



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Philip
Fletcher Bell, circa 1963

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Philip Fletcher Bell circa 1963. The interview took place in 1635 Wisconsin Avenue, Washington, D.C., and was conducted by Harlan B. Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This is Phillip Fletcher Bell. 1635 Wisconsin Avenue, Washington, D.C. [Pause.] What I think is of importance to discover is what it was you were doing in Washington in '34 and '35, prior to the emergence of the Federal Art Project under the WPA.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, I was painting a huge mural painting—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Were you?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —for McKinley High School library. Some 120 feet of running wall's length, and it was about eight feet high.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was this under the Treasury Department, or under the local—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was under several things.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It started out—at the very beginning, they had different names for them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And it kept changing its name.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, it was the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and then there was—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —the Civil—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: That's right—

[Cross talk.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —Works Administration—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —it came under that at one time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It came under both of those, I think, at one time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I was stuck in the middle of it, and I had to be rescued and—to finish it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And it's at this juncture that the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It took two years to do that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Took two years. Do you have a—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Of part-time work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Do you have a—did you have to, you know, present a design or a sketch?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh, yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. What was the procedure, do you remember? Of getting it accepted, was there a group to which you had to submit this?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, I was among several small groups selected to do this work in the schools.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And Duncan Phillips headed the committee, as I recall.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And Olin Dows was—oh wait a minute, he wasn't on it. He was at the Treasury—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Project?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, I was on the Treasury project, painting easel paintings for a good while, and then I was shifted to WPA—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —as an artist.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: As an artist, and your—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And because of my background, I was picked from the Project, as an artist, to be a supervisor.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And to head up the Children's Arts Gallery, it was called at that time. It was an experiment in children's art education. And these art centers were set up all over the country, but the one here in the District was a unique adventure, in that it dealt with children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And it centered on a gallery which exhibited children's work, and the project itself had all the artists working as teachers, in the various public and semi-public organizations around town of a social nature.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So, you know—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Including St. Elizabeth's.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Do you know the emergence of the idea for art centers, how this was sparked? I'm aware of the fact that, under the Art Project, there were any number of regional variations and where the pattern of work done was, in a sense, tailored to those that were in the local area.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Whose idea it was, I don't know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But I presume somebody advised the President on it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Who it was to give it this form, I don't know. Now, the whole art—
aide to art idea was a man named Bruce.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Edward Bruce, yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Edward Bruce, who was a friend of the President's.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And whom I met when I first started out to do the mural.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. When the—when you were made a supervisor here in the area,
this involved, what? A team of which you had to—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I think top employment on our little project here was about 95—
[00:05:01]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: 95.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —or 98.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And it's these—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Persons.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, and of this 98—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They weren't all artists. There were carpenters and janitors and
office workers, and so on that were required to run the project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: We had, oh, I'd say a prior to the turn of the century building down
on Independence Avenue, which is now torn down. But it was almost a Victorian type of
brick building, which, you know, which the Art Project was housed, the Music Project. They—I
think the Writer's Project was in there, too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But they didn't have much in the way of activity because they
worked at home. And of course, the artists worked at home too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Surely.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But it was a center for all sorts of activities in the art field.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. What were the functions of a supervisor in those days? What, as a
supervisor—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, I was appointed the assistant project supervisor—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —in charge of a Children's Art Gallery.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And that was my special duty, and I had it for about five years, I
think. It was—had just been formed before I took it over.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And it had a—it was—fell into the pattern of these art centers that
were established throughout the country. This was for children, and there was a sponsor's

committee.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Which consisted of all sorts of people, psychiatrists, labor specialists, society women. There was a lawyer on it. They were volunteer members; did I say executive committee?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, were sponsoring executive committee.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. And you worked with and through this committee? I gather.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Through the committee, yes. They had met once a month as I recall.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was there any difficulty in obtaining space for a gallery? The children's gallery at Children's Art Center?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, it was already obtained when I it took over, I don't know if they had any difficulty or not.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I don't think so, and I think they took over the building.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: When we were kicked out of there, and I don't remember just why we were. Seems to me they were going to tear it down or—something required us to move from there, and we moved out to a mansion on Massachusetts Avenue, which was built by a millionaire and was sitting idle. And we shared it with the woman who ran a children's theater.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is this the—this isn't the McLean mansion, is it?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Incidentally, speaking of Evalyn McLean, I taught a class at her house for a short time in the summer. It was her class—art class.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I was the instructor, and I took over in place of Lowell Watkins [ph], who was Phillips' right-hand man.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Lowell Watkins [ph] was gone away over the summer, so he turned it over to me. And it was quite an experience. [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'll bet. Tell me, was Duncan Phillips much in evidence in the Children's Art Center? Was this—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Not as such, no.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No. So, he did have a—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: He had to do with the whole Art Project idea, but not so much with the WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And was this accessible to children, black [ph] children, or was there some criteria of acceptance or what?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, this went on for a long time, and we finally established classes at the gallery for talented children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Which was integrated at that early date.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I'll be darned.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And that was by vote of the committee, to integrate it, and it worked very successfully. And there were a few Negro children, but they didn't over swamp [ph] the class. And they were selected by the teachers out in the various class locations, who would run across a talented child and recommend that he be taken into the Center.

[00:10:10]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, so—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Work was submitted—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —to the teacher, and the teacher submitted that work to me, and two or three of us used our judgment.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You know, as to, in other words the—it was an effort to, in a way, to find talent in the school systems, which—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, this had some relation to the school system, but only partially so.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I forget the name of the—what was it, the Recreation Association?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: National Youth Administration?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was a recreation association of the public school system—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —which held classes of all kinds at night, special classes. And we had a number of those. And then that's what was connected with the school system at the time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But we tried to, in our teaching, to supplement the schools, which taught by rote, and by non-artist, inexperienced teachers.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Who would have to tell a child to copy something, which we definitely opposed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Trying to bring out the originality of the child in every way possible, which pretty much led—meant letting him have his head.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And guiding him along with it. Some of our teachers were very good, some were medium, some were not so good, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, but they were all stationed here locally?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: All, in terms of the time—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, and many of them were fine artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Many of them were just hacks.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But were good at teaching.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oddly enough.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And this was a means to fulfill a need at that time, from their point of view, in terms of employment?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Was there any problem in the materials for the school?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, it was set up that the sponsors would furnish the materials.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Now the sponsors were—not only this executive committee, that happened to sponsor the Children's Art Gallery—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —but all the other classes, which were part of the Project, as well as the Children's Art Gallery, were scattered all over the city. There were some 165 of them a week at one point.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh boy.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And they were sponsored by that Recreational Association of the school system, by supplement houses in St. Elizabeth's, by correctional institutions, by anywhere we could serve to start classes. But they had to be of a semipublic nature, they weren't private classes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. So, that the idea then stems out of the WPA, but it was maintained, once in operation, by the sponsors?

[Cross talk.]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, it was maintained by the staff of the WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: These artists that worked for—the teachers who worked for the WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But now, the history of the Children's Art Gallery was, when the real art came along—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —WPA went into limbo.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And the question is, what would happen to the Children's Art

Gallery? Well, it changed the name of it to the Children's Art Center, and we took the most talented teacher we had, and she ran it under the sponsor's direction. And I withdrew from it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Eventually, sometime toward the end of the war, as I recall, the sponsors voted to give it up. It was just too much for them to bother with.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They had their social obligations, you know, and this meant activity, which required some work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And required that they give benefits of different kinds to raise money for it.

[00:15:02]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Because, whereas they took in some tuition on it, it was a nominal tuition, and not enough to care for the indigent children, who the thing was originally set up for, and which they didn't turn away when they operated as sponsors. They eventually gave it up, and turned it over to the teacher, who operated it as a private school. Want to turn that off?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, do you want me to go to—[Recorder stops, restarts.]—the termination of the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Children's Art Center?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, Children's Art Center. That it got—reached the point where people who were involved thought more of their—the war came on and so on—and they thought more of social obligations, perhaps. Although, I don't want to do them a disservice, but in any event, it was terminated.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, it was too much for them. I think they just couldn't volunteer any more time for it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Is there any way in which you can assess the net effect and significance of this on the children that came?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No. I think it spread out throughout the land, in a way that—there's no way of assessing it, because it's passed on to their children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. It's a—it was an opportunity, which was—the times helped create for the talented youngsters.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well now, this talented part was only a portion of the thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And a rather small portion when compared to 165 classes a week we had—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —at one time. I counted them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, these 165 classes didn't—met in various places throughout the city.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Isn't that it? But they didn't meet at the Children's Art—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: That's correct.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —Center. The—as I understand you, the membership of the classes at the Children's Art Center was made up of—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Talented—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —those who had been recommended by—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, talented children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Especially talented.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But this was a kind of aesthetic service, which was set up here in the District of Columbia, largely. With whom did the—well, as I understand it then, the Children's Art Center was a sort of—once established, was an independent thing, with its own sponsorship committee and benefit shows to help sustain it and so on.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes. There was also a gallery for adults, which was started.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And these were both part of the Project, but the—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —adult gallery didn't have an executive committee, as did the Children's Art Center—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —which was an art gallery. It wasn't called an arts center until—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Later on? Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, until the sponsors took it over.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. But the salaries of the personnel were paid by the WPA?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The—but to enlist the community in its interest, the sponsorship committee was formed.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: To give it a kind of solid basis. Is that the formula, in a way, of which—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, and the executive committee supervised bringing in other sponsors, which were the governing boards and officials of various projects around the city—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —of a social nature.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: As I said, including even St. Elizabeth's.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: We had no children's class at St. Elizabeth's, but we did have an adult class there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And the adult classes were all part of the same thing, it was all part

of the Project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But the special children's part of it was—came under the special Children's Art Gallery.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Were you—were many visitors from other—did many visitors from other sections of the country interested in the development of children's projects come and use it as a kind of model or yardstick?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was it used that way?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes. [Inaudible] activities at that time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. So that it was—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And the various children's projects were started in other art centers.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But they weren't focused, as it was here, on children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: The arts centers included everything.

[00:20:01]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. Yes, the art center movement was broadcast throughout the land. But, as you say, the Children's Art Center was more or less unique—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Special to Washington, yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yeah. Was there any exercise of leadership on the part of the arts section in the WPA? Holger Cahill, for example, and others.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, he was the head of the federal—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, and—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —part of it, and this all came under the federal.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was a portion of the federal, just as all the whole arts centers in the country came under it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Each city had its project, and it had its arts center.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Was that too—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I think—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: [Inaudible.][Cat meowing.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —I simply wondered, because I know when they dealt with the state of New York, for example, I had to go through the state agencies, which had been established under [hammering sounds] the FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] and the CWA [Civil Works Administration] so there was an organization in [inaudible], as a kind of a—working with the state. But here, where there is not a state, I wondered whether the direct, not supervision, but—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, that's another angle. The District government, we came under, too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, did you?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And it acted as a state.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was a state project, which we were.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In other words, the city government—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: The state and the city were the same thing in this—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In the District of Columbia?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —in this locality.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. I wondered about that, because Washington, D.C. being the special, unique place it is—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —is that a different kind of picture than, let's say—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, there was a District WPA head.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And he covered all sorts of things. Sewers and—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Roadwork?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, that kind of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Construction?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And we were part of that organization.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Cross talk.]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: We had many ties—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —that came under the Federal Art Project, WPA Federal Art Project. We were tied to that, that was above us. We were tied to the District, which was a state organization above us.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But then, within the idea itself, you were allowed to develop this pretty much as your own baby, you put it. This was a—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But as the creation of 100 odd classes throughout the District must have been on the consequence of some notice that this was available to interested parties. You know, and classes were held, and people came. It's a form of human cry in a way.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, the sponsors would request a class, and then they'd produce the children.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, I see. I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But it was a WPA sponsored thing, too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But we worked through the organizations in the city.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: There were settlement houses here, quite a number.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were the churches quite prominent in it also?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, not as such.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Not as such.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, it had no religious angle.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, but I mean as a social thing, where children are involved—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: You'd think it would, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —not directly.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: The churches had an interest in some of the organizations that were benefiting children, but they weren't church groups.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They were not church groups.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Were the—I gather that exhibitions were held?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, we had quite a program of exhibitions. Many foreign ones, in which they were opened by the embassies or the ambassador of the country which supplied the exhibit.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And these were, again, children, or what?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, all children's—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —exhibits, and the executive committee put on teas for the openings and invited the ambassador and his entourage.

[00:25:01]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And many of them were open there, many, many countries. Oh, and I must say friendly countries, at the time. We had a Polish exhibition, and the Polish—Poland was not—was friendly to us at that time. I don't remember that we had a Russian exhibition. I don't think we did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Were the exhibitions—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Although, Pol—Russia was friendly to us at that time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Was there—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think we had just shortly theretofore recognized Russia.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: '34, '33, something like that. Were the exhibitions well attended by the people of the District, or interested parties in the District? Yeah. It made quite a stir, didn't it, the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, we got very good publicity.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I handled the publicity, and—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —we put out press releases.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You did?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: With photographs of children's work and so on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Were there any papers connected with the— papers in the sense of documents and so on—connected with the Children's Art Center? Was there any—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Thousands of them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —they were—that were accumulated records, yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: You know the government.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It's a paper organization.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, but unhappily, a lot of it gets lost, somehow. I was thinking of the publicity releases, the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I have a number of them here, and I have a number of invitations, which were made up.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: We had a silk-screen project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, did you?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Project in one of the youth organizations, what was it? The National Youth Administration.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: So, many young people in that did the designs for the invitation. We had one Seventh Day Adventist girl who did a number of them, it was very good. She was my assistant for a long time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But she didn't come as a religious connection. She was on the National Youth Administration.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. So, there is this, you know, this relation with other agencies also active, not particularly in the art field, but in the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —employment field. Were—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And they centered [ph] at that building for a time and they had classes there at one point, and they moved somewhere else.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Was there any sort of arts and crafts training, in addition to art and the painting sense, the drawing sense?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, we had modeling.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You did?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Clay modeling.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And crafts as such were not emphasized. I mean, there was no basket weaving or anything like that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was for artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. And the teaching was largely drawing and painting?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Now, all the time this was going on, the project had its own activities with its artists, who were painting for the project. [Cat meowing.] We set up a lithograph project, we had a silk-screen affair, we had various things. We had a photographer there, but he had no classes, I think.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, the children got a—if they wished, a wider sampling than merely drawing and painting, then?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Not much.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Not much?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Not much, no. [Inaudible] drawing and painting and clay modeling.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But even though lithography, or was this a project outside of the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: This was part of the project—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, I see.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —for adults.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Not—it was outside the children's.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They weren't, didn't include the children. It was an adult—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Was it—were the schools utilized at all in any way?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Schools?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Schools, public schools.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I explained that to you, that the recreation association of the public school system sponsored the classes, many of the classes we had. Now, this is an activity out of the school system.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But the art teachers in the school system were involved in that—were not involved.

[00:30:02]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Were not? No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: As such, they may have gotten into it on the side here and there, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I was thinking of a traveling exhibition from the Children's Art Center to various schools in the community here, which would—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, we don't—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Not much of that, not much of that. No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I can't remember shipping out any of our own exhibitions to speak of. Might have had a couple.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But most of them were shipped in from abroad.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In addition to the invitations, which were printed, calling attention to the exhibition, were there catalogues also, of various shows? Is there any trace of any kind of any of the work that was done by the children? Is there a locus where some of that work was deposited?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I don't think so, no. It wasn't saved as such.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was considered very fine, artistically, but in the modern sense, I mean, we ran across many small Matisse—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —type of artists. And many of the modern techniques were naturally evolved by the children.

[Audio note: Droning and fuzziness increasing.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. I think you did indicate that the emphasis upon the training was to bring out a sense of originality of their art.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Which is something quite apart from trying to superimpose on them [inaudible]. [Cross talk.] Yes. This takes, I think, a rare degree of discipline on the part of an art teacher, where there is a, perhaps a—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, it's a lack of discipline if anything.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, really?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It's giving a child his head.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, but what I meant was, a teacher who will, perhaps, have a solution to a problem, or a method, or a technique, will—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They won't impose it on a child.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This is the discipline I had in mind, that it will refrain from leading the child where originality will not take him. And letting originality have its head so it can develop in a natural way.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Can you remember any of the kind of work at all? You mentioned there were some Matisse or Matisse-like creations on the part of the children?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What about the more modern developments in—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: The abstract work?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Something of that kind, yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, abstraction has been behind art for centuries, it's not a—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Not a new thing.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —new thing except as it's isolated.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And has become a fashion. And when you go into the basic techniques of drawing and painting, you deal in abstract terms, just from a technical point of view.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I mean, the arrangement of colors and the arrangement of lines and the arrangement of spaces and so on. Now, when we got up to the teenage child—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —our age limits were about, I would say, age four to age 20.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: When we got up into the teenage classes, they were taught more adult forms. Being adolescent for the most part, they reached in that direction

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was this period of some excitement for you?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'll bet.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But I kept in mind that I was not a social worker, but an artist.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And that I was interested in an adult [cat meowing] proceeding in art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I didn't confuse my homework or myself with a—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: With a—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —child point of view.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Although it must've been quite illuminating to see a range of youngsters, you know, attempting to project a statement.

[00:35:10]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And it must've been exciting in itself, since—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —I'm not sure that anything comparable to this approach towards children had existed theretofore.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: No, it really hadn't.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And, in a sense, we were opposed to the school system, in that—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[Siren noises.]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —and we had some conflict with heads of the school system on it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, did you?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But not serious conflict, I mean after all it was—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: A matter of how one looks at it?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, and it was not an attempt to mislead anybody.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Teach them anything false.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, but I would think that older heads probably with a deeper commitment to something might, raise an eyebrow if the emphasis—progressive emphasis upon the aid toward originality on the part of youngsters, you know?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, they just didn't understand it. I mean, they taught a child how to make a figure.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: A circle for the head—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —a couple of lines for the neck, several for the body, and two lines for the—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —arms and two for the legs. And they taught the child to do that. We didn't teach the child to do that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They frequently learned it at school, and then came and did it at our place.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was hard to completely isolate the influences a child has.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, they act as restrictions, don't they, to the more originality—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: They don't have to—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —or they can. Were there classes on still life, with models, or what? Or was this just—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, that was only for the teenagers.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Only the teenagers. But for the children, it was just sort of freewheeling experience—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, of giving them their head.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: If they had an idea that—a trip to market, they would make a

market according to their own ideas.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: With vegetables, and maybe some—momma shopping, or—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, you when this terminated, you left. Is this to open up the antique shop, or had you had that also at the time?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh, no, I went into the government. The war was on us.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I worked for Rockefeller's outfit for about two months and hated it so that I left that and got a job as a space planner for the War Production Board.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Which was designing offices for the—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —war effort. We had to streamline the offices, as it were, to set up—to break a bottleneck and machine gears or something.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And I was in that during the war, and at the end of the war I went to work at the Library of Congress as the Assistant Exhibits Officer. And I worked there for 10 years doing exhibits. I'm sorry I wasted all my time doing that, it was very interesting and edifying, but I should've been painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Now I'm going blind and can't do any more painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh. Is this a progressive thing?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh. That's—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: In a sad way.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, for an artist it's not an easy confession to make. But at least to some extent you can look back to—certainly to the '30s, as a period in which you, [cat meowing] whatever the consequence, broadened at least the receptivity to the idea of originality in youngsters.

[00:40:08]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And that's not a little to claim. The collection of memories is one thing that most of us don't do very much about anyway. But if I had that one on which to rely as—no more as a—more or less as a shot or a spur, to deeper understanding of the aesthetic experience of it, the creative experience. It's a rare thing.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I just wonder whether, and of course there's no way to ascertain this, if it doesn't, you know, come out from you, whether any of the children that you had have gone on in the painting world.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yeah, I have no knowledge of them carrying on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: None?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I also taught, at that period, at George Washington University.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Advanced Design in their School of Painting, School of Art. And I did this part time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And I did this part time, along with my government work, for three winters.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. So, you were—well the list must be somewhere. The list of children that were involved—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh, that was thousands and thousands and thousands of students and so on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That went through?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I also had my own class at the Library of Congress.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: For about five years or six, I don't remember just how long it was. And I developed one very good painter there, a girl.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Who became pretty well known afterward. She's now in Africa, I don't know very much, I don't know what she's doing. [Pause.] But none of these children became professional painters that I know of.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Although it's certainly, you know, enriched their experience, which they in turn can hand on.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You know?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. In that sense, it's a, oh, quite a contribution. I don't know how many other children's centers there were, or whether there were any others. Unless it's part of the larger—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I don't think there were others, except as part of a larger—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —center.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Did you do any traveling in this period, throughout the country to visit other centers?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Not really.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: A few in Virginia.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. And that was just about the—although you did say that people passed through here from other sections of the country to see what construction—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh yeah, even from Canada.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and what the procedure was and so on and how it functioned. I'm—I think probably the success of the arts center movement is related to the receptivity of a

local person who's willing to take the time, to hold the teas, to create the benefits—or hold the benefits in an effort to support the center. And it may well be that the spirit of the times encouraged this, you know, as a movement, local interested citizens doing this.

[Cat meowing repeatedly.]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Oh, hush! Hush!

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Although I don't really know, and the arts center movement is something that has barely been touched upon historically. It's existed as an idea, and it's noted as an idea, but what happened to it? But the process was—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, when they closed the WPA, they dumped all the stuff.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Dumped it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Many of my paintings I did for the project were just given away and hanging in various public buildings, many of them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Somebody in an office would see one and grab it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Also, Senator—the very aged Senator from Rhode Island—

[00:45:09]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Green?

PHILIP BELL: Green, was it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Theodore Green.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes. Latched onto a six-panel screen that I did—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —for a—it was done for the State Department through the Treasury Art Project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Well, he admired it, so I just gave it to him to put in his office. What happened to it, I don't know, it was egg tempura.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Washington cherry blossoms, done with a slightly satiric slant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. This is true [inaudible] the easel painting that you did was simply stored, wasn't it, or given over to the Project as a whole?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: It was given over to the Project as a whole, and they had this art gallery there, where people from various government outfits and offices came and took pictures to decorate their offices.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And of course, when WPA closed, there was a great scandal about it. In New York, I remember there were hundreds and hundreds of them that were in a warehouse that was just dumped over and bid on by some man that bought them for a song. I don't know what he ever did with them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. I think there was an art dealer involved—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —that began to market them.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I never heard that they were marketed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well now, I may be wrong in that respect, but I know they came into his possession.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, I remember that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: How scandalous it was to me because many of these artists were well known artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yes.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And many were not. There was a great deal of bad work done, too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure. But in terms of the temper of the time and the needs of the time, the question was how to get a given sum of money to people.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And, uh—well, there were lots of varieties.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: There was minimum wage, but it didn't tide these people over.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure didn't. There was a difference between—well, I don't know, prior to the New Deal, certainly among the modern artists there wasn't much in the way of earnings. I'm thinking particularly of a person like Stuart Davis, for example, who painted all during the '20s and had difficulty selling a painting.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes, artists have always had a difficult time of it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Still do.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, there were those who could handle portraiture and, you know, and make a living out of it. If somebody had some unique something they wanted to do, it was pretty much on the brink in the '20s. And so, the '30s gave him, in a sense, a much better, or at least a steadier income—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —than he had ever enjoyed heretofore. I think, myself, that the—so far as the imaginative, creative artists, the pinch, let us say, was felt early in the '20s. And it was only until the '30s that they began to see that—or the government took the notion that an artist has a stomach like a bricklayer and like a road builder and was entitled to eat.

[Cross talk.]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Of course, I had a very fine background. I'm a graduate of Yale in painting—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —and that's why I was picked as a supervisor, because I was outstanding among artists that were working. Not for my work, but for my background.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, this is the Yale School of Fine Arts?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. You had been there as a student?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And graduated [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh. And then you had always lived in the Washington area? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I'm originally from Missouri.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: But I've been here since I was 13.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So, you returned from the Yale School of Fine Arts to Washington to continue painting. When did you graduate from the Yale School of Fine Arts?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: '33.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In '33, just at the—

[00:50:00]

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Just when it was all starting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Just when it all started.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: That's why I got that assignment, to such a large mural painting—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mural painting, yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —job in McKinley.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, the—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I have photographs of all that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The Yale School of Fine Arts was in the tradition of mural painting too, wasn't it?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I mean, yes. What was it—the Society of Mural Painters was largely dominated by—dominate is a bad word—but the leadership of it was a Yale School of Fine Arts.

During this period in the '30s, there was organizations created by artists. Now, they may not have been as vocal or expressive as the organizations were in New York City, they were quite vocal and expressive there. They had a single employer, they were all virtually in the same boat, and they organized together and banded together.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Are you from New York?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. The Artist's Union, the Artist's Congress, and various other—

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I know, a good part of it was social.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And I'm a non-joiner, and I avoided all—joining all organizations here.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: For which I'm very thankful because many of them turned out to be Communist front organizations.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: And I don't think all the members were by any means, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: —they were sucked into it and had to answer for it later, one way or the other.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But I think it is a very interesting phenomenon to see artists that are unique, individualistic people, creative people, thinking in a sort of collective term in this period. It's almost anachronism that they would do this, that is, there is a kind of sharing of misery. And yes, you're right, I think the main emphasis was social, as distinct from ideological, or otherwise.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Of course, the Communist idea was rampant then, and it was legal.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, the popular front movement was in almost every organization from, well, the Lawyer's Guild and so on, the Writer's Guild, and the like.

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: Have a grape.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You were not a joiner?

PHILIP FLETCHER BELL: I've had the occasion to be thankful for that, too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'll bet you have. Well, we're practically at the end here.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bell63_11_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]