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Oral History interview with Adele Brandeis, 1965 June 1

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Transcript

Interview

AB: ADELE BRANDEIS
HP: HARLAN PHILLIPS

HP: By way of departure, I think you ought to fence in the story of how you became involved in the WPA, what the situation was like in Kentucky, what you had to do with and what you went about.

AB: That's kind of difficult. I don't really know what the situation was in Kentucky. I got involved through knowing Constance Rourke and her interest in the Audubon and her interest in the Shakers. When Constance Rourke told me that they were going to start on the Index of American Design, I instantly decided that somebody ought to record what the Shakers had done in Kentucky. It seemed a very mild beginning, and I suddenly realized that I had no idea how it was to be recorded. I couldn't record it, and I found they wouldn't use photographs. So, I did know through being on the board of the Art Center School here -- I've been on the Board ever since it started -- that there were a great many young struggling artists who had been working in the Art Center School and had no idea of ever being able to make a living in depression days. It occurred to me that if they could possibly be taught how to do this interesting and meticulous work for the Index, that maybe it would somehow serve a purpose later on and at least [it would] pay them a little something and tide them over and keep them from being quite so discouraged. My work with the WPA really started through the Index of American Design. Then, queerly enough, before there ever was any Treasury Art Project here, I was asked -- I don't know why, except that through Bruce I suppose -- to help judge a mural project in Washington. When I found that some of the murals weren't so very good, although some of them were extraordinary, it occurred to me that maybe some of the people here in Kentucky who were pretty impatient with spending their time doing the Index of American Design and who would love to paint in oil or in fresco, which they didn't know anything about, or even in watercolor, would like to try something like that. So I asked if it were possible if I could find any artists. [Knock] Come in. Thank you so much. Did you bring me the original? You didn't bring the original. Bring that too. So, it occurred to me that if I could find the artists who might possibly have some creative ability and not just copying ability, we might be able to start a mural project. Is this what you want?

HP: Yes, indeed.

AB: I did know some of these young people. I had worked with them at the Art Center. Then when they began explaining to me that they had to have contests, or competitions, then I realized I couldn't just use the young people that I knew here in Louisville. It would have to be state-wide and then I found it could also be Southern Indiana. So, at that time I was able to get enough publicity in the Courier Journal and the Lexington paper, to alert artists in other parts of the state. Well, there didn't seem to be very many artists in other parts of the state. Interestingly enough, there was a rather experienced man named Frank Long who had a studio in Beria, and he immediately said that he would like to try. He came up here to talk to me and I got him to talk to some of the young people. Orville Carroll, for instance, and Mary Nay and William White and Robert Purdy, were my first who had been working for me. I asked them to let Frank Long explain how to do a mural, if you could explain it. They were all very enthusiastic and all of them asked if they could be allowed to compete. Well, Orville Carroll was good enough and Robert Purdy was good enough, but Mary Nay had never had any experience except as a senior in art school, and I didn't think she'd get anywhere, particularly in a big competition, so I asked if it were possible to use some of these people who would like to do murals and have them have a local sponsor. I got the library to sponsor Mary Nay, and she did a mural in the Children's Department and the library sponsored Orville Carroll who did his first mural in the lobby. Orville's was good enough. Interestingly enough, Mary's, I didn't think, was as good as Orville's. Orville's was good enough that I suggested that he enter into some of the national competitions. He got a post office mural in Southern Indiana and one in Columbia, Kentucky and Harrodsburg, Kentucky and part of the Marine Hospital in Louisville. He did four of them. Meanwhile, Frank Long, who was in Beria and who was, as I say, quite an experienced artist, not young like these children. These were mostly in their early twenties. He told me that he had an extremely talented young man from a little tiny country town ten miles from Beria who would love to work on a mural. He was helping him, but he had never done anything but race horses and copies of Daniel Boone, or Audubon at $25 a throw. I went down to see him and found that he was a most eager, excited person at the idea of painting. He showed me a lot of sketches and I was pretty sure he would be good enough. So he tried for a competition for the Post Office in Hopkins County, Kentucky, in Madisonville, and he was the only person in the competition. So there wasn't much question about his having a competitor. He was good enough so he was chosen immediately. As I say, he worked in a town of 77 inhabitants called Disputanta. He couldn't come to Louisville and hire a studio because he was only getting $45 or $50 per month, and he would have had to rent some place and eat and sleep. So he suggested that, as long

as it was a very large mural, he would work in his father's tobacco barn and that's where he worked. One at a time, he did five. Meanwhile, the public schools were very interested. I found I could get a couple of public schools through the superintendent of schools who was a very wide-awake person, to let me have some of the less experienced children work in the public schools. I had four murals done in public schools here by different people. The interesting thing is, for instance, that one boy named Robert Purdy, who worked in a public school, has since become an artist in New York, making a large living, and has done all the decorating and designs for the Revlon people. Then a young man named William White is now the art director for the television station here in the Courier Journal and has 14 people working under him. It is extraordinary, really. Orville, who worked on the Index for me until he began painting murals, is now an artist and also makes picture frames, but he is an artist who has been painting ever since, has gone abroad and studied over there and has had a one-man show recently in which he sold, on the first day, the opening of the show, sold 77 out of 100 pictures and has now sold all but two. He has some more orders. Mary Nay who at 18 or 19 did the children's mural in the public library here, has since won prizes all over this part of the country and is an instructor in the art department of the University of Louisville Fine Arts Institute. I don't know what . . . . Bert Mullins, who was the one who was the very ambitious one from out in the country, has died. I don't know how far he would have gone. Every instinct in that man was an artistic one. I remember, I said to him: "You know, Bert, you are not going to be able to work very many hours. The smaller the town you come from, the fewer hours you work and the less money you get and what are you gonna do the rest of the time?" He said, "I guess I'll just lay." I said, "Now, Bert, you are too young and too strong to just lay around doing nothing." He said, "Doing nothing! I'm gonna lay me a stone house." That's what he did. Frank Long, the most experienced of the lot sent by the government, taken away from me, and sent by the government to work with the Eskimos, to teach them work that they could do with their hands, carved ivory from tusks, and use the stones that were found up there, particularly jade. Frank was able, how I don't know, to get silver. He learned how to make rings and bracelets and key ring things. I don't know what happened to him. I've lost him long ago. The government took him away from me. Charles Goodwin, who started out as a sculptor and whose love is still sculpture . . . . Whenever a mural wasn't quite able to be finished, somebody was taken into the army, or something like that, Charles was willing to finish it. He worked on murals too, but he has now become a sculptor who has won a good many competitions and makes a very comfortable living as a designer for a big decorating firm here. I had one person who worked in metals. Did you see her outside of the library?

HP: Yes. I wondered about that.

AB: Well, I only had her for a short time. She was extremely talented and very interested, but she got married quite early in the game and had a baby even earlier in the game. So, I lost her for good; but she was good. She is still interested in art and is an art patron even though she isn't practicing any more. She's helped me raise money for things that I need. I had three elderly people who learned how to do Index. They were taught when this new fellow came down here from Boston and there was no question of the fact that they were not creative but they were incredibly good craftsmen. All three of them have died. They were all older people. I had one very talented girl named Cecil Coleman. I didn't know what to do with her. She was the kind who could do almost anything. The first job I got for her was to do illustrations for the Elmwood Beer Club Bulletin that came out every . . . . She knew Kentucky and could do very good black and white illustrations for that. It was only published once every four months for a while and that didn't seem enough for a living, and I found that she had a pretty good eye for color. So I had her do a whole series of block prints on Kentucky birds to be used in the public schools. I lost her because she got married and went to Texas to live. I was a matrimonial agency almost. I had a very good lithographer whose name I can't remember who did very nice lithographs of Kentucky scenes, but he had an exhibition and was good enough so that one of the Chicago papers hired him and I lost him that way. Of course, if I lost them to something much better, and something where they got a job, that was just what was intended all along. I didn't have any failure and the ones that are still here, that I keep track of, in the first place they are all more grateful than you could possibly tell for the project. They all say that it started them in the way that they wanted to go, that it gave them an ambition when they didn't have any, when they knew they weren't going to be able to make a living that way. It was the one thing in the world that they wanted and if any such thing ever happened again, I think you could collect that group of people and start an entirely new project in five minutes with their help. It was amazing! I had a very talented young man in Indianapolis who didn't really belong to me except for some reason they gave me supervision over him. He won a project for the Marine Hospital here. His name was Henry McNair. I lost him to Peak. Afterwards, he got a hold of him in Indiana and I never got him back again. I think I've gone over the list of them, haven't I? Carl Shoulders -- as I say, he was the most talented of the sculptors, but he moved to Florida quite a long time ago and had the unfortunate experience of marrying a very charming girl who was jealous of his art and said he spent too much time in the studio and he got an ordinary job and that was the end of him. It sounds like the Ten Little -- what is it? Do you remember . . . and then there were nine and then there were eight . . . you go along like that.

HP: Ten Little Indians, yes.

AB: I think that's . . . . Is there anything else you want to know?

HP: Yes, you've indicated that one of the functions of running the show here in Kentucky was to find areas in which you could use the talents that you had. I want you to describe how you . . . the process of the sculpture out at the University, for example. Was this just something you saw, or . . . ?

AB: Well, there were two niches in the administration building which had been left there by an imaginative architect which had never been filled. These two young boys, one was 21 and the other was 22, who had always one little wax models and things at the school art center were crazy to do something big, and it occurred to me that maybe it might be possible for them to do something good enough to fill those places. It had better be pretty good, or else it would be better empty. Luckily, the President of the University of Louisville was one of our sponsors. So I went to him and asked him, and he said, "Talk to the head of the fine arts department." The fine arts department, headed by Dr. Justice Bear was interested too, but he said, "I haven't got time to manage it, though." I said, "Well, that's what I'm here for." So for three months those boys did nothing but study photographs of Greek sculpture, and occasionally unfortunately Roman, and make models, wax models, and they made clay models. Finally, when they had something that I thought was good enough, we hired a room in a garage way up in West Louisville and the boys worked there, one of them for five months and one of them for six months, on these things. Nobody could work full time because they weren't being paid or enough hours. You couldn't keep them from it. They'd go back at night when they didn't think I knew anything about it. Then, as far as the Shaker thing was . . . . There wasn't any question in my mind that had to be recorded some way or another. It was Shaker furniture and Shaker weaving, Shaker artifacts and Shaker clothing, all the things. The Shaker community was closed. The whole place had been sold and the furniture was being gradually auctioned off and I knew that if we didn't have some sort of a record of it, it would be gone for good. I had three artists who were terribly interested in doing that and going down. I got them a place to live, to board and lodge down in Harrodsburg. There was a bus that went over every day, and they lived down there. Orville Carroll, who painted the mural in Harrodsburg, went down and lived with them. I had four of them down there and I went down every other week and spent a day or two with them. I think that that was about the most successful thing that we did. I mean, I think that that was really a rescue of a vanishing age. Now Shaker town has been reconstructed. They've been working on it just the way they have on Williamsburg, and the man who has been doing it who was at Williamsburg says that the material that the Index sent to him from Washington that he borrowed was invaluable in helping to resurrect Shaker Town. I didn't tell you that I had wanted to record Kentucky double woven covers. We'd gotten started on that until I found that they were doing the same thing in the New England project and there weren't enough differences in most of the designs to make it worthwhile, I thought, to go on, although the men were crazy about doing it, until I did discover one cover that had a B&O Train woven into it and "1847" woven into the corner. I had an exhibition at the Museum of a lot of my pieces before I sent them on to Washington. This was, of course, just a corner about 18 by 12 or something like that of one corner. One woman said, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself to have cut up a cover like that!" I said, "It isn't the real cover, it's just a painting of it." She wouldn't believe me at all. One thing that I thought was very interesting but we could never learn to do it well enough, was the old Powder Horns. There is a big collection of them in Harrodsburg, old Kentucky Powder Horns: pewter, brass, but mostly pewter. We never were able to really and truly master the pewter thing. Pewter and glass were the hardest things to master, and silver, of any. There was very little glass here that was any different from anywhere else. It was mostly brought. We did do a few old stone salt jars like the ones that they have in Pennsylvania because they had different patterns on them, and they did record a few of those. But the main thing was to try to find out something that would not last, something breakable and record it before it was gone.

HP: That was the criteria?

AB: That was the criteria. Not just that it was beautiful, but that it was fragile and ephemeral.

HP: Ephemeral, right. Yet it was also a distinctive unique piece.

AB: It was a unique thing, and it was unique to this part of the country. Of course, a great deal of our art here, craftsmanship, is inherited as it is everywhere else. Goodness knows, in Pennsylvania the things came from Germany, most of them, and a lot of our things, of course, did come over the mountains. We didn't have very much Indian . . . . Our Indians were . . . . Daniel Boone did away with them, practically. There were not any Indian things left to record. We did record some of the old things which were in Fort Harrod, which was the earliest settlement in Kentucky, and we were able to find a few things that had been brought over the mountains from Virginia. They were like the Virginia things, but they were just different enough so that I thought that they were worth recording. I can't tell you how many we did on the Index. I suppose they know in Washington. They don't know how many we did but I mean they know how many they accepted because I would say at least three out of five I didn't think and they didn't think were good enough. In the first place, some of them were just . . . you experimented. Then, if you only told them it was an experiment, they didn't try hard enough. They had to think it was going to be the real thing, but then when they were done they would realize that they weren't the real thing.

HP: Who was responsible for sending the painter down from Boston?

AB: Miss Mouteau?

HP: Yes.

AB: Oh, Adolph Glassgold. I'm sure he was, because I just wrote to him and said, "I don't know how to do this. I've never done this in my life and I can show them a lot about watercolor painting but not about this meticulous thing." There were two methods, you know. One starting dark and getting highlights and the other starting light and darkening it. I knew how to do the starting light because that's the way I paint watercolor, but I never had done the starting dark and painting white over it. I couldn't do it. He said, "Would they feel offended if he sent somebody down? I said, "Offended? Heavens!!" They nearly died of excitement when she came. She was extraordinarily nice.

HP: Not only that, but this in a way had been a new departure for her too, that is, while she had become an expert, when she began she was just in the same position they were.

AB: She had worked in the Boston Museum, I think. I think she told me but she had never done that sort of thing. I don't know how she worked it out. I don't believe I ever could have done it. I mean, I don't think I really knew enough to have ever worked it out. I hadn't seen enough. She'd been seeing all the things that Boston had been doing up there for a long time. You see, my Index got started later than the Boston one did. I guess that was the first, wasn't it, Massachusetts?

HP: Yes, I guess Boston and New York pretty much came under the wire at the same time. Ruth Reeves in New York and, I think, Morrison, who . . . .

AB: Dick Morrison, I think he was incredible. The thing is he couldn't do a thing himself.

HP: But he could, you know, he could . . . .

AB: Oh, I mean he kept saying all the time, "Here I sit and I cannot tell them how to do anything." But he could find everything. He could find everything and he could get along with anybody. I'll never forget him with the sisters up at Sabbath Day Lake, Maine, those Shaker sisters. He'd been up there several times before he took me up there, and they were eating out of his hand, you know. The same way at Canterbury [New Hampshire -- ED].

HP: Oh yes, he is the one who had views about Shaker items in New England as opposed to Shaker items in Kentucky.

AB: Yes. Well, I was the one that thought there was a difference. He didn't see any particular point really in doing Shaker things because he said, "I've done it so thoroughly." But I told him that, due to the fact that they had the plague in New Orleansand our Shakers would go down the Ohio River and Mississippi River and recruit in New Orleans, that they came up here with a little bit less feeling of pure functionality, if there is such a word, than the ones that came down from New York. So, when he saw some of the things -- I had some photographs taken -- he said, "Go to it. I think you've got a point."

HP: [ ]

AB: Then he came down here and he was terribly interested. Now, for instance, we did . . . . There was a settlement at a place called South Union, Kentucky, and we went down there about the first year, 1936, I think. We started recording and, instead of having plain banisters, they had carved banisters on their double staircases. We had just gotten started on some of that when the 1937 flood came and it flooded that part of the country, and people used the big Shaker houses which were deserted as refugee camps. They used the banisters and some of the furniture to burn and, if we hadn't gotten those things, we never would have gotten them. Some of those drawings now are at Bowling Green, Kentucky, at Western State College. They weren't good enough to be in the Index in Washington, but they were good enough to keep as a record here in Kentucky, you see.

HP: Yes. Well, were they sponsored too? Was the Index sponsored?

AB: Down there?

HP: Yes.

AB: No. That was my own plaything. Well, I mean, I had the men and they had the time, and I just felt that I wasn't going to wait to find out how they feel about it. I just wrote to Dick Morrison and I said that I was going to try to do the South Union things. Of course, I had no idea we were going to have a flood in 1937. It was the biggest flood we ever had in the Ohio Valley. Then, as far as -- I'm trying to think what else -- I told you about my desire to do the Calico pieces.

HP: Yes, but this was again a search.

AB: Yes. I had a car and could drive around, you see, and I knew Kentucky. My father and my grandfather before him, but my father was a most passionate lover of Kentucky and that's the way I knew Shaker Town so well. One of Father's favorite expeditions was to drive to Shaker Town and buy preserves and seeds from Shaker Town because the Shakers were the first in the world, as far as we know, to put seeds up in packages. If you go down to Shaker Town now, you can see the original packages. So, I've been going down to Shaker Town all the time. My father was a grain broker and bought grain from all over the state, you see.

HP: Yes.

AB: So I knew the state and I knew where certain things were and I knew people in all those different parts of the state so that I could go down and ask favors, really. Of course, then I went out and made speeches. I went to the University of Kentucky and spoke to the Woman's Club, for instance, there and asked if they had anything. What they mostly had there were covers which happened to be the thing I didn't need. They nearly all had inherited things like that. It was a terribly exciting experience because I really . . . . Not only did I get to know all these young people but I really did get to know the state even better than I did. I'd like to be doing it still.

HP: That's as good a test as any. What were relations with Washington like, in the WPA, for instance?

AB: Well, I think perhaps mine were a little informal. I had known Constance Rourke before, you see, through her interest in Audubon. She had stayed at our house and she met Audubon's granddaughter through us. My mother knew Miss Hattie quite well. It's a queer thing to say, but feeling that I wasn't being paid, I had a feeling that I could be a little more informal that if I were getting a check every month or something like that. It does make a difference.

HP: Oh, indeed it does.

AB: Then, through my uncle's knowing Mr. Bruce, that also helped. Then, through knowing Henry Varnum Poor, having been on a judging competition with him, he helped me tremendously on any advice I needed about murals. As far as working with the Index people, with Mr. Glassgold, it was just heaven. He was appreciative; he was helpful; he had a great many suggestions; he was extremely patient and, when he had to be critical, which he had to be of course, he was very kind about it. Working with Ed Rowan in the Treasury Federal Art Project with the murals was also an extraordinary worthwhile experience. I did go to Washington quite often in those years, so I got to know people personally that way. Do you want me to say anything about him?

HP: Yes! These are only names to me.

AB: Well now, Im going to go over to working with Holger Cahill. I'm sure that he was a remarkable organizer. I think the thing never would have happened if it hadn't been for him. I don't know if it was his idea, or Miss Ramey's or Constance Burke's idea, but whosever it was, he was the person who was carrying it out and coordinating it all. But, he was not an inspiring person to work under. He was very definite and he did . . . . Whatever he told you to do, I'm sure that was the right thing to do. but, there was never any feeling of exultation which there really was when working with the rest of them. Has Dick Morrison died?

HP: No, he's not. I'm going to see him this coming Monday.

AB: Well, ask him if he remembers taking me up to Sabbath Day Lake, Maine . We spent one night in Portland and we spent a night in -- I guess it was Lenex, that big hotel near the railroad tracks. They are going to tear it down. Then we went up to . . . had a wonderful time in New Lebanon. He finally took me over to Waterfeet and dumped me at Troy. I was going up to the Adirondacks, but we had three or four days together. It must have been about 1937, something like that, '36 or '37. He had known one of my cousins at Harvard so we immediately struck up a friendship on that basis. My uncle was Professor Tausig, and Dick had studied under him at Harvard too, and I was staying at Dr. Tausig's in Katueit. Dick came to get me, and he said, "I'm going to tell your uncle that you are going off unchaperoned with a young man." I said, "Yes, but you're going off unchaperoned with a rather elderly lady."

HP: He was a man of idea.

AB: Oh, yes.

HP: A stimulating fellow.

AB: Yes, very stimulating.

HP: You didn't get this then, except where Glassgold was concerned, from Washington -- stimulation -- and from Glassgold you got . . . .

AB: Oh yes, I got it from Ed Rowan and I got it from . . . .

HP: Well, this is WPA.

AB: WPA yes. Well, I can't remember that I worked with anybody else except Glassgold. I got a lot of stuff here . . . not for you, but there is some stuff that I'm taking to Shaker Town. Well, now you see . . . . You got from Glassgold, you didn't get it from Cahill.

HP: Yes.

AB: This is all Shaker Town material I am giving to Shaker Town because I think . . . . It's a queer thing; it's the only thing I kept.

HP: Isn't that interesting.

AB: I guess it is because it was the thing I was so interested in before.

HP: You had prior interest, sure, you had continuity. Well, did you see Mildred Holtzauer?

AB: Yes. Now I remember her. She was small, thin, sparrow-like sort of person, wasn't she?

HP: Yes.

AB: I think she came down here twice, but it is very strange. She was very helpful and made very little impression on my people.

HP: Well, you know, everything you say lends itself to the view that Washington simply gave rise to an opportunity. What you did with the opportunity depends upon the local people.

AB: It depended upon yourself, really. We felt far away.

HP: I guess so.

AB: If you were in New York, or Baltimore, I don't know what the Maryland project did, but there you were within reaching out and touching [distance].

HP: Well, your history of travel, to and from Washington . . . . But for that as a built-in kind of contract, it would have been nothing.

AB: Well, that wasn't WPA, that was just on my own. I was just doing it.

HP: That's what I meant. You had the continuity of contact through your uncle and . . . .

AB: Yes, that was it, and Mr. Bruce. He liked me because he was fond of my uncle, you see.

HP: He was pretty much of a cyclone, wasn't he? Ned Bruce?

AB: Umhmm.

HP: I have had him described as a really cyclonic guy; that is, with fierce drive.

AB: Oh, yes, fierce drive, but a kind fierceness. Oh, he was always kind.

HP: Gallant.

AB: Ed Rowan was the most lovable of any of them, except Henry. Of course I . . . . But Henry didn't have anything to do with the thing. He was just helping me on the murals. I'd send suggestions to him with some of my designs and I would just say on the PBQ, "Do you think this would make a mural?" He would say, "Take out the left-hand figure. You've got too many figures. Where is your diagonal line?" Or something like that. I thought he was so nice. I still think he is a wonderful person although I didn't hear from him this Christmas. I was wondering if anything had happened.

HP: Well, you had known him also for a greater length of time.

AB: I knew Henry . . . . Well, I'll tell you how I knew Henry. My cousin Harry Wehle was the curator of painting at the Metropolitan Museum for a great many years before Rousseau [Theodore --ED]. Rousseau was his assistant and Harry resigned when he was sixty-five, which I imagine was about ten or twelve years ago, I guess, and he was a friend of Henry Varnum Poor and the first time I ever saw any Henry Varnum Poor paintings was in

exhibition on 57th Street and when Harry took me and Henry Varnum Poor was there and I was crazy about some of the things, terribly interested in them and I wanted to buy one. And he said, "My dear child, you can't possibly afford to buy anything I paint." After he gave me a couple of sketches. But anyway, I knew him that way before I ever met him. Then when I . . . . I still don't know how I got put on a jury for some of the government things . . . . Yes, I do. Did you ever hear of a man named Harold Weston?

HP: Oh, yes.

AB: Harold was a friend of mine up in the Adirondacks and Harold was painting, I think, for the Labor -- Commerce Department, or something.

HP: I believe he is the man who gave rise to the NRA, isn't he? As an idea?

AB: I think so, yes. Well, anyway, I had known Harold. For a long time I'd been going to the Adirondacks, since I was 17 or 18, I guess, and Harold must have suggested me. He knew I was interested in murals and that I'd seen murals in Europe and everything. It was Harold that suggested that I might be useful in a jury because I had absolutely no connection with any of the things that were being painted. I hadn't started my thing then. Henry Varnum Poor was on that jury, and I remembered him but he didn't remember me, of course, but when I told him who I was and how I met him, then we struck up a great friendship. Then he had this young stepdaughter, Ann, who I think is an incredibly talented person, and she was in Washington. Ann and I used to do things together. And that way I really got to be a very good friend of Henry's. Then when Barry wanted a mural painted for the Lobby, he asked me if I had any ideas, and I said right away, "Yes, I have. I've got an absolutely definite idea. I wish you'd go to Washington and look at the ones . . . ." This was about . . . . Barry was in the Pacific when the Japs surrendered, so it must have been '46 -- ". . . in different buildings and I'll write down the one I like best and then you look at it after you've decided." I wrote down the Wildlife of Audubon, one that Henry did which I think is the most interesting of any of them, more interesting than the Biddle ones, or anything. So when Barry decided that was the one he liked, he opened the envelope and there it was. So, there was no question.

HP: A meeting of minds.

AB: There was no question about getting Henry down here and, as I say, that was the way I knew him. By that time my thing was all over, of course.

HP: I wish you'd tell that one story for me again; attending the theater. That's a marvelous story.

AB: Well, that doesn't have anything to do with WPA.

HP: No, but it's a marvelous story, and if you don't put it down, it may be lost.

AB: Well, Bessie Brewer, her name was -- I mean that was her writing name. I was in the East and I had a letter from Henry. I was visiting Camille Hair up in Chatham. Henry said that Bessie had a play called "The Sundowners" which was going to have its premiere in New York and if I were possibly going to be in New York at that time, he would like to send me a seat and would I go with him and see it. Well, I was going to be in New York, so I wrote him and when I got to the hotel there was Henry's letter with the seat in it. Then I went to the theater that night and Henry was waiting. I was late, and there were two men with him. I didn't catch their names but we all went and sat down together and the play began, and the longer it went on, the worse it got. There was no particular enthusiasm and there was a good deal of restlessness, and I think Henry was a little nervous about it. So he said to me, "Go out in the lobby and walk around and see what people are saying. Nobody knows you and they know me." I went out in the lobby and walked around and heard some not very cheerful comments, but I met Theresa Helbren [Helprin?] who was with the Theater Guild and had been at Bryn Mawr with me and she said, "What are you doing here tonight?" I told her, and she said, "Well, it's the worst play in the world. It won't run at all. Terrible." Then I walked a little farther and there was John Mason Brown, who comes from Louisville, and used to sit in front of me in church and make a noise. He said, "What in the world are you doing here?" I said, "A friend of mine has written a play, and I thought I'd like to see it." "Well," he said, "It is just as well you came to the opening because it will be closed tomorrow." Then I went back, nervous as a witch, having to tell these things to Henry, and I didn't see quite how I would do it. One of the men that was with him was sitting next to me, and he said, "Well, what did you hear?" I told him. He said, "What do you think of it?" I said, "I think it's awful -- too many people in it and they all talk too much at the same time and they keep going back and forth. What do you think of it?" Well, he had even more stringent and better criticisms that I did and I said, "Goodness, you seem to know a lot about the theater." He said, "I ought to, I'm Maxwell Anderson." I said, "My God!"

HP: That's marvelous! that's the one answer he could come up with.

AB: Oh, it was really awful because, afterwards, we went for supper and there wasn't any . . . . What could you do?

HP: What could you say? Well, I gather that you had a lot of fun there in Kentucky during those years.

AB: Oh I, I have fun still.

HP: Well, I . . . .

AB: I came to be on this newspaper, the editorial staff of this newspaper in 1945. Of course this is not for this -- what do you call it, this recorder because Barry Bingham, who as I said has always been a friend of ours, a friend of the family, was in the Pacific and Mark Ethridge, who was the publisher was in Australia and that part of it. Mrs. Bingham called me up one day, and she said, "I'm simply frantic. People keep dying, and there is nobody here on the editorial staff who knows who they are, or who their fathers were, or what they did. Can you come in and work on the paper for a little while?" I said, "Well, yes, for a little while." My mother had just died that year, and my sister and I were living in a 24-room house wondering what the hell we were going to do with it. So I said, "Yes, I'd love to." So I came in and I had an awfully interesting time. When Barry came back, he asked me to stay on for a little while, and I said, "Well yes, provided that I don't have to work on Saturdays and I don't have to come in until 10 and can have a month in the summer because I don't want to work all the time." He said, "All right, write your own ticket. Would you stay for a whole year?" I said I would. Now I've been here twenty.

HP: That's marvelous.

AB: I resign every year on my birthday because I am way over age, of course. But then he says, "Well, just stick it out for another year if you can." I really love it, and I wouldn't like to do anything else because I'm not a passionate housekeeper. I have a little house and I manage it all right but I wouldn't . . . . I can't possibly use up much time on it.

HP: Just a pass and a prayer.

AB: This is just perfect. Interesting people and time off. I've been -- '50, '52, '55, '59, '60, '61, '63 -- I've been to Europe seven times since 1950. I didn't begin to go right away because I didn't realize that I could just take as much time as I wanted instead of four weeks. Just take myself off the payroll and go. I think maybe I'll go this year. I've got a seat for the 18th of July, but I haven't got any room at the Bronze Hotel, yet, which is where I always stay. So, I don't know whether I'm going to go or not. Yes, I never had a more interesting time than I had because I've got lots of young relatives and I like working with them. I like working with these young people and like to keep up the connection with them. Now, Bob Purdy I have no connection with anymore. I mean, I see him when he comes back here but there is one other boy . . . . but I don't think he ever really belonged to me. I used to help him a lot, but he never was on WPA. His name was Kenneth Donahue and he was at the Art Center. Then he went to the University and took some courses there and then he got a job at the Museum of Modern Art as a docent. Then he ran the Ringling Museum in Sarasota and is now the Assistant Director of the big new Los Angeles Museum. He always says he got started through me, but he didn't. I never paid him anything. He never did do it regular on WPA. He used to come in every once in a while and paint on one of the boys' things, or do something. He was crazy about the Index things. But he did it because he wanted to. He wasn't impoverished enough to go on WPA.

HP: Sure, there was that woman who wanted to get on. What was her . . . ?

AB: That was Dorothy Coeur. She died, poor lamb. But she wanted to do it just for the fun of working with other artists. That was the same thing he wanted to do. You know, painting is a damn lonely thing. I mean both of my sisters, one is a pianist and the other is a violinist, and they play together three times a week. They play in quartets and . . . you can't paint with anybody. I mean you paint at the League in the room with people, but you don't paint with them. You paint in spite of them.

HP: Right.

AB: I think some of these people just -- that I had seen just sitting there in the room and looking over each other's shoulders, "Is that the way you get the grey or is that the way you get the brown?" "I never thought of doing a highlight like that." -- You know, that takes the lonesomeness away. Mural painting is a lonesome job. I used to see Henry . . . . [Papers rustling while she looks for something.]

HP: Oh yes, that's here.

AB: Yes, that's here. That's before he got very far along. These are some photographs he gave me of the Audubon, the wildlife. Here is a color thing.

HP: Oh, that's marvelous, isn't it?

AB: Would you like that picture of Henry? I've got three of them.

HP: Which one is this?

AB: Could I entertain you to have it?

HP: You could do something for me if you would.

AB: What is that?

HP: That is, the Archives of American Art could make copies of these.

AB: Well, listen, I'll give you one right now; you can have it. Because I've got . . . .

HP: What's this?

AB: No, not that.

HP: Not that sort of thing.

AB: But this one, would you like this one?

HP: Oh, yes.

AB: What would you . . . .

HP: Well, the Archives, as you know, is a means whereby we are collecting . . . .

AB: I know, but what I mean is, would you like this?

HP: Yes, thank you.

AB: Well, I can have a photograph of it taken for $2 if you'd like to spend $2 on it. . . . upstairs, you see. Take it upstairs to the boys up there and ask them. Here is the whole thing, you see, this whole . . . .

HP: Yes.

AB: . . . . before it's finished. He's just got those figures sketched in.

HP: Well, I can't carry this around with me because I've got about fourteen . . . .

AB: Would you like me to have it done and send it to you?

HP: What I'd like is to have the whole collection of photographs . . . . Do you have those murals that you showed me that the people had done locally?

AB: Yes. Now look, these are the ones you've got. These are the ones in Washington, but Henry just sent them all to me because I was so crazy about them.

HP: Oh boy! This is the one of the Interior.

AB: Yes, the Interior. Haven't you got those?

HP: Yes. I think we have those.

AB: You must have.

HP: Those are marvelous, aren't they?

AB: Oh, I think they are. That's what Barry chose him on. I think they are simply beautiful, but . . . .

HP: He is a grand old fellow, even now.

AB: Well, I don't believe Henry is any older than I am. I don't know exactly, but I am pretty old myself. The cutest thing that Henry said when he came back here. He painted all this thing, you see, and then Barry had found this pink marble which was pinker than he thought it was going to be and have it in the lobby. Then Don Owenslinger got some friend of his to make that big world.

HP: Oh, yes.

AB: It is the zodiac and everything like that. When it was hung properly, there was nothing to be seen because it's all Antarctica and has no land. So they decided to hang it upside down to make it more interesting. And Henry came back to see everything and he wrote and said, "I kind of wish I hadn't come back. My four heros isolated in pink marble and looking out on an upside down world!"

HP: Yes, that sounds like him. Oh, that's dry! He's very witty, I'll tell you.

AB: Oh, he's a darling person. I told him once, "You are the only man I've ever seen that I really wish I were married to because I've never been bored with you." He said, "Well, you haven't seen me for a good many years." I said that was true. I can have these . . . . Let's see where these other ones are. These are the sculpture of Marshall Fredericks that he did for the outside of a building . . . . If you'll give me an order. I can't get them done for nothing unfortunately.

HP: I understand that. Bert Mullins?

AB: That's Bert Mullins. That's not the one in Madisonville. That's somewhere else. I've forgotten where that one is. Let's see, that's in Mount Vernon. I think that's the most desperate look, that's a Shaker bonnet you see recorded. Well, now, would you like . . . .

HP: Yes. Now this is . . . .

AB: That's Orville Carroll in the Marine Hospital. Somewhere I must have some good photographs of that Marine Hospital thing because I had them all taken for an article in the paper, but I don't know just where it is. I don't believe you want that because they don't show enough.

HP: No, this sort of thing where it is in process.

AB: I think that's an interesting one, don't you?

HP: Darn right. I'll tell you what you do. If you can find photographs of the murals that were done here, I'll have Bill Agee, who is in charge of the project, write you.

AB: Well, they must be someplace. I might go upstairs and ask the photographers if they've got them. This I like because it's got the models that he did . . . that he worked from.

HP: Oh, it shows the process.

AB: This I think is a nice one of Birch. See, here is the woman.

HP: Yes, that's the frontier.

AB: And here she is.

HP: We don't have anything like this.

AB: Really!

HP: No.

AB: Well, I wonder where my . . . I had photographs at one time . . . . Oh, I know what must have happened. They must have sent them to Washington because I had photographs of all the Marine Hospital things and I had photographs of the Harrodsburg ones.

HP: They were sent to Washington?

AB: I'm sure I sent them to Washington because I haven't got them.

HP: Then they must be in the file. Well, the Archives is making a microfilm copy of the . . . .

AB: Let's go upstairs a second and ask them if they have any of the negatives.

HP: -- France and the fall of the WPA project in Kentucky.

AB: On the 10th of June, France fell and I fell down my own private steps and broke my wrist in three places and cut my head open. I was in the hospital for weeks and weeks. I knew I could never do anything like that again for a long time. The murals were all finished and as far as I could see we had most of the things that I thought were important in the Index, and I hesitate to say so but it was impossible for my secretary to have done it. I mean, she was a useful person but she wasn't an imaginative person, nor was she a . . . . I don't think she was a

creative person. She was told by my family and me to bundle everything up and send the things on to Washington and that was as far as I ever got. As I say, she is now dead and I can't possibly tell you any more about it than that. I mean I got simply wonderful letters from everybody and they all thanked me but the whole thing was folding up by 1940. I don't know whether it ever went on much beyond that. Did it?

HP: There was a problem of allocation, I think, that carried it through until maybe early 1943, but this was a housekeeping function by that time. A retraining program also emerged out of it but why would there be retraining in Kentucky?

AB: Yes, well, I didn't have anything literally to do with it after the 10th of June.

HP: Fateful day!

AB: It sure was a fateful day. It changed an awful lot of things with me. I couldn't do anything at all from the 10th of June, as I say, and the first time I could use my hand, I was able to come to the Christmas dinner table and cut my meat. I mean, it was that long.

HP: Yes.

AB: I had an incredible surgeon who thought he would have to amputate and then decided not to but, look at this a second. See this thing here?

HP: Yes.

AB: See where it is on this hand?

HP: He reversed it.

AB: He just simply put things together and hitched them and everything got small. Look at the difference.

HP: It's incredible, isn't it?

AB: But I can use it perfectly.

HP: Look, let's be grateful!

AB: Oh, I'm grateful! I should think so. I can do everything except I . . . . I broke it here too. I can't get around back, but I can drive a car perfectly, fix my hair and all that sort of thing. Well now, I'll get some of these photographs . . . any of these. In fact, I really ought to let you have them. I just keep them out of sentiment because I'm so fond of the people that did them.

HP: Well, that's a memory which is . . . . You know, you may want to look at it and look at it.

AB: As I say . . . .

HP: You let me get in touch with Bill Agee, and he will write to you.

AB: Is his name on this letterhead?

HP: I believe so.

AB: I do want to write that list down for you. I'm going to send that too, because you might as well have those names.

HP: Yes. Here we are, William Agee. He is the fellow.

AB: Oh, yes. New Deal and the Arts, isn't that interesting!

HP: Well, photographs of the murals that you have, depending upon what they found in Washington . . . .

AB: Suppose you tell him to write me. And he can always get me at this address. I mean I always come in five days a week except when I'm away. I don't know how you were smart enough to find me, to telephone me the other night.

HP: Listen, can I let you in on a secret? I have phoned you four times three days in a row and I hadn't been able to get you.

AB: Here at the paper?

HP: I hadn't been able to get one word to you. I got to the girl at the telephone and I figured I'd better call you at your home.

HP: Well, that might happen because I don't stay in here all the time.

HP: There is no reason that you should but I did get you that night. AB; Well, that was fine but I just wondered how you were able to. I was just wondering if there was anything else I had. Wouldn't you like . . . .

HP: I'd like this list of names.

AB: Let me get it then. Can you read the bad handwriting? It takes me so long to type. I still type very badly. I remember the first time I sent in an editorial in type. The Chief of the Editorial Page said, "Your typing is quite poor." I said, "I was hired for my brains and not my fingers." They still laugh at that!

HP: Really. END OF INTERVIEW