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Oral history interview with Jacob Baker, 1963 September 25

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Transcript

Interview

Interview with Jacob Baker
Conducted by Harlan Phillips
At the Chelsea Hotel in New York
September 25, 1963

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jacob Baker on September 25, 1963. The interview was conducted at the Chelsea Hotel in New York by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

JB: JACOB BAKER
HP: HARLAN A. PHILLIPS

HP: I think probably we ought to start with some insight, background, to you personally before the 30's and, more particularly, the Depression, and your connections with those people and those agencies connected with relief.

JB: I'll make it chronological. I, by training, am an industrial engineer. I have no college degree, however. I was employed in San Francisco and Chicago as an industrial engineer and then came to New York conducting my own business and also operating a foundation, known as the American Fund for Public Service, or more commonly called "The Garland Fund," a publishing enterprise to publish -- well, the members of the board of the Garland Fund had an idea that it would be possible to renew interest in all of the various social classics. And so, without regard to whether things were socialistic, Communistic, anarchistic, and so on, they had an idea that it would be possible to find things that had been important in 1890, or 1901 and publish them in 1926. So they invited me to organize that enterprise for them from the standpoint of organizational effectiveness rather than the historic publishing knowledge. And I set up the Vanguard Press and ran it for two or three years until it was sold.

HP: It was a great publishing enterprise.

JB: Yes, it was, great.

HP: An enormous enterprise.

JB: At the same time I conducted my own affairs as an industrial engineer, but I wasn't very busy. In 1932, some of us thought we could organize something here to help out people across the country who were repeating an historical experience. In every great depression there has been organized self-help cooperatives. Sometimes they were called Mutual Aid. For example, in 1893, they extended all over the country and, in 1894, they had a national convention at Buffalo addressed by Chauncey Depew. Delegates came from all over the United States. It looked like a way of folks trying to work out their own affairs. It didn't turn out that way. It never does because on these barter arrangements, which is what they were, you can't find the work that can be done in a city among the unemployed that the farmers particularly need which will give those unemployed the foodstuff they want, and so on. In our modern society it's a little bit naive. But anyhow, we organized -- Stuart Chase, John Carmody and myself -- and most important in it, a young lawyer here in town named John Farnum. We organized the Emergency Exchange Association. We organized that in 1932 and collected money, and in 1933 we gave help and aid and a little guidance to some of these self-help people across the country -- in Akron, Ohio, or Dayton, Ohio, or . . . I've forgotten where it was in California, and so on.

HP: Was it a clearing house of ideas?

JB: Clearing house of ideas and also we actually funneled out a little money. Not much. I don't think we ever accumulated . . . that is our total accumulation I think was less than $100,000, but we also had an idea that it would be a good plan when the new administration's relief bill was passed, was enacted, that we should ask that there be included in it a provision for government assistance to do the thing that the Emergency Relief Association was doing and do it on a wider scale. So Olds and I went down to Washington and testified before the La Follette Committee. It was a Committee of the Senate that was writing the relief bill in 1933. Bob La Follette and the other folks thought that was a good idea and so they put in it a provision that there should be aid to self-help organizations. And then . . . oh yes, another member of our Board of Directors of this Emergency Exchange Association was a chap named Langdon Post. Lang had a little bad luck in his campaign in 1932. He was running for State Senator. He knew Roosevelt and he wanted to make a showing, as it were, across the

country in addition to New York, so he went on a long trip, and airplanes were not too secure. He wasn't hurt, but they came down and didn't get up again, in Missouri somewhere, and by golly, he wasn't here on the filing date, so Tammany just out-foxed him. He was out. I asked them about it, and they said, "Well, the boy wasn't here, and we didn't know whether he wanted to run." It was in all the papers where he was. They knew he was working for Roosevelt, but that's the way he lost his job, his state senatorial job, and Roosevelt figured that he lost it because of his loyalty to Roosevelt. So, shortly after, when the bill was passed that created the Relief Administration, Roosevelt took his man from New York, Hopkins, to Washington as the Federal Relief Administrator. Then he told Hopkins, "Now there's a boy I'd like you put in as assistant administrator." He put Lang Post in. So Lang was there and Lang remembered, since we'd been working on this Emergency Exchange Association, the self-help people, and he called me up and asked me if I'd go across the country for him. Well, I wasn't very damn busy, so I was glad to go, and I made a survey of the self-help organizations. Salt Lake was rather distinguished, effective. They had a big outfit, and Oakland had one, and various places . . . they were important enough, and so my advice to him was to set up a Division of Self-help. He never did set one up, as a matter of fact, he never did. When I made that trip and came back, or something of the sort -- it may have been before I made the trip -- he said, "You better come over and have dinner at my house." I did and Hopkins was there, and that was the first time I met Hopkins and, you know, there are few people that you find completely in sympathy with you, and Hopkins and I felt that way. We were amused at the same bits of joke, and so on. And so after I had completed that survey and the job was done, I came back to New York. Then I began to get telephone calls from Lang; would I come down there and be an assistant administrator. They needed one. They needed one very badly. And so I finally . . . well, I sent them two or three people I though would be useful because it wasn't in my conception to work for the government, but finally, I was glad to do it. As I say, I wasn't making much money, and life wasn't too satisfactory, although with NRA coming on, the industrial engineer was just at the beginning of a tremendous expansion of the decades. But anyhow, I did go down there and became assistant administrator in charge of work programs. Thus it was that my connection with Hopkins ran on through all the other agencies that Hopkins became in charge of, or associated with -- the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, the Civil Works Administration, and the WPA. That explains it.

HP: Well, in going to Washington and entering upon this period as an administrator, making a piece of legislation walk, It's one thing to write a bill, it's quite a different thing to put it in motion.

JB: Oh, yes.

HP: I wonder what this process was, and perhaps you can describe it.

JB: The reason they wanted me to come was they figured I could do it. After all, I'd been an industrial engineer and manager. I was young still; I was 38, I think. What was that -- 1933? Yes, I was 38. But even so, I'd had enough experience and enough varied experience. Perhaps my personality seemed to them effective, I don't know. In any case, I never found any difficulty whatever in government administration. I never was conscious of the problem. So many say, "Under Civil Service you can't fire anybody." I never had any difficulty. I just would say, "You're fired," if I had to. Usually, if you can kind of guide a guy, you don't have to fire him. Frequently you can transfer him to something where he'll do a little better. I did that frequently. I remember a number of cases. So that actual administration of a program isn't too difficult, but I should say I feel a little sorry for Barnes. He is the traffic commissioner in New York City now, because he feels so frustrated, but I'm sure he's frustrated because he isn't just taking hold.

HP: You mean he makes some of his own . . . ?

JB: Well, they're there. The frustrations are there, if you accept them and acknowledge them. Otherwise, if you just say, "I'm going to do this," you usually get it done.

HP: Well, initially, was this the Federal Emergency Relief Administration?

JB: Hopkins took charge of that in May and I became his assistant in June. I was the only assistant he had at the moment. They he employed other assistants. The second one that he employed was a man named Bookman, who was the founder of the Community Chests in the United States, and the director of the Community Chest in Cincinnati, a very competent social worker and administrator on the social side. Then a little later Harry -- well, you see we inherited, we took over the Crockston Administration, whatever it was called, Crockston Agency, from the R.F.C. Crockston had appointed . . . I never knew what became of Crockston. Have you ever heard?

HP: No.

JB: I don't know.

HP: No. But this is an interesting tie-back that the relief aspects of an emergency kind were centered in the Reconstruction Finance Cooperation under Herbert Hoover.

JB: That's right, and we took them over.

HP: Yes.

JB: We took them over for Crockston, who, I suppose, didn't want to come along. I'm sure that Hopkins would have been glad to have had him do something, although it may be that Roosevelt would not have had him because of Roosevelt's annoyance with, or antagonism to, Hoover and so he might have said to Hopkins, "I don't want Crockston over there." Crockston's name was a national figure and Roosevelt might not have wanted that. I don't know. I have no knowledge. But we did take over . . . I think it was seven field representatives, regional field representatives. Aubrey Williams was one. A guy named Pearce Williams was another on the Pacific Coast, and I can't remember -- Brandon in California, I believe, but I'm not sure. The others I don't know. Well, then, after a while, Aubrey was the only one of that group that had had genuine widespread social work experience. Bookman wanted to go back to Cincinnati. He wanted to go back for the Community Chest Campaign that fall of 1933. So Williams came in as an assistant administrator. Williams gave his attention mainly to the social work, the problems of eligibility, means tests, and so forth, and trying to improve the situation where they were operating cruelly, as they seemed to be in New Jersey, though I don't know really how cruelly they operated there. Or where they seemed to be too lax, as in Wisconsin. He did a pretty good job of stabilizing it. He started out, of course, with the idea of making relief respectable, so nobody would be ashamed to be on relief, which was a very good sentimental idea. It led to some disabilities to the Program. So there we were: Williams in charge of who got on relief, and I in charge of what they could do.

HP: What was the nature of the early program as designed?

JB: Well, there again, we picked up a lot of things. For example, here in New York there was a committee known as the Gibson Committee. I'd been a member of -- not the committee itself, but one of its advisory services on engineering, advisory committees -- so I was acquainted with it, and it did a good job. I've forgotten what Gibson's first name was, but he was president of the Manufacturers Trust, I believe. He was president of a bank. They just went out and clearly said that the city's got to find the money -- I've forgotten how many millions; it's in the books -- but they got a lot of money and they had a lot of projects. In Milwaukee there were projects. In St. Louis, as I remember it, there were some, and otherwise; some using municipal money, and some voluntarily contributed money like the Gibson Committee. In all those cases, I directed our state relief administrators to encompass those projects because the people were on relief. Consequently, we had quite a network of work by -- oh, I should say, by November of 1933. Then we set up a sort of communications service. We'd send out bulletins about projects and kinds of projects that were being used and worked around. I employed Floyd Dell to write that material. And . . . .

HP: The novelist?

JB: Yes, the novelist. A young man named Goldschmidt came down from New York. Quite a number of the people, by the way, that I employed there had been associated in one way or another in the Emergency Exchange Association, of which I spoke. Goldschmidt had been there and Carmody had been a member of the Board with me. I didn't give Olds a job. The president took care of him. We set up a little division, a little office, under Goldschmidt in which we did a very simple thing, and yet it had tremendous effect of tying things together and making things function effectively at a higher level than it would otherwise. We set up one simple requirement that every state director of relief who was receiving Federal funds should send to us within two weeks of initiation, a procedure, a description of any project he set up. He could describe it any way he wanted to. We sent out a little outline as to objectives, material used, requirements for the people and so forth. Those began to flow in about September, I guess, and certainly by October of 1933. We had a lot of them. As a matter of fact, we had to stop it, stop the flow, because by that time, November, Goldschmidt, Tugwell, and I . . . Goldschmidt had been a student of Tugwell's -- I didn't know Tugwell until then -- had worked out the scheme of taking public works money, Public Works Administration money, and setting up the Civil Works Administration where there would be much greater freedom, but where the only known municipal problems could be worked on, municipal, state, county, and so on. We had that tremendous growth of the Civil Works Administration from -- well, I think the first people were employed on the sixth of December of 1933, and it grew right up. We finally had three and a half million people employed there.

HP: This was the Civil Works Administration which dealt with the construction of public buildings . . . ?

JB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but we also, for the purpose of paralleling it -- I mean, of giving employment under the same terms to people who were not manual workers or technical workers, but artists, musicians, writers, and so on -- we set up a thing called the Civil Works Service, and that we paid for wholly out of the relief money, so that we were not violating the public Works Administration law by using money to improve county records, or do a job of recataloging a library and all that sort of thing and I think about twenty percent, I've forgotten the number, but twenty percent of the total number of people under the Civil Works Administration finally turned out to be the Civil Works Service, and included in that. Here we turn to another purpose of the WPA art project. I

persuaded a fellow -- well, I didn't have to persuade him much because he was greatly interested. As a matter of fact, he had been promoting the idea, and he thought Roosevelt, or somebody, ought to give him more money for it. A man named Edward Bruce, who became the director of the Civil Works Administration art project. He didn't like that term, so one day I got a note from him and he had printed up paper himself -- Public Works of Art Project. Well, that change of name didn't matter, and it gave him a sense of distinction. He felt that it made his artists feel better, too. In the Civil Works Administration, Miss Perkins expressed an idea, and expressed it so deeply that it was done, whether Hopkins or I wanted it or not. We originally thought of the Civil Works Administration as the means to give the people who were destitute but competent work, jobs, and to give them regular jobs at regular wages. We started out to do that, and she said, "You can't do that. You can't do that. There are eight million unemployed." She had a conference with us, sort of dragged Harry and me by the neck to come over and see her. "You can't do that now. All these other people unemployed have a right. Now, we can't give them all a job, but you've got to give as many of them a job as you give the people who have broken through the line of destitution. There was no virtue in their breaking through the line of destitution. It's a misfortune, and I recognize it, but you can't leave these other people out." So every time we put on a relief case, we had to put on another case, and that's the reason we built the damn thing up so fast, of course, because all the guys that had been working for all the municipal jobs up and down the country and were unemployed because the municipalities had run out of money, they just came back to work, not all of them, but some of them. And I think we paid them $32.50 or $37.00 a week. I have forgotten what the maximum was.

HP: Yes.

JB: They got their regular rate. Pile drivers who got six dollars an hour worked -- oh, hell, they worked one long day out of six days, and that's all.

HP: The funds involved.

JB: Yes, that's how we did that. Well, that was Miss Perkins' contribution. I think it was all right, too, except the result was to frighten the President, and the Civil Works Administration only lasted from November to March.

HP: Yes.

JB: My God, we were spilling the money out so rapidly, you see, and he just thought we couldn't close it down. He thought these people would just never accept dismissal, and I think it was partly that, and also another thing. We set a minimum wage of thirty cents an hour and the result was that by the time the news of that got around in February all sharecroppers, everybody of any sort at all who could justify themselves as relief cases through the South, they wanted to "work for the government," as they phrased it. So they just came in droves, and the proprietors, landowners, and operators of enterprises in the South just -- well, they had been paying their workers as low as five cents an hour and their workers would all diminish. It did have the effect of causing them, competitively at least, to raise their wage to fifteen cents an hour, and also it laid a basis for the Wage and Hour Administration that finally established the thirty-cents-an-hour minimum.

HP: There are a lot of things here. With respect to Mr. Bruce, this indicates that the office in Washington was available to men with ideas as to programs.

JB: Oh, yes. I finally came to the conclusion, and I frequently described my function there as sitting back of the desk and listening to ideas, and very frequently, as in the case of Bruce, this was so. He came in, and he'd say, "Now, you ought to do this. I'd say, "You do it. It's your job; you're now employed." $6,000 a year. Bruce had been making about forty or fifty. "Fine," he'd say. He'd waddle out. He was a very stout man, very fat, a very amiable fellow, very, very . . . what I mean to say is that there is nothing wrong about it, but he was very insistent about running his own show.

HP: Yes.

JB: So at once I gave him that. He was also smart. He got our bookkeeper to give him the privilege of writing vouchers up to some amount or other and by that time Hopkins had another assistant named Gill. In fact, he had Gill first before he had me. Gill's function was to "keep the books," as Harry said. Gill was an economist who had been down there with the unemployment commission that Uncle Freddy Delano headed back under Hoover, and then Gill had carried on, and Leo Wohlman recommended him to Harry, so then Harry hired him. We didn't get much information about lots of people we hired.

HP: But Bruce was able to make a separation, at least to a certain extent, on the management of his own . . . ?

JB: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, we did that on some other projects, too. For instance, we set up one during the Civil Works Administration which was later carried on greatly under the WPA, called the historic building survey. Eventually we gave that to Ickes. He hired a young man that ran it. When I say, "gave it," they had to meet the standards and requirements, and they had to have the proper complement of relief cases, and our social

workers made sure of that. The social workers were always on our necks for not having more relief cases on work and less of the self-supporting unemployed, as it was.

HP: Yes, yes, but the . . . .

JB: Bruce, however, also picked up the art project that we had here under the Gibson Committee and an art project that was operating up in Connecticut. I don't remember how well it was operating. Miss Little was our state administrator up there on relief, and she had some artists at work, just paid to work as artists, and up in Buffalo there was one such. I don't remember how far they extended across the country. Bruce employed, or engaged, or persuaded Juliana Force, of the Whitney Museum, to be the director here; Taylor, the director of the Worcester Museum, to be the director in Massachusetts; and the result was that these people knew enough about artists around the country, or around their area, and Bruce knew enough of these people like Taylor and Juliana, Nagle in St. Louis, and other such folk so that Bruce had his artists at work, I guess, as soon as the folks got to work on the construction jobs.

HP: You're right about the almost quick curtailment of this. It was discernible in the WPAP, for example.

JB: PWAP -- Public Works of Art Project.

HP: It began on December 8, organized in December 15, and I think the following February there was an indication that it would terminate very quickly.

JB: Yes, yes.

HP: This, as you indicate, was related to Roosevelt's over-all fear that this would be a continuing . . . .

JB: He never would explain it to Hopkins and me exactly. He just gave Hopkins a directive on that.

HP: Hmmm . . . .

JB: Hopkins was terribly depressed. He'd come back and sort of want me to encourage him, and I could always offer the possibility that we could reconstruct something very quickly, which we did, and that was the relief projects under the state relief administrations, but still there was a lot more glory in the Civil Works Administration. I mean, more for the worker. Not that Hopkins was looking for glory particularly, but all of us had more fun working with a viable program. It's true that we had taken more money. We used up more money than the Public Works Administration eventually did. I'm not sure but that we might not have broken the Depression more quickly than it was broken by the long slow process of the Public Works Administration, which never broke it anyhow. I mean, the war did that.

HP: But the start was in that direction.

JB: Oh yes, oh yes.

HP: But this is related to the minimum wage that was set, thirty cents, and the fact that the conditions of whatever kind, political, social, and economic, throughout the country encouraged vested interest to object in a way. The farmers, the entrepreneurs.

JB: Oh, yes, the farmers, particularly where we were actually drawing on their labor supply. In the North, everything north of the Ohio and west of the Mississippi, there was really no serious objection.

HP: Yes.

JB: But in the great Southeast area, and that was the controlling body of Congress because that was of the majority party.

HP: Yes.

JB: They were chairmen of all the committees, and the President -- he just knew he had to do what they said.

HP: Yes, the cotton belt.

JB: Yes.

HP: I wondered about that, but out of this, in part, came the committee to set up and draft the wage and hour legislation.

JB: That's right.

HP: In part, this is one of the seeds of that.

JB: And also the Social Security thing.

HP: As I understand this process, and as you have indicated, you had state administrators. Were they Federal, or were they state?

JB: Well, they were state administrators under the relief act, but during the period of the CWA when all of the money . . . every man was paid a Federal check. We had to have a responsible Federal official in each state, and so the simple thing we did was to appoint forty-eight Federal administrators one morning; namely, the state relief administrators that had been appointed previously by the governors.

HP: Yes.

JB: They all automatically became Federal administrators of the Civil Works Administration during that four-month period, or whatever it was.

HP: But there was no concept of grant-in-aid here, was there?

JB: No, the relief administration was the one that worked on the grant-in-aid scheme.

HP: Yes.

JB: I was never quite able to convince Hopkins because it was a little slower process than direct Federal employment, and I never convinced the President, although I tried, that we could within a two-year period have a solid grant-in-aid system that could be squeezed up or down as we needed and could be shifted here or there. It could meet the requirements of Alabama and the requirements of Wisconsin.

HP: Yes.

JB: They might be quite different requirements per capita. I couldn't quite convince him. I stood strongly for grant-in-aid throughout. It's true that I helped invent the Civil Works Administration, which was not grant-in-aid. It was Federal money, but there was this. We did bear down on all the communities to furnish all the materials and all the skilled supervision so that in a sense it was grant-in-aid.

HP: Yes.

JB: And that was the best we could improvise in the three weeks that we improvised, from . . . well, I don't remember.

HP: The grant-in-aid concept is in keeping with your self-help earlier.

JB: That's right.

HP: Namely, if the people on the local level do not have enough to invest, either time or energy, it is silly for someone else to pay the whole affair.

JB: A year and a half later -- about a year later -- well, in that year, 1934 to '35, I greatly strengthened the grant-in-aid aspects of work relief, and strengthened the program because I employed a lot of industrial engineers, took the whole damn board of directors of the Society for Advancement of Management and the Industrial Engineering Society and had them employed as field representatives, going around and examining carefully the quality of management under each state relief administrator.

HP: Yes.

JB: Work management, and they effected a great many changes and improvements. They found good engineers and work that was just paralyzed by a sense of red tape that they didn't understand and that didn't exist.

HP: Yes.

JB: A hell of a lot of red tape that people talk about doesn't exist, if you're in the job and doing it. Well, I was rather proud of what we accomplished and I thought Hopkins would be, and indeed he was. He saw that by the end of 1935 we would have the administrative problem totally licked as far as work was concerned. Projects would be good, material supply would be coming forward, and if they needed to build a bridge, the local community would issue bonds and get the materials, and our workers would do some of the bridge building, or all of it, or something, and we could withdraw from the fields of activity as unemployment decreased, you see, We weren't seeking empires.

HP: Yes.

JB: And so the President came to make a speech on the state of the nation to Congress and Harry said, "You'd better come up to my office for this." I did. There was just he and I sitting and his radio running, and the President went along with his State of the Nation message. He said, "Now, as to this business of relief, I'm going to quit it. We should never be on relief. We're going to see that every man has a job," and then he went on with his plan. We never knew where he got it, but "We're going to have all of the government agencies, each one of them, hire people at regular wages, and then I'm going to have Harry Hopkins act as an over-all coordinator of this and, where there isn't quick enough activity by the local people, we'll have a little organization called the Works Progress Administration." Oh, yes, Hopkins would be in charge of the works progress, how this thing progressed. Then Hopkins could set up small projects that would serve to relieve the frictions and meet the immediate needs. Well, Hopkins and I sat there and Hopkins said, "I guess we'd better go back to New York. It doesn't seem that we've got anything to do here." I said, "We'd better try," and then I tried another score at that time. I began writing memos to Harry about the grant-in-aid system. Some of them were partly imaginative. For some of them I had some data. I remember one about the hospital at Sarawac. There was some obscure disease down there, and the folks in the hospital had found out what to do for it, but they didn't have enough money to build the facilities, so it went back up to London to the hospital department there, got money out of the parliamentary appropriation, shot it back as a grant-in-aid. The Sarawac people were proud; the people in London had a sense of proprietorship and participation. I wrote that out in detail. I said, "That's the way grant-in-aid works." It was working on those privies down in the South where we were building them and I gave it to Harry. Harry was a very loyal guy to people working for him that he liked, and I guess he was loyal to all of them, as a matter of fact. He trotted over to the White House with it and gave it to the President. Well, I wrote two or three like that, one phase or another of grant-in-aid. So finally the last time, probably the third one, Roosevelt said to Harry, "Bring Jake over here." Roosevelt knew me because I was serving as a member of a committee appointed by him on rural rehabilitation, or homesteads, that M. L. Wilson was running, and a committee that Mrs. Roosevelt had about West Virginia. My function on those committees was largely in connection with Louie Howe who just happened to like me and I liked him, so I was on committees, but I would turn up in the White House in the office and so the President knew me. At that time, I don't think I'd ever eaten a meal with the President. He said, "Bring Jake over here. You'd better come over for lunch." We came over and it was in the spring, the early spring; it must have been about winter, January or February probably, of 1935. When we went in, I said nothing except, "Good morning, Mr. President." We sat down, and the President was feeling fine, you know. And when he was feeling fine, you could tell by the angle of his cigarette at least so I'm told by people who have been with him many times. In the three or four times I saw him I observed that, but I think it was correct.

HP: Yes.

JB: He said, "I've been reading your memoranda, Jake." "I'm very glad about it, Mr. President." "You write good memos." "Well, I feel strongly about this subject that I've been writing these memoranda on, and consequently I've tried to explain what I think is the effectiveness of grant-in-aid as part of the total governmental structure." He knew, by the way, that I had been a worker for Hoover and was a Republican. I was his captive Republican. He would show me off at parties occasionally. One time at dinner, he suddenly pointed across the table, "That's our Republican." Then he settled the whole matter. He said, "Now, Jake, I want you to understand one thing." -- he was shaking his cigarette at me --"I'm not going to let these Republican sons-of-bitches have any part of our money." Thus the WPA was set up. He couldn't give grant-in-aid to any Republican governor. That's the way the structure was built.

HP: There is some indication . . . .

JB: Two of the guys are dead. I'm the only one alive, so you could never prove that statement.

HP" No, but I have no reason to, ah . . . .

JB: Well, there is no reason, because he was gay, he was gay about it.

HP: Sure, and he was a gifted user of ever colorful language.

JB: Oh yes, oh yes, sure.

HP: But running parallel with this was, and I think this may tie in with the CWA and the withdrawal from that picture, even though, as I understand it, you made some administrative changes under the state administrators to pick up, for example, artists who were already at work on a . . . .

JB: On a relief project.

HP: Yes, but with some continuing work and they couldn't terminate it as of February, let's say . . . .

JB: Yes.

HP: And it went on through June, but it went on through June back under the FERA.

JB: Yes, that's right.

HP: Which made for continuity, even though the project as a project terminated.

JB: I was unable to persuade Bruce to continue with any relief funds at all unless he got a lump sum appropriation, and that came into effect in the fall of 1934, '35. -- I don't remember when. The public buildings embellishment project . . .

HP: . . . of the Treasury?

JB: Treasury, yes, but the people were not paid out of the Treasury.

HP: No?

JB: We gave them six hundred -- well, start with $600,000, and then I don't know how many millions we gave them to carry it on.

HP: In other words, the source of funds was the FERA.

JB: FERA -- you see, that was appropriated with unusual freedom of use. The administrator was authorized to spend it any way he felt like, that he found by careful examination would lessen unemployment, relief destitution, care for the needy. I have forgotten what the other terms were.

HP: Yes. Now there was another organization, as I understand from the press of the time, set up under Ickes. The PWA, Public Works Administration.

JB: Well, that of course was done by law.

HP: Yes.

JB: Yes, and Ickes became the administrator of that with Colonel Wade as his assistant.

HP: Yes.

JB: That had nothing to do with relief. That was to sup . . . .

HP: Compromise in a way?

JB: Yes, lend money to the state municipalities and even to other -- well, any municipality -- a drainage district, a conservancy district. It could lend money to anybody. The money . . . Ickes worked out very carefully guarded contracts to prevent graft. He was very much afraid of graft. That was one of the things that made him so slow in going. There was no reason to say that he did it by intentions to sabotage the program. He was very eager to have it move fast, but it moved very slowly under Ickes because of that continued preoccupation he had with grafters.

HP: And there was -- let's see, construction programs had to be submitted.

JB: Oh yes, oh yes.

HP: And these were carefully gone over as to their reliability?

JB: Well, and their feasibility, their desirability.

HP: Yes.

JB: He wouldn't lend money to the city of Forth Worth. Well, the city of Dallas is an illustration. It took Dallas a flood to get money for a levee project.

HP: Yes, yes, yes. It took an act of God.

JB: Yes, that's right.

HP: But while they were waiting for Ickes, and it was time-consuming . . . .

JB: Oh yes.

HP: FERA continued to function.

JB: Oh yes, all the time after the Civil Works Administration was closed, and it was on the basis of that delay that Ickes had come, by the fall of 1933, to recognize it would occur. You see, he got his legislation and his appointment in May. Maybe it was April. I think he got his appointment before Hopkins got his, and Ickes had a committee, an advisory committee, consisting of Tugwell and two or three other people, somebody from the treasury, and it was to Tugwell . . . . This is the way in which the Civil Works Administration was created. Tex Goldschmidt and I needed some money for materials and some other things for some projects, national projects, the privy project and several others. Tex Goldschmidt was this young assistant of mine who, by the way, is at the United Nations and is available to your conference, if you want to see him; and he has . . . well, let me go on and finish the first sentence. We presented to Tugwell . . . Tex did this kind of over-my-shoulder. I didn't know he was going to do it so quickly -- the idea of $200,000, $400,000 for some particular materials; and Tugwell said, "Well, of course, that's feasible. We can get that from the Public Works Administration." Tex came back and told me that, and said, "Well, if we can get what he said, if we can get $400,000, why not $400,000,000, and set up a program, a work program." I said, "That sounds fine. Talk to Rex about it." Well, he talked to Rex about it and Rex thought it was fine. Unfortunately, Rex jumped the gun on it and told Hopkins about it as though it was all arranged before Hopkins had ever heard of it. He was quite irritated but, you know, naturally, when you hear that your organization is doing something that you don't know a damn thing about . . . .

HP: Yes.

JB: But we ameliorated all that, and thus it was out of that imaginative concept of young Goldschmidt, Tugwell, and myself that we created the Civil Works Administration -- just by draining off -- I think we finally drained off about over a billion dollars out of the Public Works Administration.

HP: Yes, and well, it was a different climate, too.

JB: Yes, oh yes.

HP: And a different atmosphere, too.

JB: Oh sure, and Ickes was vulnerable because he couldn't get action.

HP: Right, right.

JB: So he had to let some of his money go, but he knew he would get more money from the next Congress.

HP: Yes.

JB: But Roosevelt was of the opinion that we couldn't get more money for the Civil Works Administration as such. Whether Roosevelt was right, or not, I don't know, but he was under such pressure from these Southern senators about the wage rate that they just finally gave it up. Well, as a matter of fact, as time ran, you see, they got under pressure from so many other senators that they had a thirty cent minimum established, the national minimum.

HP: Yes, one of the consequences of the pressures from the South because of the wage rate was the termination of the CWA, but its effect in New York City brought La Guardia and other city people to Washington, comparable to the Southern farmers, for the reverse, which must have eased the . . . well, the administrative device of then working through the state relief administrators to carry on the people who had previously been on CWA although without the standing and the stature and the atmosphere which the CWA afforded.

JB: I was going to tell you, a young man named Forrest Walker, as I mentioned the other day, writing his doctor's dissertation on the Civil Works Administration, wrote me, so I thought the best thing we could do, and it would renew my memory continually and also draw on Tex's memory, would be to get Tex down here. We took a recorder and recorded for an hour or so, and Goldschmidt has that tape covering the Civil Works Administration. It doesn't deal particularly with the arts, but deals with the total project.

HP: The mechanics.

JB: The total problem, the history of the CWA a little more intimately than I am able to here.

HP: Yes, but this was in a sense an idea to give a better standing or posture to those who were receiving Federal funds.

JB: That's right, that's right.

HP: And to get away from the emergency relief aspects.

JB: Yes and, as a matter of fact, it had its effect a year later how the WPA was finally set up.

HP: Yes, but the WPA, according to Roosevelt's state of the union message, was to have been a coordination arm.

JB: Yes, that's why . . . that's what . . . .

HP: This is one of the amusing things . . . .

JB: That's what Harry was supposed to do.

HP: Yes.

JB: Co-ordinate the Bureau of Entomology and the conservation of districts and so on -- their projects. They were going to put people to work but they couldn't do that. They just never did. Why, I don't think we got 200,000 people at work on the Federal Department projects.

HP: Yes.

JB: What did we have finally on the WPA -- three and one half million?

HP: But here again I think it was Ickes' failure, for one reason and another, to come through with a consistent program which was designed to prime the pump.

JB: That's right.

HP: So that something had to be used and the coordination arm became suddenly -- almost a CWA.

JB: Roosevelt . . . yes it did, it did, and the wages, you see, got set pretty well, because labor by that time -- it wasn't strong, but it moved in enough -- and Miss Perkins moved in enough, so that we were compelled to pay going wages under the WPA, and we paid going rates -- up to a minimum, or a maximum, I've forgotten what it was, $32.50 or $37.50.

HP: Well, she had also been involved, I think as had Hopkins, as was Hopkins, in the President's Committee on Economic Security.

JB: Oh yes. That's the Witte Committee?

HP: Yes.

JB: Oh yes. Oh yes.

HP: Which is another facet of almost the CWA thinking as distinct from the relief thinking.

JB: In Walker's final dissertation that I spoke of, he makes a rather astute remark, that the United States decided on its Social Security policy almost as insurance, diverting it entirely from the relief channel. Well, that's true. There's no doubt about it.

HP: Well, it's part of the thinking in the play of the social forces which were operative at that time to relax the CWA, in effect, hide it for a while, bring it back when pressure came from other sources like La Guardia. He was going to Washington every other week claiming that he . . . .

JB: He'd put his hat down on my desk. Coming there every time to see me not because I could do anything. He just wondered what we had done, and he could blow off steam with me entirely because he knew me fairly well. I know La Guardia was around a lot.

HP: Yes, you know, to offset the pressure from Southern farmers, the cotton belt farmers, which were very strong in Congress.

JB: True. La Guardia continued to engage himself with legislation about as much as he had when he had been down there. He . . . for example, I remember one time nobody around the Treasury seemed to have any realization of the reason for the desirability of tax exemption of municipal securities and La Guardia had it at his finger tips, but he had a table made showing that municipals with the tax exemptions bear an interset rate of about one and one half percent less than Federal securities, so that it is a sanction and a grant from the Federal government, as it were, in benefit of this public, but La Guardia claimed and convinced the whole Congress that not a municipality in the whole country could sell a bond, if they were not tax exempt, and that has hung over

until today.

HP: Yes, I know.

JB: Well, he was just as busy at that as he was at anything. He was nonplussed on one thing. He was convinced that Secretary Mellon had improperly used his office to benefit himself on income tax. As a matter of fact, at one time while he was still in Congress, he appeared on the steps of Congress with a big trunk, and he was pulling it up, and he told the correspondent he was going to do it. "What is that?" "These are the documents that cover Mellon's tax evasion." The next day . . . La Guardia always insisted that he was responsible for it; I don't know, but it happened. The next day Mellon was appointed ambassador
. He was removed from office. Well, then, the amount of money that La Guardia claimed was involved was $35,000,000 and so it happened before Mellon's death that Mellon's lawyers came to the administration; in fact, they saw Roosevelt directly and proposed a national gallery of $35,000,000.

HP: Yes.

JB: It was a good enough thing, a good enough deal, because the nation got the $35,000,000 which it probably would have recovered. La Guardia was sure that he could have recovered it. It don't know, this . . . .

HP: Well, Mellon was hailed into the court on a tax deficiency charge, and part of it was the fact that he had created a trust for his art, an educational trust for his art. The difficulty was no one was educated.

JB: I see.

HP: He didn't invite the public into his home. This is only one facet of the case. The other thing had to do with wash sales of stocks and the control of banks in the State of Pennsylvania.

JB: Sure. Pittsburgh.

HP: Particularly in the Pittsburgh area, but the use of banking power to force other banks to the wall and taking over their assets, washing the sales down and showing a loss. He had some very astute attorneys now and then.

JB: My goodness, yes.

HP: But this was a tax prosecution and, while this case was before the Board of Tax Appeals, at that very moment he made this pitch to the White House without telling the government attorney, who was Robert H. Jackson.

JB: Oh yes.

HP: And suddenly Jackson and the tax case was, in effect, covered with Madonnas because Mellon had some great art and the creation of a national gallery, in effect, grew out of that tax case.

JB: Oh, yes.

HP: And there wasn't, there is no rule or no law or no word in the Constitution that would allow or empower Congress to grant funds to create a building to house a private art collection -- nothing. As a matter of fact, the opinion came from the solicitor general's office to the effect that it was illegal after the arrangement had been made.

JB: Well, Roosevelt wanted it.

HP: Oh, sure.

JB: He figured it would be a historic memento of his administration, and Mellon, of course, wanted it very badly, although I think Mellon was a little regretful that he hadn't been able to hang on to those things down in Pittsburgh.

HP: Yes, but he made a very good witness on the stand.

JB: He did.

HP: He was a very candid witness, and he was treated very gently by Jackson and a great deal of economic and banking history and art history . . . Duveen was called to testify, for example.

JB: Yes.

HP: About the net worth of the various paintings, and they were enormous.

JB: Yes.

HP: There was this educational trust where no education took place. Well, the fact of the matter is, if you set up an educational trust, you have to demonstrate somewhere that it is, in fact, educational and if you do not invite the public into your living room to see this priceless art collection you have . . . .

JB: Yes, you haven't done it.

HP: Suddenly, somehow you're really off base, but initially the lawyer who suggested this trust suggested it as a tax gimmick -- that is to say, an educational trust is tax exempt.

JB: Yes.

HP: So there was no need for him to pay taxes on his collection as a valued property. It was given to a trust, but in effect it existed on paper only. He was really caught.

JB: Yes.

HP: It was not only just a tax deficiency case, a civil case, but a criminal case, too. I would imagine that a man's image required that he do something about it, which he did. I forget the Irish fellow who was his attorney in Washington, a wonderful guy, Hogan.

JB: Oh, yes.

HP: Hogan was the one who . . . .

JB: He was Jimmy Byrnes' half-brother, or something, wasn't he?

HP: Yes, a wonderful guy, flamboyant and an able attorney.

JB: Yes.

HP: But he knew when he was in a pinch, as he was in this case, I have that whole record at home.

JB: Is that so?

HP: Fabulous.

JB: Who did you get it from? Hogan?

HP: No, I interviewed Justice Jackson at great length. One of the topics we covered was the Mellon tax case, fabulous.

JB: Well, when the situation came that Hopkins was going to assume a kind of coordinator's role under the Works Progress Administration, I wonder if you would explain the process under this from coordination to . . . ?

JB: Well, we clearly recognized in the relief administration that we couldn't possibly . . . well, we honestly tried to get the government departments through the summer of 1935 to set up projects any way they wanted to through state agencies, or any others, but they just had no facilities. So it became clear that if anybody was to be employed, and I think by law the relief administration was to end in the spring of 1936, maybe earlier than that, maybe around January 1, 1936 -- I've forgotten. And so we had to have organized by that time and effective a WPA that was employing people. They could be small projects in one program. Well, the only difference between the WPA and work relief to begin with was that the WPA had a state administrator who was a Federal official, and in those cases I think there was one Republican; otherwise they were Democrats. Of course, there were still lots of Republicans in the country, but they were all just out. Their relief administrations were not demobilized. They simply knew that as of whatever that date was, January 1936, I think, there would be no further relief funds.

HP: Yes.

JB: So during the latter summer, August and September, the various assistant administrators with sub-divisions of activity, Westbrook for rural activity, I guess I had charge of the general work program for a while, and then a man named Harrington, a military man, was put in charge of construction work and I continued in charge of professional and service work, and then I also had charge of another function that never worked very well. Finally I told Hopkins it just wasn't consistent for me to have charge of both and that was the employee relations arrangements. So we hired a guy who knew nothing about it and consequently couldn't make any mistakes, or it would all be mistakes, a fellow named Thad Holt from Alabama. Finally Hopkins had more chiefs than Indians. I

think he finally had eight or ten assistant administrators, a lot of us.

HP: Yes.

JB: And, following the practice of the relief administration and the CWA, we developed working procedures that would be available for our state administrators, and also we developed this system of appointing state directors of the various scientific and aesthetic projects, state director of art, one for architecture, of writers, of music, of theater; I don't remember how many. Some of the projects still continued. The one on historic buildings still continued, directed almost wholly by the Ickes organization. Reynolds, the chief architect -- I've forgotten what his title was -- but he was in charge of Federal buildings.

HP: Yes.

JB: And it was under him I think that this historical building survey thing started. One day a guy came in to see me with a note from Raymond Moley and Moley said he was a good man at Princeton, but "I think he can do abetter for you than he can do for himself at Princeton," and the guy had an idea that there were a lot of historic documents scattered around the country that we ought to get hold of, and he talked about it for a half hour, and my imagination captured it with pleasure, thinking of going up in attics and elsewhere and finding these documents and making a record of them, not trying to transcribe them, but just a record that it existed, and then getting an agreement from the owner that they would be sent to or placed in a local historical society. The result was, of course, that that project created about, oh, I think a thousand historical societies in six months scattered across the country, most of which have done all right.

HP: Yes.

JB: The guy was Luther Evans, who later became Librarian of Congress and UNESCO.

HP: Yes.

JB: Well, we got him going in a little while, and he got a little publicity on it and suddenly old Charles and Mary Beard appeared, and Mary was full of beans, had quite a bit to say and said that we weren't including women and that there ought to be special attention given to women's letters and other documents that women had written. So I persuaded her that it could be put under Evans and Evans was malleable enough, so he was willing to include these tasks. As a result, he told me afterwards, or somebody did, that they found a hell of a lot of valuable letters and diaries of women that probably would have been just disregarded as old Aunt Mary's or Grandma's, when actually they have a historical value as great as that of any expedition leader.

HP: Right.

JB: Well, that's where we got the projects. You come in with them, and then you take it over.

HP: One thing you told me the other day, and I wondered under which this came. This is the rural electrification.

JB: That initial study of lines needed was made in a number of states, only those states that happened to have available electrical engineers, or surveyors of some kind who were on relief, or could qualify as relief supervisors.

HP: Yes.

JB: And I remember West Virginia and Wisconsin were two, but there were a number of other states where we got the survey quite extensively made, and then when pressure developed from the farm organizations in the country for a Federal agency, Roosevelt happened to ask Hopkins if he knew anything about it, and Hopkins said he would find out, and he found we had this detailed survey of a number of places. So he took it back and Roosevelt said that's wonderful, you see, a survey showing the population without electricity. That's what it did, and where electricity could feasibly be produced or drawn from to get there. So then he said to Hopkins, "Well, now who will I put in charge of that?" Hopkins came over, and I think Hopkins maybe thought that I would like that job. I'm damn glad that I didn't show any interest in it, but I said I would do what I could and then I said to him right then, "Well, I'll tell you there is only one guy that I know of that has done anything about it in his own state and that's Morris Cooke up in Pennsylvania." He had studied coal and electricity and so forth, and Harry knew Morris, and he knew the President liked Morris's wife, he liked Morris, too, but in any case, Harry thought that it was a good enough thing, too. So, as a matter of fact, within three hours he had gone back over to the White House. He had pretty easy access then, and he had proposed Morris Cooke, and Morris Cooke was appointed within a few days.

HP: Yes. Well, who brought in the . . . ?

JB: And then Morris took over those surveys and with the surveys he took over the four or five men that had been in charge in my office, kept them together.

HP: Who came in with the idea for a Federal Art Project under WPA?

JB: Well, that of course was a natural. Nobody came in with it. Nobody came in. I think that we in my office just told Hopkins that we would have to have four professional projects -- art, writers, music, and theater. Our problem was to find somebody to run them.

HP: Well, was this because FERA was continuing these writers and . . . .

JB: Yes.

HP: And if the FERA was going to terminate, something had to be done?

JB: Done, yeah. That was it.

HP: Yeah.

JB: And we found that they were productive and also attention-calling -- that is, they caused people to recognize that it was possible to do something for the artists and writers and so forth. We started the writer's project with the idea of taking care of destitute preachers.

HP: Oh really?

JB: Yes. Not the WPA writer's project, but back under the relief administration, yes, the earliest one. A fellow came in and he told me about iconography. I had never heard of iconography really. As ancient things, yes. But he said, "Well the way you get at it is to go through all the newspaper files in the county and get a history." I said, "Well, why do that?" Well," he said, "You've got a lot of people who can't do anything except that kind of reading research. They aren't researchers, and they aren't writers, but they can write down what they read." "Who?" "Well, you've got a lot of retired preachers, or destitute preachers," and we did. That was one little group we couldn't find anything to do, no relief project, and so I seized on that, and I asked Miss Little up in Connecticut if she'd try it out at a project, and she did. It worked fine because she had quite a few preachers. Then of course, it grew beyond the scope of the preachers entirely, and we had professional writers do it. You see, one of the things was that within a year of operation without any direction from Washington what came along and saved the WPA as a working organization was the fact that we'd get applications. At first they were very minor applications for supervisory classification to enrich the project, not to be supervisors in charge of other people, but of that classification. I think we finally got up to 26% in the professional projects of allowable supervisory classification, and that would bring in people who got the full professional rate, not beyond their relief allowance but whatever, a dollar an hour, or a dollar and a half an hour, or whatever it figured, and in that way those projects were firmed up by the end of 1936. They were pretty professional.

HP: Was this true of the musicians, too, under FERA?

JB: Yes. There you had a little different situation, but we had a relief music project in Chicago, a big one. Petrillo was very active in getting it organized. He insisted on professional standards and dignity of employment, as it were.

HP: Yes, and this was an eye-catching thing, an eye-appealing thing, an ear-appealing thing to people generally because you had concerts in the parks and where you hadn't had them theretofore.

JB: That's right.

HP: What about the theater? Had there been experimental work in the theater under FERA?

JB: In New York and in Chicago, but very little of it. We did have an awful lot of theater people on relief. The word kept coming through, "What do we do with those folks? What kind of project can we give them?" I found some over-all funds for travel, and we set up here in New York, I think it was about ten or fifteen companies. Then we put them in busses and took them to all the CCC camps. I remember I went up to one at the place which is now called Camp David -- I have forgotten what its name was then. It was then a CCC camp; in fact they cleared it, and fixed it all up. You know, "Shangri-la" was Roosevelt's name for it. I was standing at the door and one of the CCC boys came, and he said, "What picture is this?" He was looking in, and I said, "You go in and see." They have never seen the living theater, you see. That was very successful with the CCC boys, and it was very successful for the theater people because the folks that went on those trips, they either stayed overnight at the camp and had provisions made for them, separately for the men and women. There was always room there. If there wasn't, they stayed at some nearby place because they would get away so late that it would mean an all-night drive back to New York. It was a two-day trip for them, to one camp. We tried to arrange for them to see several. That summer, I suppose, we must have had fifteen, twenty touring companies out of New York, and there was a similar group out of Chicago. I never happened to be out there to actually, personally, observe it,

and I don't remember the detail, but we had a theater project in operation.

HP: Yes, so that these were continuing. They were seeds, and it was simply a matter of . . . .

JB: Oh yes, I should say that the continuum runs from 1932 under the voluntary committees, like the Gibson Committee, to 1944, whatever it was, when they finally closed up the WPA entirely.

HP: Yes.

JB: There weren't any project workers, I guess, after 1941, but there were people employed in the semi-supervisory capacity who were either closing out materials, or doing something or other. That sort of thing hangs on, you know. There are still commissions in Washington that were set up in 1903.

HP: That's its function. Once begun, it never really gets out of existence.

JB: That's right.

HP: When the WPA came in as coordinator, you already knew then that there were these continuing projects where there was a need so you made provision for them.

JB: And we had learned a little bit about how we could . . . how we could stretch our funds, or twist them around, not to avoid the mandate of Congress, but in essence to make that mandate effective, because you had to have some professional work that you wouldn't get out of the simple destitute. You might or you might not. In fact, we had in simple destitution some damned good artists and writers. I remember the guy that became the assistant director of the project up here, the writers' project, a fellow named Johns who was a very good writer, had one leg. Every payday he would go to the nearby bar and take off his peg and lay it up on the bar so he could engage in a fight. We couldn't persuade him not to, and he got a little publicity out of it. He was a good man, and he was destitute.

HP: Yes, which were the qualifications.

JB: Yes.

HP: How were you able to . . . ? Well, you said that the problem was getting people to run them. Was this to head up the national organization?

JB: Well, it was hard to decide whom to appoint. The theater project is an illustration. I came up here; I think I brought Goldschmidt with me so he could make some interviews and I others, though we mainly went around together. We went to Actors Equity. Gilmore, a fellow named Thomas, the counsel there, talked with us a long time about it. They offered some ideas but they were lame ideas, usually broken-down actors. They just didn't have anybody. I talked to the Shuberts. Eva Le Gallienne turned up in Washington one time, just about the same time. It was known that we were looking for direction for these things, and also ideas as to how they might best function. Eva wanted to have subsidized three or four repertory companies that she'd run, and Shubert had made a similar suggestion, although his was on a much bigger scale. I told her that and it made her angry and she got up and left. So I didn't hear of her any more. The President had an idea and told us he thought he knew the man. It was Eddie Dowling, and Eddie was in town. So he came over to see me, and we talked, but Eddie wouldn't take on administrative responsibility. He just wouldn't do it, but the President wanted him to have a piece of something, so I made him in the theater project the director of the vaudeville section, and I don't think he ever got . . . well, a few plays where there were vaudeville actors. They set up in New York a vaudeville project and one or two other places where they would play in the parks in the evenings and elsewhere. I still didn't have a director, and one morning I opened the Hearst paper, yes, it was the Washington Herald, I guess, that was the Hearst paper, wasn't it?

HP: Yes.

JB: I think it was then, and there was an editorial, an attack on the theater at Vassar. I sounded interesting and then there was a remark there, "It would be better if Mrs. Flanagan went back to Grinnell." I popped upstairs to Harry who was from Grinnell -- you know.

HP: Yes.

JB: And I said, "Do you know Hallie Flanagan?" "Yes." I said, "What do you think about her as director of our theater project?" Harry thought it over quizzically, and he said, "I think that would be a damned good idea. She's got energy, fire, imagination. I think she has some administrative ability, but you could staff her for that." I called up Hallie and asked her to come down and see us, and I employed her with Hopkins' approval, of course. I mean she went up to see him, too. All these directors -- I liked them to feel that Hopkins was employing them. Cahill I just found through a field worker who reminded me of the fact that I had known him while he was the

publicity director over at Newark and was all right. I thought he was all right. I mean he did turn out all right. He was a kind of suspicious guy. He got an idea that he was being badly treated at times, and he would lead conspiracies to attack people, but not too seriously, but I mean he was just that . . . .

HP: One of his temperaments . . . ?

JB: Yes, temperament. He was that way.

HP: Were any other people considered for the art project?

JB: Well, Bruce -- I insisted he take it, because Bruce had done such a swell job.

HP: Earlier.

JB: On the earlier job, but Bruce wouldn't do it. He said he didn't want to be concerned with finding the kind of organization that would accommodate the destitute. He wouldn't do it. He wanted to hire people because of proven professional status. It was difficult for Cahill's whole organization to hold professional standards and relieve the destitution together. It was the most difficult administrative problem that existed at the time.

HP: Yes.

JB: So I think he did pretty well at it.

HP: Well, I think they added, certainly in the art project, they added an aspect of teaching.

JB: Yes.

HP: Kids, children, and adults for that matter. So that those who didn't have what might be referred to as professional standing in the fields, but who were destitute and who had the interest in the technique of art . . . ?

JB: Knew about it, yes, could function.

HP: Function, yes. What about in music, Sokoloff?

JB: Well, he was my own invention. When I was a youth, 21 or 22, a young White Russian arrived in San Francisco where I was, and he was energetic and vigorous and organized the People's Symphony, and I could attend that and thus I, in effect, took a course in symphonic music through one whole winter at twenty-five cents a concert, and I had heard about Sokoloff after that. I had an idea that a conductor would make a good director of the project, and I made inquiry about other conductors that might be available. Stokowski -- I made inquiries if he would be interested, and one or two other people, but none of them were. I mean if they had a good job, they didn't want to get associated with relief, but Sokoloff had just quit, or had been fired from, the Cleveland Symphony. I never knew which it was, and so I got in touch with him and he came down, and again it was a question of we'd have to staff him, and we did staff him with good people, that made the project a very effective functioning project and Sokoloff pleased them, the local projects, because he was a traveler. He loved to go and hear orchestras, or choral groups, or whatever were in the project, hear perform, and it bucked them up to know that the big man from Washington was going to come, and so he turned out to be . . . well he turned in a good record, as it were, although he wasn't too good an administrator. I later came to the conclusion that what I should have done was to have found some guy who was running a conservatory because he would know the administration much better, but I don't know. Anyhow, Sokoloff did all right.

HP: Sure, but finding . . . .

JB: And Alsberg was working for us in the relief administration.

HP: Was he?

JB: Yes. He was an old acquaintance of mine here in New York, not much of a friend, but when we were running the CWA, we wanted to have a record, a written record, and so we set aside a little bit of money, quite a bit, as a matter of fact, and published a rather beautiful book -- I don't have it here -- called America Fights the Depression. Did you ever see it?

HP: Yes, I have.

JB: Good. Well, then you know of it. Well, Alsberg was the editor of that, got all the pictures together and so forth. Then when the CWA ended, he continued doing publicity on the professional projects that were going on under the FERA, and he was there and he presented himself so sadly, that he wanted to run the WPA project. I knew damned well that he didn't have exactly the administrative ability, but by that time I had come to the

conclusion that there was one big thing to be done and that grew out of the iconography. That was a guide book of the nation and I remember I outlined the God-damned thing and how we were going to . . . well, I had an idea to divide the pages. The story goes at the bottom and the guide at the top and so anybody would have an easy running guide across the country and they could also get all the history they wanted, if they wanted it. The history came out of iconography. Well, it didn't work out that way. Henry advised that that wasn't a good format, and perhaps it was not. I had no irritation about it, but he did get good advice, and they did build up probably the most successful single achievement of the WPA in the American guide.

HP: The guide books are simply enormous.

JB: Yes, and we had a problem of getting money for materials and special expeditions and various materials, particularly for the theater project, and so I talked to a fellow over at the comptroller's office, the Comptroller General. "How does a government agency take in money and use it without turning it in to the Treasury?" "Oh, that's easy. That's been done since 1793 when we founded the first post exchange. They call it an agent cashier." So we set up an agent cashier in all these projects, and consequently they could give performances for cash money, take the money in, use it for the project. The agent cashier was bonded. We had very few cases of theft. Once in a whole, but it worked all right. You don't have to be bound by red tape if you exercise imagination and inquiry.

HP: Yes. But then, as I understand it, the WPA again worked through a regional kind of organization, too.

JB: Well yes, obviously, no matter how many assistant administrators we had in Washington, we had no rank among each other. Under the CWA I was the deputy administrator. So that for a little while I sort of out-ranked my fellows, but this was a momentary thing and actually never got confirmed, but Hopkins announced it one time and that lasted two or three months and so it never mattered. As assistant administrator, there was a little bit of conflict among the various assistants. Finally, Williams got himself in after I left there. I was fired. Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt got mad at me.

HP: Really?

JB: Yes.

HP: What's the story there?

JB: I don't know. I never knew quite completely, but she had been so very friendly with me over a long time and, as we got these art projects functioning, she got interested in them, and they weren't quite satisfied . . . well, the problem came to them that Bruce foresaw, maintaining professional standards on levels of destitution.

HP: Yes.

JB: And so they got unhappy -- Hallie and Cahill both. Alsberg was not and certainly Sokoloff wasn't in town enough. He was conducting orchestras. He had a good time. Mrs. Roosevelt had another idea, too, and that is that there ought to be a woman in charge of it, and there was a woman who was an assistant administrator in charge of women's work, so-called. She had formerly worked under me and then was given separate status as women's director, Mrs. Woodward.

HP: Yes.

JB: And for one reason or another, I don't know what, Mrs. Roosevelt decided she would like to have Mrs. Woodward on it and told Hopkins. And Hopkins in that case ceased his loyalty to the organization and moved his loyalty to the Roosevelt family and so he said, "You usefulness has diminished to me because of your relationship with Mrs. Roosevelt." I didn't resign at that moment. He said, "I tell you what you do. I think it would be a good idea if you went to Europe." And so I was made chairman of the commission of cooperative enterprise. We made a tremendous study. We published a large document on the status of cooperative enterprise in Europe and so forth. When that ended I came back, and the only job I had was as Hopkins' representative on the National Resources Planning Board. And Uncle Freddy Delano, the President's uncle, was very fond of me, and he wanted me to come over there on his staff, but I figured . . . . Well, I don't know, I got another offer; I got another offer. This was it. John Lewis wanted to see me. I hadn't resigned. I still was titled the assistant administrator of the WPA. Well, I went over to see Lewis, and he apparently was rather well acquainted with my status at the WPA, that it was relatively inactive, and I told him that Uncle Freddy would take me in as a divisional head of the National resources Planning Board. He said, 'Well, I don't think that's going to last very long." I said, "I don't know either." He proposed that I should take the presidency of the United Federal Workers, which I did and held for two years. Lewis' concern was that Communists would seize it and that I could perhaps repress that, which I did for two years. He also had an idea, I learned, that through me he would have a bridge to the White House, which he would have had, except that about six weeks after I took the job . . . . Well, the President thought that it was a fine idea, too, and Hopkins did. It would solve all their problems, but about six

weeks later, though, Lewis issued a public blast against the President then ended all bridges; there were fences. So that was the way I left the WPA.

HP: This was when?

JB: 1937.

HP: 1937?

JB: Yes. In 1939, I got sick of that labor organization. It was a ridiculous idea. I shouldn't have done it at all, and I went back to the Federal Works Administration as Carmody's planning consultant, and I was there for two or three years.

HP: Under the art project itself what sort of an administrator was Cahill?

HP: Well, he was pretty good. He played favorites among his subordinates and lost some status with them that way. He was eager for recognition and, if anything was done well, he invented it, and if anything was done badly, he wasn't there, which is not good. He did keep pretty close track of what was going on which is what an administrator needs to do also. An illustration of that. Finally Cahill blew it up into some recorded documents. One morning a woman I knew here who was Leland Olds' first wife, and was a textile designer named Ruth Reeves. I remember one sunny morning the sun was shining on my desk. I had to move her around so that it wouldn't shine in her eyes. Ruth Reeves came in to see me, a great big book under her arm. It was a history of French costume design, and she used it as an illustration. It didn't illustrate her point very well. But she said, "I think that the art project, scattered as it is all over the U.S., with lots of people that can't create anything, but can copy things, ought to set up an Index of American Design." Well, that much of a statement is almost precisely it, you see.

HP: Sure.

JB: So she went along with the discussion and all, and I said, "Well, I think that sounds all right. Will you work at it?" Yes, she would work at it, so I called Cahill and I said, "There is a woman in my office named Ruth Reeves, and she has an idea which I'd like to have you put into effect. It's to set up an index . . . well, you'd better come on over." He came over. I started to tell him on the phone, but his office was a little ways away, and we went over it in some detail there. Cahill seemed to be perfectly satisfied to do it. So I told him, "Well, you get the document over here for me to sign authorizing this project this afternoon, and Ruth can go to work tomorrow and she can get some other people to help her out." They got, among others, the daughter-in-law of John Collier, the Indian Commissioner, Nina Collier. And Nina did a lot of promotional work, going around the country to see that it was set up, and Ruth went with her, as a matter of fact. Ruth would talk, and the two women would do mission jobs scattered around. By golly, they got it going. Nina was a pretty good person at getting things actually started administratively, you see.

HP: Yes.

JB: And so the Index of American Design, I think, is one of the show pieces of the thing. Cahill's dissatisfaction with it, however, was because there was always the knowledge that it had sort of been set up for him rather than with him, caused him to . . . . Well, I think we originally specified that the contract should be made with the Metropolitan, that it should stay there permanently, with the hope that the Met would keep it growing as occasion arose. And it would have, but suddenly, one day before Cahill left, he got the Counsel of the Administration to issue an order that it should come down to the National Gallery. Well, the National Gallery has taken good care of them. There is no question about that, but it's not available to all the design students of New York.

HP: Yes.

JB: Well, Cahill was a fair administrator, let's say that.

HP: Yes. Well, was the fellow . . . well, there is a name that lingers in memory, a fellow by the name of Norman.

JB: I don't know.

HP: He was brought in as an administrator because Cahill was out on the road not a little.

JB: Oh, I don't remember. That was probably after Mrs. Woodward took over.

HP: Yes, I wondered . . . well, this had to do, not with the Index of Design, but with the art project as a whole. What about the Industrial School of Design that was set up here in New York City?

JB: I know nothing about that really. I knew it was set up, and gave whatever approvals were necessary as assistant administrator in charge of it for the program, but I don't know anything about how Mrs. McMahon got it going, the people she got. She had Diller in there, didn't she?

HP: As a supervisor of the mural project but not of the School.

JB: I think they did awfully good work.

HP: Yes, for a while. Yes, it was to set up a school to show the relationship between art, artists and the industrial society.

JB: I see. There was a great deal of freedom of ideas on the part of the people working in the WPA.

HP: Yes. In short, what was set up was a structure, an enabling act, to enable people to capitalize on an idea or to improve an idea.

JB: That's right.

HP: And within no necessary limits. You know, if funds were available, this could wash, so that you could have differences, let's say, from region to region, depending on the imagination of the local administrator. But finding these local administrators was, I gather from what you say, the real tough problem.

JB: It was kind of difficult. There is no question about it. It took Cahill and Mrs. Holzhauer then, my present wife; the two of them worked at it by making trips around. Mildred did more travel for that purpose than Cahill, but Cahill also was concerned about it. They would get these folks and send their names in to me and then I had to do very quick job. I always acted as though I took it for granted that the person was not unsatisfactory to the state administrator, and he in turn had to take it for granted that the person was not unsatisfactory to the patronizing agent, whether that was the senior senator, the junior senator, sometimes the state committeeman, sometimes the national committeeman from the state. It was different in every case, and Roosevelt was absolutely adamant that that should be done.

HP: Yes.

JB: And it was my task to merge that all together and then, you see, Cahill would have told a gal, "Well, now, you're the administrator of Colorado," while he was out in Denver and then nothing happened. Her papers didn't come through. She put it down to red tape, but it actually was clearance, political clearance.

HP: Yes.

JB: And I always insisted that Cahill and Mrs. Holzhauer should be careful not to get anybody that had been active in local politics, if possible. Sometimes they would get somebody who had been active in local politics on the side of the guy in charge, the patron controller, but we got them all approved, or enough of them approved, so that we never really failed to have an administration of the states. And that approval, that political approval, was not only the state administrator, but also the state directors for the various projects.

HP: Yes.

JB: Alsberg was the shrewdest and slickest at getting his people approved.

HP: Yes, the writer's project, for example, on the day it was announced, had names for every region and the art is left to luck in inference here and there. They had had one or two, or at the most like Morrison, Mrs. McMahon and so on. Mrs. McMahon had some continuity in the field. I don't know about Morrison in New England.

JB: I don't know either.

HP: Whether he had continuity, but there seems to have been some difficulty in . . . you know, ascertaining who is to be where within the art, or the visual art field.

JB: Also Roosevelt was a little bit scared that we'd have something that somebody would say was improver or obscene. We had had that experience once or twice before, you know. A guy painted a picture, something about sailors here in New York.

HP: Oh yes.

JB: And Roosevelt was embarrassed. He just felt embarrassed.

HP: Well, the Navy didn't particularly like it. It was called "Shore Leave," wasn't it?

JB: Yes, I think that was it.

HP: On Riverside Drive.

JB: Yes, on Riverside Drive and these guys were with . . . .

HP: With a couple of gals.

JB: Yes, yes. I don't know whether it was a good picture, but it was kind of a cute idea.

HP: Well, it created a furor, I know that.

JB: Well, it was a furor that reached over and affected these appointments because Roosevelt would say to Hopkins, "Is Jake getting any avant garde people in on this?" You know, he was scared.

HP: Well, was the picture so far as art complicated because of the developing unionization among artists?

JB: Oh, I don't think so, really. The Communists moved in on the projects very quickly, and those unions they created no longer exist. Maybe Artists Equity exists partly out of that, I don't know.

HP: But, given the times, given the spirit with a single employer . . .

JB: Yes.

HP: . . . the government, it seemed wise and . . . .

JB: And also the government was very vulnerable, you see.

HP: Sure.

JB: Much more vulnerable than a private employer. Rockefeller could cover up the Rivera mural, and that was it. They could make a fuss, but whom could they fuss about.

HP: Yes.

JB: But they could come and have a sit-in strike as they did in New York, you know, and raise hell for a long time.

HP: Well, wasn't it partly traceable to the mind and faith of Somervell who was . . . ?

JB: Well, that may have been. Somervell was pretty tough.

HP: Yes, that is, he had a bad press.

JB: Yes.

HP: He treated people as though they were fungible goods.

JB: Yes, that's right.

HP: And they invaded his office and just sat there.

JB: His office and the office of the art project here. I remember we sent Harold Stein up when Harold was in charge of the office here and I think he was held in there for forty-eight hours.

HP: Yes. I can understand why Roosevelt would be leery about these situations. For example, one of Somervell's points was that there had to be this cutback even in the WPA.

JB: Yes.

HP: And that the number was just going to be cut back. This was an arbitrary thing.

JB: Yes.

HP: Well, there was enough furor created so that that wasn't done.

JB: Yes, that's right. We made one cutback in March of 1936.

HP: Yes.

JB: That in a way was a kind of calculated situation. We decided, a small group of us, Hopkins, myself, and a few other people, I suppose the other assistant administrators, that whatever figure we had on March 1 the President would say cut it back. Well, there wasn't anything much we could do about it as far as construction was concerned because the construction projects, as rapidly as they could get going, they would get going and people would keep coming on. I remember I explained to the four professional directors that this would happen.

HP: Yes.

JB: And I said, "Now the thing to do, as I see it," -- I should say this was in January -- "is in the next six weeks to encourage your state directors and their local directors to take on people so that you have . . ." -- I've forgotten what the maximum on the art project ever was, but I suppose it was about five thousand persons -- " . . . between five and six thousand, and if it's cut back to 3,500, if it's cut back twenty percent, that will only take you back so much." Well, Hallie said that that was outrageous to take people on who were going to be thrown off. I said, "They will get some money. They will get six weeks employment, and you're in a better situation to maintain your project." She held hers at about 7,000 one year. But on the whole, cutbacks were partly the President's decision.

HP: They were politically dictated?

JB: No, not exactly. Ickes continually complained that the WPA was taking too much money from the Congressional appropriations, you see. I mean, here you had two things to appropriate for. Ickes by that time had got to the point where he wanted four billion a year, and we were taking about three and one half, or four, weren't we?

HP: Yes.

JB: I have an idea.

HP: What?

JB: A pitcher of clear water.

HP: Oh.

JB: It's not what you thought.

HP: Thank you very much. There was a delay here reflected in the press from the opening announcement. For example, Alsberg, Sokoloff, Cahill, and Flanagan were announced on July 27, 1935 by Hopkins, but it isn't until some time later that these projects themselves got going. And I gather that the delay here is the political clearance with the structures.

JB: Well, that was the major part, but we also had a problem. The actual appropriation for the WPA did not become effective, I think, as early as that. I'm not sure. The records certainly would show that, but remember the other day Mrs. Baker was remarking that she didn't get her first month's pay for a month.

HP: Yes.

JB: And that was because there were no funds for the project as such. We had it for the administrative people apparently -- well, she was administrative. I don't know. I can't explain, but there was a little difficulty in the appropriation. I don't remember whether it had to be covered by a deficiency appropriation, as I said the other day, or whether we just drew on it when it finally did become available. It takes a little time after an appropriation bill is signed and made effective. Unless it's given a crash program, it takes some nineteen to thirty days to get the money, the funds available, to draw on.

HP: Well, as originally set up, this was to take some of the slack which had developed because of Ickes' failure to come through with a program. This was again a kind of crash program.

JB: Yes, that's right.

HP: The need to sustain one had been continued therefore under FERA and was about to terminate. Was it possible that the initial funds were to come from Ickes' organization?

JB: No.

HP: It was not. A separate appropriation by the Congress?

JB: A separate appropriation by the Congress, yes. The WPA never drew upon anybody else's funds. As a matter

of fact, because of freedom of action that we had with the relief funds, other people were inclined to draw on us sometimes. And I remember we advanced -- we got the money back -- but we advanced two months' payroll for the NIRA once, I think that was what it was called.

HP: Yes.

JB: That money was paid back.

HP: Well, you know, putting people to work . . . the first national health survey was made under the WPA.

JB: Was it?

HP: Yes, it was an idea to find out what the health of the nation was.

JB: Yes.

HP: This was in a way from the Millbank Fund, Sydensticker and . . . .

JB: Kingsbury.

HP: Yes, Kingsbury and others who had worked in small towns and made surveys of small towns. This was an idea to find out what the health of the nation was, and to put people to work, or to train personnel to go to households and ask specific questions in a huge survey like this, a sample survey.

JB: Yes.

HP: Nothing like this had ever been done before. So the WPA in its earlier manifestations, the CWA and so on, was really a way in which an idea could really germinate probably for the first time in many ways.

JB: That's right.

HP: I wonder how sensitive the organization was as structured to the continuing sniping of the Hearst Press?

JB: I don't think they were greatly affected. I don't think the organization felt painful, or pained about it particularly. Of course, it was only some of the Hearst Press, wasn't it? Wasn't the Mirror the outstanding one?

HP: Yes.

JB: I don't think the Hearst papers in the West had much of an attack. I don't remember.

HP: No, but I think Hearst's general point of view as reflected in the Mirror was one of anti-WPA.

JB: Yes.

HP: And, more particularly, a kind of continuing anti-Eleanor Roosevelt.

JB: Yes.

HP: And her interest in a dancer, among other things. This was made, you know, the butt of a series of sick jokes, et cetera, et cetera, and so I don't know whether this weighed in the President's own thinking as to whether we should pull in our horns, or whether we shouldn't pull in our horns.

JB: He had been very amused and annoyed by some guy's testimony, or public statement, or something here in town, in New York, about one of the recreational projects of the relief administration, and he used a word that may or may not have existed. Hopkins and I couldn't find its source. Boondoggling, and that, of course, was a beautiful word for Hearst to use.

HP: Yes.

JB: And it was used ever and ever after, still used, as a matter of fact, about anything that people think is a useless activity.

HP: Yes, well they didn't quite understand the nature and the extent of the distress that existed.

JB: No, that's true.

HP: And certainly didn't understand the purpose to which this new organization and its funds were being put. I mean destitution is no joke.

JB: No.

HP: And to claim that this was no more than boondoggling, or leaning on shovels. You mentioned the other day, and it was a fascinating story, about food -- I mean a basic commodity like food. Little pigs, where there was munificent [insufficient?] grain available to feed them. What do you do with them? You ought to put that in. That's a great story. This is the one where Henry Wallace has been charged eternally by the Hearst press as being the pig killer.

JB: Well, to put it in just simply and very quickly, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration determined that it would be a useful part of their program if they took the younger pigs that were not to be fed out and that otherwise would have had to be killed and thrown away, take them and use them for relief food. At that time the relief administrations over the country were giving relief both in money and in food. The problem put up to me was, "Can you distribute this pork?" I think it was about twenty-five million pounds finally. I said, "Yes, it can be distributed, of course, one way or another. We can have our own trucks and storage, but I think I have an idea that'll work out a little better." I told Wallace this and we created a corporation to handle it called the Surplus Relief Corporation, of which Henry was a vice-president, and Ickes was a vice-president, and Hopkins was the president, and I was the executive. To make it effective in distribution and not have to buy our own trucks and our refrigeration, I said, "Well, if you can get this processed at the processors in Chicago and elsewhere and shipped everywhere, I'll see if I can get the chain stores to distribute it." That was the time that I went to see the two senior Hartfords, and they were immediately interested. I said, "Now, you want to keep your customers coming to your stores?" They said, "We certainly do but they haven't any money." I said, "What is better than if you have something to give them, so that they have the habit of going to the A&P, think that the A&P is doing a good job for them, a kindly thing?" A&P took out of the twenty-five million, about ten million pounds; Safeway a large quantity; and others, and we didn't foreclose the availability of the pork to the individual stores, the individual butchers, but not many individual butchers wanted to bother with it as they had to keep a pretty careful record, because I insisted that we should know for sure that this was finally given away to a reliefer. You had a voucher from a social worker that he or she had the right to ten pounds of pork or whatever it might be, and it worked out so smoothly that the pork was all gone before a lot of people had a chance to get any. Very amazing. Actually, there was no waste and, as far as the little pigs are concerned, they never ere killed. Nothing was done about them because it left enough grain to feed them.

HP: Yes.

JB: Simply young hogs -- I've forgotten what the weights were, but they were less than the usual size processing weight.

HP: Yes. There was a corollary to this. That is part of the danger inherent in people arriving at a store with their men folk and taking what was necessary from the shelves.

JB: Oh yes, that happened. That was happening, as a matter of fact, through 1932. It grew to its peak in the fall, or the winter, of 1932. The report of that, and the report of the situation with regard to the mortgage foreclosures in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, the farmers coming in and just standing in a line around the sheriff and bidding a dollar for something that was security for two thousand dollars, and the sheriff or his auctioneer would try to deny the bid. The farmers would move up with a pitchfork or a rope. They never did any violence, but they scared the people.

HP: Yes.

JB: Well, the reports of those events and of the looting of the stores, and the looting wasn't confined to one little area. There was more perhaps in the textile towns in New England because there the folks had been destitute for so damned long, but it was nationally almost universal. That was the reason that the relief bill, $600,000,000, went through so quickly in March-April of 1933. As a matter of fact, it went through without any provisions as to an organization to distribute the money. And so the second bill went through very quickly which created the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and I think Hopkins came to work for them down here. He had been here in New York as Roosevelt's relief man. Hopkins came down, I think, about May 10 or 15, and I went to work the next month.

HP: But it has this restless background which was quite real.

JB: Oh yes, it was. Yes, it was very real. You felt it. You felt it whenever you went into working class sections in any city. I remember I was in Detroit that spring, and it was quite obvious that there was seething unrest there.

HP: In terms of the products created under the art project, and there are successive art projects under FERA and so on . . . . Other than those in public buildings like murals, was any provision, or thought, given to the ultimate disposition of them?

JB: Well, the WPA finally . . . as a matter of fact, after Cahill ended his tenure, Mrs. Holzhauer was continued. The WPA existed, but I think Cahill had left his job in 1942, or '43, and the objects were all collected, or a great number of them were collected, not all of them, but a tremendous quantity, in a big warehouse in Chicago. There Mrs. Holzhauer devoted a year with a staff, two or three people, to allocating those objects to public institutions everywhere.

HP: Yes.

JB: All over the U.S.A. I've forgotten how the publicity was organized, but I guess out through the relief administration or rather the WPA administrations with the idea that people would apply. If a school wanted a picture, they would indicate the size and so on. If there was any remnant of the art project left in that state, or place, they would recommend it. I don't know how many objects were shipped, but it was a great number. So there . . . there were a few places where that was not done effectively. Mrs. McMahon apparently slipped up on it here in New York. There was a warehouse of stuff that should have been allocated. It was not. It was just left and, of course, the warehouse man, when the rent ceased to be paid any longer he owned the stuff, and I remember there was a very excited moment when the stuff was all auctioned. The artists who had produced it by that time might have been making enough money, many of them were, so they could have bought it back, but they didn't know about it, and so the work of very competent artists who were on the WPA slipped out into the hands of buyers for two, or three, five dollars, that had cost the government forty, or one hundred and eighty, or whatever number of weeks the artist had put on them. These were mainly easel pictures, and sculpture.

HP: Yes. but there was a collection point then for art objects.

JB: Yes, in Chicago.

HP: Ah, that was for the ultimate disposition, but then I assume each regional director . . . ?

JB: Oh, they had privileges. Yes, and as a matter of fact . . . well, indeed the condition of the project was, you know, not that the WPA would hold these objects, but that a continuous flow of utilization should be effected. Going to schools, libraries. The Newark Museum has a lot of the material that was allocated to it permanently.

HP: Yes. But you're right as the thing evolved, it was to create work and then to share it.

JB: Right.

HP: And the sharing aspects were like traveling shows.

JB: Yes, well there were many of those. In fact, that was the job I think that Mrs. Baker did mainly there for a couple of years, or three years. That's the reason she has such an intimate knowledge of all the museums of the country because she traveled around to see where they were going to put things.

HP: Yes.

JB: And in charge of the exhibitions.

HP: This wasn't thought of initially. This was . . . once you have the work on hand . . . ?

JB: Well, in a way.

HP: Was it?

JB: In a way it was because, you see, in our successful art projects heretofore it was never in the mind of anybody that artist's work created under the Gibson Committee should either be the property of the artists, or should go to the dealers on 57th Street. Now it might have been better if they had gone to the dealers, if anything the dealer wanted had gone there, and he had sold it and the money had gone back to the Gibson Committee, or something of that sort. That might have been a better deal.

HP: Yes.

JB: But it wasn't quite thought out to that degree, or carried through to that extent but all of these fragmentary projects and certainly under the PWAP of Bruce under the CWA -- all the objects of art were done for public purposes.

HP: Yes. Yes.

JB: That's the reason it was with such difficulty finding an adequate and big enough project for all our writers

because that concept existed that this had to be for a public purpose. Universities just didn't need the kind of quality of help we had or various other people that might have any writing done, state planning boards, or whoever it might be -- there just wasn't enough work.

HP: Yes.

JB: So the Guide gave plenty of work. The agent cashier system broke down with the Guide, finally, in a measure because actually the publishers that were willing to publish were willing to pay the royalties back to an agent cashier, but the contracts apparently couldn't be drawn, or they never drew them. I don't know why. I think it was some fault of our general counsel's members. So that Hastings House and MacMillan and these other people that published the Guide -- they published it essentially without royalties, I believe. I believe that. I'm not sure of that. You'll have to check with Alsberg on that.

HP: Yes.

JB: I know I felt a little dissatisfaction with the arrangement.

HP: Well, as you sit back, what was the over-all contribution made in the arts by the series of attempts to forestall destitution with the FERA, the PWAP, the CWA, and then subsequently the PWA?

JB: Well, if course it's pretty well known what it was. As we observe the names of the artists today who are alive and producing good work. They lived. I was at a party out in Amagansett, or East Hampton a year or so ago. A guy had a big Stanford White house. White apparently built a lot of houses out there, but anyhow there he was, and he had a big party, two maids, and two men serving drinks, big grounds. He had just bought the house. I knew he was an artist. He had been on the WPA and in on the Civil Works project, too. He had come through, you see, with great success and then, as I was introduced around, and some of the folks I recognized, some of the names I recognized. But then I suddenly turned to my wife and I said, "Aren't these . . . isn't this the WPA organization?" She said, "Why, of course," and they all were.

HP: Yes.

JB: They had come through and they produced. Well, that's all we wanted -- save their lives and their productivity, and we saved both. We did have deaths, you know, from malnutrition in the winter of 1932, '33.

HP: Yes.

JB: It was mainly on the common labor level, but there were some people . . . it wasn't an easy winter. It was quite cold.

HP: Terribly cold!

JB: Yes, and there were people at all levels of employment who were destitute, who underfed themselves, fed the children a little more than themselves, just didn't have food enough to feed themselves. Then they would get pneumonia and die. Penicillin hadn't yet been invented.

HP: Right. But it does have that aspect, and it was that, you know, a form of putting your hand in the dike.

JB: Yes.

HP: And from what you have said it was flexible enough to encompass almost any idea that showed some fruitful way of preserving body and soul and keeping it together.

JB: Yes, that's right.

HP: What of the . . . ?

JB: One day a man came into my office. He said his name was Steinlein and I happened to know his mother, who ran a book shop in Wilmington. He was born in a single tax colony down in Arden, Delaware. Well, he said he was a naval architect and he had an idea. He said that there had been some storms in '32, '33 and they had dislodged and broken up quite a number of naval hulks, or marine hulks, not just naval, but all kinds of ships, and he said, "Another few storms, and a great many will have gone. Some have now, that we should have, but I think it would be a good idea to do just what the Historic Building Survey is doing with ships, set up a project. You folks do this. You can give marine architects who are out of a job, a job making drawings, reproducing the stuff." He talked a half hour. Again that was a case where I said, "Well, when can you go to work on it?" I made him the director. I put him under somebody else, I think, though I vaguely remember that Tex Goldschmidt had charge of him, so he may have been right under my office. I don't know, but the historic naval structure survey was made. I don't think it ever employed more than five hundred people, but it did employ five hundred people

up and down the coast and all around.

HP: Yes.

JB: There were a few out on the West Coast. As a project, of course, I had a little special interest in getting it going right away, so I could send a report of it over to the White House because it interested the President tremendously.

HP: Yes.

JB: He was interested in naval service. Well, that was an idea. I didn't think of it. Nobody in my office thought of it. None of our field people thought of it. A man just came in.

HP: Walked in.

JB: Yes. It got noised about that people could walk in and we'd give attention to their ideas.

HP: Yes, and depending upon the numbers, if feasible and wise, it was like taking a flyer and, given those times, you had enough flexibility and discretion to make that kind of judgment.

JB: Yes.

HP: I don't know that you could obtain it now.

JB: No.

HP: I don't know.

JB: No, you see, it's very difficult to remember and to visualize that situation of fear and dread that came up out of the Depression.

HP: Damn right.

JB: Because it was a situation of fear and dread that enlivened the imagination.

HP: Yes.

JB: People designated to meet it had to be imaginative to do it.

HP: Yes. But it's not a little disturbing to note that the imagination of people is in obverse ratio to the size and health of their pocketbooks.

JB: Yes.

HP: In the sense that with the lean pocketbook we developed suddenly a tremendous capacity for ideas.

JB: Yes, doing imaginative work.

HP: Yes, out of sheer necessity and desperation; whereas when we are sitting around quite hefty, well-fed, the generation of ideas is . . . well, you know . . . .

JB: I think it would be an error to say that we ought under such circumstances to turn to government because all the government did there was to take, as it were, the free enterprise system and just give it a subsidy.

HP: Right.

JB: And since there isn't any reason to turn to government very greatly right now, although I think that probably our local relief administrations now are not as imaginative as they ought to be about work relief, I think we could be getting a lot more things done with work relief if we had a training program, a good training program, and the actual creation of projects.

HP: Yes.

JB: I would have no hesitancy in seeing the City of New York devote part of its money, a substantial part, to a work relief program. I think it would tend to reduce the number on relief in the course of a little while, and it would certainly lend to the dignity of those poor devils that are still on relief, because a guy on relief now must admit to himself that he is a terrible failure.

HP: Yes. Then, too, isn't it a fact that the continuing relief organizations, the need for same, have come up under a kind of, not work relief gambit so much as a protect the public health gambit.

JB: Yes.

HP: Through welfare agencies and so on, but which have come out under legislation which was directed toward the public health as distinct from the rationale for yours, which was an emergency program.

JB: Yes, it was always treated as that.

HP: Yes.

JB: I had a little difficulty, by the way, keeping my people convinced that it was an emergency program.

HP: Oh?

JB: Yes. I discovered all the way up and down that some of the best administrators and some of the most imaginative people about creating something, would dislike the idea when I insisted continually that one of the measures of success, one of our measures of accomplishment, was how many people we could get off the program and back at gainful
employment.

HP: Yes.

JB: And that was a little slow. My recreation people did a little better than anybody else, although their idea was to shift from one governmental body to another. I had a fellow named Ed Lindeman as director of recreation, and he had a very bright young woman named Sally Ringe as his assistant. She would come in about once a month and report to me that such and such a county, and such and such a city, and such and such a district had taken on the program, you know, taken it from us entirely. They worked at it. They worked at making these programs actually go back to the point where they ought to be supported. They went back to the county, or the county could put up a fair ground and charge admission and get some money out of the community, too, and some taxes, and it was done by people that would otherwise have been on relief, but they had regular jobs there.

HP: Yes.

JB: But I never did get Hallie to understand, Hallie Flanagan, to understand it completely; that she wasn't competing with Shubert, she was just trying to funnel her people into Shubert's.

HP: That's interesting.

JB: Yes, it was difficult.

HP: Well, they . . . you know, they probably had the orientation that art was art. Period. Whether it came under Shubert or . . . .
JB: Well, that was it, but also they found it sort of comfortable to work under the government.

HP: I know I've talked to several artists who said that they hadn't had it so well theretofore. Certainly the Twenties was, you know, no sparkling period of prosperity for modern art. I mean for a fellow like Stuart Davis.

JB: Yes.

HP: Or a person like . . . .

JB: How old is Stuart?

HP: I guess he's in his seventies.

JB: Yes.

HP: But he had a tough time in the Twenties.

JB: Oh yes, I know. I know.

HP: So suddenly he was in the Elysian fields.

JB: Yes.

HP: By comparison, not that he wanted much out of life really. Tables and chairs meant nothing to him.

JB: Yes.

HP: But I can see whereby there would be this built-in competition between the Flanagans and the Shuberts simply on the basis of self-belief and belief in an idea.

JB: That's all. And it's true that the Shuberts in all fields were a little bit alarmed lest a permanent government competitor was being built.

HP: Were they really? Was this really felt or not?

JB: Oh, I think . . . .

HP: Was it articulated?

JB: Well, I don't know if it was articulated by the Shuberts, but I'm quite certain that it was felt by some professionals. A few professionals who didn't have to get on WPA felt that there was danger that in some way they were being passed by. I talked to them, one or two artists whose names I don't quite remember, but I am quite sure that part of the Hearst attack . . . of course, basically the Hearst attack was disliking Mrs. Roosevelt . . . .

HP: Yes. But you did mention the fact that all the administrators had the problem of confronting destitution as destitution and some professional standards.

JB: That's right. You see, the person on the outside looking at that didn't know about the destitutional requirements.

HP: Yes.

JB: He knew about it theoretically, but he didn't know that that actually determined the way the project operated.

HP: Yes.

JB: Obviously, if destitution had been eliminated in 1936, there wouldn't have been any projects.

HP: Right. Well, by the same token, the notion of destitution, your own ideas of the Civil Works Administration, was an effort to get a way from the oppressive quality, psychically, of the nature of destitution.

JB: Oh yes. Oh yes. Well, there we just figured we'd spend money as fast as we could. That was the main point. I mean that was a case of giving total service to the Keynesian idea. It's never been proved, you know.

HP: No. But it's an interesting idea.

JB: Yes. Well, we certainly gave it . . . well, if we'd just had a slightly more courageous Congress, that would have given us another . . . . How much did we spend on Civil Works? I think it was five hundred and four hundred, wasn't it. Nine hundred million.

HP: Yes.

JB: Well, if they had given us another three billion . . . if we'd got that there instead of a year later under the WPA, it would have been very interesting to see if we might not have broken the back to it in that year.

HP: I agree but, you know, the essential timidities of . . . .

JB: Oh yes, but because, you see, actually as you looked at it from the standpoint of the only question of what affected the Depression, there are only two things I know of that did that you could see measurably in the United States. One was our first $600,000,000 for the relief administration and the other was the $900,000,000 for CWA.

HP: Yes.

JB: There, all the records indicated, department store sales went up twelve percent, bills began to be paid, all kinds of bills, mainly for durable consumer goods, such as radios, things that people had. Refrigerators were just coming into use then. We were on a lift, on a real lift on that day of March 1 when the CWA stopped. Then, you see, our money was less. I don't remember if we had an adequate amount for our relief structure. I guess, I've forgotten. In the summer of '34 it may have been too small, but we got another the appropriation, but the tempo

was less. And then we were going at a tempo. We waited until 1936 before Ickes got his bridges going. I don't think he started the Triboro Bridge until 1936.

HP: It is an interesting speculation.

JB: Yes. We would have been better off, much better off, if the President -- again this was a personal thing -- if he had appointed Bob Moses as the PWA administrator. His name was mentioned and some of the folks thought he ought to have the job, some of the Congress people, but he didn't get it, and Ickes got it. Ickes was there, and Ickes persistently wanted it, and he could see it done honestly. His point was apparently that he was the only person in the United States that understood the crookedness of cities. Maybe he did. He had grown up in Chicago.

HP: Yes.

JB: But Moses would have got things done. It would have moved fast. With that amount of appropriation Moses would have had a bigger organization than Ickes. He would have moved it faster and it would have proved its case. Ickes' Public Works never proved their case, not at all.

HP: Yes. Where did you get sources of information that retail stores . . . the Bureau of Statistics?

JB: Well, I picked them up in, I guess it was, Women's Wear Daily or something of that sort. There are figures kept regularly on department stores.

HP: So that you could see the difference, that it was priming the pump?

JB: Yes, and in my own practice subsequently in the past twenty-five years, twenty years, I had as clients many department stores and they tend to be a little amused at me, as it were, as having been a cog in the Roosevelt machine. Then I tell them this, and they say, "That's right. We felt good about it." A guy down at Dayton, Ohio, runs a big department store called Rike-Cummler, the name is Rike, and he said that, as a matter of fact, he wasn't sure but that he would have to close up. Sales were getting lower and lower. He couldn't keep laying off people because they would go immediately on relief. They had no savings. Isn't it curious that people come to a crisis and they have no savings? They have lots of savings now. They had none then. I suppose that the growth out of the inflation in the 1920's had got them out of the habit of saving.

HP: Yes. Well, as we mentioned the other day, the Committee of Cost of Medical Care was set up because they couldn't pay for medical care.

JB: Yes.

HP: And this was in 1926, so that there were available things which they conceivably could have had, had the rates of pay been different and had they had a backlog, but it was beyond them. It created enough of a problem for economists and doctors and so on to get together to try to at least work out, or find out what the problem was and then . . . .

JB: When did the WPA make that study? Do you remember? What year?

HP: This early study of the Committee of the Cost of Medical Care was about 1927.

JB: Yes, that I know. That would be economists and doctors.

HP: But the survey was made in '35.

JB: 1935?

HP: Yes. It began in '35, '36 -- anyhow, national health insurance was an outgrowth of it, too.

JB: Yes.

HP: Studies like this were going on all over the place. Not only that, but the WPA, the way they sustained even your cooperative study is published as a separate manual. I mean it was a publishing program which contains, well, fantastic information of the time about the state of the U.S. really as to what existed. It's an interesting period.

JB: It was to ease the President out a little -- I mean, he wanted to ease himself a little about my situation because he was embarrassed that he had been directed by Mrs. Roosevelt to fire me. That's what it amounted to, and he, in turn, had to tell Hopkins, and I've never seen Hopkins so embarrassed as he was that day when he said, "Your usefulness has ended." I said, "Harry, my usefulness hasn't ended to you or the President, but it has

to Mrs. Roosevelt." Well then they gave me that job to make this big study in Europe. I took a commission of six people and a staff of eight. We covered the whole of Northern Europe, all paid for with relief funds. As the President said, "Well, co-ops in Europe are supposed to be good for relief of destitution. Let's find out what they do in Europe." They don't directly relieve destitution but they do tend to equalize the society.

HP: Yes.

JB: That's just an illustration. In fact we could use relief money any way we wanted to.

HP: Right.

JB: All we had to do was to say it with a straight face so that the comptroller general of the United States felt that this in our best judgment would relieve destitution.

HP: Yes.

JB: You had to say that. We didn't actually have to say it, but we had to be prepared to say it. If McKarl made a fuss -- McKarl for many years had been George Norris's assistant and secretary and when the office of comptroller general was created early in the Twenties -- McKarl wore a string tie -- he was a very dignified fellow -- and he was appointed. And of course, he was an agent of Congress, not of the presidency. He didn't do anywhere near as much as the current fellow does, who is a member of Congress, about digging into things. The current fellow has no hesitancy whatever about digging up improper acts by executive agencies. Of course, they've learned that that can happen, so they are very much more careful, but they are also much more constipated, more hide-bound, more caught with red tape. They are more frightened.

HP: Yes. It has become a question of looking over their shoulder.

HP: Right.

HP: And this wasn't true of you because the times were different.

JB: That's right. And also McKarl had respect. I mean he knew that if Hopkins came to him and to a Congressional committee and said, "In my best judgment this is it," well, they might have said, "Your judgment is pretty lousy," but they wouldn't have said, 'You are a crook." Now they are afraid that somebody will say that they are crooks.HP: Nor would the Congress have been prepared to substitute its judgment for what Hopkins had to say.

JB: That's right.

HP: He was fingered for the ultimate responsibility if it landed in a smash any way.

JB: That's right.

HP: The fact of the matter is it helped a lot of people.

JB: Well, it's a very interesting question as to whether Keynes was proved a fool, or proved a wise man, by the spending program of the Thirties.

HP: Yes.

JB: I think that our beginning activity in relief, our quick spending and our insistence on standards, but the standards had to be built as you spent . . . .

HP: That's right.

JB: I think that was proving his theory, but I think that the continued expenditure got enmeshed in our economy sufficiently so that the delay in capital investment, see, the great increase in public works expenditure tended to delay capital investment.

HP: Right.

JB: People were frightened, and consequently we had an actual plateau of capital investment from about 1931 to . . . well, it rose in 1933, and then it was a plateau until 1938. When did we have that depression, in 1938?

HP: 1937.

JB: 1937, yes, and there capital expenditures were scared. They were sick and that was at the time the public works expenditure, PWA, was about at its top.

HP: Yes.

JB: They had finally got there. So it is hard to say whether anything is proved in the matter of the Keynes theory.

HP: Yes.

JB: Keynes was over here that fall of 1933, and Rex Tugwell arranged several conference with him and Hopkins, and I was always included because Hopkins figured he needed me. He always thought I was an engineer, but I wasn't a very good one, you know. I wasn't really much of an engineer. He always figured he needed and engineer, and so we had, I think, three conferences. I remember one in a Georgetown garden with Keynes, and he had completely lost belief in his own theory in the sense of feeling it ought to be done. He wasn't sure. He said, "I just want to hear when it happens." That was essentially what he said. He was an awfully nice guy.

HP: Well, I think we've gone just about as far as we can go.

JB: O.K. Fine. Fine.

END OF INTERVIEW

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