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Oral history interview with Aileen O.
Vanderbilt Webb, 1970 May 7-June 9

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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Aileen Osborn Vanderbilt Webb on May 7 and June 9, 1970. The interview took place at her apartment, 340 East 72nd Street, New York City, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. 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. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

Interview

[00:00:05.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay, it's May 7th, I think, right?

[00:00:08.76]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:00:09.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Paul Cummings talking to Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb in her apartment. Could you give me just some family background about brothers and sisters and things? You were born in Garrison, New York.

[00:00:24.32]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, my father and mother were Mr. And Mrs. William Church Osborn, O-S-B-O-R-N. And they both were very active in good works of one kind or another. My father was President of the Children's Aid Society for, I think, 34 or 35 years or more. And on the board of The Ruptured and Crippled for a great many years, and connected with politics. My grandmother started the first school of nursing in this country at Bellevue. And she was the first president. My mother was president of the Board of Managers for 34 years. And I've been on the board for a great many years, though not active as she was.

[00:01:14.78]

I had three brothers: Frederick Osborn, Earl Osborn, Bill Osborn. And I was the only girl. I was brought up in private school in New York, Miss Chapin's. I spent my twelfth-grade year in Paris, in school. And as always, when I was growing up, I've done very mediocre painting, but have used my hands, and been interested in it. My father never painted at all, but was very interested in painting, and acquired a great many very beautiful Impressionist paintings, two of which I have, and my brothers each have one, and the rest are at the Metropolitan Museum.

[00:02:05.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you grow up in Garrison, or was it in New York City?

[00:02:08.56]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, we grew up in Garrison over weekends and in the summer, and then went to school in New York.

[00:02:18.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like being one girl with all the boys?

[00:02:21.00]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, it never worried me very much. Now I have one son who has five boys and one girl so that—

[00:02:28.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: She's going through it, too.

[00:02:29.37]

AILEEN WEBB: She's really going to be in trouble.

[00:02:32.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Were they older than you or younger than you?

[00:02:36.66]

AILEEN WEBB: My brothers?

[00:02:37.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:02:37.56]

AILEEN WEBB: One was older, Frederick Osborn, who was Head of the Information Education for the Army during the war, a General. And the other two—we're very close [in age -Ed.]. The other two were younger.

[00:02:53.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you went to Paris then really rather young.

[00:02:56.74]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I was seventeen, and went to a finishing school in Paris, as it was called in those days, and learned very little, perfected my French, and saw a great deal of theater and opera. But mental training wasn't all that it might have been.

[00:03:17.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, how did you like Paris at that time? That was—

[00:03:22.05]

AILEEN WEBB: That is 1910.

[00:03:23.53]

PAUL CUMMINGS: 1910.

[00:03:24.72]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think you'd like Paris in 1910 and in 1970.

[00:03:30.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Always.

[00:03:31.59]

AILEEN WEBB: It's always been a beautiful city, and even more beautiful now that it's cleaned.

[00:03:38.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I hear. I haven't been back to see.

[00:03:39.89]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, it's really very exciting, I think, now.

[00:03:42.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: True. Well, it sounds as if you've always had an interest in the arts and crafts.

[00:03:50.34]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:03:50.64]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's been very much a part of family life.

[00:03:52.78]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah, the crafts, I never had any particular interest in, until I started this work. Then I was married when I was just twenty to Vanderbilt Webb, who was just twenty-one. So that we were in Oxford, England for a year. He went to Balliol. And he went through Yale in three years, then he went to Balliol for his fourth year. And then we went to Harvard Law School. Well, he went to Harvard Law School, and we lived in Cambridge for three years. And we have four children, three boys and a girl, following the same pattern.

[00:04:39.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: All the boys.

[00:04:40.24]

AILEEN WEBB: And altogether now, I have 18 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

[00:04:46.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. And there are lots of boys in that.

[00:04:52.79]

AILEEN WEBB: Twelve grandsons and six granddaughters.

[00:05:00.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's great. Well, at home, was there a great interest in, other than painting, I mean, literature or music or things like that?

[00:05:07.99]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think my father was an excellent conversationalist, and I think that it was a cultivated home and a home particularly interested, really, in political conversation, more than an artistic conversation.

[00:05:28.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were interested in politics here, it says, for quite a while.

[00:05:31.88]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, well—

[00:05:32.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things?

[00:05:34.78]

AILEEN WEBB: I was put on the Women's Democratic County Committee in Putnam County, which is where Garrison is, as soon as women got the vote. So I was Vice-President, I think it was called, of that committee. And I worked very hard developing democratic clubs, holding

meetings, holding parties.

[00:06:01.10]

Matter of fact, I held a democratic picnic for everybody in Putnam County at my place up in the country the following June, after women got the vote. And Mrs. Caroline O'Day and Eleanor Roosevelt were the two speakers. And I think it was the first political speech that Eleanor Roosevelt ever made. And I can still remember standing up in the extraordinary clothes she used to wear, especially then with her hand shaking as she held her notes. And I often used to think of that later when I heard her speak to thousands of people without a tremor.

[00:06:45.21]

And it was just straight grassroots kind of work, trying to elect assemblymen, Democratic County Committee men. And I served for a year or so on the state committee, Democratic Committee. And I think it's a fascinating—political life is a fascinating thing, because you see life at its raw human nature, and its raw—far more, I think, than you do in almost anything else.

[00:07:18.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. Because they're all out after something.

[00:07:20.56]

AILEEN WEBB: They're all out after something. They're all out cursing out the other guy. But it was a very interesting experience. And as that as a result of all that, it was really the way I got into the craft field because at the time of the Depression in 1929, '30, through there, I was put, because of my political activities, on the various committees, the PWA, the—I don't really remember what they were, but I was on several committees for the County. And I was so horrified, much more horrified than people are now, at the result of welfare on people who really want to work and had never been without work before. Two other women and I started a little group called Putnam County Products.

[00:08:24.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were they, the other two?

[00:08:26.43]

AILEEN WEBB: One was Ernestine Baker, who was the wife of Ernest Baker, who did a lot of covers of *TIME* at that time—an artist. And the other one was—well, her first name was Nancy, and I don't remember just who they were. They both lived in Carmel, New York. And we started a small group called Putnam County Products, with the idea that we would market anything that anybody in the county could either grow, or do, or make. And I thought of it more string beans and eggs, but actually, within two months, it was things which people made by hand.

[00:09:10.85]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are these things they had been making, or they just started making them because of the group?

[00:09:18.48]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, they're things that—you know, all farm women, all suburban women have always made things. They make afghans, they made doilies.

[00:09:26.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, they crochet.

[00:09:27.09]

AILEEN WEBB: And then you did find certain people who had skills painting on tin, or caning. There was a number of men for whom we sold. And that organization went on, in conjunction

with the Tea Room, for six or seven years, never very profitably. We had one winter here in New York, for a few months, which was very unprofitable, but taught us a great deal. And we realized, at the end of that time, that our main difficulty was that we couldn't sell during the eight months of the winter because there were no tourists. And of course, in those days, especially in New England, there was no skiing. Nobody went—

[00:10:17.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Nothing in the winter.

[00:10:18.47]

AILEEN WEBB: There was no activity in winter. So we called a meeting at Shelburne, Vermont, where my husband's family had a big place, still have, of the leaders of New England in the craft field. I think there were all the New England states and New Jersey and New York were combined. And we spent quite a long while. We spent three days, matter of fact, and left with a national organization cooperative, which had a long, complicated title.

[00:11:01.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So this was the American Craftsmen's Cooperative? [1939 -Ed.]

[00:11:04.45]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, Cooperative Council. And the function of it was to try and develop a place where the New England craftsmen, or any craftsmen, could sell in a metropolitan area. And that was the inception of America House. And America House, we finally organized sufficiently so as to open America House in a small shop on 54th Street in 1940. And we had a lot of difficulties because the top craftsmen thought of it, thought of us as just two crafty women. By that time, I had associated with Mrs. Frances Wright Caraway, who was one of Frank Lloyd Wright's daughters.

[00:11:59.47]

And we opened America House in the autumn of 1940. We stayed on 54th Street for three years, pretty well in the red. And then we were able to get a location on the corner of the 52nd Street and Madison Avenue where the Venezuela Travel Bureau is now. And we had a lovely space at a very reasonable rent. And we were there for ten years. And during that ten years, the shop was developed tremendously, and we did really quite well.

[00:12:47.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about, because we're going along at a terrific clip here, how did people find you, or how did you find the craftsmen to supply the shop?

[00:13:00.61]

AILEEN WEBB: That's the easiest thing in the world to do because the craftsman is always looking for an outlet.

[00:13:07.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So once you were established, they—

[00:13:11.08]

AILEEN WEBB: Once you're established. Of course, now, we have a selection board that selects the things that we sell at America House. And I suppose we only accept, oh, perhaps a quarter of what's sent in. And we have to not keep at least three quarters of it because the standards just aren't high enough. That's really when the educational values that come from America House. It shows the buyer what is good. And it shows the craftsman the need of good design and good work.

[00:13:51.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it works both ways.

[00:13:53.24]

AILEEN WEBB: So it works both ways. And originally, really, the theory back of America House was, that the American craftsmen did work which was merchandised. Up until that time, the buyer, when they wanted something by hand, would shoot over to Europe, get something in Austria or Germany. And I think we've accomplished that purpose one hundred percent. But when we moved—do you want me to talk in the same vein?

[00:14:27.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, sure, go ahead.

[00:14:28.96]

AILEEN WEBB: When we moved out to 52nd Street, we realized that without the education of the craftsmen in the problems of selling, and of standards, that we wouldn't do well. Of course, we could only sell really good objects. And that our selling personnel were spending too much time on the education of the craftsman and not enough on the selling of their work. So then we applied to the Regents of the State of New York for a charter for the American Craftsmen's Educational Council, it was called at that time. And since that time, it was such a long mouthful, that it's been cut down to the American Crafts Council.

[00:15:29.69]

And we got that quite quickly and had a small gallery in the mezzanine. End of ten years, our lease expired at America House. And they wanted to increase our rent, perfectly appallingly, and we didn't think we could meet it. So we had to give up the front of the shop, and we sort of retired. And from then on, for a number of years, we did very badly. Up until then, we'd done very well. I think that was partly our fault. Instead of meeting competition, especially the competition that we'd built up—

[00:16:12.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: For example, what kind of competition?

[00:16:15.54]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, by Bonnier's, Jensen's, neither of which existed really when we started. Jensen's was just a small silver shop, and then they expanded. Bonnier's expanded. All of the Irish—there was Irish House. There was Sweden House. And so there were a lot of other places where you could buy handmade things. And of course, during the war, we could get merchandise when the ordinary store couldn't get merchandise, because we were just getting it from individuals in the home.

[00:16:53.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: People were making it, right.

[00:16:58.18]

AILEEN WEBB: So that we stayed in the mezzanine of America House office-wise and exhibition space-wise for about fifteen years, and by that time, we had been in contact with enough craftsmen and enough activities all through the country to know very much what the problems were. And we realized that we were getting to a position where either we advanced and expanded, or marked time. And that just means, goodbye, really, to any effective thing. And so that we had trustees meeting. We all agreed on it.

[00:17:50.64]

And I went over to see Rene d'Harnoncourt, at the Museum of Modern Art, who was one of our trustees who wasn't at the meeting, and told him we decided that we should have a place of our own. And he said, "Well, why don't you buy the house next door?" So that was how we bought our present place at 29 West 53rd Street. The museum at that time owned the building where the theater people were next to us, but they didn't own the building that we bought. They knew it was for sale.

[00:18:29.51]

So then, by that time, the active Executive President of the American Crafts Council was a man called David Campbell, who was an architect, trained as an architect, had become involved in the crafts during the Depression, by being employed by Mrs. Coolidge in New Hampshire. And he built up the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts, which is one of the biggest group organizations in New England.

[00:19:06.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there many organizations of craftsmen before you started, or were they just very—

[00:19:12.40]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, there were a great many, somewhat unorganized. There was no national organization. I think the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts was the biggest. There was one in Massachusetts. They were scattered all over the country. And, of course, there are a great many groups now. I would hesitate to say just how many, but I should think, from 300 to 500 groups, organized groups of craftsmen all through the country in every state in the Union. And now, almost all of them are members of—not all of them, but most of them are members of the American Crafts Council.

[00:19:54.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what do those local organizations do? Do they cover a state, or a community?

[00:19:58.68]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, they vary a great deal, but they are—well, there's Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, with headquarters in Philadelphia, but they have, in their membership, a lot of small community members who get together, either on an overall media setup, or who are members of the Metal Guild or the Weavers Guild.

[00:20:30.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:20:31.02]

AILEEN WEBB: Or something of that kind.

[00:20:33.16]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do those groups do? Do they provide information for craftsmen? Information as well as merchandise?

[00:20:37.95]

AILEEN WEBB: They have meetings at which they have lectures, which they show slides. They have exhibitions. They have fairs. They do all the things on a small basis, that in a way, that we do on a larger basis.

[00:20:56.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see. There's an enormous number of people involved in this, aren't there?

[00:21:01.36]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, there are, really. *Craft Horizons*, for instance, our publication, started as a one-page mimeographed information sheet for the people who were selling through America House. And then it got a little better and a little better. I was the editor at the time, knowing absolutely nothing about it, but I learned how to. And then it got a name. Then it got illustrations. And then it got beyond my powers of editorial capacity. And we had a woman called Mary Lyon as editor, and then one other, Blanche Ribicoff. And then Rose Slivka and Conrad Brown became co-editors, and Rose Slivka is still editor. And *Craft Horizons* has a subscription list, membership list, of over 30,000. And it's published every

two months, six issues a year. And everybody who is a reader of *Craft Horizons* is also a member of the American Crafts Council.

[00:22:26.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:22:28.23]

AILEEN WEBB: So it's a subscription membership.

[00:22:34.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a lot of people in this, right?

[00:22:35.79]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes.

[00:22:36.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Seeing how many people are there, each one of those are involved.

[00:22:39.77]

AILEEN WEBB: Because each subscriber of *Craft Horizons*, the issue must be read by, at least, or looked at, by at least five to eight or ten people.

[00:22:53.20]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

[00:22:53.78]

AILEEN WEBB: And some people are very snippy about it and get very annoyed because we don't have more how-to-do-it articles. But our theory is that there's the ceramic magazine, there's a weaving magazine, which are filled almost entirely with how-to-do-it articles.

[00:23:17.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there are lots of books published all the time.

[00:23:19.34]

AILEEN WEBB: And of course, there are a great many books, so that we try and keep them alive to what's going on in the world.

[00:23:28.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's interesting. I'd like to go back a little bit here, say into the '30s. What kind of things were you involved with the PWA, or any of the other government organizations of some kind? Who might some of the people have been?

[00:23:49.36]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, it was purely on a local basis of Putnam County, and we just helped to try and get jobs—

[00:23:59.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: For the people that were there.

[00:24:00.79]

AILEEN WEBB: —for the Putnam County people. And it's a long while ago. I'm really quite vague as to just the identical things that I did right along.

[00:24:10.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, who did you sell the things there?

[00:24:14.49]

AILEEN WEBB: We had a little shop.

[00:24:15.73]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a shop?

[00:24:17.11]

AILEEN WEBB: In Carmel, and then in Mahopac.

[00:24:20.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And, well, did you find that the winter was a problem there too?

[00:24:25.80]

AILEEN WEBB: Nothing happened in winter. And that was the reason we made one abortive attempt to have a Putnam County shop here in New York. It just didn't work.

[00:24:36.74]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there were enough people traveling through the summer, then.

[00:24:40.43]

AILEEN WEBB: There were enough people motoring and traveling through the summer, a number of lake resorts there.

[00:24:48.73]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's very interesting because one usually has the idea that practically nothing happened in some of those years. But there were people moving around and doing things.

[00:24:56.52]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes.

[00:25:03.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who are some of the other people involved with the opening of America House?

[00:25:10.05]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I had three wonderful trustees. Dorothy Shaver was Head of Lord & Taylor, Dorothy Draper, who was the decorator, and Dorothy Liebes, for whom we've just been showing an exhibition. And those were three very powerful and colorful women. They were very much involved. They were involved as trustees of the American Craftsmen's Council, rather than directors of America House. We had some people. I don't know when we—America House was started as cooperative.

[00:25:53.67]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it was.

[00:25:54.83]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, and everybody who sold through America house had to have a two-dollar share of stock. And that became so cumbersome. And sending them fifteen cents every year as interest, you know, just didn't work. So then it was reorganized into a business corporation. And it's operating as a business corporation, with shares stock outstanding,

most of which I own. And so it is not connected, really, in any way with the American Crafts Council, except through an interlocking directorate of myself on both directors.

[00:26:47.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I have often wondered what the relationships are between all these different sections.

[00:26:53.57]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, the American Craftsmen's Council might be called the umbrella, the national umbrella, under which the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, which it maintains, falls, *Craft Horizons*, which it maintains, falls. The research and educational department, which has very extensive files of craftsmen and everything that pertains to craftsmen, lists of shops, lists of schools, and so on, is positioned to give a great deal of very good advice, which is called on a great deal. I don't think I ever go down to the library during the middle of the day, where the research service has its headquarters, when there are not one or two people looking at records or books or studying something.

[00:27:47.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find that there are people now who come to America House and say, "I want to commission someone to make this, or that," or something?

[00:27:54.41]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:27:55.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You do.

[00:27:56.77]

AILEEN WEBB: We had a regular service of that kind for a while. It just didn't pay for itself. But we take a lot of orders. And now, for instance, there's a man called Paul Evans, who does heavy metal furniture involving things that hang on the wall. It's quite interesting. And we are his outlet for custom furniture. A great many people will say, "That that table is fine, but I'd have to have it six inches shorter to fit in my dining room," or something of that kind. So we take quite a good many orders.

[00:28:37.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific, because I know people have such problems finding things, sometimes, you know?

[00:28:43.51]

AILEEN WEBB: Yep.

[00:28:46.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even commissioned things. How did the idea of the museum come about? Why did that—

[00:28:54.77]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, at that time, when we moved—we opened the museum in 1956. There had never been an exhibition of the work of American craftsmen before 1953, when the American Craftsman's Council, The Brooklyn Museum, and the Chicago Art Institute joined together and held the first national exhibition, which opened at the Brooklyn Museum, and then went to Chicago and San Francisco, I think. And so that it was obvious, that when we moved, what we needed was a gallery where we could show the work of American craftsmen.

[00:29:44.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: In a non-commercial kind of setting.

[00:29:46.57]

AILEEN WEBB: In a non-commercial way. And when we first moved into the new building, which Dave Campbell, incidentally, was the architect of, renovating, and he was the architect for the renovation of America House too, later, we didn't see how we were going to fill the building. Now, we're just so jammed that if we had one more secretary that we needed, there wouldn't be any place to put her, suspend her from the ceiling or something. So before we know it, I think we're going to have to go into an expansion drive of some kind.

[00:30:27.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Oh, that's fantastic. Well, who are some of the people that have worked with you for a long period of time in all these activities?

[00:30:37.77]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, Alfred Auerbach, to go way back, at the time of forming in 1939 and '40 and '41 when we were starting America House, there was a comparative international organization being started by Miss Anne Morgan because of the importunity of a friend of hers in the South. And I knew Anne Morgan quite well, and our families have known each other. And she and I spent a whole winter sort of coordinating our work, and then they disbanded.

And a number of their directors came on our board, and Morgan came on our board. A man called William Barrett, who was one of the vice-presidents of Metropolitan Life was on our board for a great many years. And after he retired, when David Campbell died, he became the President of the ACC [American Craftsmen's Council -Ed.].

[00:31:44.72]

The three Dorothys that I told you, were dated from about that time. And Dorothy Liebes only just resigned because of ill health within the last year or so. Alfred Auerbach, who was a public-relations person here in New York, who's been on the board since its inception. And Jack Larson has been on the board for a long while. And the other members of the board, of which you have a list, I think.

[00:32:24.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I have a list there. Curious about the long-term ones.

[00:32:28.65]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, well, those were the long-term ones. Frank Stanton has been on the board for quite a long while, but I can't say he's terribly active. Augie Heckscher was on for a number of years, and he's taken leave of absence. And I hope that he's going to get out of the city and come back and be a member.

[00:32:52.98]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, are the trustees very active? Or do they just tend to—

[00:32:57.76]

AILEEN WEBB: They're increasingly active.

[00:32:59.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They are?

[00:33:02.71]

AILEEN WEBB: [When we started] it was like pulling yourself up bootstraps, to get a group of people who—because crafts just didn't exist when we started. And so they've been a little inactive. But there are some that have been active. And I think they they're increasingly

active. We put on some younger, newer members of the board within the last year, a couple of years, and they're taking much more responsibility.

[00:33:35.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how would you—I'm trying to find, say, the difference in general public attitude now, as to oppose, say, in the '30s, towards crafts.

[00:33:49.01]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, there's a tremendous difference in attitude. As I say, there'd never been an exhibition of craft work. Now there are exhibitions all over the country. There are too many. I think *Craft Horizons* tries to review them. And I got the figure. I think they reviewed about 150 exhibitions of crafts on a national basis during the last year.

[00:34:16.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: My goodness. That's a lot.

[00:34:17.39]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. And all of that has really come from the impetus which the American Crafts Council has given to the crafts. They hold national conferences every two years, and the first one was held, I think, must have been about 1950, or something, at Sylmar in California. We started holding them every year, and now that's become too much of a chore, and we hold them every two years or three years, I think.

[00:34:50.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you find there are outlets now in other major cities like America House?

[00:34:55.96]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes, we publish a list of the shops through the country that handled crafts. And I think there are about—well, I don't think I'd better put a guess figure on, but it'd be very easy to check. There are a great many shops. And a craftsman can really make a living. And he can really sell his work if it's anywhere good. For instance, I was just up at Putney School last week where they had a day, a convocation on communications through art, through dance, and music and crafts, and so on.

[00:35:45.68]

And they had demonstrate, a man called Bill Saks, who makes a very comfortable living for himself with his pottery. And he sells as much as he can make. And he never ships any. He only sells through the radius of 200 or 300 miles, so he can reach by car. He delivers all his own stuff. The Bennington and the—we have six craftsmen trustees on the board, each one representing a different region in the country. And each one has an assembly of its own, regional assembly of its own, which is made up of one or two representatives from every state in the region.

They meet once a year and plan on what they're going to do the following year. And we subsidize them to the point of giving them money for the expenses of running the organization, comes to about \$1,500 a year, something like that, and then advance any money that's needed to subsidize a—well, a big exhibition or something that would pay for itself.

[00:37:08.82]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, that's terrific. I really didn't know there was this much activity.

[00:37:13.44]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. And practically in every region, they have a fair of some kind. Now, for instance, the Northeast Craftsmen have held a fair for the last five or six years. In July. They've held it twice in Stowe, twice in Mount Snow, and Bennington. And those fairs, the

wholesale buyers come in great quantities. And I think that the first day of the wholesale fair, last year, in Bennington, they took orders for about \$150,000.

[00:37:56.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific. Well, what are they, people from department stores and specialty shops and things like that?

[00:38:01.20]

AILEEN WEBB: And small shops. There's practically no town in the United States that doesn't have some kind of a gift shop.

[00:38:07.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true.

[00:38:08.02]

AILEEN WEBB: And if they can buy work of craftsmen that has a different feeling to it, different approach, and everybody else doesn't carry it, too.

[00:38:21.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, the unique thing that the people like. Well, how did World War II affect all of your activities, the crafts, because you said that it was—

[00:38:37.35]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, of course, a great many craftsmen actually worked in the war effort, used their skills, boatyards and things of that kind. The others who didn't, went on making parts, and went on making this and that. And I suppose doing war work on the side, just the way everybody else was doing.

[00:38:55.52]

And so as I said before, America House was able to get merchandise when a great many other stores weren't able to. And those years were the years, really, we were acquainting ourselves with what was going on and beginning to build up a skeleton organization. And so that all of that was not very affected by the war. The war did push us into starting the School for American Craftsmen, which I don't know whether that's down there.

[00:39:36.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, that I don't know about.

[00:39:37.28]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, we opened the school for American Craftsmen in 1944, when it was at Dartmouth, in Hanover, [New Hampshire -Ed.], and was opened in connection with their extracurricular activities. And they gave us space. And our first student was a Seabee, about fifty years old, who had hurt his back and wanted to become a ceramist. He didn't last very long as a ceramist.

[00:40:13.03]

But we stayed at Hanover for two years. And then when the war was over, they wanted their space back, and also wouldn't let us take women in any of their courses. And with a great deal of help from Owen D. Young—whom I knew quite well, he was a great friend of my father's, and who was at that time, I guess, Chairman of the Regents of the State of New York—he put us in touch with a man called Walters, who had just been made President of Alfred University, and who had some growing ideas of how he'd make Alfred the cultural center of upstate New York.

[00:40:59.70]

And he got into a terrible campus row. By that time, we had a student body of about twenty-

five, actually, or thirty. And at that time, we took on, as director of the school a man called Harold Brennan, who has done a wonderful job. He's just retiring next autumn. And we were at Alfred for three years, expanding. The bulk of our students were returned veterans. Of course, they had their tuition paid, though we were beginning to get other people in. And then Dr. Walters resigned, quit, as a result of the row.

[00:41:52.86]

And part of the row was built up because he tried to have the School for American Craftsmen within the liberal arts college. And it was very offensive to a man called Harder, who was head of the New York State College of Ceramics, which is really the tail that wags the Alfred dog. And so we realized that our future was very much in doubt, and we'd better do something about it. So by happenchance, Mark Ellingson—I don't know whether you've ever heard of him or heard of the Rochester Institute of Technology.

[00:42:42.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

[00:42:43.06]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, he's an extraordinary person with a great deal of vision, and has built up an extraordinary institution. And he heard about the school, and he came to see me in my office here in New York, and practically left with the school in his pocket, so that we moved there, I guess, about eighteen years ago. And now, I think the School for American Craftsmen is really the best school in the country teaching all of the different medias. I mean, there's other excellent ceramic schools.

[00:43:25.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Special [inaudible] for the students.

[00:43:27.47]

AILEEN WEBB: And we give degrees, we give MAs. We have, I think, about 128, 130 students. It's a four-year course. They get the educational necessities for their degrees. And RIT has just moved from a very unattractive, crowded campus, the very bad part of Rochester, to an extraordinary campus about five miles out of the city.

[00:44:03.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. So that draws on students from all over the country, or from everywhere?

[00:44:07.17]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, well, we have education veterans. We may get more veterans out of this Vietnam business. But we have students from California, all over the country, and a number of foreign students.

[00:44:22.92]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So someone graduates there with a degree, they can do what? They can go out and teach, or they can set up their own—

[00:44:28.41]

AILEEN WEBB: They can teach, or they can set up their own shop.

[00:44:32.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrific. So they're really going to train you, rather than just picking it up piecemeal.

[00:44:36.54]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes. Yeah, it's very real training.

[00:44:43.31]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who runs that school now?

[00:44:45.15]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, it's part of the Rochester Institute of Technology. I went on their board, and Mark Ellingson came on our board. And I am an honorary trustee now because I'm so old. And you have to resign, I think, at 70. And so that's about—And we supported the school until it moved to Rochester. And since then, we have no financial responsibility to it.

[00:45:31.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It carries itself. What is the World Craft Council? Because that's something I heard a great deal about a few years ago, because a friend of mine was working on that, Sandra Zimmerman, at the museum for a while.

[00:45:49.98]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes.

[00:45:50.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And she used to say—

[00:45:52.78]

AILEEN WEBB: How is Sandra doing now? She went over to England.

[00:45:55.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: She did, and she's back, and she's living in California.

[00:46:00.30]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, the American Crafts Council found that it was very difficult to get any kind of information from foreign parts, as to what was going on in the craft field. And Mrs. George Patch came to me with a real plan for her giving funds and then going around the world on those funds. Ultimately, the idea of developing an organization that would do for the craftsmen of the world, what the ACC has done for the craftsmen of the United States. And so she went around the world, and she collected a wonderful list of people, and schools, colleges, museums, and craftsmen.

[00:46:56.91]

And we were having a national conference of the ACC, in 1964, and we started to have it at Columbia. It was the time of the World's Fair here. And we decided to make it an international congress. We asked, so as to make sure to have people from other places, other countries, we paid the expenses for about fifteen different people to come from different key places. And we let it be known that we would offer hospitality during the two weeks of the conference, which was almost our undoing, because having expected just a few people, we had 250 people—

[00:47:46.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: My goodness.

[00:47:46.57]

AILEEN WEBB: —from outside the country. But we got funds to maintain our promises.

[00:47:53.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How many did you expect?

[00:47:55.36]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, we just didn't know. We were sure of fifteen.

[00:48:00.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] 250 is a long way from fifteen.

[00:48:02.21]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah, and we thought that others would come. Then we had a constitution drawn up and everything beforehand by the Coudert Brothers. And we organized the World Craft Council at that time as a membership corporation. And so that we—Mrs. Patch and I—had a feeling that we could be self-supporting through memberships. We'd be able to get enough memberships. And at that time, I think there were about twenty to thirty countries that joined. Now we have sixty-seven countries that belong. They are all members of UNESCO, and they pay a quota, which is ten percent of the quota which their country gives for the support of the UNESCO. So it varies from some countries that only have \$100 quota, to the United States, which naturally, as usual, bears the burden of, say, \$15,000.

And Mrs. Patch and I continued to run it just by ourselves, in a very amateurish way, really. We have congress every two years, a biennial congress, which we're going to change to every three years. Running a congress every two years is a real effort abroad. The second year we were at Montreux, Switzerland. We were incorporated under the Swiss laws because they're the best international laws for incorporation. And what'd I say?

[00:50:09.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's just talking about the—

[00:50:15.50]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes, about the conferences. So we had one in Montreux. And then two years ago, in '68, we planned to have one in South America. We went to a place called Huampaní, which is just outside of Lima in Peru. And there we expected about 250 or 300, including South Americans, and we ended up with 850. And we had a very successful, very difficult to manage, conference.

I went down in March, ahead, for ten days, and I found that Huampaní, which is about 45 minutes from Lima, and a charming little government-owned and operated vacation place for government employees. It was only 45 minutes' drive from Lima, and took an hour and a half to two hours to get a telephone call through. So [laughs] it's one of the most frustrating ten days I've ever spent. And the different countries elect members of the board of the direction, and the direction in Peru is a man called John Davis, an American who's lived there about twenty years and married there. And so that—he's not terribly efficient, but he's efficient enough.

[00:51:51.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I'm curious that the World Craft Council is made up of what countries, then, really?

[00:52:05.04]

AILEEN WEBB: Sixty-seven.

[00:52:06.00]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sixty-seven countries, and each country is represented.

[00:52:09.93]

AILEEN WEBB: Each country elects their own. The members in each country elects their own representative to the—

[00:52:17.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —national craft groups in that country will have—

[00:52:20.91]

AILEEN WEBB: And what we are trying to decentralize is to have every country have a strong section of the World Craft Council, with enough members in it to elect their representative, and enough activity so that if we can send slides, they'll surely be shown in schools and colleges. And these conferences are really very exciting. We're having one in August in Dublin, Ireland. And well, we know now, thirty-five countries that are going to have representatives there. And there may be more, because they're very casual about letting you know when they're coming or not.

[00:53:13.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They just appear.

[00:53:14.34]

AILEEN WEBB: And we'll have a total. Of course, we always get more Americans than—But we will have total of about 700, from 600 to 700 people. And you get 600, 700 people all excited about the same thing, and with demonstrations and talking, lecturing and things to see. And it really becomes a very heartwarming occurrence. And one of my basic feelings is, that through the arts, and through something which is completely aside from politics, we will be forging one more nail in the ultimate peace.

[00:54:10.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have any idea that the international group was going to grow as rapidly and get as large?

[00:54:17.18]

AILEEN WEBB: No, we just had an idea and started it.

[00:54:19.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And away you went.

[00:54:21.49]

AILEEN WEBB: And certainly, when I started Putnam County Products, the last thing I thought I'd be doing is what I'm doing now. But I have a feeling that no movement of this kind, and it really is a movement, I think, can come, unless there's a desire for it on the part of people.

[00:54:46.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Somebody just can't start it and try and do it [inaudible].

[00:54:50.54]

AILEEN WEBB: You couldn't start from on top, and go to people and say to a community, "You've got to have a craft group." And you'd have to go and say, "If you do it this way, you will foster interest, and you'll develop your craft."

[00:55:10.04]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, have you traveled around the country a great deal and lectured, or things like that?

[00:55:15.25]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, I've traveled a good deal. And I've traveled around the world. And we had a meeting, the first Asian meeting, for the World Craft Council this last November. And the John D. Rockefeller III Asian Foundation gave us the money to bring the people to New Delhi. And I went first to Poland with an Englishman. And then we had a European conference in Prague, which lasted about ten days. And then I went to Hungary and Romania.

[00:55:53.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do the other countries take to this idea? Is there are a lot of support? Are there great craft traditions there?

[00:56:01.64]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think the most active country, probably, is England. Ireland is active. In France, they fight. In Germany, they are divided into three big groups, and the groups fight. And so that we're trying to bring all those varying elements together. We were able to do that in Great Britain, where the craftsmen all fought like Sam Hill about one thing and another, and now they're all united under the World Craft Council.

[00:56:37.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Isn't that interesting.

[00:56:39.67]

AILEEN WEBB: We are planning in 1973, to have the first big international exhibition of crafts, just as the ACC did with the 1953 exhibition.

[00:56:54.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see,

[00:56:56.02]

AILEEN WEBB: And we're going to hold it in the botanical gardens of the Platen Un Blomen Organization in Hamburg, which is giving us for free, plus great many expenses, their exhibition halls. And certainly, Mrs. Patch and I certainly have help now. Mr. James Plaut, who was, at one time, head of the Contemporary Museum in Boston and American representative at the Brussels Fair, is our Secretary General. And he's done a good deal of traveling. And then we are also going to get help from the present Vice President for Europe, James Noel White, who is giving up his job and is going to work with us.

[00:57:57.63]

And [horns honking] we held this conference in New Delhi. We had representatives from twelve Asian countries, and they'd never, any of them, gotten together before. And they all have the same problem craftsmen have everywhere. And that is the question of sales. And we are now planning to do something in that area. We don't know just what it's going to be. But what we'd like to do is to set up something a little on the same order as Howard Johnson, so that if anybody is traveling, and they see a big thing, they'll know that they'll find work of international craftsmen of high quality.

[00:58:57.39]

I don't think this is the time to give you a dissertation on the problems that have been caused by the United States government's support of Alianza, for instance, in South America. But the buyers go in there and see a rug that somebody does perhaps one of or two of, the year, and orders two dozen. The craftsman cuts corners, doesn't do quite such a good job, isn't used to keeping a date. And then the next year, they want something else. So it's the whole problem of developing crafts.

[00:59:41.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a big store down in the Village that sold a lot of things from South America and Central America.

[00:59:49.11]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah.

[00:59:50.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And I could never figure out how he got all that material produced all the

time. It did seem to change in quality frequently.

[01:00:00.30]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. I think that one of the great problems that these developing countries are meeting, is the transition of their people or their laboring people from a hand economy to a machine economy. And I think that one of the great things that the World Craft Council can do, is to build a bridge between the past and the 20th century for those craftsmen who are creative.

[01:00:44.26]

Now, of the million weavers who weave in India, very, very few of them are creative. They're technicians. They're really artisans working in a factory. Only they're doing it in the home, and so on. And the younger people, the younger kids, as they are educated and see what's going on in the world not going to want to sit cross-legged and stare at somebody else's mark on cloth, you know. But out of all those people, they're going to be some who are creative and who are artists and who should be not submerged by industry, but given an opportunity to develop and maintain the cultural values of their own country. And I think that we can be a great help in that.

[01:01:48.69]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find, say, Japan, as opposed to India in their attitude towards craft? Is there a great deal of difference?

[01:02:00.10]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think each country has its own problems.

[01:02:06.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Its own kind of traditions.

[01:02:08.76]

AILEEN WEBB: And own traditions.

[01:02:11.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that they learn and accept things from other countries very easily, or is it very difficult for them to, say, an Oriental to see how Europe is doing something, and then say, oh, that may solve our problem.

[01:02:28.69]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. I think that, especially in Japan, they've tried to Westernize their art. Japan is divided into three groups of craft activities. They all fight, don't talk—the folk art group, the traditional group, and the contemporary group. And the contemporary group, still has a long ways to go, I think, to get really beautiful work, though, some of their artists are extremely fine.

[01:03:11.45]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about a country like Hungary where [inaudible]?

[01:03:15.80]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, what you're really bringing up, I think, is the problem of the folk art. And again, I think that's going to have to be a problem of diversity and leading into other work. There was a very able man called Shiraz in New Delhi, in November, from Iran, where they are developing the old traditional work purely for the economic benefit to the country. And well, he gave us figures of what they exported, it's just basically astounding. Whether the present, younger generation of people in the West are going to be interested in straight folk art, there's little question in my mind.

[01:04:25.14]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I find that young people in their teens and twenties that I know are very interested in folk art. And they love the kinds of things that they find when they travel around. And they're not as interested in what Bonnier's has, for example, except that they're [inaudible].

[01:04:45.14]

AILEEN WEBB: Of course, Bonnier's has gone so downhill now.

[01:04:47.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, [inaudible].

[01:04:51.57]

AILEEN WEBB: They weren't making quite enough profit. And so the Bonniers family let Holmquist, who built up its quality, out. And they appointed the Bloomingdale foreign buyer—I forget what his name is—to manage it.

[01:05:17.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now Jensen's is going to move too.

[01:05:19.15]

AILEEN WEBB: And Jensen's has—since just Lunning died, it's going downhill.

[01:05:25.08]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It really takes one person behind all of these enterprises.

[01:05:27.92]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah.

[01:05:39.64]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are all kinds of awards here, which are interesting. I know, what's the Elsie de Wolfe award?

[01:05:53.59]

AILEEN WEBB: That's the award that the AID gives—American Institute of Decorators gives annually to somebody who has done something in that field of furnishings or decorations.

[01:06:08.47]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do decorators buy a lot of things from America House, for example?

[01:06:12.61]

AILEEN WEBB: Up to a point. Not an awful lot, because we can't allow quite as big a discount as they'd like to have.

[01:06:19.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. It's amazing. That's almost inevitably what people in our field will say about decorators. We just can't give them enormous discounts. So they only buy a little here, a little there. The Michael Friedsam award; that's a very famous one.

[01:06:40.23]

AILEEN WEBB: That's an Architectural League one. Well, most of these awards I got after the opening of the museum, I think.

[01:06:50.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think the museum has lent a new kind of

status or something to the craft?

[01:06:59.14]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes, I think tremendously. What we're trying to do in the museum, and a great many people—we say, "Give us back our crafts," and, "We'd like to see constant exhibitions of pottery," and so on. We tried to show what is really being currently done and what the young are doing. And so we've had some shows that seem a long ways from tatting and knitting. Every once in a while, I think, perhaps we go a little far. But I think it's better to go too far than—

[01:07:34.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not enough.

[01:07:35.70]

AILEEN WEBB: —not enough.

[01:07:36.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. No, I've seen lots of various exciting exhibitions that are over the years. You know, I think they sometimes nudge the Modern Art next door to be a little more aware and kind of look a little better.

[01:07:50.46]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah, and it's interesting how many younger people we get just flock in as soon as we have a—what might be called a "far-out" exhibition.

[01:08:00.55]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, has the attendance grown greatly there?

[01:08:04.12]

AILEEN WEBB: We have an attendance of about 100,000 a year.

[01:08:07.66]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's pretty good.

[01:08:08.53]

AILEEN WEBB: Which I think isn't bad for a small museum. Perhaps a little under that, probably 90,000.

[01:08:19.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's quite a bit, though. That's a thousand a week, almost. You can't get more than a couple hundred people in there at one time, I don't think, comfortably, generally.

[01:08:30.86]

AILEEN WEBB: No.

[01:08:36.44]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are the craftsmen, or what kind of reaction have you gotten from the craftsmen since the establishment of the museum?

[01:08:44.09]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, I think we get a very good reaction.

[01:08:47.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, is there a lot of political activity in their part to have their work shown there?

[01:08:52.81]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, there's a lot of frustration on the part of a great many people, but they've learned that we decide on the theme of our show, and that we implement it from our own files and knowledge.

[01:09:11.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's no collection there, is there? The museum really is an exhibition museum.

[01:09:15.73]

AILEEN WEBB: We have a collection, but we haven't got the room to show it. And I hope that if you come back to interview in ten years, we're both alive ten years from now, that we will be able to get more space.

[01:09:32.61]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Space is really horrendously expensive.

[01:09:34.74]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. Because what we need is twice as much gallery space. Then we'd continue the exhibitions we have, but now the museum is only open ten months out of the year because we have to be closed almost two weeks between exhibitions. We have five exhibitions.

[01:10:00.30]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. For installation of—

[01:10:01.61]

AILEEN WEBB: For installation.

[01:10:05.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm pretty curious—in going to exhibitions there and talking to various craftsmen when they were either in the show or not in the show, it's a little different feeling than what you get from, say, going to a painting exhibition at the Whitney, talking to artists who are not represented in the show. There's a greater attachment on the craftsman's part to the museum.

[01:10:39.31]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, we've done a great deal for them, of course.

[01:10:42.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, maybe there isn't any other place that really consistently is involved with them either.

[01:10:47.10]

AILEEN WEBB: No.

[01:10:47.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that might be one of the reasons for it. There are lots of other museums for painters to show in.

[01:10:55.77]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah.

[01:10:57.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I just—there must be lots of other things here I could ask you about, but I'm not too—

[01:11:05.58]

AILEEN WEBB: It seems to me, I've talked you deaf, dumb and blind.

[01:11:08.02]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Oh, no. How did your whole interest in the crafts start? As you said, you were involved with politics and then the Putnam County Products.

[01:11:24.40]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, it's because I've always painted and always used my hands. I do ceramics; I've done some enamel; I've done some wood carving. So that I enjoy the thing that makes a craftsman a craftsman.

[01:11:36.72]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. So you had your own identification with the activity.

[01:11:39.45]

AILEEN WEBB: I had my own dirty hands.

[01:11:45.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Well, you've mentioned the quality a number of times here. But the aspects of quality in craft things, are they very much different, do you think, than, say, in manufactured?

[01:12:03.20]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, there's a great difference. And one of the great differences is, of course, that a machine just stamps its technological perfection on anything it does. Whereas there's always room for some special quality. Now, no machine could make a box like this, for instance, which is just obviously a one-of-a-kind piece. And so when a person buys something of this quality—and that's what they come to America House to find.

[01:12:50.91]

There are the two things, actually, in a place like America House—two things craftsmen do. They do production, and then they do one of a kind. And a shop and a craftsman have to be used to doing both to make a living. A craftsman doesn't have to do the one of a kind as much as the shop has to have some. But the shop has to have a basic group of work that is not too expensive. That means that it's repetitive. And a lot of craftsmen just can't. They're doing the same thing—

[01:13:38.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Over and over.

[01:13:38.62]

AILEEN WEBB: —over and over and over, which—

[01:13:40.43]

PAUL CUMMINGS: They want a new object, new idea.

[01:13:43.01]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[01:13:43.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: A new experience. I've often been curious about the style aspects of craft things as opposed to the sort of things one would see in—Well, Bonnier's is an example where everything really is now just turned out, it seems.

[01:14:09.90]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. I think the craftsman, very often, sets a new style, very often adapts his work to what has been set by the artist.

[01:14:24.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's very interesting. I know that there was a great interest in this ceramic sculpture in California, with the number of people that are doing wild shapes. Things with all kinds of glazes and slips and colors and things. Although, I don't see it in New York yet. It seems to be very active out there.

[01:14:44.38]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. Well, I don't think the New York public is quite the same as the California public.

[01:14:50.46]

PAUL CUMMINGS: California, yeah.

[01:14:50.80]

AILEEN WEBB: Just as the climate isn't the same.

[01:14:54.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, are there any other things that you think we should talk about that I haven't brought up? There must be lots and lots of activities involved here.

[01:15:13.26]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I could take up all the different things that I've talked to you about and go into detail. I don't think either of us have time.

[01:15:21.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I have lots of time.

[01:15:23.70]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah, well, I don't know. What time is it?

[01:15:26.26]

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it's 11:00.

[01:15:28.26]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I haven't got much time. I've should really go down.

[01:15:31.23]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay, well, would you like to stop?

[01:15:34.73]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I'd like to, if you think you've got enough.

[01:15:39.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, let's see—

[END OF TRACK AAA_webb70_9083_m]

[00:00:05.13]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's June 9. Paul Cummings talking to Mrs. Webb. This is part 2. Well, we were just talking of your father. Could you mention something about his—

[00:00:17.50]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, my father, I don't remember—I don't know the dates or the years, but I know that he was on the Board of the Metropolitan Museum for years and years, and intensely interested. He himself was not a practitioner of the arts. Didn't paint. He wrote a little very poor poetry. But he had a true appreciation of the beauty in art.

[00:00:44.47]

And as you may know, he bought Monets when nobody else was buying Monets. And he bought a couple of Gauguins and a Manet when nobody else was buying. And so at his death, he was able to leave to the Metropolitan four or five Monets. My brothers and I each got one, a Gauguin, "The Tahitian Girls," and Manet, "The Guitarist." And during the years when he was Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Metropolitan, he worked very hard at it. He was extremely interested. It meant a great deal to him in his life. That's really about it, as far as I was concerned.

[00:01:36.81]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think that had any effect on you as far as your interest in the museum idea?

[00:01:42.76]

AILEEN WEBB: Don't you suppose that any cultural interest in any member of the family is bound to rub off somewhere? And that a different personality will pick it up in some different way. So I suppose that my personal interest in creative process probably came from some hidden genes of my father's, but I wouldn't know.

[00:02:13.90]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you start your own—because you studied pottery making and things like that, didn't you?

[00:02:21.70]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I've always painted. And I took painting lessons while I was in school. And I am not very good. I don't think I would have been even if I had given it more time. But I've always loved it. And I've done quite a few watercolors of my different trips, which are not great watercolors, but perfectly creditable. And a very pleasant reminder to me of where I've been. And in the process of developing the American Crafts Council, I just sort of naturally took up pottery. And—

[00:03:09.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that came after the painting, in a way? Or later?

[00:03:12.76]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes, well, the amount of painting that I'd done was a great help to me in my pottery and in the little enameling that I've done, because basically what makes a good picture makes a good pot.

[00:03:28.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:03:29.13]

AILEEN WEBB: And it's a question of a basic knowledge of the elements of design: portion, forms, all that goes up to making good design. Or fine picture. Or fine pot or tapestry. And so having had that training as I grew up, I know it's been a great help to me in anything else

that I've done. I've done the little wood carving, but not for quite a long while. But if you like to do things—and I do like to do things, everything that you do has a relationship with whatever else you may do.

[00:04:17.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. One thing leads to the next.

[00:04:18.97]

AILEEN WEBB: One thing leads to the next.

[00:04:19.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Almost logically, it seems, when you do it.

[00:04:24.08]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah.

[00:04:27.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, have you developed any—how can I say it—ideas or a philosophy about where crafts lie in American life? Because it's so different from, say, European traditions or something.

[00:04:49.01]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think that there are more people looking to the crafts for a certain release of nervous tension probably in this country than they are in Europe, probably because there's more nervous tension in this country than there is in Europe.

[00:05:11.05]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:12.20]

AILEEN WEBB: But not only is there more nervous tension, but there's more leisure. And that's, I think, especially true amongst the women. But I think that the crafts in any society play a very vital role in the culture of that society, because they are more understandable by the individual than painting. And more comprehensible for a person to do than painting or sculpture. So that it would seem not quite so bold to say, "Well, I'll make a cup, or I'll make a plate," as it would say, "Well, I'll paint a picture." And so that the average person can conceive of themselves as doing something creative with their hands. Of course, that has been abused terrifically in this country by the kits that have gotten out—

[00:06:17.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The powder.

[00:06:18.53]

AILEEN WEBB: —the pottery you can make with just mixing, how-to-do-it business. But gradually, I think, the proper attitude towards crafts are being taught all through the country. There are more and more craft exhibitions. I could get you some of the figures from my annual report—the increase in the contacts that the American Crafts Council has with educational institutions and with groups, which would be surprising to you.

[00:06:57.53]

For instance, I think we rented out about just under 600 kits of slides. By kit, I mean a group of slides with commentary to be read while they're shown, which are rented out all sorts of institutions, groups, and individuals. And those—probably each one of them is seen on average by 50 or 60 people. So you multiply 50, 60 by 500, and that makes a tremendous interest permeating all of society, and its tremendous education towards a higher standard of values as to what's good and what isn't good.

[00:07:50.42]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of institutions use the slide sets?

[00:07:55.13]

AILEEN WEBB: More universities use them. A great many schools. And then, as you know, there are a great many craft groups, small craft groups who—all through the country. I don't know how many there are. Probably several thousand. Well, each one of those has to have a program of some kind for the members during the year. And we photograph the photogenic exhibitions that we have here. And we make up kits that have relation—each slide has a relation to the whole subject. And it's part of the work of the research service of the American Crafts Council.

[00:08:43.23]

We also have had several movies done. And that's something that we hope to be able to do in greater amount. But we really consider the work of the American Crafts Council as the work of an educational institution without walls, to follow Malraux. And that all the exhibitions we put out are all educational. So that I think that there is a permeating in our society slowly. Not all of it, but more and more and more of it is being permeated by a knowledge of craftsmanship which induces a knowledge of appreciation of beauty and what is good and what isn't good.

[00:09:41.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting because the whole difference between craft and the craftsmen things that are sold at, say, Jensen's or Bonnier's, there seems to be such a difference in—Bonnier's seem to be highly stylized and designed for manufacturing, and less personal.

[00:10:04.32]

AILEEN WEBB: Of course, the craftsmen themselves can work in a number of ways. They can work for their own pleasure. They can work one-of-a-kind things or small production. They can also design for industry. And you take this exhibition that we had here this winter of the work—a retrospective exhibition of the work of Dorothy Liebes, who was—had more effect on the color and appreciation than any one person in this country over a period of long years.

She worked exclusively towards the end with an industry—DuPont and Stroheim, and something or other, and so on. And the things that you're thinking of at Bonnier's are probably really manufactured. But the original piece is designed by a craftsman. But the process of reproduction does not reproduce the personal quality.

[00:11:15.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because they just all look alike after a while.

[00:11:16.81]

AILEEN WEBB: So that they all look alike and they and they lose that personal, instinctive thing which hands can actually give to something that an individual piece has.

[00:11:36.29]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's interesting. We covered about three questions already. One of the other things is—well, you talked about the World Craft Council. And why did you pick UNESCO to be involved with it? Why—

[00:11:55.66]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, UNESCO is the great international cultural organization. And what do the initials stand for? United Nations Education—

[00:12:08.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Science and Cultural?

[00:12:11.02]

AILEEN WEBB: Social, and something—

[00:12:12.18]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Cultural.

[00:12:13.19]

AILEEN WEBB: —cultural organization. And so they have been immensely helpful to us in developing the World Craft Council through D'Arcy Hayman, who is the head of the educational work. And now the World Craft Council is being accepted as a Class B member of UNESCO, who will be able to get certain funds. So that it's—why not be part of UNESCO?

[00:12:49.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's larger, and covers more countries, more people.

[00:12:54.36]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. And it has a worldwide reputation. So that being a Class B member of UNESCO gives you a real kudos with people who follow international affairs.

[00:13:07.35]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you think that affects, say, the local craftsmen, either in this country or in other countries?

[00:13:14.13]

AILEEN WEBB: I think that the—I'm going to answer your question, but I think that the American Craftsmen's Council, during the 25 years of its life, has had tremendous effect on all of the craftsmen of the United States. It's done it because they were—because the presentation of their craft as merchandise through America House. It's done it because the exhibitions that have been sponsored by the Council here at the museum and the traveling exhibitions. It's done it because we've had real influence with certain government activities that are interested in the development of the individual. Well—I don't know if I should get to that.

[00:14:03.29]

And it's done it through slide service, literature, magazines, and so on. The result has been that you have a sounder craft program in the United States than in any other country in the world, I think. A different kind—I mean, you'd say, well, how about India? India is not—is purely really a merchandising interest.

[00:14:29.37]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But their craft is still kind of primitive manufacturing there, isn't it?

[00:14:33.28]

AILEEN WEBB: It's more like the manufacturing, only without the machinery.

[00:14:37.78]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

[00:14:38.58]

AILEEN WEBB: Where really, from the point of view of the future and of the understanding of beauty and the surroundings of beauty, it's got to be something which comes from the creative instinct of the individual. And so that there's been nothing of this kind that has brought the world together, the world of ideas together, in the craft field before the World Craft Council. And we would like to see and feel that ultimately it will be able to accomplish

on an international, interworld, intercountry basis what the ACC has been able to accomplish in the United States. And it's taken the ACC twenty-seven years now to reach the position that it's in. And the World Craft Council has only been gone six years. So in another twenty years, why, we hope we'll have very concrete results to show.

[00:15:47.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well, who directs the World Craft Council, then?

[00:15:49.99]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I'm President. We have a Secretary General, a man called James Plaut who comes from Boston, and—

[00:15:59.75]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mentioned that, yeah.

[00:16:01.70]

AILEEN WEBB: And we've just taken on our staff James Noel White, who has been the Vice Chairman of the Industrial Design Center in London. And he's come on two-thirds of the time as a member of our staff. And he would probably have to—one person can't do everything in —

[00:16:31.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a large world. [Laughs.]

[00:16:32.39]

AILEEN WEBB: It's a large world. And we have sixty-seven countries now that belong. So that the board of direction, which is made up of about twenty different people representing the different areas, plus these two paid men, plus myself, plus Mrs. Patch, as volunteers.

[00:16:59.21]

PAUL CUMMINGS: My goodness. That's so few people for such an enormous job. [They laugh.]

[00:17:03.30]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, it is a big job. Now we concentrate, you see, on the biennial, which will probably be triennial, conferences. We are building up sections in each country that are developing their own individual exhibitions and activities. We are going to hold the first, really, comprehensive international exhibition of the crafts in 1973. I don't know whether I spoke about that before or not.

[00:17:38.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you just mentioned that it was being formulated.

[00:17:39.92]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, Mr. Plaut has been abroad for two weeks and he just called me up. Just back. Says it's all signed and delivered, so it's really going to happen.

[00:17:49.70]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrific.

[00:17:50.30]

AILEEN WEBB: So that all of that type of activity—

[00:17:53.62]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there's never been anything like that.

[00:17:55.94]

AILEEN WEBB: There's never been anything of this kind. I think in twenty years, long after I'm dead and buried, we'll really be having the same effect on the crafts of the world as the ACC has been able to do here.

[00:18:14.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

[00:18:15.65]

AILEEN WEBB: And I don't know whether I said this before about the World Craft Council, but one of the things which I hope we're going to be able to do is to build a bridge between the developing countries and the 20th century. And this will give an opportunity to people who are contemporarily creative and who want to break away from—

[00:18:47.48]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Repetition—

[00:18:48.32]

AILEEN WEBB: The repetitious, folkloric kind of work, to find themselves through exhibitions, through slides, of this—

[00:18:57.79]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you think that might then destroy their kind of folklore tradition? Or do you think that would still carry on in some different way?

[00:19:08.11]

AILEEN WEBB: I think it will enrich the work of the creative people. And just as our background, the complex of our Indian, Spanish, the early New England influences subconsciously have an effect on the development of the creative adult now, so these various forces that have built up the folklore will still remain and come out.

[00:19:46.93]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very interesting. I think that—do you find that there are—craftsmen are interested in doing—in designing things for commercial production?

[00:20:03.17]

AILEEN WEBB: I think it just depends on the personality of the craftsman. Some of them have that bent, and so that they want to work with industry. They're apt make more money if they get an industrial contract than they will if they just stay and produce something for a retail shop. And so if that's the kind of thing they like to do, more power to them. If they don't like to do it, why should they?

[00:20:35.20]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they can still do either one—

[00:20:37.90]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. They can do all—and I think that's the great thing about being a craftsman. You can live any number of different kinds of lives.

[00:20:47.83]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And be independent, too.

[00:20:49.18]

AILEEN WEBB: And be independent.

[00:20:54.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you had mentioned before an exhibition in Brooklyn. I guess it was about 1953. How did that come about?

[00:21:03.05]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, Mr. Charles Nagel, who was head of the Brooklyn Museum, and Meyric Rogers, who was Head of the Art Institute [of Chicago -Ed.], and I happened to get together, really helped largely by Meyric, who was Curator of Decorative Arts in Chicago—we just had the idea and we were able to carry it out. Things like that come about as a result of ideas, I think.

[00:21:35.01]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, that was the—I think you'd said the first exhibition.

[00:21:39.32]

AILEEN WEBB: That was the first real museum exhibition of contemporary crafts in this country.

[00:21:46.27]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's amazing. It's only seventeen years ago, or something.

[00:21:51.91]

AILEEN WEBB: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And now there's just a flood of—I forget. I think that *Craft Horizons* alone last year reviewed 290 exhibitions of crafts all through the country. I might be wrong on my figure, but a great many.

[00:22:10.54]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a long way from one show.

[00:22:12.38]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. Because those are big, huge shows.

[00:22:19.12]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well—but that exhibition, then, was very important as something—

[00:22:22.36]

AILEEN WEBB: That was a milestone.

[00:22:23.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: The milestone, yeah. How are things selected for it?

[00:22:29.30]

AILEEN WEBB: In that—at that particular show? We had a regional jury, and Mr. Nagel and Mr. Rogers and I went out to almost all the jury and selected the pieces that were sent into a central depot.

[00:22:50.19]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So there were like groups of small things?

[00:22:53.97]

AILEEN WEBB: All the Northeast things were sent to Brooklyn Museum. All the California and West Coast things were sent—I forget—to de Young museum, I think. And they allowed a space to jury.

[00:23:07.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Then you could—

[00:23:09.69]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. And then they were all brought—the choices from all the six regions were brought to the Brooklyn Museum. And we had a final jury by outside jurors and other jurors as to what we wanted to include.

[00:23:25.99]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, do you have any idea of how many things looked at in the preliminary selection? Was it a great deal? Did you pick a high percentage or—

[00:23:40.69]

AILEEN WEBB: I think we didn't pick a very high percentage, and I think that we probably had about 350 pieces in the exhibition. I suppose we could look that up if we had to. But now, when we had this Young American Show last spring in Albuquerque, we—it's a national competition for craftsmen who are thirty years and younger. And we juried it first by slides here in this very room.

[00:24:15.39]

Each craftsman was allowed to show—I think it was three pieces and three photographs of each show or something. We had over 900 craftsmen sending things in. It was just perfect bedlam. More and more, if you have a competitive exhibition, the number of craftsmen is so great that you—they and you can't afford the expense of—

[00:24:42.90]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Of looking at it—

[00:24:43.77]

AILEEN WEBB: Of looking at all the pieces and having been sent—having them sent in.

[00:24:47.50]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That's very expensive, processing that much material.

[00:24:53.54]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. So that each craftsman had to do his own photography, of course. They had a wonderful rig up. So that we had five carousels in a row here. And the work—all the photographs of the individuals could be shown—

[00:25:11.56]

PAUL CUMMINGS: At one time.

[00:25:11.77]

AILEEN WEBB: One individual could be shown at the time on that wall, and the jurors sat over here.

[00:25:16.34]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous.

[00:25:18.62]

AILEEN WEBB: They juried about two days. And then the head juror went out to Albuquerque. And the jury made sure that we hadn't let in because photographs something perfectly terrible. And that's traveling. And we'll travel for another year, and then it's traveling to a great many museums.

[00:25:47.39]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is there a great deal of regional difference in the kind of crafts or kinds of things people do in, say, the Northeast or the Southwest or something?

[00:26:00.55]

AILEEN WEBB: Not—I don't think a great deal. I think that where there's a very strong school—for instance, a glass school in that area, there would be more craftsmen doing glass. I think where there's a very strong personality who started perhaps some new idea in ceramics, that there may be a difference. But by and large, I don't think there's any great difference.

[00:26:33.94]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's like other things. People tend to gather around a focus point.

[00:26:37.50]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:26:37.86]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —and work with it. Well, the other thing is, some of the people that have been involved with the museum, which we really haven't talked very much about—you'd mentioned David Campbell, who was the first—he was the architect—

[00:27:01.22]

AILEEN WEBB: He was the architect and the first real president.

[00:27:03.89]

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was the first one. And he was at the—

[00:27:07.29]

AILEEN WEBB: He was Head of the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts.

[00:27:09.87]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. How did you—did you know him, or how did you pick him?

[00:27:12.66]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, when I first started—before we started the America House, we were able very easily to get the names of the craft leaders in the New England states. And he was the craft leader for New Hampshire. So he came to our first conference.

[00:27:35.36]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, but he did a great number of things. I mean, my research showed his name kept cropping up in all kinds of—

[00:27:42.15]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. He was very creative and a very active person. And actually, he had great judgment. And he was really a grand person.

[00:27:52.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was he trained as an architect?

[00:27:54.29]

AILEEN WEBB: He was trained as an architect and graduated at the depth of the Depression. Then he couldn't get a job and he taught Shady Hill School, I think. And then he was

employed by Mrs. Coolidge in New Hampshire to head the then-just beginning New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts.

[00:28:18.15]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:28:19.52]

AILEEN WEBB: And he really gave up, I think, a very promising career in architecture because he became so obsessed with the conviction that the creative use of hands is one of the things which the world needed.

[00:28:41.77]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's very interesting. I wonder what kind of—it's very hard to phrase questions sometimes. What kind of things did he do, or was he responsible for here?

[00:28:57.15]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, he was responsible, in the first place, for the architecture of this building in America House. He was not a very good organizer. He was responsible for imbuing people with the need for high standard values and pointing out values. He was very good at setting up an exhibition. Paul Smith learned a great deal from him. He was just a grand all-around guy.

[00:29:29.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did Paul Smith work here?

[00:29:32.19]

AILEEN WEBB: Paul Smith came really, as an apprentice right out of the Buffalo School of Art, whatever the name is, in Buffalo. And he came as Campbell's assistant and helped setting up the exhibitions and so on.

[00:29:54.58]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And learned the whole thing as he went along. Yeah, wow.

[00:29:57.58]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, he took training, I think, to specialize in woodworking in Buffalo.

[00:30:04.33]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, because I didn't really know where he came from.

[00:30:11.65]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, he came from outside of Buffalo. He went to Buffalo College, is it, or University?

[00:30:22.51]

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's also someone, William Barrett, who you had mentioned.

[00:30:26.44]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, William Barrett was a very nice person. When Dave Campbell died, he'd been on our board of trustees for a long while. And he was one of the first Vice Presidents of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. And he told me an amusing story. He grew up in South Boston. He said he found that on Saturdays, he could go and take woodworking classes in one of the settlement houses. And he did that for several years as he was growing up. Then he went to MIT. And so that he had a basic underlying appreciation of what using your hands could do, though he never—as far as I know, ever did anything anymore with his hands.

[00:31:16.84]

And he became President, and he was President for about three years. And he put a certain amount of order into some of the disorder that Dave had left. But he didn't have the personality, or anything. And then he died, too. Now we have an excellent man now, Donald Wyckoff, who—just an answered prayer. I hope nothing happens to him. I think I've killed off two presidents. [Laughs.] Whenever he gets a little tired or something, I'm terrified.

[00:31:48.07]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who is he, now? Because—

[00:31:49.45]

AILEEN WEBB: He is the Executive Vice President. He was head of one of the biggest public schools in New Jersey, and came to this. And he's a craftsman himself, but he's a very good organizer. He talks well. He's really putting us in a position that we've never been in before. In relation—and I'll use the word government. He's kept in very closely with the—not only with the New York State Council on the Arts, but with different councils on the arts and helped. We've really become now the national source of information on the crafts. And we are called on more and more by government agencies, or by anybody who wants to develop.

[00:32:44.80]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And use the library downstairs, and things like that?

[00:32:47.54]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:32:49.60]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. Well, most of the people then that have been trustees or are trustees have had some kind of craft interest or the training—

[00:32:59.73]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:33:00.17]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —something along the line.

[00:33:03.57]

AILEEN WEBB: Which has been a weakness in a way, in the board of trustees because what you have to have in a board of trustees in an organization of this kind are good, hard-headed businessmen who are willing to go out and ask for money.

[00:33:17.03]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

[00:33:17.40]

AILEEN WEBB: And we started getting the other kind.

[00:33:20.32]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:33:20.62]

AILEEN WEBB: And gradually, as we put on new members, Mr. Samuel Johnson of Johnson Wax just got on the board.

[00:33:30.68]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, he's a good businessman.

[00:33:32.26]

AILEEN WEBB: Yeah. Well.

[00:33:33.90]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's very interesting. So many organizations—art organizations will have a lot of art people, and they really do need somebody who's [inaudible].

[00:33:45.90]

AILEEN WEBB: I've known very personally and been very friendly with Dana Creel, who's head of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. And I always say, he's been my father confessor in what I ought to do. But right from the word "go," he kept saying, "You should strengthen your board with businessmen." And it's very difficult to do. You have to do a lot of selling to the businessmen before they're willing to do it.

[00:34:12.41]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because their time is so valuable—

[00:34:14.22]

AILEEN WEBB: Yes.

[00:34:14.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: —and they want to—they either really have to be interested or get something out of it. Well, what do you think—just to sort of come back to this again—is going to be the future of the craft idea and the craftsmen in this country? How do you see it going?

[00:34:38.51]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think there's going to be a greater and greater acceptance of the basic idea that we've always believed, and that is that the word "crafts" is really synonymous in a great many ways with the word "art." And that it has a bad connotation—I'm sure I must have said this in my first tape. It has a downgraded connotation in the minds of the public, because it became so "artsy craftsy" after the Industrial Revolution.

[00:35:13.40]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:35:14.22]

AILEEN WEBB: And my feeling is that it's going to grow and continue as one of the great recreational outlets for people. And one of the great areas of release. And one of the things to which people who need release from the tensions under which we live will turn to.

[00:35:42.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there's great satisfaction in using one's hands and seeing a useful object—

[00:35:47.54]

AILEEN WEBB: And out of that—I mean, out of the thousands of people who may be doing it, there may be a hundred, if that, who are really top-flight artists. But all of them will have a good time.

[00:36:06.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think there's a difference between, say, a craftsman who does it as a hobby or as a part-time thing, as opposed to a craftsman who wants to really work out and make his living out of whatever his activity is? Whether they have similar

problems, do you think?

[00:36:30.26]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I think that the possibilities to both of them are the same. And then it just depends what the person is looking for and what his personality is, what he puts into it. Now, a person who doesn't need to make any money can be a professional in my mind, as long as they're really highly skilled.

[00:36:52.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the quality is there.

[00:36:53.93]

AILEEN WEBB: And the quality is there. And there's always been a great deal of quarreling about what is a professional. And a lot of people like to say, well, it's just a person who earns their living. Well, I just don't agree with that. I think a professional is a person who is outstanding in their work.

[00:37:16.57]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Makes a contribution.

[00:37:17.58]

AILEEN WEBB: Makes a contribution.

[00:37:20.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very interesting. Well, with America House and with the museum, has there been a great deal of association with people like decorators and designers, architects—

[00:37:36.49]

AILEEN WEBB: The decorators are helpful; the architects are helpful. Some architects give commissions. Some decorators come. The difficulty as far as America House goes is to give the amount of—

[00:37:50.11]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Discount—

[00:37:50.92]

AILEEN WEBB: Discount that the decorators want.

[00:37:54.20]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's always a problem. Yeah. But there are architects who do come and look and commission things?

[00:38:01.12]

AILEEN WEBB: Oh, yes. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that is one of the services that our Research Department downstairs gives.

[00:38:08.38]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find that that's a rather level amount or does it increase or decrease?

[00:38:14.19]

AILEEN WEBB: I wouldn't really know. It just depends.

[00:38:19.24]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've mentioned Mrs. Patch a number of times. Who is she?

[00:38:23.44]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, Mrs. George Patch, her husband taught, I think, at Cranbrook Academy a long while ago. She comes from one of the very old American families. I don't remember the name. But they have one of these families that have long—the families associations. And she is a weaver—was a weaver. She started the Guild Weaving in Massachusetts. Her husband died. She has some independent means.

[00:38:55.06]

And she has got a very good mind, and a mind that absorbs facts and is interested in facts, though she tells me that she isn't. But she couldn't—no one could do what she does unless you were. And she has, on her own, traveled around the world and spent three months last spring in Africa, and has been responsible for the development of the research activities, really, that the World Craft Council is developing.

[00:39:31.76]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

[00:39:33.12]

AILEEN WEBB: And she has written a book that we've published, *A Short Guide to World Crafts*. And she wrote a large part of the material in this book, *Crafts of the Modern World*, that the World Craft Council published.

[00:39:53.65]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a new book, isn't it? Fairly new?

[00:39:55.72]

AILEEN WEBB: It was published a year, year and a half ago. And so she's just been very helpful. And she and I have traveled around together a great deal.

[00:40:14.16]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, great. I was just wondering if there are other people like her that you worked with on particular projects, or have worked closely with over the years that we haven't mentioned or talked about.

[00:40:33.72]

AILEEN WEBB: Well, I've worked so closely with the staff here. There hasn't been a great many outside people, but there have been a great many people who've been interested, who have come here to meetings and who've helped us and who've helped us financially. But from the point of view of actually—

[00:40:59.52]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Projects and things—

[00:41:00.36]

AILEEN WEBB: projects—

[00:41:00.63]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's really here, isn't it?

[00:41:02.10]

AILEEN WEBB: Most of it has come from within. And we've had a great deal of very sympathetic understanding from other people, and a great deal of support from other people. But from the point of view of actual work, I suppose that D'Arcy Hayman that I mentioned before, was Head of the UNESCO, has been one person who was very helpful.

Meyric Rogers was awfully helpful, and he was—before he retired. And Harold Brennan, the Dean of the School for American Craftsmen, has been one of my very good friends.

[00:41:53.71]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody has—

[00:41:55.00]

AILEEN WEBB: Everybody takes their own place, and I play a place in their lives.

[00:42:01.06]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, are there any things that we haven't touched upon that you think you'd like to talk about or elaborate on?

[00:42:12.05]

AILEEN WEBB: No. The only thing I can elaborate on is the great need for more space and more financial support, which is the sad tale and history of every cultural organization.

[00:42:28.91]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Because you said the building here is so filled up now, the space.

[00:42:31.40]

AILEEN WEBB: It's just—it's just perfectly terrific. So that one of these days, we still hope we may be able to get a bigger building.

[00:42:39.95]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's an expensive proposition in New York City.

[00:42:42.96]

AILEEN WEBB: I know.

[00:42:44.88]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay, well, if there's nothing else that you would like to talk about, I think that would be fine—

[00:42:54.18]

AILEEN WEBB: I haven't the faintest idea—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]