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Oral history interview with Mildred Baker, 1963 September 21

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Transcript

Interview

Interview with Mildred Baker
Conducted by Harlan Phillips
At the Chelsea Hotel in New York
September 21, 1963

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mildred Baker on September 21, 1963. The interview was conducted at the Chelsea Hotel in New York by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

HP: HARLAN B. PHILLIPS
MB: MILDRED BAKER

HP: This should really be a form of amusement and, if you find it becoming other than amusement, please say so.

MB: Well, when Jake just mentioned some of these problems, I remembered that I was in charge of the gallery up in Woodstock, New York . . . you know, the art colony in the Catskills. And word reached Woodstock that Cahill had been made the administrator of the Federal art project, and there was such excitement! I mean, all the artists started talking, talking, talking, "What's going to happen? How can we get on the project?" When Cahill called Woodstock where I was and asked if I would come down to be an assistant to him, that created more of a stir. So all through August I sat waiting, waiting to find out just when I was to come, and then Dorothy Miller and I drove down, I think it was over Labor Day weekend. Cahill wanted both of us to be assistants to him. He had three jobs to fill. The assistant director, and these two jobs of assistant to the director. I was appointed assistant to the director. So that interval that we just mentioned . . . it lasted about a month that we sat and waited for things to get going, and sat in the old auditorium. Do you know that building in Washington? A vast, boxlike structure that was transformed into our headquarters, with lots of little cubicles on the floor where we sat. Then we were moved shortly after that into he famous McLean mansion. Do you know where that stood? It no longer stands. I think it was 1500 I Street. All the arts projects were put into that building: theatre, writers, music, the art projects, were all assembled there, together with the Historic American Building Survey project.

HP: You had, then some prior preparation for being thought of in terms of the arts?

MB: Oh, yes. I had worked with Cahill on the first Municipal Art Exhibition in New York, and that was our first association together, although I had known him previously. But I had been for years with the College Art Association, with Audrey McMahon, whom I mentioned to you last time. She was made the director of the Hew York City project. Have you seen her?

HP: No, I haven't, but we intend to. In short, your interest has been the arts all along.

MB: Yes. I had been employed at one of the galleries on 57th Street before that, so I had years and years of exposure. Also, I was married at that time to an artist, so I had many contacts in the art field.

HP: So this wasn't, in a sense then, an abrupt break in any way. It was an extension of your own interest.

MB: That's right, it was. There were several things done for artists here in New York during the early days of the Depression. The first Municipal Art Exhibition was one of them. La Guardia sponsored that and then there was an effort made by other organizations to pick up the slack by providing interest in exhibitions through trying to encourage people to purchase works. Wanamaker's, for instance, set up a show, and I was connected with that. I was in charge of that. And there were several other efforts made. Aline Liebman set up a Christmas show and tried to encourage all her friends to buy and I was in charge of that, so I'd been involved with the problem for quite a while.

HP: The first municipal show was quite, I think, a shot in the arm for a time, wasn't it?

MB: Yes, it was.

HP: The College Art Association, I believe, quite early, even before the Public Works of Art Project, which was a short-term thing prior to the WPA project, had some relief plans. Did you have any association with them?

MB: Well, Mrs. McMahon was involved with it and just what the chronological order is there I'm not quite sure, but I know that it was under ERA. Maybe we'll have to go back to the literature to get this straightened out. I'm not sure whether PWAP was under the ERA program, or how they tied in. I know there was a state relief organization and Mrs. McMahon and Mrs. Pollack -- Frances Pollack -- worked together to secure funds to employ artists, and in the College Art Association itself we had several people from the relief roles working in our packing department, our shipping department, and so forth. There was a tie-in there.

HP: I think . . . what was it called, the CWA?

MP: The Civil Works Administration.

HP: Yes, for a time supported the PWAP too. When that project was terminated as a project, there were in existence certain continuing commitments.

MP: I guess that was it.

HP: These were picked up by the FERA for a time, and continued, as I understand it, until the development of the WPA. There was also certain continuing efforts from the Treasury Department's building and grounds division, which is something wholly apart from the subsequent developments under the WPA; in any event, there was a lot of concern, certainly. I mean, even the College Art Association itself, through exhibitions, and so on, attempted to stimulate sales.

MB: Yes, that's true.

HP: In an effort to alleviate some of the ascertainable suffering among artists. Well, when Mr. Cahill spoke to you about this task, did he give you any idea as to its range and depth?

MB: No. I don't think anyone knew just what was going to be involved. We knew that we were going to employ artists over the country. The first job I was sent out on was to make recommendations regarding people to head the project and to investigate the situation in the states of Ohio, Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa. I started out on what I thought was going to be a short trip, but it went on for weeks and weeks and weeks. I did begin making contacts on that trip with people in the states I just mentioned. In Ohio, William Milliken had been closely associated with PWAP and he was the person to whom I turned for advice. And he made recommendations regarding a person who could head the project in Cleveland. So from there, going down to Missouri, it was quite a problem because that was the place I mentioned where we encountered the difficult political situation, and I was completely innocent. I didn't know a thing about the Prendergast machine, but I was right in the midst of it and, when I came into the office of the local administrator in Kansas City, he said, 'Why of course we'd love to employ artists. I think it would be very nice to have them marbleize our halls, or building. I think we could use them in that way." The money was allocated specifically for the art project, as you know; it was not to be used in any other way, but these politicians saw a way, they thought, of latching on to some of the money and having their own people do various jobs. But we never got anywhere. It took years, I guess, before we could get started in Missouri with the Index of American Design and that was quite successful. And then the establishment of a Community Art Center in St. Louis, which I believe is still in existence. It was established for the Negroes of St. Louis. And so that was Missouri that waited a long time. I don't recall who the senators were from Missouri at that time, but there was a very tough state administrator who sat in Jefferson City and could be perfectly charming talking to you, but it was impossible to get anywhere. That was the state that we found ourselves in . . . just being completely frustrated. He'd be just so very nice.

HP: Tell me this: sitting in Washington when you received this assignment to aid in the development of the local organization structures, what was the thinking then, in Washington, of Cahill and others, as to the design and development that would, they thought, might, develop?

MB: Well, I think that the most important thing was to get the artists employed, get them on the payroll, and the suggestion, of course, had been made regarding the project. It was necessary for the local people to get sponsors and to find a location for the works. They had to really do a big job in going out and enlisting the interest of public organizations -- building schools, etc., to sponsor the projects and then get the artists on the payroll. I think it was just in the hands of the local people, once we got our state people employed.

HP: In short, you were an idea center -- an organization center -- a, what would you call it? A collecting point of information from various areas but the discretion to move or not to move, or employ or not employ was not the central agency's task, but was left to the discretion of the local people whom you had a hand in employing, or getting accepted.

MB: Yes. And of course they, in turn, were responsible to the state organization. In some instances in the larger centers they were responsible to the City administration.

HP: And this is the trying period, then of getting a ship afloat, isn't it? That is, organizationally. Though interest was present and money was available, it takes more than merely interest and money to sustain an idea. Well, I would think then, that the central office then became like a group of nomads, ascertaining what in the way of development had taken place in the various states and keeping some semblance of harmony and communication.

MB: That was it. Of course we were trouble shooters. When difficulties arose in various communities, or in state organizations, we would be asked to come to try to settle the situation. Special problems, for instance, that arose with the union organizations, we would have to go to try to settle it, the problem. The artists were known to a great degree to the local administrators. For instance, in Chicago the woman who administered that project -- I think her name was Increase Robinson -- she had run a gallery previously and had also been Bruce's representative in Chicago and she knew the art scene, art world, very well indeed, so that she was able to get the artists together whom she knew about and who were in need and could appoint the supervisors for her project. She had excellent leadership available. Audrey McMahon, too, through her past experience in New York City, could get going because she knew who the artists were and whom she could get for the supervisory jobs.

HP: There's something about teaching and training, too, in this picture. For example, here in New York, as I understand it, Mrs. McMahon was one of the leaders and Mrs. Pollak was another in the training and teaching aspect of art.

MB: Well, that was one of the projects that developed in New York City. It was a highly successful one. Of course, over the country there were various art groups -- art classes -- founded. Here it probably was a little more spectacular because there were various areas of the City where teachers could go and where a great body of work was turned out by the students and there were exhibitions of the work and there were some outstanding teachers, too. But that was just one project here.

HP: It also suggests that the manner in which the organization developed left flexibility -- regional flexibility.

MB: It did. That was one of the fascinating and interesting things that developed, that in various areas individual projects would turn up that we knew nothing about, but it would be because of local talent that existed there. For instance, in New Jersey, in South Jersey, there were several unemployed glass blowers, and there was a very interesting glass project that developed as a result of that. Now that wouldn't happen anywhere else; it was peculiar to the region. It depended a great deal on the talents of the people who were available. And so it was in relation to the Index of American Design. In new England, for instance, there were some amazingly talented people who could give leadership in the renderings of, for instance, crewel embroidery, which couldn't be duplicated anywhere by anybody. They really did a magnificent job. And ships' figureheads in the rendering of the wood. That, I believe, was a New England development, too. And there was quite an imaginative regional supervisor by the name of Richard Morrison. I don't know where he is now. I last heard he was in Texas, but he had an amazingly active project over the New England states. So there were these various leaders who appointed very excellent supervisors who developed these projects and got them going. There were other local developments that I can't think of just now. But, of course, in the Community Art Centers teaching was an important thing and I think you've heard of the Art Center in Phoenix which brought in -- at that time Phoenix was a relatively small city -- but thousands of people came, I think, to the opening of the Art Center there and immediately rushed into buy art materials and became art students in the Art Center. I think if sometime you can get hold of Philip Curtis he might have an interesting story to tell. He was the director of that Art Center. He was sent from New York. You see, that was another thing: that New York did provide directors and supervisors for programs in various sections of the country.

HP: It did?

MB: Yes. We had that flexibility under our program, especially under the Community Art Center program, that we could find the right people here and then send them out to Spokane, Washington; to Wyoming; to Arizona; and I believe also to California. Some of those people have remained, and you'd have to go out to get their story.

HP: How much reliance was there on the, you know, the local talent, not necessarily the known or name talent, but the local talent? Let's say Bijou, Kansas, just to pick a name I've always enjoyed. There may not have been an artist in Bijou, Kansas. I don't know. But, unlike the Treasury program, where there appeared to be a competition in terms of idea and a generation of ideas for something specific, a building, and so on. As I think we indicated before we turned this on, there was a certain haste, or urgency abroad in the land to do something and, while government itself was waiting for Secretary Ickes to come up with a program, the President turned to Harry Hopkins for stimulation of something, and so this would transcend and go beyond, or it appears so to me, perhaps the emphasis on -- I don't want to use the work, but on name or on quality which the Treasury Department might. I wondered, you know, to what extent the local artist as artist, maybe an unknown, figured?

MB: Well, there once again it was up to the, either the state art supervisor or a local supervisor, to find a way of

employing that person. That's why many people of rather mediocre talent could be used in helping, for instance, on a poster project. This is an isolated case. Of course there you couldn't set up a project for one individual, but that individual might be brought in to a larger program and his talents used, either in, as I said, poster making or in some vast mural project where many helpers were needed or, even if he was a stone carver, he could be used on a project that was designed by an outstanding person. There was always help needed. And of course in the art centers themselves there was help needed -- maybe in docentry or teaching or in some phase of the work in the art program in the community art centers. But that was where the ingenuity of the supervisor came into play because he had to devise ways and means of using even most mediocre talent.

HP: So the discretion with reference to idea and use, then, rested with these regional directors?

MB: Or state directors or local directors in a city. In Detroit, there was a very good sculptor, Samuel Cashwan, who created many pieces of sculpture and I'm sure on that project he needed many helpers, so that others could be employed to help him, and there were innumerable ways that people could be used in assisting. Teaching, of course. There you had to have good people and experienced people, I would say. For the designers of the murals you needed experienced people, outstanding artists, but there were these various other jobs that could be performed, and that was how the rolls could rise to well over 5,000. I think at one point we reached 6,000.

HP: Yes, I think I have seen that figure -- 6,000. This would, I think, certainly indicate to me that, for example, when you went out to try to select for Cleveland, went out to Ohio, that the state itself, while you were trying to think of an organization, too, from Washington, the state itself had its state organization and within it there was a question of who might be suitable for given localities within that state. So that the -- if I understand you then, I think there were 17 or so regions for states, or areas, like New England was a whole. Connecticut, New York and I think parts of New Jersey formed a regional structure. There were the Southern states, and so on -- lumped together in a kind of administrative thing. But then it was not only setting this up in being, but finding the local people, like in Buffalo or Chicago or Joliet, or, you know, wherever. And the success of the project then would be a kind of reaction to the local impulses which you couldn't find and necessarily feel in Washington, D.C.

MP: That's correct. Sometimes the recommendations came from a region. As I remember, the recommendation of our West Coast director came from the region, as far as I recall, and this person was known to some of our friends in Washington who said he'd be excellent. And so it came through locally to us, rather than our going out there and finding the person. In many instances the individuals appointed had been previously employed in a supervisory capacity by Mr. Bruce's organization.

HP: So there was a continuity to rely on. It was simply getting established and figuring out the basis on which you might make allocation of funds. Did you in Washington, at the central office, have the final say on the allocation of the funds?

MB: Well, we worked with the funds appropriated to us. That I'm not too clear about. I don't remember how that was organized. Mr. Parker probably would remember that because he handled the business end.

HP: I just wondered because how would you at any given moment ascertain who was being employed where on what? You wouldn't, necessarily, would you, except through the state supervisors, or the regional directors, or even the local directors, as in New York City, which must have presented a special problem, or Cleveland, or Chicago. So how would . . . you know, when you project a program, and I understand the sense of urgency and perhaps I'm trying to read too much in the way of logic into something which grows the way humans grow. This may be, so that the number of people who were employable as distinct from those who were employed on the project might differ. Let's say the organization in Cleveland was sharp and astute, bubbled with ideas, created programs, and so on. It's conceivable that funds were allocated in that direction, whereas some other outfit, let's say Missouri, where there were other problems not connected with art as art, but other problems which were connected with politics, put a paralytic hand on the development, so that funds might conceivably not have gone there.

MB: They were earmarked but not used. That was the point. Each state had its allocation and then, if the funds weren't used, they were just there, in the treasury.

HP: In other words, the central organization, or someone, made some decision as to what conceivably might have been given this program. And then, within that, adjustments were made depending up on the developments locally.

MB: Yes.

HP: Well, there wasn't any precedent for this, as we know, and it was, you know, human beings pushed by a sense of urgency as the times required. Artists having stomachs like other individuals, required something. Thinking about it, at what moment would you say the development was fully launched? How much time do you think had elapsed, at a guess? But then, this would vary, I suppose, from region to region.

MB: Yes, I think it would. By February of 1936, I think there were already well over 3,000 artists on the roll, as I recall, and then I think from there it went on up until, by 1940, I guess there were over 5,000. But there were cut-backs every once in a while. I would say the program was well launched by the early part of 1936. There we'll have to look back and see statistics once again, but I have a feeling that we were on our way in the early part of that year.

HP: You know, it's one thing to send off pyrotechnics that you can read in a newspaper, and I recently reread some of the original notices from the President, and so on, that certain allocation of funds was going to be made to the arts. I think this is in July of '35. An indication that this is going to happen. When your husband was in here before we turned this on, I raised with you the question of what seemed to be an inordinate delay. Well, it's one thing to create an idea and quite another thing to get it to walk. And your husband indicated that there were problems of getting passage or senatorial courtesy on the various appointments that were going to be made, and this kind of jockeying, which delayed the beginnings. But as you point out, I think the fairly well along, that is in being a going organization, developing a sense of momentum -- you know, gathering flexibility of employment of whatever talents there were available, in your view this particular answer to artistic distress was in being and afloat by February of '36.

MB: Yes. The mention of political approval came up, and I recall that I was asked for a letter of recommendation or approval from my senator, and I had never been active in politics, and so I was sent over to Senator Wagner's office, and I received a letter of approval so my appointment came through. That was an introduction, let's see, in September, I guess it was, that it was found necessary to have senatorial approval for all of us.

HP: You know, that's peculiar to me, you know, as alien as anything I can think of but I think you were fortunate, in a way, to have gone to Senator Wagner, although what he used by way of a . . . you know, it is silly, isn't it?

MB: Leon Keyserling was his secretary at that time.

HP: That's a sharp boy.

MB: And he was the one who received me and heard my tale.

HP: These are the compulsions which the circumstances require. And, you know, it must have been a fantastic experience for you. I mean, you know, suddenly, as you put it, to have been around in New England and in New York and suddenly to be off in Washington with, you know, the Government, whatever you can fill into that word. And the snares and red tape this involved. And I think this is one of the reasons why Harry Hopkins was picked because there was too much red tape from Ickes, and it took a long time to get problems started.

MB: I think we were comparatively free of it once we became familiar with the workings of government.

HP: I think so too, and I think remarkably so. But then, this was a crash program. And the initial design was, as I mentioned before we turned the tape on, people were demanding the government do something. Apparently they were.

MB: Yes.

HP: How did the developments within the artistic community itself complicate matters, if in any way?

MB: Oh, not too much, I would say. In some instances it did. Perhaps the story about Iowa is a case in point. We received a telegram of protest from some of the young artists who had worked with Grant Wood in Cedar Rapids and they were making demands that . . . I think we had appointed Grant Wood as our state advisor, or he had been under Bruce, and this younger generation coming up was opposed to Wood. So I went out to Iowa, and we didn't get too much of a project started, as I recall. We had difficulties there with getting a state director. I had introductions to various people in Des Moines and, as I recall, it took quite a while to launch the project there. The Treasury project, or rather, Bruce's project, had been active and created some murals in Iowa City at the state university there, but it did take quite a while to get a community art center started in Des Moines itself.

HP: Maybe I'm thinking of a projection of what was, oh, symptomatic of developments in the art -- artists -- among artists in New York City. There was the union organization, for example.

MB: Oh, I see what you mean. At first I thought you meant local art organizations that existed, or groups that existed, such as that Cedar Rapids group.

HP: No, I was thinking of the . . . well, here for the first time artists, in a way, had a common employer -- government. And for whatever reason -- I haven't got the vaguest idea except organization was in the air -- "stick to the bunch like a banana or you will get skinned," you know. It was in the garment district. In a sense a contribution that was made by the 30's in the Depression was the right to strike ultimately got sustained in the

Wagner Act in constitutional test. But here are artists who are notoriously, or at least as I understand them, and certainly it's reflected in the ones that I have met, individualists. Thinking in collective terms from the point of view of organization, getting a voice which may represent a consensus. I find it difficult to believe that it did represent a consensus but, none-the-less, thinking in organized terms seems to be a . . . well, mutually contradictory record of their work. You know, when you stand in front of a canvas with a brush, it's an individual thing. Although there are aspects of artists just as there are aspects of people, generally, which I suppose can be seen collectively. You know, that is my stomach.

MB: Well, I think that's a very dramatic story and you'll get a good insight through Mrs. McMahon, and I believe you're also going to talk to Harry Knight, are you not?

HP: Yes.

MB: Well, then, they were right in the midst of it in New York so they can give you a very good idea of what the developments were here.

HP: You mentioned that you had to go out and settle some disputes.

MB: In Chicago that was. Well, there the artists were not too sympathetic toward their supervisor, and they felt that she was being a little dictatorial, and it was an effort on the part of the union members to have her removed because of their dislike of the way she was handling the project. She had favorites, I think. It wasn't too difficult a session. At that time Robert J. Wolfe, who is on the staff at Brooklyn College, was president of the union, and he handled the situation very well. He did have some militant members, but we got along very well. And I think the matter was smoothed out very satisfactorily. In general, I think that the unions were concerned about the pay rate and these basic economic problems, so that you can see why artists would organize when they were confronted with these economic problems.

HP: Yes.

MB: And of course there were demonstrations that were quite dramatic, and picketing.

HP: Yes. I'm reminded here in New York that an army colonel, Somervell?

MB: Somervell, yes.

HP: He had a bad press, in a way.

MB: Yes, he did.

HP: Terribly bad.

MB: He was the administrator in the city -- of the WPA.

HP: As I understand, he, as a good army man, he was probably carrying out the instruction which he had received, but this is the period of the almost arbitrary cut-backs. And of course this earned protests, picketing, sit-down strikes in the office itself. I would assume certainly boisterous representation of one's interest with the common employer, government, and the inability for artists as individuals to accept the . . . well, it certainly appears in the press to have been something of the, you know, the monolithic structure of a military man in this particular position. Now this is maybe an incident, not necessarily representative at all, but it certainly shows the play of forces which were involved. I assume here that the instructions for cut-back were related to funds. And this is a matter of dollars and cents. And it may be that the use of funds, you know, had extended beyond the danger point, so that deficiency appropriating and difficulties with a Congress that took something of a jaundiced view about this may have caused certain uneasiness as to the continuance of it, if it went beyond the normal traces. But I can understand Somervell's problem as an administrator, you know. That's easy. You have so much money and you have so many people on the payroll and, if you pay it all out, you're going to be in the red. No matter what the human impulse is, you've got to be tough. But the artists' collective union -- were they effective at all in Washington in sustaining the continuance? Were artists called upon and used and utilized?

MB: Well, I recall that some of them did come down to see the senators and, oh, Paul Manship was one of them, Rockwell Kent, various artists, came down to help, and I guess they may have been effective. I guess they represented organizations, too, so that they brought their strength to bear in that way, but otherwise, I can't think of too many instances where they brought pressure to bear on our office, though Cahill, of course, when he came to New York, would see many of the representatives. I don't recall any of the delegations coming to see us, though.

HP: Well, he was a rare choice in that regard, too, because he was a . . . .

MB: He was very well liked. The artists held him in high regard, and of course he had many friends among the artists long before he became the director of the Federal Art Project.

HP: Which made it easier when it came to communication, certainly. And there was no blockage, no alienation?

MB: No, not at all.

HP: And it would be alien to him to have been otherwise. I mean, it was the man. He was part of the scene at once and a reflection of it, too.

MB: I think the artists all had confidence in him.

HP: Yes, I talked to one or two who were -- Stuart Davis, for example.

MB: Yes, they were very close friends.

HP: Where the question came up as to whether this would be a good think for Cahill to do or not to do, and in some backyard fence somewhere where the nightly entertainment was a series of howling cats somewhere, he and -- Stuart Davis and Cahill had this talk, I guess, over a glass of beer, or something, and, you know, the sense of urgency from the point of view of Davis, who may not be symptomatic of artists in general but certainly had had a difficult time in the 20's, let alone in the 30's, and urging Cahill that this was just the thing, that he ought to do it, that he was just the person. Which is related to radiation, you know, the quality of a personality that can turn on the spigots of charm and spray indiscriminately and come off, I think on a positive side as distinct from negative.

MB: Yes. Well, he got along very well, also, with Harry Hopkins and so it worked in both ways, both being able to handle the administrative people as well as the artists themselves.

HP: Yes. What role did the museums in general play in this?

MB: In some instances the museum directors were advisors and in some instances museums were very hospitable to exhibitions of work done on the project. At the time of the World's Fair in San Francisco, Walter Heil invited the WPA art project to present a comprehensive exhibition in his museum, the De Young Museum, which we did. And that was quite successful. Other museums cooperated, too. You know about the exhibition that the Museum of Modern Art presented which Dorothy Miller organized, called "New Horizons in American Art." So that they . . . some museums were very hospitable and very helpful in relation to the project. And some museums, too, had projects within their walls. The Newark Museum, for instance, had some of the WPA artists at work. They duplicated for us a Tibetan altar, for instance, which is still in the museum. And I think that several institutions benefitted by the work of the artists who were employed in their institutions. So I wold say that in general they were very friendly.

HP: It wasn't an alien land?

MB: No, it wasn't.

HP: You know, when you find yourself in the frying pan, as most people did in this period, to rely on an asset, which is knowledge, you know, it's good. And where it becomes helpful, and not, you know vindictive. And I think the spirit of the times is one of genuine helpfulness.

MB: I think it was, yes.

HP: And from all sources. Even the unions, strangely enough. I mean, you cannot read the press without seeing, or listening to a spokesman -- Paul Manship, for example, thinking in terms larger than Paul Manship. And thinking in ways which identified artists as artists -- a group -- and, you know, this was a strange thing, or at least certainly a new thing. But it's part, I think, of the atmosphere of the period. I'm not sure that it obtains now. I mean, you know, spirit changes. The times change -- people change. But certainly during this period there was this, I think, genuine kind of camaraderie. With all the divisive influences which individual personalities will create, none-the-less the mainstream, the main thrust in this period, was one of, you know, friendliness and concern - genuine concern. At least I find it so; at least that's what the papers reveal.

MB: I think it just had to be, or else we wouldn't have gotten out of the situation as we did. But in various localities, for instance, organizations would get together and help raise funds. For instance, in one of the Midwestern towns where a Community Art Center was to be founded, the Junior League came in and helped with contributions, and so forth. So I think that you did in these various areas get organizations working around a central idea, when you had a good one. Especially the community Art Center had vast appeal. I don't know if you have heard about that movement that developed under the WPA.

HP: This is the . . . ?

MB: The Community Art Center movement.

HP: As to its inception, no. As an idea, where did it come from?

MB: Well, that was an idea that really started, I believe, in Raleigh, North Carolina, and a young man worked with us at the time. He was brought in to establish Community Art Centers over the country -- to stimulate them wherever there was an interest. His name was Daniel Defenbacher. I don't know what's happened to him, but he did go into communities where an interest had been expressed and guided the local people in the way of forming a Community Art Center and advising them on the funds needed. And we did in Washington supply designs for the furnishings of the galleries, and he, in turn, made recommendations regarding directors for the art centers. And that is how many of the New York artists did go out over the country to head Community Art Centers. I mentioned Philip Curtis as one, and we had Carl Morris, who was sent from Chicago to head the Center in Spokane, I believe, and Hilda Morris, who came from New York to teach in that art center. The artists were sent out to the various locations where there wasn't local leadership available, and the Community Art Centers grew in number to nearly a hundred and, unfortunately, I cannot tell how many of them have survived, but I'd like very much to go back and see just what has happened to the movements. I'm sure that those Community Art Centers have had their effect, though, in as far as the people today who are now adults may have worked at painting or sculpture in the Community Art Centers when they were children, and they have really been a great stimulus because we do have this tremendous growth of interest in art, and I think in many instances it might be traced back to that movement. There were some small cities, very small towns, as a matter of fact. I think of one Gold Beach, Oregon, which had about 200 people, and there was an art center established out there. But one that had lasting value in life was the Walker Art Center, which the WPA had taken over and built up once again, and that still goes on as a very thriving center out in Minneapolis. But it was exciting to find the local interest and to see how people poured into these art centers -- Oxford, Mississippi; Greenville, Mississippi -- and then exhibitions were sent to these places. Some of the people in these communities had never seen an original work of art. I was very much amused in one instance. We had the good fortune to obtain from Lessing Rosenwald, the great print collector, a selection of his very fine prints, including a Rembrandt, and I thought that would be an ideal exhibition for a Greenville Art Center. We sent it down for the opening, and they were deeply disappointed because these works were prints. They were in black and white, and they wanted to see color there, something exciting. And in so many instances I made a wrong guess, that people wanted to see a modern painting and not something in the field of traditional painting. So those are the unexpected things that we encountered. I hope some of these centers in Mississippi have survived because there they had a great opportunity of bringing art to the people.

HP: You indicated that Raleigh, North Carolina, was the initial source.

MB: I believe it was. There was a woman by the name of Elizabeth Gilmore teaching down there. I think that she cooperated in the establishment of the first art center. That's my recollection of it, but the movement spread out from there, and when Defenbacher was brought into our office in Washington he worked continuously on this program. One of the interesting ones developed in Big Stone Gap in West Virginia, which was a mining community. And there were some very touching photographs that were sent to us of the children working out in the fields painting away. They really had a very lively center there where the leader was the ceramist, a very well-known ceramist now, by the name of Scheier, and he met there another person who was sent into teach painting, I believe, and they subsequently married and established themselves as ceramists and are among the leading ceramists of our country. So that was a development of our Big Stone Gap Art Center. I think they had a kiln there, too. They created a great deal of interest in this rather poverty-stricken community.

HP: It's strange what developed and the variety that developed.

MP: Yes. Wyoming had a very active art center movement, too, and one of the artists of New York City, by the name of Campenello, was sent out to direct the center in Rock Springs. And he, I believe, had never been outside New York before in his life and was terribly excited about what he was able to do there. It created a vast interest in art and received allocations of paintings, finally, for the schools. I'd like to go back to see how the paintings have been used since that period of 1940, when those schools received a large allocation. And Campenello never came back to New York. He's now in Kansas, so he became a Midwesterner as a result of his WPA experience.

HP: Where did ultimate ownership of these creative, or created art -- where did it rest? With the government?

MB: It rests with the government.

HP: Was it ever collected?

MB: How do you mean?

HP: Well, I mean, I've heard of some things that were disposed of.

MB: Yes. You mean the New York City situation? The things fell into the hands of a dealer and were sold?

HP: Yes.

MB: Yes, that was unfortunate. I don't know the details of that. I believe they were in a warehouse, stored away in a warehouse, but how he got his hands on the works, I don't know. But we were very careful as far as Washington was concerned. We had large numbers of works to allocate from Washington and that was my final job, to see that all the things that were in our hands were allocated, and there were thousands of prints and hundreds and hundreds of paintings that we allocated to institutions over the country. And I assume that they're still in the hands of the institutions to which they were allocated. But it was a tremendous job because there were so many works to dispose of. Every once in a while, when I go to a building and see a WPA painting, it's quite a surprise.

HP: I'll bet it is. But with, you know, the amount of work that was turned out by 3,000 people at that rate of speed is enormous, because the procedures continued for, let's see, when did it finally terminate? I guess it was . . . ?

MB: July of '44.

HP: '44. I mean, the number of works over that period.

MB: Yes, they were disposed of locally, as I said, through the local projects and then through the national office and the headquarters for our final disposition were in Chicago. The exhibition project was moved to the large warehouse out in Chicago, and we disposed of the things from there. So that in the Midwest you'll find quite a few collections, because the people in the colleges and schools, when they heard about the program -- we wrote out and told them that the things would be available -- they actually came in and made selections. But the Library of Congress received a large number of prints, so that you'll find them stored there, and there are various depositories over the country. Some went to the Denver Museum, as I remember, and I think the Chicago Art Institute received some; the Detroit Art Institute; so that museums do have collections of the works. Of course, the Modern Museum has some in its hands. I believe the Metropolitan received an allocation of prints, too, and the Philadelphia Museum. So they're there.

HP: Throughout all this period this process was subjected to criticism, particularly on the part of the Hearst press. Some of the things were quite miserable. I wonder if it had an effect at all. Effect in the sense of . . . ?

MB: On the voters?

HP: No, I don't, you know . . . .

MB: That's what they were aiming at, wasn't it?

HP: I'm not sure.

MB: Really?

HP: No, I'm not sure. It seemed to me to be in essence a kind of blackmail, because they picked on an area where reactions can be and tend to be subjective. I mean, that's something you can be . . . either you love a thing or you don't. I mean, there's no half way -- twenty percent I like, you know. It's not like that. It's not something that you can, oh, readily ascertain; it doesn't come up green or red so easily, and to continually harp on this -- in the Mirror, for example. I wouldn't mind so much if there had been some scintilla of fact behind their stories. It seems to have been really a hatchet job for a . . . .

MB: Do you mean on the project as a whole, or do you mean on individual things, such as a mural by . . . ?

HP: They hacked away at murals. They hacked away at individual artists. They hacked away at the project as a whole. They dismissed it as a form of boondoggling.

MB: Oh, yes. I recall that.

HP: Entirely overlooking the fact that after all these were people and in the context of this time they needed attention, because of the major concern. But this didn't blunt or in any way soothe these writers who wrote this screed about American art.

MB: Well, there was so much on the politics side, though, that I think that . . . .

HP: It tended to offset . . . ?

MB: I think it did.

HP: It's possible that it had a greater currency here in the city because of the union, as I think, or a delegation from the union, invaded the Mirror building and, as I understand it, got the fellow who was doing the writing out in the hall.

MB: What year was that?

HP: This was -- well, they ran a series in the Mirror, the Sunday Mirror, some series of essays on art in American WPA art in America, and wholly misleading -- really terrible stuff -- just awful! And the people representing the union -- Davis was one -- went as a delegation to try to, I guess, teach this fellow something about what was going on in the arts. They finally found out who it was who was doing the writing and had a talk with him out in the hall. Nothing rude or rough took place, but I imagine the exchange of words was feverish, at least -- possibly pretty colorful, you know, and in the end rather pointless because it continued. But there was this reaction. And I guess possibly that the New York experience was perhaps not symptomatic of what was going on elsewhere.

MB: I don't think so. The situation here was quite different.

HP: Many public figures were sensitive to what Mr. Hearst said because he owned so many papers. So I think you're right. I think the impulse, for example, in the Community Art Centers, or the act that people could see a painting, perhaps for the first time, was an experience in itself which offset -- that is, it wasn't the fact that something was not being done. Something was being done, and here it is. And, as in the case of most developments, local interests and local people put their shoulders to the wheel for the purpose which may not be identifiable by Mr. Hearst at any time, you know. And there is . . . well, if you read about this solely through the Hearst press view, you get only a false picture of what was going on. But I wondered how, you know, how much it figured, because it was designed, I think, in jabs and as, oh, sticks and stones.

MB: Well, you see now in retrospect I remember very little of it, although at the time I was probably very exercised.

HP: What, in your judgment, was the net effect of this whole period on developments in American art?

MB: Well, I think it was a vastly important period, because so many of the artists who are thriving today, survived during that period as artists simply because of the project, and I think many of them will acknowledge that. Have you interviewed people like Philip Guston or de Kooning or . . . well, you have interviewed Stuart Davis. But these are the outstanding artists of our period and, when you read the list, especially of those employed here in New York, you'll see how much it really has meant in the development of American Art. I think appreciation was one thing that was developed. People were exposed to art as they never were before, and then the individual artist who was given a chance to live as an artist, and the talents that were stimulated through the leadership that some of the young people had.

HP: I don't know whether you could say in the Twenties whether or not there was a conscious development toward something ascertainable as American art. I'm not sure. Communication being what it is, you know, someone working, perhaps, in a closet or somewhere -- like Davis, for example. Some people knew his work, but I can't imagine very many did, or that very many were necessarily sympathetic to it.

MB: In the Twenties?

HP: In the Twenties. And yet there is a continuity in his development in the Twenties and in the Thirties. It's not in any way that I can see -- he many have done one or two things for magazines that were published -- a cartoon kind of thing. But this fellow traces all the way back to one of his early jobs. But so far as the painting is concerned, there's a continuity to his development even though the Depression period was on, and he was a collective leader in the union movement, or one of the leaders.

MB: Yes, he was.

HP: But it seemed to have no effect on . . .

MB: His painting?

HP: . . . his creativity -- just none. It was a wholly different problem which the times created. So that it may well be that the sense of organization which was national in scope, through these various directors, both stimulated something which could consciously be called American -- made for communication -- identified areas and people who were having problems similar to those who were living in New York. I know the NRA, for example, brought together -- well, the textile merchants from all over the country. So that they weren't thinking of their problems

solely as a Western Massachusetts affair, because the fellow who was operating in -- I don't know where he might have been operating, but let's say Kansas somewhere with a textile mill, or in North Carolina, was having comparable problems, so that there is not an end to parochialism in a way, but a sharing beyond the parochial line. I should think that this took place in art, too.

MB: Yes, I think it did. Of course the various supervisors were in touch with one another, and we were in touch with them, so that there was that flow back and forth of information and discussion of problems, and so forth, and every once in a while Cahill would call a conference of his directors so that they could get together for a discussion of a special or a specific problem or become familiar with what each was doing. I think that was an important thing, too. Because, as I said, there were developments in certain regions that could be applied elsewhere.

HP: The exhibitions must have been, as you, I think alluded to in part, appreciation beyond the artist community itself, and yet stimulating to the artistic community in the sense of being a representation of what was going on in some other part of the country. So that you had both an opportunity to see what was being done and to get and assess on your own work some of its effect.

MB: That's true.

HP: So it may well be that the organization was loose enough to allow for regional development, which was tailored to the interest and talent available in the regions, something which I don't find obtaining to the same degree today, although I may not know where to look for it. It worries me sometimes. That hideous box we look at has tended to make us share experiences in such a way that I don't know that there are going to be differences anywhere in the future. But in this period it would seem that the certain fluidity that did exist allowed for greater expression on the part of artists in their regions and then a sharing through this exhibition, so that you can see coming through this exhibition system that was set up, in the ultimate allocation, so that there is in existence a body of material sustained and brought into being during this Depression period, which could, I think, consciously now in retrospect be referred to as an American impulse of art.

MB: I think so.

HP: I do too. And in that sense it was a great stimulant to creativity.

MB: I wish someone could go around the country now and see the effect in specific places where we know things got started, but we have no information now about them -- just to observe. I think it would be a very interesting program to undertake, and there is so much misinformation about the project, and of course now young people are turning to the 30's and writing theses on the period and actually the real story hasn't been written. I don't know if through your archives project the source material can be gathered together so that the true history can be written. We always felt that Cahill should do it and yet he was too close to it. I don't think he ever could. And most of us were too close to it to be able to do much about it.

HP: That's one of the unhappy features of a time and a period which is spent with great zest, where you only have so many minutes. You can't make a day's end observation or an entry in a journal. And one day telescopes into another and so weeks and months are all under one thing, "I was busy."

MB: And so little is saved, too, in the records. The records, I believe, were microfilmed and I suppose they have been stored in the archives in Washington. Have you been able to find out about that?

HP: The National Archives?

MB: Yes, the National Archives.

HP: Yes, there's quite a sizeable -- I don't know how extensive the collection is but it's quite sizeable.

MB: But specifically on the subject of the art project, did you find anything there?

HP: No. I mean they are collecting in Washington. Whatever is available will be in the National Archives. I believe that the most organized material is that material which comes through the Treasury Department. This is . . . well, personally I don't know how the office was run in Washington, you know. You had payrolls to meet, what communication was like. It would appear that Cahill certainly, yourself probably, were out in the field and the discretion, if it was lodged within the state regional directors, the problems such as they were would come up to the state regional directors and probably be settled on that level. Whatever paperwork, or whatever records, you know, might be still in the regions, and heaven only knows what has happened to them if that's the case.

MB: Yes. Because I don't know where the regional offices' materials would be. In a city, for instance, like Chicago, where much of our material was deposited in relation to the allocations, all those records were left

there. I'd be curious to know what happened to the warehouses.

HP: Well, you know, that's an illusive thing. In part, it's one of the purposes of the project to turn up illusive, documentary material which will help shed light on the process. I do think that since the Treasury Department was located in Washington and had a section devoted to this -- the architect, the building and grounds department, and so on, that the chances are that the material still obtains.

MB: That's Bruce's project, PWAP.

HP: I don't mean to indicate that the Harry Hopkins project is without source material. But you know how it happened, and how it developed and where it was a search for the people, the construction of an organization, and then the floating of an idea basically from the local communities, and on the basis of that experience entertaining an idea elsewhere. So a central direction really would have been alien to the value of what did take place, wouldn't it?

MB: I would say so.

HP: Yes. Because I find it very difficult, from what I know of Mr. Cahill, for him to have given any sense of national direction in the sense that this is what we want. No. He represented opportunity and through him, and through the organization, funds were made available for a variety of opportunities where they met local needs. So I guess you're right. I guess one would have to go back and trace, or find out, what did happen to a Community Art Center that was particularly vital to the community, or lively. Just whether there are any traces of them.

MB: Key West had one, and it was very active.

HP: Did they?

MB: Yes. Oh, there were several in Florida. There was a whole chain of Community Art Centers down there. South Carolina, North Carolina, both had centers, and I mentioned ones in Mississippi and the ones in Wyoming, which were important. Salem, Oregon, had a very active one. That was right in the state's capital. Maybe there's something that remains of a record, anyway, of what happened to that. But the people who led these centers are hard to track down. There was a man by the name of Val Clar (?) out there directing that art center. He did a very good job. And, let's see, in the state of Washington, Bruce Inverarity is now director of the Adirondack Mountain Museum. He headed that project of the state of Washington, and he should be a good source of information regarding the West Coast.

HP: Was there ever any time a directory or a rostrum published by the central organization?

MB: Yes, there was a list, a mimeographed list that we had of the various supervisors and directors of the areas. I don't know where you could find that now.

HP: The other day I ran into a list of people. These are some illusive things. I ran into a list of people who were . . . Miss Mary Curran, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

MB: Oh, yes. She was quite active. She was director of the project in Philadelphia, and she was superseded then by, I think, Benjamin Knotts. No, I'm sorry. It wasn't Knotts. But she had run a gallery in Philadelphia, and she was familiar with the artists and had directed the project under Bruce. Where's she living now?

HP: Well, I don't know.

MB: I don't know if she's still alive.

HP: I don't either. This is dated October 1, 1935.

MB: Oh. These are the appointments.

HP: This is the first . . . yes, the anointments. And they list only six, and in New York State they list Tom Parker.

MB: No, that's not correct. Tom Parker never had anything to do with New York. He came from Virginia, originally, and Cahill brought him up to Richmond to be assistant director of the art project in Washington, What was the next?

HP: Well, there's C. Law Watkins -- D.C. and Delaware and Maryland.

MB: Oh. Well, C. Law Watkins was in D.C., and he may have functioned in Bruce's organization, but he did not in ours. He may have been a regional advisor, but he was connected with Duncan Phillips and lived in Washington.

Very interesting as names. What else is there on the list?

HP: There is a fascinating commentary on the New York Times. Mrs. . . . well, you mentioned Mrs. Increase Robinson in Illinois.

NB: In Chicago.

HP: Chicago, yes. And then Audrey McMahon who was here. Mary Curran and Richard C. Morrison, whom you have already mentioned. It also has Francis H. Taylor, who was Worcester.

MB: Well, he was an advisor to Bruce, I think; he may have continued as an advisor to the art project.

HP: This was an early . . . I think Cahill came to New York. I know your husband came to New York, too, because he's listed here. It was a three-day meeting in New York City, and the WPA framework was finally established and it has art, theatre, music and writing. And it has endless lists of people who were placed in these four areas, which is all part of the show as directed in Washington, wasn't it? That is, there were these four areas, art -- something we haven't touched on. We've treated art as though it didn't have anything to do, necessarily, with theatre and with music and writing. Yet there were these other areas and the projects were expected to cover them. And I think your husband made this announcement because Elmer Rice had just been appointed as the representative of the theatre, and art was just what I've suggested to you, just those few names. So that it was still in process, and these may well have been to some extent misleading. It's interesting.

MB: Well, I know Thomas Parker was in Washington and not in Connecticut.

HP: If I understand you, people who were employed would have certain continuity in dealing with this, even in the earlier PWAP. If it were possible to use them, that kind of experience was used.

MB: Yes.

HP: And to the extent possible people were appointed in key positions, supervisory positions, who had both some sensitivity and some knowledge of the art community of which they were a part. So that you had to depend upon local knowledge and create that organization through which local knowledge could become fruitful for the artists in that area. And the criteria was a broad as could be. As I understand it, there was no criteria that was so rigid that it would necessarily exclude anyone who had some background in the arts.

MB: Yes. You'll have to remember also, that in addition to taking the artists from the relief rolls there was a ten percent where artists could be drawn from non-relief areas, and that ten percent was increased to twenty-five percent at one time to give the proper leadership, because the feeling was that we should maintain as high a standard as possible as far as quality of work was concerned. And therefore that twenty-five percent gave the local projects quite a bit of leeway in employing artists who were not on the relief rolls. That's how you got some of the outstanding people on the easel projects and on the mural projects.

HP: In other words, they did make a distinction and for purposes of maintaining at least their . . .

MB: Quality.

HP: . . . quality, yes. I'd read something in the paper the other day when I was looking through this about ten percent. I didn't see how it applied, but now I see what you mean. In other words . . . .

MB: They were non-relief.

HP: That's right. Ten percent employable underneath this program could be those from a non-relief situation, and those were the, perhaps from a quality point of view, the more technically-competent or talented people.

MB: And they were the supervisors, too. When you had the vast numbers as you did here in New York, you had to have outstanding people. For instance, heading the print project they had an outstanding person. I think it was Gustave von Groschwitz, who is now head of the Carnegie Institute Museum. He was head of the print department at the Cincinnati Museum. Well, when you have people of that sort involved, you can maintain a standard of quality and so that twenty-five percent represents the people who gave the leadership and the quality to the program.

HP: How did the idea for the design laboratory in New York begin?

MB: Oh, I really don't know who instigated that. It was a very ambitious program, and it did not last very long, as I recall. The designer, Gilbert Robey, I think, was involved in it. And I know many of the draftsmen and designers were interested and were employed. I think Ruth Reeves was one of the teachers, and there was a furniture designer by the name of Snyder, and there were various other good people, who were supposed to carry this

forward, based at least a little bit on the . . . well, I don't know, the Bauhaus idea, but it was to introduce good modern design to people. As I recall, it was rather short-lived.

HP: Well, there was quite a story in the press about it, the number of people who were going to be on the faculty . . . .

MB: Yes.

HP: They were staggering, when you think of it in retrospect -- just staggering. And as an idea, it was the creation of a new school, a new approach to design to somehow, some way, make it possible, or feasible, for the artist to become involved with, or mixed up with the problem of production of new commodities and new goods.

MB: And bring good design to the home -- expose people to good design. As I recall, I visited it once, and it seems to me that it had headquarters in the East Forties somewhere.

HP: You're right; it was short-lived.

MB: It was a New York development.

HP: But, you know, part of the development of schools. A wrinkle on the general impulse toward art education.

MB: Yes, that is true. It was an indication, but unfortunately, I don't think it lasted too long.

HP: Now, one of the things that really intrigued me about this whole process and period were the developments back of the Index of American Design.

MB: There's been a great deal of controversy on that subject.

HP: It's an incredible thing, you know. There was been a great deal of controversy.

MB: Yes, yes. And I don't think it will ever be clarified, because there are so many conflicting stories. We can only tell our story from our own personal observation, and our own encounters with the beginnings, and they may be contrary to what someone else may tell you. But, as I recall, it was in operation in New York and had begun in New York City. But my first encounter was meeting Ruth Reeves on the street in Washington one day going to lunch, and she said, "Oh, I'm so excited about the Index project, which has started in New York and which will be on a national basis, and I'm on my way over to see Jake Baker," whom she knew, "to get him interested in seeing that this is put on a national basis." She did go that afternoon to see Mr. Baker, and as far as I knew, that was the beginning of the project on a national scale. Because then he had Cahill in, and they discussed the project, and it developed in the Washington office with Nina collier and Ruth Reeves -- I believe they were the two, and they, in turn, came to New York and issued a manual, which was withdrawn subsequently. They didn't have national approval, Federal approval on what they'd done; these two energetic women were getting things moving at too fast a clip, but at any rate, it did get going on a national basis. I mentioned the developments a while ago in New England where they did some outstanding things, and then it go going over the country. I think the community projects were especially interesting. The portfolios that developed -- for instance, the Pennsylvania Dutch portfolio was one of the interesting things. I don't know if you've seen that -- it still exists -- these silk screen designs. And then there were local projects in recording some of the early Communist colonies, you know, where they developed. Oh dear, what is the name of the one in Ohio that did such interesting things in crafts in the 19th century? It's slipped my mind. But then Bishop's Hill in Illinois was another place where a project functioned very effectively in making a record of designs of the early colonists there. I don't know if we did anything in Ammon in Iowa, but I hoped that we would have a series of these portfolios that represented the crafts of the 19th century that sprang up in these various localities over the country. However, the Index as a whole is a very valuable body of material now. It's just unfortunate that it's not in a place where it can be used by designers and by manufacturers, which was the original intention, actually, to create a body of reference material for designers similar to those that developed in Europe. That was Ruth's idea, and she used that in her first conversation on the subject. We should have something, such as France has, in the way of a body of early designs to refer to.

HP: It's surprising the absence of records that they had in the 30's.

MB: I'm surprised, because there were so many writers employed on the program and there were so many local archives established.

HP: What I meant was that, as of the time this idea came into being, it wasn't then in existence -- relatively little in the way of reference material. For example, the writers went out, oh, they created wonderful guide books to localities, and so on, which was an amassing of existing materials and putting it in a form which could be used, functional, use as a guide to an area, a region, and so on; its collections, its churches, its this, its that. And these

are . . . well, to an historian there, you know, these are fantastic contributions. They are. And the Index of Design having rightly pointed that out. It was a reference for use.

MB: Exactly. It took a while in some places to develop the skills necessary, because some of these plates are so beautifully done. They're works of art in themselves. But then, gathering to gather the material locally to find the objects that should be recorded; deciding what should be recorded -- Connecticut had a very fine selection of chests and early furniture that was produced there. And I mentioned the ships' figureheads. Of course, President Roosevelt was very interested in that phase of the work and some of them were allocated to the Hyde Park Library, where I hope they still are, but the main body of the Index rests now at the National Gallery in Washington.

HP: Yes. Was this a project which was more centrally organized than the others?

MB: I would say that the direction came from the central office, or rather the stimulation urging the various localities to develop the program. That urging came from the central office, and it was a very useful program to take care of people who might not be creative, but could develop the skill in rendering.

HP: Yes. Yes, it had ancillary uses.

MB: Yes. And of course in some instances there might be material that's rapidly disappearing. The records should be made of that material. You know how quickly things do disappear, in the case of wooden objects that disintegrate.

HP: Well, when I see that new canyon of glass, Park Avenue. We tear our buildings down before we can even get a chance to love them or recognize them.

MB: That's true.

HP: And I would assume that other ephemeral things would just disappear also.

MB: Well, the historic American building survey functioned there in making records of buildings which I am sure is very useful. I believe that's been deposited with the Library of Congress, and of course there was the Maritime project, too. You know about that.

HP: Yes.

MB: Eric Steinlein headed that. I don't know what's happened to him. Have you been able to find him?

HP: No, no. But this Index of Design has been -- I don't know why it hasn't been -- Congress spends whatever it spends -- put out in a form which can be used.

MB: It's quite expensive. Of course there was that one book published some years ago, with Mr. Christensen's introduction, but the original object was to have a series of portfolios with these works reproduced in color, so that they could be widely distributed. That would be quite a publishing undertaking. Now if the National Museum can see its way clear to doing something of that sort I think it would prove very useful. The simple attempt made in Pennsylvania, I think, was quite successful rendering the designs by silk screen -- the portfolio that you've seen. And of course Fortune Magazine reproduced some of he objects in color and that section was reprinted and distributed rather widely and I think proved quite useful, but it should be done. It's a good project for one of the foundations to undertake.

HP: It's a staggering thing. Well, it was a staggering idea at the time.

MB: Yes.

HP: Staggering. What is there about Miss Reeves that would give rise to this -- she must have been an imaginative thing, too. I don't know her.

MB: Well, she'd worked in the field of textile design herself and was quite a distinguished designer. She's been in India for the last five or six years, I think, working on a craft project for Nehru, and I don't know how much longer she's going to be there. But you'd have to talk to her and get the beginnings as far as she's concerned. The project was very active and was a large one here in New York City, and they did have some excellent advisors in the various fields. They had specialists. Cornelius at the Metropolitan Museum was one of the advisors. Helen McKearin was on the project and gave the guidance in relation to the renderings of glass. She's an expert in that field. So they were able to drag in experts and to get expert advice on the developments in these various fields. The Shaker material is another root that I wanted to refer to when I was mentioning the development in the various colonies, and that portfolio was an excellent one. Of course, once again, they could be very useful if reproduced, since there's so much interest with the museum up near Lenox, you know, that's attracting visitors

now. And there Mr. Andrews, I believe, was an advisor. He and his wife both were advisors on that Shaker portfolio.

HP: How do you account for the developing controversy over this, though?

MB: I really . . . it's hard to account for it. I don't know. It was logical for this to be one of Cahill's interests because he was so interested in Americana. You know, he organized that first exhibition at the Newark Museum, of Folk Art -- Folk Painting -- and then one of Folk Sculpture. And, well, his field of interest since he worked with the development of Mrs. Rockefeller's collection, the collection at Williamsburg, and so Ruth knew that she could interest Cahill in the project. He brought Adolph Glassgold down to Washington to head the project in our office. He was the, more or less, national director of the Index project there. He lives in the Chelsea. So he might enlighten you in that respect. I think there were certain jealousies that existed and I think it was all a matter of, well, just personality -- one forceful personality against another, in claiming credit. I can't unravel it because I wasn't here in New York at the beginnings.

HP: Well, you know, it's a little astounding that what appears in retrospect the credit thing only becomes important when this Index of Design is in existence. And then one has to carve their way back to some ascertainable item, something that you can isolate as a reason.

MB: Yes. Well, I know Ruth Reeves was in quite a state about it, and I think she turned to Mr. Baker for his version of it, and of course his version is similar to mine because that was my first encounter, and my knowledge of it came from Ruth who presented it as her idea, but what transpired on the local scene . . . .

HP: Who knows?

MB: Not now.

HP: It lurks in inference.

MB: Well, maybe Mrs. McMahon can enlighten you, too.

HP: In Washington, was there any evidence of Forbes Watson?

MB: Oh, yes. At first, you know, we weren't too friendly with the Public Works of Art Project, but after a while things simmered down, and we became very friendly indeed with Rowan and Forbes Watson and had a very pleasant exchange with him of ideas and information and social encounters.

HP: The reason I mention his name, in reading the New York Times several weeks ago, concerning this period, I ran across three articles by him in which he puts the Public Works of Art Project, the Treasury Building Section and the WPA in a broad context from the point of view of idea and anticipation, and it's beautifully done. This man could really write.

MB: Yes, he did. He was editor for years, you know of the Magazine of Art.

HP: Yes, he was, yes. But this was a man who had, or so I gathered from these articles, had a sense of direction, and the potentiality of an idea. There was one article to be written which I didn't find. Obviously he went off to Washington, you know. So I wondered whether you had bumped into him in any way, because I know he had had a falling out with Mrs. Force, who was I guess just what her name implies, so that they weren't really pulling in the same direction. I don't think they lost respect for the aims that something had to be done. In any event, the Arts Magazine declined and abruptly, almost precipitously, from what it had been. Of course, this is the 1930's, 1931, and there were other problems to be done, like the development of the Whitney Museum and it's a possibility of no longer being in a position to give the subsidy which had been happily received theretofore.

MB: Yes, Mrs. Whitney had subsidized The Arts.

HP: So that I can give myself a hundred and one reasons why the falling-out took place and maybe none of them necessarily relevant, but Watson did go out to Washington and he had been a fighter, in a way, in the 20's, for American art, and I was just wondering whether, you know, ships that pass in the night, and how sparks flow from person to person and how you tap experience, et cetera. I don't know whether he and Holger Cahill got along.

MB: Yes, they did. At first there was a certain amount of rivalry between the two programs, but then as I said, things smoothed out, and we became very good friends. We used to see Mr. and Mrs. Watson at dinner once in a while, and I think that everything ended happily. Ed Rowan became very friendly, too.

HP: This is a real matter of a kind of jurisdictional dispute?

MB: Yes.

HP: Who was doing what, where?

MB: I suppose in any situation where you're trying to get as much money as you can for a program and want your program to be the outstanding one, I think that possibly the people working on the Public Works of Art Projects felt that it was impossible to swing a relief project and give it quality. They, I think, wanted to emphasize quality and the professional worker, and I guess they didn't have much faith in what could be done with the person on relief, when you're working with large masses of people, as we were. But the problems were solved, although all the work . . . I'm not saying that all the work was of first quality. At least there was that effort made to have works of quality produced.

HP: I think you in some ways perhaps do yourself a disservice, because there was so much going on, so much that needed to be done, so many people that needed to be sustained somehow, some way, that the most important aspect of it was to get something started.

MB: That's right. Getting people to work.

HP: Right.

MB: That was the main thing.

HP: That was the President's message. That was what he announced. That explained, so far as I'm concerned, the switch from the Ickes organization, because he just couldn't wait. And once you float an idea like this and find an organization, I think it's to the advantage of the organization that they chose, so far as they were able, people that had prior experience. Because there was . . . you know, it suggests a continuity, both of interest and ability. And then you let ideas germinate. That's what it amounted to. You didn't stand up there and say, "What we need is to glorify the American Indian or buffalo." You said, you know, "Develop ideas." So that I think, as you look back on it, probably the most arresting thing was not merely the opportunity, but within that opportunity the variety. Now this is good.

MB: There were various techniques that were developed on the program, too. Now, for instance, the silk screen project that I mentioned to you, became quite an important thing through the project, and some of the people who worked in New York on the poster project went off and set up their own business in the field of silk screen, and continue to this day, applying it to glassware and so forth. It's become a tremendous enterprise. So that really had its beginnings there on the project. Then there were other techniques. Well, there were some print techniques that developed in Philadelphia. The carborundum print was developed there. I don't know if it's still carried on by artists but that was a development. Then something in California that was of interest, I don't know how it developed. Perhaps there were some Italian stone workers on the project who knew the opus sectile technique, cutting stones and creating a design. Near Oakland you'll still find, I believe it's in the courthouse, this opus sectile, which was very handsome, as I recall, in the courthouse. Then in California, too, it seems natural that it should develop there, the mosaic projects. In Long Beach, I remember a tremendous mosaic that was developed there outside the auditorium, and from that various other techniques were developed. Stanton Macdonald-Wright was the supervisor for the program in Southern California, and he would be an awfully good person to interview sometime, because he's very lively, and he created a very interesting program in Southern California.

HP: And besides, he's a seasonal American painter.

MB: Absolutely.

HP: Yes.

MB: He was very important.

HP: Indeed he was.

MB: So, if you can find him, I think it would be a very good idea to interview him. Of course, one of the sensational sculptors of the West Coast was Benny Bufano. You've heard of him?

HP: Yes.

MB: He had mighty projects afoot always. One of his first things was the very handsome piece he created for San Francisco, the Sun Yat Sen. I believe it's been moved from its original site, but it was quite an achievement. He created -- oh, many, many more pieces of sculpture. Of course, his big project has been the St. Francis. He tried to sell that to Cahill through the regional supervisor and then through his own personal appearance, but I don't think that was ever completed under the WPA project, but he's still a lively little fellow.

HP: Were there limitations assessed at any time -- a ceiling on what a man could do -- what he could generate? I'm thinking now, and I was told -- this has nothing to do with the WPA -- but I was told that the WPAP received an idea from a sculptor to dignify the American plow. It was a huge, enormous plow to be on a mountain or something or other out in Kansas. You know, a staggering idea, which would have cost, I don't know, X thousands of dollars for the steel or whatever it was had to be done. But, you know, this was a drawing and a design, of course, wholly impractical in terms of the requirements, and certainly in terms of the amount of funds that were available for the WPAP. But I wonder, you've indicated here that there is this enthusiasm, and a man's enthusiasm for not only the idea which he generates, but the opportunity possibly to convert it into something more than an idea, something real.

MB: Well, we were set up differently. In the case of WPA it was necessary to have a local sponsor.

HP: It was.

MB: And his supervisors were able to obtain local sponsors for many of the things that he did. Is it called Marine Park in San Francisco? I think there's some pieces of his there. And he had other local sponsors who received his things, but he was a very energetic man and a quick producer. When we had our show there at the De Young Museum the entrance hall was filled with his things, starting with a mouse going up to a bear, you know. And as I said, he's still going strong. He still gets himself into the newspapers with his projects or his difficulties in having his projects carried through, a very strong, powerful sculptor.

HP: But this would be just one person, you know. This wasn't symptomatic by and large. That is, most work that was done was acceptable to the local supervisors even before the national organization ever came into play. Oh, thank you very much.

MB: To quench your thirst.

HP: Thank you muchly.

MB: It's scotch and soda. I didn't ask you whether you'd take it, but it's all we have.

HP: I shall ever be in your debt. What I mean was that from the point of view of individual artists and the kind of sword-dancing charades sometimes you can get into, you didn't have this here in that period -- that is the kind of exhibitionism that can take place sometimes when I'm with an artist.

MB: Oh, I can't remember any instance.

HP: Not necessarily disturb the essential drive and spirit of the total structure.

MB: Oh, I have really no recollection of any instances of that sort. I suppose they may have happened and not come to our attention, but there's nothing on the national scene that I can recall.

HP: Were there differences between the productivity of one region as opposed to another? Let's take the Midwest and the South, or no?

MB: Well, it had to do with numbers on the roll. Very little came out of the South. We had very little work from the Southern states. There were some good artists in Louisiana on the project. I remember John McCready and a few others there, but in general very little of the easel painting or of sculpture came out of the South. However, they had these other ways of using the talent that I mentioned in the Community Art Centers and in other teaching projects, and so forth. I think that in New York City a given number of easel paintings were to be turned in by an artist, either each month, or however it was organized, but there was a requirement as far as production was concerned. And I assume that that was true everywhere. If an artist painted ten pictures during the pay period he didn't have to turn in ten of those pictures to the project so I think that prevailed throughout the country. It wouldn't be necessary. I mean, one couldn't say that one region was more productive than another. There just happened to be more artists -- concentration of artists in one location as opposed to another.

HP: You mentioned earlier Harry Knight.

MB: Yes.

HP: Who handled, as I understand it, direct dealings with artists.

MB: Yes.

HP: Now the national organization wouldn't necessarily come in to this, would it? That is, to setting up whether a man, an artist, had to report what he was doing, none of this?

MB: No.

HP: This is the bookkeeping on the local areas?

MB: Yes, it actually . . . I think much of it was done through the local WPA office. I think they may have established the criteria that had to be met by each one of the programs.

HP: I see. This again would make for flexibility, wouldn't it? That is, we're thinking here is that there's no uniform approach toward whether an artist is being productive or not. You were running . . . that is, you were conveying an opportunity, not setting up a peephole, spy system, to see whether an artist was in fact working in art. And some of this comes out in Somervell. It may misconvey so far as the country's concerned. I think he was set back on his ear largely because he picked a major who had no particular artistic talent to decide whether something was artistic or not. You know, this is one of the reasons why there was the sit-down strike in his office. It just wasn't acceptable. This is an alien kind of thinking in this field anyway.

MB: Well, if you had a project -- a mural project -- the artist on the job would be the supervisor of those workers and see that they produced.

HP: The mere development of a mural project, once accepted, would be accepted for the purpose of having it done.

MB: Yes. And the sponsor would have to be in existence to be a co-sponsor, rather, of the project. Aside from the easel painters, most of the artists worked in groups either on poster projects of . . . well, of course, some of the sculptors worked in their own studios, too, but on many of the Index projects the workers were together. Some of them may have worked at home, but usually they had to go to the object. They couldn't take the object home with them, so that there was supervision in all of these areas and, as I said, then the easel painters would produce whatever the quota was for the time period.

HP: I asked Stuart Davis this question. Because in the 20's particularly in The Arts and some of the editorials by Forbes Watson, there was a distinct antipathy to the use of government and government power. The general argument is that if you give government power over you, it will begin to interfere with your creativity. And I asked Stuart Davis because he was on the project, I guess, with some degree of continuity up to 1940, perhaps, maybe longer. I asked him the extent to which he received what could be referred to as government direction as to the scope and content of his work or as to time in which it should be done, or how it should be done. He couldn't remember any.

MB: Well, I believe that's true that it didn't exist because it would be very difficult to do. Of course, there may have been time limits if a building had to be completed by a given time and someone was doing a mural for that building, but as far as Washington was concerned, we never superimposed.

HP: There was nothing oppressive like this at all?

MB: No. That wasn't really our function, I guess. That was really always in the hands of the local authorities.

HP: But even in the light of thinking, which is available in the 20's, about government. For example, there was a bill introduced by a representative Tinkum.

MB: Yes. The man with a beard.

HP: Yes, he was very much interested in establishing a cabinet post for art.

MB: So he was. I didn't remember.

HP: To design what American art should be. Well, Forbes Watson, in his editorial ripped this apart mercilessly, and the general idea was that government cannot dictate in the field of art. Suddenly the scene shifts. The economic scene shifts and government is projected into the field of art with precisely the opposite result, a minimum, if any, intrusion into the creative thing apart from the acceptance of an idea; and if it was feasible within the range of money. For example, you could not support a sculptor who was going to make a mile-high something to glorify the American plow. It's impractical. This doesn't mean that they wouldn't accept some idea from him, but this one was beyond the role of acceptability. But otherwise, those in control, in the sense that control is, had sufficient sensitivity to art as not to intrude in the creative process.

MB: Of course now there's a great deal of speculation of what role government should play in art. As you know, Lloyd Goodrich heads a committee and there's a great deal of conversation about it, and August Heckscher has expressed himself on the subject. It is a question of just what the government can do.

HP: Yes.

MB: And I don't know how happy artists are designing postage stamps. It might be a good way to get good designs, but if that's to be the role, it isn't exactly what many people had in mind. The WPA could never be duplicated -- never should be. I mean, our method of operation should never be necessary again, but people are speculating on this matter, and I am curious to know what will happen. Appointing committees doesn't make the thing work.

HP: There's a great happy thought. I heard the vice-president of a university tell me one day, "Don't commit yourself; committee yourself." Which is the way to bury an idea. That's what he said, but I think, you know, if you look back on the experience you had with the WPA, given the context in which it occurred, it was an emerging thing always. It was always in a process of becoming something, with new idea, and so on, and in the absence of any precedent, it's impossible to arrive at any fixed conclusion as to what you should do or what you should not do. This doesn't mean that it isn't subject to criticism.

MB: No.

HP: I'm not suggesting this, but criticism has to take it in its context.

MB: Exactly.

HP: And what the design was supposed to do.

MB: That is the important thing.

HP: And I marvel at the sum of money that was expended for which there was little in the way of harsh, dictatorial control from a bookkeeping point of view or from an idea point of view, and the more I think of the potential radiation from this opportunity period and how it could have been done in the sense of a more rigorous application of some genius mind mapping things out for people to do -- to leave the amount of discretion that was done and then to attain as much as was attained, which was original, creative, varying quality, to be sure, but the stimulation that came from that is what we are now reaping.

MB: Yes. Well, if you think of New York City, coming back to our original conversation about the New York project, the supervisors, Burgoyne Diller, who is one of our distinguished painters, was a supervisor, I believe, for a mural project, and he is now one of our important contemporary painters. We have one of his works out in the hall, you see.

HP: Yes.

MB: When you had your leadership in the hands of people like that, you're most fortunate. I think that one of the great things about the project was the leadership in most instances on the local level.

HP: Yes. And the judgment of one's peers in the sense that you didn't bring in a cook or a mechanic or even an administrator as an administrator to determine the scope, range and direction of the project. You brought a man with a certain empathy and sympathy for the area as a whole dedicated toward a whole life. I mean, from Cahill on down, that's what you had.

MB: Yes. That, I think, is the secret of the success of the whole organization. There may have been some exceptions.

HP: Sure.

MB: But in general . . . in general I think that was the fortunate thing that happened.

HP: Yes, I think there is one exception, anyway. You cannot make either an art critic or an art historian out of a military background. That's one thing -- Colonel Somervell. Although he must have had a job to do, he lacked public relations.

MB: Was he preceded or succeeded by Ridder?

HP: I think he was succeeded by Ridder. This was during '36-'37. He had his problems and apparently no means at hand, or no sensitivity, for the area to make a necessary thing for him, namely. the cutting back an acceptable thing. I'm not sure, given the context, that even the Lord himself could have been sufficiently persuasive to make acceptable cutting back. You know, I don't see it in those terms.

MB: Naturally -- there was resistance.

HP: Self-interest being what it is.

MB: Yes.

HP: Anyone would have had a frightful time attempting to do it. Perhaps in those terms he's not a blot on the escutcheon anyway, except some of his public relations things sound terribly harsh even when you read him in retrospect in the paper. They do. They're just awful. It's as though you can take art and artists and clip off a third -- you know, it's a numbers game he was playing. That's not very effective.

MB: Well, you can see he had to say just cut back.

HP: And apparently when he entertained delegations he was less than tactful.

MB: He was an army engineer, wasn't he?

HP: Yes, and in his own right an able fellow.

MB: Yes. That's what I understand.

HP: Very. But, you know, a hearing is a hearing and there are procedures which are accorded. You don't dismiss out of the room one of the spokesmen as soon as he's completed. You know, there were silly little human things that happened.

MB: Yes.

HP: And I gather that they were magnified perhaps out of their significance by the local press and were, of course, untypical of the general project, the national project.

MB: Oh, there may have been disturbances in other areas but it . . . as I said, as far as my memory is concerned, none of them seemed too important.

HP: Yes.

MB: We finally were moved out of the McLean mansion and I think . . . yes, we returned to the old auditorium building and the Index was then on the national scale was handled from there with Benjamin Knotts in charge of it. He's now on the staff of the Metropolitan Museum as exhibition manager, and so he could tell you something about the history of the Index from that period of the, I guess, late 40's on. They established a little gallery in the auditorium, too, where people could come to see some of the paintings that were produced on the project. We had a job of allocating to the offices, the federal offices, from our central location there, and so congressmen and senators and their wives and secretaries, and so forth, would come to select works for use in the Senate building, the Senate office building and the House office building. That was one of my earliest jobs, to handle those allocations and so probably, if we'd go through the Senate office building, or the House office building today, we could still find some of those works around. One of the very enthusiastic visitors was old Senator Green of Rhode Island. I always had a wonderful time with him because he loved to paint himself and was terribly interested, and I found him a most delightful person. I enjoyed him very much.

HP: Theodore Green?

MB: Yes. He was charming. And, let's see how ling -- how old was he when he died?

HP: Ninety-some, ninety-odd.

MB: I suppose he was. I saw him twenty-eight years ago and he wasn't young then. He was really terribly nice and had such a lively interest in art. I guess the final location, the last location, was a return to the old Walker Johnson Building, and that's where the project, the whole WPA headquarters, were in the earliest days of 1935. That was the final resting place, I'd say.

HP: What effect on the project did the shift in the general atmosphere have? I mean by this the . . . ?

MB: You mean when we were approaching war, the . . . ?

HP: Well, there was the preparedness era from '38, let's say, to '40 and the struggles in an effort to define what our interest was, the Committee to Aid America by Aiding the Allies, and the America First Committee. I mean, they sprang to arms and enriched the atmosphere with a lot of imperishable words, I suppose, but atmosphere shifted from a concentration on stomachs, work, food, to . . .?

MB: Preparedness.

HP: Yes. To other things, and then with the advent of the war itself there is sort of a transition. I'm not entirely

sure we ever solved the economic problems of the '30's, or whether they were solved for us by subsequent events as they changed direction.

MB: Yes.

HP: And, in this period of transition, I wonder what effect, if any, the shifting atmosphere and concentration had upon the projects.

MB: Well, it had a definite effect. I think that there was an interest in developing programs that would be useful in the war effort. I remember there was quite a discussion on the subject of camouflage, having artists work in that field, and in the poster field. Those two things became quite important and, let's see, we had two people brought in to the office then. One of them was Achley, who is now dead, and the other was Clement Halpers who was brought in from Minneapolis to work on some of these programs. I think somewhere there exists a description of what was being evolved in the way of suggestions, what could be done locally. But you're correct, there was a shift of the interest in the direction toward the war effort.

HP: So that there's continuity in the WPA.

MB: Yes, in fact, it carried over because some of the boys went into the Navy, and there was quite a program that developed under the leadership of some of these people of the WPA program. Robert J. Wolfe headed the project; Edward Millman was on it and Diller was on it. They were all working together on creating these devices. It's funny, I have such a slight recollection of that, but there's quite a story of how the shift went on into this new direction of the '40's.

HP: Yes.

MB: They were all in the Navy then, but they did transfer their techniques that had developed under the WPA to their activities of the '40's.

HP: Well, you know, what is of interest is the sensitivity that an organization will have, as loose as the organization was in terms of its development to meet shifting scenes. The original impulse was "feed em."

MB: Yes.

HP: You know, then it becomes relevant to do something that goes beyond feeding them, like protecting them. This essence comes out in the '38 and '40 period. What do we do? Which side are you on? Or a book called We or They, you know. Or the swing away in the press from preoccupation with ourselves and the knowledge of an attempt to convey the impact of a night in London under bombing, you know -- all these things take place. It's reflected even in motion pictures strangely, you know, that there is a sensitivity to this spirit, and I would assume that it would be the same in institutions, you know, and more particularly, institutions that deal with a creative impulse like the arts where there is a sense of relevance, where you deal with idea and where you have to capture atmosphere. Otherwise you're out of step, or if not that, certainly operating in a tunnel somewhere. So many of our institutions do not do this. They become fixed and rigid where their procedures are so fixed and rigid that when something new comes along . . . . Well, one of the functions of President Roosevelt was to create a new administrative structure to get out of the old one. Because it was a vested interest which worked at variance with the new need, but here the structure was such that it remained fluid and could adapt itself to the new atmosphere.

MB: Yes.

HP: Yes.

MB: Well, the need, of course, then, as artists -- people were being absorbed by industry and by the armed forces, that a change, too, as the numbers decreased so rapidly on the relief rolls there was no longer need for the project, although it could have served well and been one of the instruments used to create posters and these various means of informing people about the situation. It just couldn't continue under that structure.

HP: Yes. And as you've indicated, many of its personnel, both from the point of view of technique and ideas, found their way into . . .

MB: Yes indeed.

HP: . . . the armed forces and were absorbed for the same purpose only under a different uniform, more rigid, let's say, more exacting. But, you know, the anticipation of things. I gather that the termination days, then, were less a matter of continuation than it was, perhaps, winding up and tying up loose strings.

MB: That's right. By the first of the year things had more or less ceased. The first of -- January 1, 1944, and the

rest was just . . . .

HP: A matter of tidying up.

MB: Yes.

HP: And terminating, you know, the administrative bookkeeping aspects of it. Who was it that you said was in charge -- was it Parker?

MB: In terms of what?

HP: The business aspect with bookkeeping.

MB: In the beginning. He left the project, I've forgotten what year, to direct the American Federation of Arts in Washington, so that the organization changed a bit. You see, Cahill brought someone from New York -- Geoffrey Norman -- I think he's still around town. Someone mentioned seeing him recently.

HP: What role did he play?

MB: Well, I think, as I recall, he followed Parker in that job of Parker's. It seems to me he did. I'm so vague now as far as sequence is concerned, and then I think Achley and Clement Halpers came in. Achley, I think, handled the work in relation to camouflage and the various things that we were doing that were being done on the project, and I went out to Chicago to handle the circulation of exhibitions. Washington no longer wished to carry this program which I was in charge of, on the rolls in Washington, and therefore I was assigned to Chicago to be on their payroll, because of the new effort to take this other direction toward preparedness and what not, made this program no longer necessary, and the expense should be borne, it was said, by one of the state projects, and so my salary was attached to the state payroll of Illinois, and then my work proceeded from there, handling the exhibitions and dissolving the project. And when we had allocated everything and the place was cleared of all the works, I returned to Washington to put the key in the door there. So that interim period when Parker left is a little unclear in my memory -- the succession, I mean, who followed. But I have the feeling that it was Geoffrey Norman, that he then left and that these other two people came in to work in Washington, but that period was rather a brief period.

HP: At flood tide, how large was the staff in Washington?

MB: Well, let me see. Cahill, Parker and myself and Glassgold and then we had, I would say, about seven at the very most. That's not including, of course, the stenographic help. Defenbacher as consultant on the Art Centers and Glassgold on the Index of American Design, and when they left, these other people came. I think the staff remained more or less at seven, although there was a woman brought in to work on the Index, but they were really assigned to us for brief periods. Pauline Pinckney, who still comes to see me at the Newark Museum every once in a while and still continues her interest in some phase of Americana. She comes from the South somewhere. Well, I would say at the most it was six or seven -- the very most. I mean there were people like Constance Rourke brought in to do special things on the Index, and individuals for brief periods, but the basic structure was Cahill as director, Parker as assistant director and then the two assistants to the director, but I don't think the second assistant was ever named in addition to myself in the beginning. I think that position remained open for quite a while.

HP: And this obtained virtually to the end, then?

MB: More or less, roughly, yes.

HP: This small group. You know, what it suggests to me, though, is a kind of holding company operation.

MB: Yes, I guess that's what you could call it.

HP: In which those in Washington or stations there were the go-between between the regional, or state organizations, and the Congress.

MB: And the trouble shooters, too.,

HP: Yes, for specific purposes, or where difficulties obtained of a personality clash and the like.

MB: Yes.

HP: I imagine at one time or other you had not only to be interested in art, artists, but doctor, psychiatrist, consultant and a whole host of things rolled into one, which I think is the function of a central office like this. I'm rather surprised in terms of Washington experience in the '30's. Not surprised, really. But it is an interesting

commentary on the scene that the organization in Washington did not become larger. It was a service group, wasn't it?

MB: It was, yes.

HP: And a kind of . . . ?

MB: The ball was out in the field where the people were. This was for people, and we were just coordinators, advisors and, to some degree, stimulators.

HP: Yes.

MB: And theoretically, too, the go-betweens as far as the state administrators were concerned.

HP: Yes, which is good. This is the holding company aspect of it. That is, you had the funds.

MB: Yes. The funds were in Washington.

HP: That's right. And an organization was established to receive them in the state for purposes identified by the President, initially as feeding people, artists or creative people. Was there ever a final report published?

MB: There were several attempts at getting one published. I, myself, don't know of any. Of course, there was the Learned Societies to write a report of the program but nothing ever appeared as far as I know. Did it?

HP: No. No. This section was given a name -- let me find it here. This was professional and service projects division of the WPA.

MB: In the beginning.

HP: In the beginning.

MB: That's the way it was set up.

HP: So the group that you mentioned -- the small group that you mentioned in Washington remained under the structure of the WPA administratively through 1944?

MB: Yes indeed.

HP: So that if there is a report it might be the WPA report, which would have this section in it, or this division.

MB: Well, the art project did not remain under the professional services groups.

HP: It became something separate?

MB: No, it was absorbed. We were not absorbed, but rather we were put under the direction of the women's projects. When Jake Baker left, we were taken over by the women's projects which were headed by a Mrs. Woodward. And she then was made a member of the Social Security board and was succeeded by Florence Kerr, who had been a regional director in the Midwest, operated out of Chicago. And so we weren't part of that professional service group any longer.

HP: Yes. But you were and remained part of the WPA. So that . . . I have all the WPA reports and it never occurred to me to look. Isn't that surprising, because you may have simply handed in a year's end statement, plus a certain amount of writing, to the WPA administrator, that could be included within his annual report.

MB: Well, I'm sure it's there.

HP: I'm sure it's there. Isn't it strange, I kept thinking of art, art, art, -- why isn't there . . . . I must look at that because, when we began, you indicated an absence of any further familiarity necessarily with statistics and this would be one place in which they would be revealed. Equally, it is true, in order to make a year's end survey, certain reports were necessary from the state organizations. Do you know that as a fact?

MB: I think those statistics were fed into the national office regularly. Copies of those reports that Cahill issued are in existence and I think . . . have you seen any of these?

HP: Well, I have read two precis of reports which he made, or which were published in the New York Times in February of the year. Let's see, one is '36 and one is '37 in which there is a summary given as to the number of people who were on the rolls, as to the number of works of art that had been done. There is at least one breakdown, certainly, in the state of New York, or the City of New York. Here, again, this is from Mrs. McMahon --

the number of people who were employed and works, and the kinds of works. You know, but it's elusive now. You can come up with summaries as at the end without knowing something about the categories, or range here. If New York City is any indication of what went on throughout the country, the range of contribution under this program in various works is quite sizeable. Photography is also covered which we haven't even mentioned. I mean this was part of the picture.

MB: Yes, there were some very good photographers employed on the project. Considered as an art form, and also artists -- I mean photographers recorded what had been produced. I want to correct myself, because I'm not so sure that it remained WPA to the end. It seems to me that it may have been taken over by the Federal Works Agency.

HP: Federal Works Agency?

MB: Yes, I believe that was the end.

HP: Well, not I'm not sure. Hopkins certainly changed posts . . . .

MB: Yes, he did.

HP: With the shift in atmosphere.

MB: I'm trying to remember some of the people who succeeded him.

HP: The Federal Security Agency, which became a sort of catch- all for a number of service organizations.

MB: I have something right here. This was an appraisal as of 1939. That wouldn't be of any help. I thought this might have some information in it about the grand ending but that doesn't -- that's too early.

HP: I wonder who published it. Oh, it's an appraisal committee, and it's still the Works Progress Administration as of 1939.

MB: Yes. That's not what I thought it was. But the last administrator . . . it's awful, but I can't remember who ended the program. It won't come to me, I'm sorry.

HP: Well, Cahill didn't remain there for the whole time?

MB: Yes. He left, as I remember, a few months before I did.

HP: He did?

MB: Yes.

HP: Through 1944?

MB: It seems to me he did. I think he did.

HP: I wondered about that.

MB: I'm pretty sure. We can check easily enough.

HP: Well, no, this is just a matter of continuity.

MB: I'm pretty sure he did.

HP: Yes. But the person to whom he reported must have changed a number of times.

MB: Oh, of course, yes. But I can't remember the names of any of the men who succeeded Hopkins in the administrative
post. Isn't that awful!

HP: This tells its own story. Well, I would imagine that while Hopkins was . . . you know, he had an exciting career of his own as head of the Tuberculosis association of the State of New York on the then Governor Roosevelt's Emergency council, an imaginative fellow.

MB: Yes, he was. Very lively.

HP: Yes.

MB: My husband always said about him that he had the marvelous quality of being loyal up and down, and that's really one of his outstanding characteristics.

HP: And it was rare, too.

MB: Yes, very rare. But I am sorry that I just cannot remember what happened.

HP: Well, when you left Chicago . . . ?

MB: I came back to Washington and we wound up affairs there in Washington, whatever was left, whatever there was to do in terminating our affairs. Well, that's a blank. I'm sorry.

HP: But you had a strange bird's-eye view of . . . you know, an overview of a period and development in American history, American social life, American art.

MB: Yes, I was very fortunate in that, and also in relation to the development of art in the country. Recently Dorothy Miller's organized an exhibition showing the works of some of the important painters of our time and the work they did when they were on the WPA. I think it's a very interesting contrast.

HP: Yes.

MB: She was going to collect some distinguished alumni, but I don't know that she followed through with that. It's a large group -- the distinguished alumni and that was the exciting thing about the project, that all these things were going on everywhere over the country in small towns and in big cities and the new things that were developing, the opportunities for people to develop new ideas.

HP: That's right. I've often wondered why it was the government chose this as one of its wrinkles, as one of the . . . ?

MB: Areas of interest?

HP: Areas of interest, yes. In the first place in the context of its own kind, it was noncompetitive with anything that was going on in industry.

MB: Yes, it was.

HP: It wouldn't ruffle the feathers of any vested interest.

MB: No.

HP: Silly reason for doing, but if one has to choose -- and take a politically sane position, it's best, I would suppose, to take that position which would ruffle the least feathers on the part of those who are vocal and organized, and this was one of the areas. Now, they put masons to work; the put builders to work; they put art -- you know, and so it's not entirely so that the WPA, as the WPA, didn't in some way compete with local industry, you know. Sure, it was government buildings -- post offices and the like -- but the arts were safe and yet necessary, and the net effect is to create something wholly unforeseen, a larger awareness of things American. The Index of Design itself will sustain that. And greater opportunity -- more opportunity for growth on the part of individuals within the field which but for this program would not have obtained at all. So in picking a safe and sane area in an effort to preserve whatever it is people think of America is as an industrial society, and that can, you know, vary, they chose an area which would not produce criticism except in the case of Mr. Hearst. Really. It's surprising. And it gave an impulse to, you know, that instinctive development of something American, which would not have obtained otherwise because there would not have been that communication or that sense of association, one area with another, or the exhibitions which exposed so much in the way of what was being done in a creative sense to so many people. It was very educational, even though safe. I think that's perhaps not often pointed out that it didn't bear on commercial art as commercial art, you know. It didn't bear on industrial design as industrial design. It was really a shot in the arm for creativity which would be something American.

MB: Well, I think you're right.

HP: Yes, and this to me is an exciting idea.

MB: I'm not so sure that it was in the minds of the people.

HP: I'm sure it wasn't either. This is the consequence which . . . yes, but I think the choice of something safe was in their minds.

MB: I don't think so.

HP: Really?

MB: No.

HP: Even in a politically sensitive creature like FDR?

MB: No, in fact, I think it was a rather vocal group and I'm not so sure that that was the case, that it was safe.

HP: I'm perhaps overstating. I would think that the Chase Manhattan Bank might take exception to a program which saw us doing what art and the development in art as shown necessary, namely, the rehabilitation of our cities. You know, the Chase Manhattan Bank might take objection to that in terms of the interference with property -- the buildings of buildings, air, air pollution, and so on, or how buildings can be now structured architecturally from the point of view of service and use; how they can be adorned, and so on. The industrial art, in a way, but they wouldn't quarrel with the government's saying, "Well, gee, there's a fellow here who's hungry and he's a painter. What is he doing? You know, he's just painting."

MB: In those days I don't think Chase Manhattan would have been involved in any way.

HP: But the Chase Manhattan had fallen heir to the Duveen collection. They, in effect, owned it.

MB: That I didn't know.

HP: Yes. And they had a very difficult time trying to get rid of it.

MB: Oh, really?

HP: Yes, on a long basis.

MB: That I hadn't heard.

HP: This was the Old Master art, not American art. Let's leave it as inference. I'd like to see what happened as to whether it was safe or whether it wasn't safe.

MB: Well, I think when you get into the early story it might reveal itself.

HP: Yes. You mean as to why the decision was made the way it was made?

MB: Yes. And how the whole thing developed as a project, as a series of projects.

HP: Well, let me turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW

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