12] There was no art history involved. There was pure history. And so this was a wide-open field. That's, as a master's thesis, how I got started on these artists, and they were chosen because these were the artists that were the most noted early painters of Kentucky. I believe it was Lewis Collins who said that Joseph Bush probably regarded as the second most important painter in early Kentucky. Well, when I was growing up, the only artist you ever heard of were Matthew Jouett and Oliver Frazer, and I think that's because they both left descendants, they both were, more or less, related to Central Kentucky. They had lived here. Joseph Bush was here part of the time, but he was a bachelor. He had no family, or at least no descendants The verbal tradition about Bush's work had died down very rapidly. Well, he painted at least seven members of the Woolfolk family, of my family, and I first became knowledgeable about him from these very handsome family portraits. Then when I realized that he was considered the most important outside of Jouett in his lifetime by the early historian, Collins, I began to look into his works. No one had done much of anything on him previously. Of course, Oliver Frazer was a Lexington artist, and had done a great many Central Kentucky people, so he was a logical person to pick as one of the three. [00:10:00] They were the three major artists who made a living in Kentucky prior to the Civil War, though both Jouett and Bush painted extensively in the South, in the deeper South.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: So then, you would say that you feel they occupied a more unique place in our Kentucky art than other painters of the same period? People like, say, Morgan or Moise, or some of the other itinerants working in Kentucky at the time.

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I'm not sure that "unique" is the right word for it, but I think that they were the most professionally gifted, the most proficient. They were the Gilbert Stuarts and Thomas Sullys of the Upper South, or the New Midwest, whatever you want to call it, they were, in a sense, the fashionable painters of the day, and many of the people you mentioned, such as Moise and Fowler, were only itinerants. They came through here frequently in the summers. There were people like Louis Morgan, who came here and lived for a while, but never really distinguished himself as an artist. There was a host of rather interesting artists, such as Chester Harding, who really began his career here as a painter, and his brother, Horace Harding, who did some interesting works, but they did not remain in Kentucky for very long periods of time. Some of them came back at later dates on return trips. Some of them were friends of the leading local artists. But the people who really made up the artistic climate of the day were these artists, Jouett, Bush, and Frazer. Now, there were others—for instance, Asa Park, who is a man of above-average talent, but not greatness, who lived and worked here from the second decade of the 19th century, until he died in, I think, 1827, the same year as Jouett did. [00:12:12] Not much is known about him. He was never considered, locally, to be as fine as Jouett. And of course, probably the most interesting native talent, and perhaps the most cosmopolitan, and maybe the best artist of all, was William Edward West, who was born in Lexington in 1788, the same year that Jouett was born in Mercer County. But so little of his professional life was spent in Kentucky, that he is largely forgotten, except to scholars, to be a Kentuckian. It's very much sort of the situation that you find with Abraham Lincoln, who was a native Kentuckian, but spent very little of his life here, particularly in his maturity. And that is the story with William Edward West. But he is a great artist, and someone that I have worked on in the past, and hope to do more with as time goes

on.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: What special problems did these painters face in the work that they were doing, and by what process did they go about their work? Did they travel from house to house? Did they set up studios? Did they work out of backrooms in shops, or what was the situation with these early Kentucky portrait painters?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: That is almost as diverse as the number of artists that were here. In terms of Jouett, and of Joseph Bush—well, let's just stay with Jouett for a moment. He had a studio in Lexington from 1815 until 1827, when he died. [00:14:00] And throughout approximately 10 of those years, he went to the Deep South every winter to paint there. So he maintained a studio in Lexington, but when he got very cold here—and probably was almost impossible to paint because of the coldness—he would go down to the South. He painted in Natchez, and in New Orleans, and, it appears, probably went to some of the plantations along the way to paint families. This was true of Joseph Bush as well. Bush did visit plantations. He went every year, or at least a great many years, to Natchez, to New Orleans. He and Jouett, I think, are both listed in advertisements in the newspapers as having been there. Oliver Frazer is the one of the three artists I wrote about who did not travel at all. He remained in Lexington always. He did not leave this area, professionally. Now, he did study abroad for four years, which neither Jouett nor Bush did. But he did not paint outside of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In the case of Joseph Bush, for instance, my great-great-great-grandparents, Colonel and Mrs. Joseph H. Woolfolk, who lived in Woodford County at Oak Hill, had him come there and stay for a number of months while he was painting their portraits, and those of several of their children. So this is a documented example of his visiting for a long time at a Kentucky farm, and painting the family. There are, of course, innumerable stories of itinerant artists going from house to house and painting families, and it may be true. [00:16:04] There are those tales, for instance, that Samuel Dearborn, um—is it Dearborn? What is his name?

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Woodson Price?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: No, no. Samuel, um—maybe it is Dearborn. I'm not sure of that—went there, riding a mule, and had an assistant behind him to paint in the backgrounds. But that's probably apocryphal, but that is the story that had passed down in the Peter family. While he was there, at Winton [ph], he executed a number of pictures of the family. So the artists, I think, did here, very much, what they would anyplace. They established studios, and then, if business was not good, they occasionally took trips to go elsewhere. Joseph Bush had studios in a number of places. He was in Lexington at one time, in Louisville at one time, in Frankfort. But Frazer and Jouett maintained studios here, at their homes, primarily. I think Jouett did have some studios in town, but he also painted at home, and Oliver Frazer seemed to paint at home most of the time as well.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Let's talk a little bit about the nature of portraiture itself. Did portraiture attain a cultural popularity as a status symbol for the family, as well as for a record of their existence? And were these early Kentuckians interested in the art of portraiture as such? What was the role that portraiture was playing in the social climate, in the social—in terms of social history in this region at that time?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: It's really hard to address that accurately without doing a lot of study to document it. [00:18:05] But my impression would be that portraiture played the same role here that it did most places in the world. First, I think that, particularly in the very early days, it was primarily used to preserve likenesses of family members. I think as time went on, and there were better portraitists, people may have wanted more ambitious pictures to decorate their walls, but the truth is that very few Kentucky portraits are elaborate portraits. They do not, in any way, approximate the Gainsborough/Reynolds tradition of the monumental, state-type of portrait. I think that may be a clue to you that the majority of pictures that were done in Kentucky were bust portraits, very simple, unembellished, or likenesses and otherwise, and not enormous. Twenty-five by about thirty was the usual size. There were a few exceptions to this, but I think you can realize that this type of a product is more related to people wanting good, life-like images on their walls than it is for some sort of aristocratic pretentiousness.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: I wonder if you would be so kind as to just share with me today some of your impressions on Matthew Harris Jouett, and why Jouett appeals to you as an artist, because you have done so much work with Jouett. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about Jouett's style and your response to him. [00:20:00]

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: Jouett appeals to me as an artist because he represents, I think, the crystallization of good portraiture in the style of Gilbert Stuart, who was his master, and who claimed that Jouett was his favorite pupil. Therefore, this epitomizes that Boston artist tradition having been spread to the New South. It's a very interesting phenomenon. And the very best of Jouett's portraits can compare very favorably to the lesser paintings of Stuart, the bust portraits. And I don't mean by that less important artistically, but less ambitious compositions, say. Jouett never did anything such as *The Skater* that Stuart did. But some of Jouett's pictures are very fine, and they do reflect the best of Stuart's training. As a colorist, he is good. He models well. He is a good artist. There are certain things that could be taken to task, I suppose, depending upon one's personal

interpretation of the artist. I think as a historical phenomenon, he is very interesting. A boy who is born in a log cabin in 1788, in Mercer County, who has a strong desire to paint portraits, and probably other things. He did a few history works, but they never got anyplace. There was no market for history painting, or for landscape painting, in Kentucky. But a boy who grows up in a log cabin, who is trained for law, who is a good student, who does well at that, but still goes back to his original love, which is painting, and then takes himself to the best painter in America at that time, Gilbert Stuart, and studies under him. [00:22:13] This is indicative of a very interesting impulse and dedication, which is hard to associate with a frontier. He was growing up in an era where Indians were lurking around the houses and cabins, and there were Indian fights and massacres. He served in the War of 1812. He was very much a part of the time and the place of Kentucky, and yet he also rose above it with his interesting, creative instinct and impulse. He then went and studied with the best person he could find. He obviously made a good impression upon Stuart, who was a very crusty old gentleman, but did say that Jouett was his favorite pupil. That was acknowledged by a number of 19th-century artists, who knew both Jouett and Stuart. So I think Jouett is an interesting phenomenon, as well as a gifted painter. It's a great pity he died at the age of 39. He probably would have developed into some very interesting, new types of style, perhaps even innovative work. We don't know that. But there are some differences in his later works from the earlier ones that show a growing maturity in his palette, particularly, and in his composition, to some degree.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: What do you think that John Neagle meant in his letter to John Sartain in Philadelphia, when he wrote back and said that Jouett and Frazer are paying portraits [inaudible] fashion? [00:24:01]

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: Well, I don't know. I've never heard that—that quotation. I know that when Neagle came to Kentucky in 1818, he said he came to Lexington and he heard there were two portraitists. And when he went to see the works of Jouett, he realized that he could never remain here, that Jouett was by far and away the best artist around, and probably better than Neagle, so he left and went on to New Orleans. The quotation about Jouett and Frazer, I wonder if that's correct, because Jouett and Frazer's professional careers really did not overlap, so I don't think Neagle could have been referring in just that way.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Before we leave this aspect of your career, would you make a general comment on the work which remains to be done in early Kentucky art historiography, and what you would suggest needs to be further researched for the research interest in this area?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I think that there are a great many things that could be written about early Kentucky art. There are a number of things that could be looked into as to why there was such a demand for portraiture. There are a great many artists that are relatively unknown, that need more work done about them, such as Thomas Jefferson Wright, or even William Edward West, whom I mentioned earlier, who is a great artist, who's not primarily related to Kentucky in his output, because he left here before much of his work was done, but who did fine paintings in London, in Italy, in New York, Baltimore, Tennessee, all over the country. [00:26:11] He's one of the most interesting artists of the 19th century in America. Then there are a host of primitives, such as Patrick Henry Davenport, and there are the itinerants, like Louis Morgan. There is Jouett's student, John Grimes, and a host of other people who worked here, who need some research. None of them really were great innovators, none of them changed the tenor of American art, but many of them are quite competent, and comparable to, if not better than, a great number of the New England artists, who are constantly being dredged up and put before the eyes of the public. So I think there's a lot to do. Then I think you can deal with horse and animal painting, because we had Edward Troye working here. There is not much of a landscape tradition in early Kentucky art. There is a little, and there is more of it at the end of the 19th, and in the beginning of the 20th century, which could be developed. There are many areas that you could look into. There's not much of a still life school, and what we have in still life is, again, related to the end of the 19th and the 20th century. But there is still a great deal to be done in the history of painting in Kentucky, and this apparently was a rather fertile field for artists, because so many worked here. And that has been well-documented in Mrs. Wade Hampton Whitley's wonderful book on antebellum Kentucky portraiture, which is a landmark in its own right. [00:28:04] A number of states have put out books, but none of them with the amount of research that she put into hers. And the listing in that book of artists who worked in Kentucky or were natives of Kentucky is remarkable. So there's plenty of work to be done, but none of it is going to be earth-shattering, and this is the sort of research that many art historians don't want to undertake, because they don't feel they can build their reputations by so doing. But I feel that, still, the field is quite open for further investigation.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Shifting our focus, let's talk about what you do now. What is the proper title of your position as we sit here in your office, and what responsibilities are involved?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: My title is curator of historic properties for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and I am called, generally, the state curator. This is a job which I have had since 1975, which, when I was appointed by the then-governor Julian Carroll, I think mainly based upon the work that I had done in supervising the restoration and the furnishing of the Old State Capitol and the Old State Capitol annex. When the job of state curator was instituted, it was primarily set up to advise the governor and secretary of finance on what to do

regarding various properties that came under their jurisdiction, properties that might be given to the state, properties that needed review considering—or concerning their status. [00:30:00] Also, I was to be in charge of the inventorying of furnishings in the Governor's Mansion and the Lieutenant Governor's Mansion, and to be available to upgrade all the historic properties owned by the state of Kentucky, when it was necessary to restore them, to refurnish them, to take care of them. There had been no attempt, previously, to do any of this, and much of Kentucky's artistic and architectural heritage has been badly abused. So this was the idea, to have somebody who had professional training in charge of various historic properties. If something had to be done to them, that he could make those recommendations and deal with these matters, either architecturally or in terms of the furnishings and the decorative arts. And during the Carroll administration, I did supervise and plan a complete interior restoration of My Old Kentucky Home at Bardstown, and adaptive use for the Vest-Lindsey House in Frankfort, and also furnishing and adaptive use of the little Henry Clay Law Office in Lexington; and in addition to that, have done tremendous amounts of consultation on a number of buildings that have been state-owned, not state-owned, such as the Green County courthouse, or the Orlando Brown House in Frankfort, or Irvington, or what have you. Some of this has been informal consultation. Some of it has been more professionally received than others.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Tell me about your office here, and its history, and the restoration that you supervised here. [00:32:07] This was one of Henry Clay's law offices, correct?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: That is the story. I do not really know the truth of the Henry Clay Law Office's history. Apparently, the property was owned by Henry Clay. The building, I had nothing to do with in terms of restoration. It was literally reconstructed under the aegis of the Blue Grass Trust during the Nunn administration, I believe. And practically nothing of the structure itself dates back to the time of Henry Clay. But it had been used, unsuccessfully, as a tourist attraction, an office for the chamber of commerce. It was vacant for a long time, and it became a problem. The state didn't know what to do with it. So I was asked, several years ago, if I would be willing to put my office here, to have a use for the building, and I said yes, it would be fine. And so then I furnished it, had it painted in period colors, acquired four of Henry Clay's chairs, and a sofa of his that is said to have been in his office in Washington when he was in the senate, and also acquired appropriate engravings and memorabilia of Henry Clay, and yet adapted the little structure so it could be used for a contemporary office.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Talk to me some about your other major restoration projects and the problems that you were involved with there. [00:34:01] You might start out at the state house, and describe for me your concept for the two front rooms there, and your choice of furnishings and carpets and colors for those rooms, how you went about that.

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: When we get on the subject of the Old State Capitol, that is so enormous that I don't even know how to begin. Basically, my concept with the whole project was to take the building back to what it had been like in its heyday, and to the appearance that it would have had as Gideon Shryock planned and executed it. Therefore, the front two rooms of the state house, as well as all the other rooms, were researched for their original colors, and they are all there. We took 45 to 50 chips of paint off the remaining woodwork and plaster walls, and had them analyzed in Baltimore, and got the original colors, and had them all put back. So what you see in the state house are the wonderful colors that Gideon Shryock envisioned and had put there. The concept of the furnishing of the two rooms downstairs on either side of the vestibule—one was known as the East Committee Room, and one the West. I decided that in the East Committee Room, we would furnish it with the furnishings of the period when the building was finished, which was 1830, so those are primarily Kentucky furnishings of that period, late Sheraton and early Empire. [00:36:00] Then, in the West Committee Room, there is Victorian furnishing, to show the other stylistic period during which the capitol was in use. The capitol was in use as a capitol from 1830 until 19[0]9. Of course, Queen Victoria died, I think, in 19[0]3. So it primarily was a building used during the Victorian period, so I tried to capture the two periods of its use in the furnishings. This was also done in the senate and the house. The senate is furnished according to descriptions, very specific descriptions, that we found in early senate journal, of the furniture that was there. None of the original furniture remained. But by studying, at the Smithsonian, and looking at examples of early furnishings in the U.S. Capitol, we were able to come up with a composite type of desk and chair that is almost certain to be identical to what was in the state house in 1830. For instance, there was a mention that the chairs were all covered in horse hair. Well, we did this. We had them covered in horse hair, which was imported from England. The furniture in the house of representatives, when you consider that that room was used primarily during the Victorian period—we had a photograph showing the last session of the legislature, showing the types of desks and chairs they had. We had one or two of those desks, and we had one or two of the chairs. [00:38:00] I decided it would be best to furnish that room in what we knew was there. There would be no guess at all. So we reproduced the desks and chairs that were seen in photographs and that we had examples of, and that were used in that room from roughly right after the Civil War until 19[0]9. The whole capitol is, architecturally, taken back to the period of its inception and Gideon Shryock's architectural achievement, and the colors are. The carpets were chosen to harmonize with the original architectural concept. They were made in England, out of Wilton carpeting, which was the finest type of carpet that was then available. They were made in period designs and colors. Most of them have a little bit of my own interpretation put in there. We took period designs and adapted them, either

color-wise, or reduced them. For instance, there was a problem, how do you put one solid carpet in a stair, a rotunda stair hall, a senate, a house, another small chamber nearby, that will harmonize with walls that are different in every room, with different woodwork? And this sort of thing I had to resolve, picking period colors and period designs. [00:40:00]

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ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: When you were working at My Old Kentucky Home, you did have to work with former objects that were already there. And did this create problems for you?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: First, let me backtrack a little bit to the Old Capitol, because the approach that I used at My Old Kentucky Home is the same as was used at the Old Capitol, which is to do as much research as possible before coming to any conclusions about how you are going to furnish the buildings. A tremendous amount of research was done on the Old Capitol. We read every senate and house journal, all the newspapers of the period, any published or unpublished documents that might relate to the period in which the capitol was built. The same thing was done with Federal Hill, which is more popularly known today as My Old Kentucky Home. I spent roughly a year researching all available information before coming up with a conclusion as to how to furnish the house. I also used the services of four very fine, nationally known consultants: Dick Hagen [ph], Jim Coger [ph], and Pete Peterson of the National Park Service, and his assistant. Two of those men are now dead. And I consulted with all of them before I made a final decision on what to do with My Old Kentucky Home. There was something of a problem there, because there had been a fire in 1840. The house was finished in 1812. [00:02:00] It was furnished with, obviously, items of that period, primarily, which, in Kentucky at that time, were Sheraton, Phyfe inspiration, a few Hepplewhite pieces, things of this sort. But in 1840, a fire took place in the house, which destroyed a third floor and did a considerable amount of damage. And a building contract remains which gives evidence that Judge Rowan, who had built the house originally, was now having the repairs made, and he instructed his contractor to replace everything just as it had been done originally. But he bought a considerable amount of furniture in 1840, which was late Empire, and it's rather heavy. And one was faced with a decision, are you going to use the furniture which the original builder lived with, even though it is not what he had in there when he first walked through the doors, or are you going to discard it? I felt very strongly, since this house had been built and lived in by three generations of the Rowan family, that anything that related to them, and to the original owner, should be retained. So that is what is done. And actually, the house is a blend of objects that were used by three generations of the family. However, to make it a little more easily interpretable, the front hall, which is the visitor's first approach to the house, and runs the length of the house, is primarily furnished with Federal furniture, which is compatible with the architectural style of the house. This is also true in the front, formal parlor. But the library behind it is furnished in the items of the 1840 refurnishing, and the period when John Rowan Jr. had taken over in the house. [00:04:10] So you can actually see two periods and two generations of family furnishings by walking from one room into another. And on the second floor, there is a Victorian bedroom, which has furniture which seems to have belonged to Mrs. John Rowan Jr., and was probably acquired shortly before the Civil War. So here, we have a house that represents several generations of furnishings. However, we did not use—and didn't have any left, I'm glad to say—any of the wicker, the golden oak, the plumes, and fans, and things of this sort, which were part of the equipage of the house when it was turned over to the state in 1922.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: At the current time, I believe you're involved in a project on the Governor's Mansion in Frankfort. Isn't this true? And I wonder, what is the motive and scope for the current project at the Governor's Mansion? And could you share with me some of the history of that house, which I see as sort of a very, very Beaux Arts, Colonial Revival mansion, in the spirit of the late 19th century? But I wonder if you could share with me some of your thoughts on the motive and scope of the current project.

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I actually have very little to do with the current refurbishing of the Governor's Mansion. I work as a sometime-consultant, and I do day-by-day work regarding the furnishings, I make recommendations. I have purchased a few items for the mansion in the past, including an appropriate French bedroom set that had belonged to James Ben Ali Haggin at Elmendorf, and is the right type of furniture for this house, and was used in Kentucky at the same period that the mansion evolved, which was in 1914. [00:06:24] I was also able to acquire a pair of Chaffeau [ph] candelabra that had belonged to Governor Isaac Shelby, and they seem particularly fitting for a governor's mansion. The actual work of furnishing, the scheme of furnishing the mansion, is being handled by the governor's wife, Phyllis George Brown, and with the assistance of William Seale of Alexandria, Virginia, and the input of several other people. I cannot, therefore, give a very explicit idea of what those furnishings are going to be like, because I am not supervising that. I'm doing more the day-by-day work of recording purchases, making recommendations, handling routine matters. The building itself was designed by a Mr. Weber, an architect of Northern Kentucky. It was inspired by the Petit Trianon at Versailles, at least the exterior. It is a nice, more or less, Beaux Arts type of approach to a large, official home. Of course, it's not large by the standards of its day. [00:08:00] Beyond that, I can't tell you a great deal about how it is going to be refurbished.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: Again, let's shift our focus and discuss, generally discuss, the nature of art in the South. Do you feel that it has been overlooked by art historians? And what about the *Painting in the South* show? Do you feel that there is a closer relationship between the decorative arts and painting in the South than elsewhere, that objects were created for houses to evoke a certain mood? And why hasn't southern painting and southern art been recognized, especially southern contributions in the decorative arts, been recognized, outside the work at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, by the nation as a whole?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: There are so many questions there that I don't really know how to begin. In the overview, I suppose, southern art, architecture, the fine arts, and the decorative arts have been neglected because nobody has done much research in them. There have been no great research centers in the South to deal with this. And since the time of Reconstruction, until very recently, there was such poverty in the South, and such difficulty in just surviving, that there was little of a subjective nature done about the culture and the arts of this region. Maybe "subjective" is not right. Maybe "investigative" is a better word. [00:10:00] People in the South simply took for granted what they had. They often worshipped it, because they had nothing else. They looked to the past because the present was bleak. In recent years, money has come into the South, but very strangely, very little of it is devoted to very fine scholarship regarding the contribution. I feel the South has made a great contribution in American architecture and art. Interestingly enough, many of the top American artists of the 19th century began their careers in the South. They were patronized by Southerners. John Vanderlyn, Samuel F.B. Morse, Thomas Sully, and quite a few others [inaudible] and innumerable other people. The South was much less populated. It had fewer cities. It had fewer centers in the antebellum days, when there was an economy that would support the arts. Therefore, many things that were used and made in the South were brought in from elsewhere, for the very obvious reasons. I think that, in recent years, and perhaps throughout this century, there have been very few apologists for the South in the arts, and therefore there has come to be a superior attitude expressed by those who have been trained primarily in New England and in the North, who really have not known what was in the South—have not seen it, have not understood it, and have often come up with biased attitudes about the southern contribution. [00:12:01] Or, more than that, have overlooked it entirely. It's an infinitely more complex matter than just these few random thoughts off the top of my hat. But I do feel that the contribution of the South is important in the development of the American arts. Very important when you consider that the first real civilization, English-speaking civilization in America, began in Virginia, 13 years before the pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock. So the beginnings of architecture, and of art, are all related to Virginia, and to the South, and the southern tradition. Strangely enough, there seems very little interest right now in supporting Southerners who have a knowledge of this sort of thing, to encourage them to promulgate and to research the truth about its background. And invariably, if a Southern job of distinction becomes available, it is given to somebody from New England or the West Coast or a foreign nation, rather than to a native son, who has a real comprehension and understanding of what the South's artistic background is. And also, many of the Southerners who are interested in the arts have been educated elsewhere, because there have been very few universities or centers where you could learn about these things. And even the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, which has done a very fine job, has such an early cut-off date that a great many of the most important painters and styles of furniture and architecture are not dealt with at all, by cutting off, I think, at the year 1825. [00:14:04] And this is a sad thing, because there has been, until very recent years, such a hatred for all things Victorian, in the rather esoteric approach of many students throughout the nation, that it became fashionable to quit studying anything that felt outside the realm of the Federal or early Empire period. That, obviously, is changing now. It's sad in the sense that, for instance, some of the greatest cabinetwork ever done in America was done in New Orleans, by French cabinetmakers who emigrated there, and yet practically nothing is known about them. Interestingly enough, the American Museum at Bath has a superb Millard rosewood bedroom set shown there, but Winterthur would not think of degrading its rooms with a very handsome bedroom set of this sort. It's the interesting view of what our culture and our heritage is, and I think that we have been limited in this country, North and South, in leaving out a great many important movements in the arts, both decorative and fine, that hopefully, someday, will come to be appreciated.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: How do you feel—this is going to wrap things up now—how do you feel about the division of art into categories such as folk, and primitive, in that this seems to be a particular Kentucky problem, this division between a folk art and a high style, and a Central Kentucky/Eastern Kentucky split? [00:16:11] Are people too patronizing of so-called folk art, while ignoring important 19th-century individuals?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I personally am not aware of a great cleavage between the folk art and the higher style, or trained, professional artists who have worked in Kentucky. I see no problem in appreciating the two, working side by side, as they did, coexisting peacefully, so it would seem. Folk art, less trained artists, have worked in all parts of the country, along with the very experienced and professional ones. I imagine economics had a lot to do with much of this. A less trained artist charged less money for his pictures. People who wanted a family portrait, or a landscape, and couldn't afford Thomas Sully, or John Neagle, would go and pay Edward Hicks to do something for them. In time, some of these artists developed highly individualistic styles, such as Hicks. They probably commanded reasonably competitive prices for their works. But I don't find there's ever been a great cleavage in Kentucky between the folk art and the more professional type of art. I think we find, in the

study of portraiture, that a number of prominent families had their pictures painted by itinerants, or very untutored artists. [00:18:09] That was, simply, probably because the artist showed up at their doorstep and said, "I'm here, and I'll paint your portraits." And if you consider the difficulty in the past of people sitting to artists, particularly in rural areas, they couldn't, because of the limitations of horse-drawn vehicles or horses themselves, go back and forth long distances to sit for hours to an artist, it was much easier to have the artist come to them. And if there was a young family of many children, and an artist came up to the farm, then it was convenient to have that family painted by the man who was there. And of course, if you lived in a town where an artist had a studio, you could go to him more frequently for sittings. But I don't find any conflict between the folk art and the more sophisticated art of early Kentucky, and I see no problem in trying to define it, because sometimes a folk artist becomes highly skilled, and almost professional, before his career ends.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: What about Edgar Tolson?

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: I don't know enough to say one way or the other. What were you referring to about that? I think that, nationally, there is a tremendous concern for the primitive, the untutored, the basic in the arts of today. And so naturally, in Kentucky, there would be this same interest and approach reflected. [00:20:04] However, in the cultural development of the state, Eastern Kentucky had no influence at all. Very few people from that area were involved in any way with the arts, and if they were, they came to Central Kentucky to have a picture painted, or perhaps a piece of furniture bought or made. I suppose there were a few cabinetmakers in the mountains, but primarily, the mountain heritage, which is very interesting in its own right, certainly did not produce anything in a sophisticated artistic sense. There is a great concern in today's world for things less sophisticated, for crafts, and there certainly were these promulgated in Eastern Kentucky. But I don't think that if you're studying the development of art in Kentucky that what happened in the mountains had much influence on the rest of the state, or was even known by people elsewhere in the state, and today, it is not much known.

ESTILL CURTIS PENNINGTON: To conclude, I wonder if you would just make some general remarks to me on your feelings about your career and what you enjoyed, and the future that you see for a career in the arts in this part of the country right now.

WILLIAM BARROW FLOYD: My career has been extremely diverse. I have done what needed to be done, when it was needed. That has been particularly true of the past 10 years, when I have worked with the state of Kentucky, first as a consultant for the restoration of the Old Capitol in the fall of 1971. [00:22:05] And ever since that time, I have worked with Kentucky's historic buildings and/or arts. So that will be 10 years in this broad field as of this coming October, 1981. What I have found is that, up to this point, there has been very little opportunity for enthusiastic support of anything done professionally in the arts in Kentucky. We have, really, only one major art museum in the entire commonwealth, which is depressing when one considers that Kentucky is the 15th state in the nation, and is part of the first state. We have an interesting background, historically. We have had very vital people shape our history. We have had some very interesting artists, and there is much to be proud of in this area. And yet, somehow, we have moved very slowly in the realm of the arts, particularly the fine arts. Some steps have been made in preservation. A great many things have been left undone that needed to be done. During the past year and a half, due to severe budget cutbacks in state government, almost all state work in preservation has been cut out, and it looks very uncertain as to what the future is going to be in the arts in Kentucky. [00:24:10] The few agencies at the state level that have been devoted to the arts in the past have had their numbers drastically cut. The direction, at this particular time, is uncertain. The University of Kentucky has established an art museum, and it's my sincere hope that this may be able to develop a good collection for Central Kentucky, because Central Kentucky, once known as the Athens of the West, has no art museum. It's hard to believe that Lexington, which is one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, has no real art center of any importance. What will happen is anybody's guess. The economy of this particular time does not encourage one, because so much in the realm of art and preservation has been related to federal and state funding, and we're in a period now where this is being cut back drastically. And the idea of private support for the arts has dwindled considerably. So I don't know what to anticipate for the future. There is a lot that needs to be done. There are people who are hungry to be fed with more than they are given, which is practically nothing. There are young people who have been trained in history and the arts, and preservation in Kentucky, who would like to make this a career, who can find no openings in Kentucky. [00:26:06] They come to me frequently, asking about jobs, and there aren't any. One doesn't want to be a prophet of doom. On the other hand, if you review what has happened up to this point, you cannot feel that even the tip of the iceberg has been touched in the arts in this state. And many of the buildings that are owned by the state, historic properties, are improperly furnished, improperly interpreted. This is true of privately-owned museum houses as well. There is no proper inventory of what is in the buildings, no understanding of what is there in terms of furnishings, whether it be a chair, a piece of silver, or a painting, and apparently not a great deal of interest in trying to find out the truth about these things. So it's hard to know. On the other hand, the state did fund the restoration of the Old Capitol, and My Old Kentucky Home has been restored according to a specific philosophy that has generally received commendation. So we do have a few places that have been thoroughly researched and presented to the public, and which are apparently enjoyed, though, frequently, the interpretation is not presented in a way that makes people understand fully the significance of what they are seeing. [00:28:11] So I would say, in conclusion, that there is

plenty that needs to be done in Kentucky. How soon it will get done is a matter of debate and question.

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