

SI AAA logo



Oral history interview Thaddeus Clapp, 1965 November 19

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Thaddeus Clapp on November 19, 1965. The interview took place at 9 Shirley Street, Worcester, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Geoffrey Swift 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 2022 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. Attribution. 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

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The following is an interview with Father Thaddeus Clapp at his home, 9 Shirley Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. Father Clapp was, during the course of the Federal Art Project, first, the director of the Index of American Design in Massachusetts, and then from 1938 on the Massachusetts State Director of the Federal Art Project. And he's now rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Worcester. The interview was conducted on the afternoon of November 17 [sic] [19 -Ed.], 1965, and the interviewer is Geoffrey Swift. Now that we've gotten rid of that necessary evil, I think perhaps the most productive way for us to begin is for you to, as best you can, tell us something about your educational background, exactly what you were doing immediately prior to joining the Project.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I had taught English and art at the Riverdale Country School in New York City, and—for a year and then I went to the artists' gallery.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: This was after your graduation from Williams in 1930?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, 1930.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: In the meantime, I had done graduate work at the University of Chicago and at the Fogg Art Museum—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —at Harvard.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In art history? Special—

THADDEUS CLAPP: In art history, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Modern American architecture or 19th century American architecture.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I went to the—on the project as director for the Index of American Design, as you know, a survey of American folk art.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: We had developed, not under me, but under my predecessor on the project, Gordon Smith—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —his assistant, later his wife, Elizabeth Bowser—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —very high technical skill in watercolor rendering of objects of American folk art. I remember particularly the crewel embroidery, which was exhibited at the Fogg Art Museum with the original pieces beside the watercolors. Both were framed in monks' cloth mats.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And it was impossible for a great many people to tell the difference between the watercolors and the original crewel embroidery.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: So, I've heard. I should love to see an exhibition of those side by side again. Everybody seems to mention the remarkable verisimilitude that the people on the Index were able to get, especially in crewel embroidery reproduction—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Every thread was done with three brushstrokes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I gather—the technique was developed, I gather by a woman at the Museum of Fine Arts.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Ms. Townsend.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: In charge of textiles at the Museum of Fine Arts, and her star pupil was then Mrs. Elizabeth Moutal.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Who taught the technique in Kentucky, in New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. I believe in New York State, she and some other members of the Project in Massachusetts.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I believe in Utah, also. I'm not perfectly sure about that, other places.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: The technique used, you may know about, they used three brush strokes for every thread, a shadow, a highlight, and then a natural tone of the color of the embroidery thread. The result was simply fantastic. It was a *truqueur* [ph] type of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed, yes. So, the reproductions could at least implant some ideas.

THADDEUS CLAPP: A three-dimensional quality.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: They also did chip figureheads, various ones that have been published in the book on *Index of American Design*.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, I've seen—

THADDEUS CLAPP: They did weathervanes, among them a perfectly enchanting weathervane of an angel from a church in Newburyport that was blown down during the 1938 hurricane and which was restored at the Art Project. In the meantime, we did renderings—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Do you know the recent story on that, do you?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, I don't.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Ah, that's interesting then. Yes. And yes, as a matter of fact, I think that

probably could go on the tape very nicely, too. As a matter of fact, I think about a year ago, in Washington, they were looking through the Index material at the National Gallery. And this was the post office department. I don't know just exactly why, but I think they were looking for a Christmas stamp for this coming year. And they came across the reproduction pencil drawing of this particular weathervane of an angel from the church in Newburyport, which was done by a woman whose name I had but don't recall at the moment.

[00:05:03]

Well, they were struck by it, thought it was a magnificent thing, and decided then and there to make that the 1966—1965 Christmas stamp for the United States. Well, a search then went on for the woman, her name, of course, was signed below her pencil drawing, and they couldn't find her. And articles, I gather, appeared in *the Boston Globe* and *the Boston Herald*, especially *the Globe*, trying to find her, kind of a human-interest story, as the government tried to find this woman. Well, she evidently all this time knew that they were trying to find her. She read the article, but decided to lay low for one reason or another. She wasn't specific. Subsequently—she wasn't specific as to why she was laying low. But she was in—lived north of Boston at someplace and worked for Raytheon, in the art department have one of their plants. And finally, after a year, and as a matter of fact, it was just a couple of months ago, that was this August, August 1965, another article appeared in the *Boston Globe* that they had found her, that she had either been found, she had moved out of Boston, that's why they couldn't find her. She had either been found or had volunteered herself, given herself up, so to speak. And publicity was given her, and a certain amount of controversy, I guess, arose because the angel, at least in her rendition, was very definitely a female angel. It was not the neutered angel that we're all led to expect in reproductions of—representations of angels. And she was questioned on this. And she defended it, and—by saying that the angels she saw in the Newburyport church, she definitely saw it as a female angel in its form there.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Very interesting contradiction of St. Thomas Aquinas. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say, yes. So, we shall see that on our Christmas stamp if we—if facts prove right. And the woman's name, I'm going to try to see her. She—I have her name written down but haven't got to see her. So, there's enough for that sideline on the Index. Just to backtrack very briefly, you wound up on the Project, I gather, partially through your connection with Gordon Smith.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, and through Richard Morrison.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And through Richard Morrison. Both of whom you knew—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Both of them I knew previously.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Gordon Smith, you had known at—[Cross talk.] [Inaudible] classmates—

THADDEUS CLAPP: [Inaudible] Harvard, and Richard Morrison at Harvard.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. Well, I guess it's well known that the Massachusetts Index project was one of the stars of the New England Project, and certainly, possibly the most renowned of all the Index of American Design projects in the country.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would think so.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Probably, at least certainly the most extensive. And I've heard stories of, oh, the man in Vermont, who was particularly—well, no. As a matter of fact, no. It was in Connecticut. In Connecticut, I gather their project, they, somehow, at the Wadsworth Atheneum developed a particularly effective way of rendering pottery. And they sent people to Vermont—

THADDEUS CLAPP: [Inaudible.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —to teach Vermont artists to help them reproduce Bennington ware. And people, as you say, went all over the country. Do you recall approximately how many people you had at one time working on the Index when you were in charge?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I'd say about 20.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: About 20?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: All highly skilled. Did they tend to be, as one would suspect, people who were naturally of high technical competence, but perhaps without the imagination?

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's correct.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: To become easel painters, in their own right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's correct. That's correct. They were essentially craftsmen rather than artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What had their background been mainly?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Varied. Sometimes commercial art, and so on and so forth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have shows of the Index materials, within New England?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, we did. Yes, we did. And outside of New England, some more materials. So, ships, figureheads, and then the Quaker—I'm sorry, the Shaker furniture—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —from a collection in Pittsfield and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, I've seen reproductions of that. Yeah. Yes, I've seen the catalog of the big 1937 exhibition, the Federal Art in New England.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Which—and some of those things were reproduced there. What would you say were perhaps the strengths—the greatest strengths of the Index? What do you think its contribution was? At least insofar as New England goes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, the gathering together of a body of material that was magnificently recorded in watercolor.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Covering a wide range of subjects, I say, crewel embroidery was perhaps the most spectacular but not necessarily the most important. The ship's figureheads, magnificent bust that was discovered of Admiral Perry in South Boston beautifully carved beginning with grain at the end of the nose, and this comes out very well in Mrs. Moutal's watercolor renderings of it.

[00:10:14]

The Shaker collection of material, various trade signs. Things like that seemed to me to be the most important contribution of the Massachusetts Index. There was also considerable work done on whale oil lamps, lanterns, tin ware, things like that, but they seem to me to be more archaeologically interesting than vitally part of the central tradition of American folk art.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was the philosophy behind this? I should say first of all, did this—the idea come mainly from Holger Cahill, to the starting of the Index, I gather, was—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, that would—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —essential [ph] to his way of seeing things.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —come from him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Since of course—

THADDEUS CLAPP: And of course, very much supported here in New England by Richard Morrison, who was very much interested. And Gordon Smith.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Did Gordon Smith get it underway in New England, and then you took over from him or how did that work?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I succeeded him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You succeeded him?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I don't know who really got it started.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: See, I was not really aware of its historical importance except in that I loved it just as American folk art, and so I didn't go into the background, particularly.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Did any of you have any kind of crusading spirit or a crusading feeling that you were saving something from—at, least recording it while it was still existing and before it could go away, at all?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I wouldn't say that, but I would say another thing—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Perhaps, crusading is too strong a word for that.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah. It was that we felt that we were getting a body of material that might be useful to artists and designers later on.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, you—

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was not just an academic archaeological—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see what you mean.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —it had practical implications.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You saw it as having practical implications. Now tell me about the wood carving. And now, Richard Morrison, in his interview, went into a little bit of that, something he was very proud of, the idea that here was—here was the Project, actually rescuing a group of important and valuable craftsmen who were suddenly thrown out of work. Boston being the center of wood carving, commercial—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Particularly Irving and Casson in Davenport.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And—

THADDEUS CLAPP: And Irving and Casson did tremendously important work in Saint Thomas's church in New York, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, the Washington Cathedral, the Yale University Library—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. Yes, I've seen those things.

THADDEUS CLAPP: So on and so forth. And the Depression came, and they had very few orders and wood-carvers, most of whom were trained under—let's see what was his name—he was never on the Project. He had died by that time. I can't remember his name.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No matter, we may come across it later.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Who was a German.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And most of the carvers were German.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And all worked for several firms. It was rather centralized in Boston. They worked for several firms. Or did they work—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, only two or three, but principally Irving Casson.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Supervisor on the Art Project was William Burnhoff [ph].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Very skillful—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He was supervisor of the wood carving—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Of the wood carving, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —aspect? Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What was this under your aegis, under the Index aegis, or was this—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, it proceeded me. No, it was not the Index. It was the Art Project proper, of which the Index and the wood carving and the research laboratory—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. I thought—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: —[inaudible] and the teaching [inaudible] were also parts.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —perhaps the—yeah, I thought perhaps that the woodcarving project was a subsidiary thing or a subheading under the Index, but no—

THADDEUS CLAPP: No. It was separate.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It was separate, by itself. Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I think that we deserve the credit, having kept the skill alive in Boston, at least having kept the carvers alive.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What kind of things did you have them do? What kind of work did you find for them?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, they did desks for public schools and for mayor's offices and memorial plaques, things like that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Let's see. I think one of the contributions that they made—I'm trying to think of some specific examples. Well, a superintendent of schools desk here in Worcester.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: The mayor of Boston, Mayor Tobin's office in the Boston City Hall.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Very amusing thing, which also had all kinds of repercussions, was restoring the eagle on the top of the Boston City Hall, which was damaged in the 1938 hurricane.

[00:15:02]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: ' Hurricane, sure. Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: We were asked to reproduce it, which we did. *The Christian Science Mon*—no, I think it was *the Globe* ran a series of bylines. Or was it *the Herald*? About the eagle, Where is the eagle? Eagles being restored at the art project, if you want to go and see it send the children up there. It's being carved by the Boston wood carvers. And so on and so forth. *Christian Science Monitor* took up the cause and said, Why does the eagle look to the left? Is it looking for Communists? This was to end any criticism. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] This was the intention of the reporter. I happen to know. I mean, he had no intention of raising the stake.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It was tongue in cheek, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. And we were called down—my assistant and I, Herbert Brown, and I were called down to the headquarters, and the publicity and public relations man said, Would you take a coin out of your pocket? Which way does the American eagle look? So, I said, What are you so rude about? Well, he said, Your eagle looks to the left, and by act of Congress, the eagle looks to the right. I said, I'm not interested in the iconography of the American eagle at the moment. We were told by the mayor to reproduce this. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] He said, Do you have a letter from the mayor? I said, We certainly do. I said, If you would like other examples, the eagle carved on the Customs House in Salem looks to the left. Various other eagles, this has nothing to do with Communism. And well, we wasted a whole day trying to convince him— [Geoffrey Swift laughs.]—this had nothing to do with Communism. And finally, he said, Well, all right, go ahead. I said, The eagle is now covered with Gilder's bole. Do you know what that is? He said no. I said, It's red paint.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Ah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: He said, For God's sake, don't tell anybody.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Laughs.] Oh, marvelous. So, he thought that he might set you to work correcting the mistake—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. But we did have a letter from Mayor Tobin saying reproduce the eagle as the eagle did look—[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Some poor 19th-century craftsman who had his eagle looking to the left.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Pre-Marx, I'm sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Pre-Marx, yes, no doubt. Maybe 18th century craftsman. [Laughs]. That's wonderful. What kind of relationships did you have—well, I suppose we could properly go on now to the time that you took over from Harley Perkins as head of the project in the state of Massachusetts. Now under what circumstances did this come about or?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I don't really know, excepting that Harley Perkins was made director of all exhibitions, which was a promotion, I believe, both in salary and prestige.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: He was an extremely sensitive, very fine painter, delightful painter. In a sort of—well not derivative of Matisse, but I would say in about the same value of painting as Matisse, intimate and colorful and beautifully designed.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think a first-rate painter.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I've never seen his work. I should like to.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Most sensitive person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was he, would you say, an effective administrator? The way I've heard his personality described is generally as a sensitive, relatively shy, ingratiating, but he doesn't sound like a forceful sort of dynamic administrator.

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, he was not.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And I gather from other sources that there was a certain possibly personality clash between Harley Perkins and Dick Morrison.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I was not particularly aware of that as much as perhaps very passive personality and Morrison was a much more aggressive—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Aggressive and dynamic personality, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —personality, but I never heard about any personal rows or anything.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think Perkins, for a while, bitterly resented me. But we ended up being good friends. I mean, there were no—I mean, actually good friends. When he found out I did not want to replace him, and that I was not ambitious politically because I'm not very aggressive myself, I mean. And not really a very good administrator, quite frankly [laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Laughs.] Well, how did your job operate? How did your office operate? What were your duties, so to speak?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, supervising—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Your prerogatives?

THADDEUS CLAPP: —supervisors. Interviewing people that applied for relief.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I mean, who had been certified for relief who applied as artists for the Art Project. Going around the state visiting artists in their studios with the supervisors.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think I was very careful never to go into a supervisor's territory, into a studio, excepting personal friends of mine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But never officially without the supervisor knowing and going with me, to the studios.

[00:20:05]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. Did you manage to get around the state frequently to see most all of the—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh yes, I knew—I knew most of the artists—all the artists on the Project. Some better than others.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. To be sure. How many artists did you have at one time?

THADDEUS CLAPP: 350 to [3]60 at the peak.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Which made it far and away the biggest of New England projects.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh, yes. Next to New York and Chicago, I think, the biggest.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The biggest, yeah. Now these 350 or [3]60 artists, I'm kind of curious to know, just how are they handled? What kinds of instructions were they given? Was there anything aside from their simple collecting of paychecks and being led to do what they want to and—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh, yes, a great deal. There were various classifications. We had artists that, quite frankly, were extremely mediocre. But we could use them. Some we could put on the Index and teach these skills, others we put in the research laboratory working with the Bureau of Standards to establish fair trade practices in artists materials. This was a very important project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was this centered in Boston?

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was centered in Boston. It was the only laboratory we had. It was under the supervision of Mr. Frank Sterner, who lived in Acton, Massachusetts.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Do you know whether he's still alive?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I believe he is, and I believe he may be there. He was a friend of Mr. Morrison's. Mr. Morrison was sort of the daddy of this project, actually. Morrison was a person of really very great creative vision, in the use of artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I think this did notable work, this laboratory.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What kind of work did it do in connection with your—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Analyzing artist's materials and testing them as to fading in the sun, as to durability, as to chemical interaction of various types of pigment and various bases and vehicles for pigments, all that type of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. But once again, this wasn't just pure research, it had commercial ends in mind, that is—

THADDEUS CLAPP: This was to protect the artist against fraudulent materials.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Bad materials. And there were no standards as far as materials. You never could tell if you got a pigment, whether it was ultramarine or cobalt, when you first bought it. You see, cobalt would later darken, ultramarine would hold its color.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: There was a lot of junk on the market.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. And also, good materials. I mean, not all the dealers by any matter of means or manufacturers were gyps, but some were.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Some were. What practical results did this research have?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, we had a big shindig at the Museum of Modern Art working with the Bureau of Standards and the manufacturers of artists materials, arriving at some kind of criterion for—criteria for artists materials, what would be reliable, what would not be. Along the lines of the Pure Food and Drug Act, things like that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, right. Were your findings given any teeth in the form of legislation or decrees from the Commerce Department or such?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Certainly, the Commerce Department, but not in terms of legislation.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No legislation?

THADDEUS CLAPP: As far as I know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But standards, the standards were passed down to the Commerce Department and—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, and to the artists and to the manufacturers.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And the manufacturers were thereby encouraged to—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Cut out what was bad and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Cut out the junk, yeah. Yeah, that was something I wasn't even aware of.

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was very important, I think, really.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say. And that's something that had immediate practical applications —

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —both for industry and for the artists.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Allied to art, but also allied to industry and protection for the artists. Art serving itself, so to speak. Did were—there other—

THADDEUS CLAPP: I'm surprised that Mr. Morrison didn't tell you. Or didn't speak of that

because he was very proud of it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It doesn't appear in his interview. I mean, it may have completely slipped his mind. I'm glad you brought it up. Glad you brought it up. Were there other research carried on by this organization or?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, not just the Index of American Design and this laboratory in artists materials were the real research programs.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, but I mean—

THADDEUS CLAPP: We did some work in true fresco, which might be considered in the light of what had been happening in this country in terms of mural art, experimentation.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: With Rubenstein, I gather?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, he started it, and then we did two frescos, the University of New Hampshire. And one in the high school in Newton, which is, I think, more interesting than the University of New Hampshire ones, which I have not seen since they were first installed, and I saw about four years ago, one I thought was better than the other. I forgot the names of the two artists, unfortunately.

[00:25:08]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Yeah, I think I've seen reproductions of the ones in Newton.

THADDEUS CLAPP: One's was better than the other, but both worked in Newton. And the Newton one, I think, is superior to the University of New Hampshire. [Inaudible.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: To backtrack once just briefly, once again, it just occurred to me, what, what kinds of people did you have working in the chemical research projects to determine standards for artists colors?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, they were artists, who were not really properly professional artists, but could be trained in scientific research. We had a consultant, Geffens [ph] from the Fogg Art Museum, who was in the restoration department there. He may still be there—a very competent scientist.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And he worked as a—

THADDEUS CLAPP: As a consultant for the Art Project, technical consultant.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And let's see who else.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was he paid on kind of a per diem basis as a separate person?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, he was not relief.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He was not on relief, no. Obviously—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Or on the Project, actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was there much of this? Were there many experts who were called in because of certain specialized knowledge they might have?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, we had a picture restorer who was called in, who would work with the Fogg Art Museum in the restoration department there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: We had Custer's Last Stand, of cigar box fame.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: So on and so forth. We had that in the Project, to restore.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Very mediocre painting, but very interesting to lots of people, and of some historical importance, actually. We restored that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. How many people, or did you have many people working purely in restoration?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think only two or three.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Only two or three. Were these people who came with restoration in mind? Had they had a previous background in it, or were they just artists who—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, they were artists that were trained by a man who had been trained in that work at the Fogg Art Museum.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Who was on the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And when they joined the Project—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: [Inaudible.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —that was their special interest, and so you found work for them to do.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Not necessarily. We sometimes put people where there was not their specialty. [Cross talk.] We'd train them.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Some of the people on the Index would rather have been easel painters, or some of the people in the research laboratory for artists materials would rather—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I'm sure of that. Well, in the case of the restoration, were these people who—was it a case of letting them do—creating a job for them to do that they wanted to do, or was it finding people to do a job that had to be done?

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was trying to get them into socially valuable work—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Sometimes with loud kicks and squawks.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, they weren't professional conservationists when they—

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, no.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —when they joined the program.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Excepting the supervisor.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Sidelight [ph], which might be of some interest, was that we had a man on the project who was a janitor who turned out to be one of the biggest counterfeiters [Geoffrey Swift laughs] in Massachusetts in the last 50 or 60 years, and we should have perhaps had him in the prints and engraving—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say so. I should say so. Just think of the things he could have done.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, it was quite a scandal.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I was going to say—oh, there was a scandal?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh, yes, he was arrested, and some of the people on the Project had perfectly innocently passed out—well, he'd go home with him in the car, and he'd say, Would you mind running into this store? My credit isn't very good here, and give them a five dollar bill to buy something, cigarettes or something like that, and pass the money that way. And of course, the people were investigated by the FBI [Geoffrey Swift laughs] and Treasury Department. None of them were guilty of actually handing out, knowingly, counterfeit money.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Then they were the—

THADDEUS CLAPP: The man went to jail. His wife came in to see me. I said we're sorry. I'm sorry it happened. She said, Well, he was always a bum. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] I'm glad to be rid of him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Laughs.] Wow. That closed the case on that poor soul.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Laughs.] Well, now—

THADDEUS CLAPP: We also had an art school on the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, you did?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, we did. We find that—we found that a good many of the painters who were not awfully good as painters were sometimes awfully good as teachers, and we had classes in settlement houses, teaching both painting and drawing and crafts. And then, we had a school at project headquarters at 881 [ph] Commonwealth Avenue. Under the supervision of Mr. Garrett Hinson [ph]—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Garrett Hinson [ph].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —who is now dead.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: His wife, however, lives in Cambridge, his widow. I see her about once or twice a year. Once a year, perhaps.

[00:30:00]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Whether she could tell you—I don't think she would be able to tell you very much. She's now a librarian in the school, I think in Wayland, or somewhere, I've forgotten. Very nice, very intelligent person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, now, just how did the school function?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, we had people who came in and took lessons like the music lessons from the Music Project. And were there for several hours a day, studying. We had a couple of models, they were always a problem.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: One tended to get stuck between floors in the elevator with various gentlemen. Clients.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. [Laughs.] How many people did you have, by and large, in the school at one time? [Inaudible.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh, I would say as many as perhaps 20 or 25. And perhaps, five or six teachers.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, what criteria were used to select people for the school? [Inaudible] students—

THADDEUS CLAPP: People who were articulate, and who could explain drawing and painting, not necessarily good draftsman. Well, no, they would be a pretty good draftsman, but not

necessarily creative artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And what criteria were used for selecting the students? Were these—

THADDEUS CLAPP: People who applied and who showed some, at least, minimum ability.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see, they weren't necessarily people with any experience at all beforehand.

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, no.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, but people who showed an interest.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And with, as I say, some skill, minimum skill.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, how did you differentiate? Or I should say, how did you pigeonhole—that's not a particularly attractive word—people. For instance, as you say, out of 300 and some-odd artists on the Project at one point, at one time, you must have found a great number, or a fair number anyway, who, though they claim to be or fancied themselves fine artists, easel painters, could have benefited from instruction in the school. How did you work this out?

THADDEUS CLAPP: We didn't put them there that would have been inadvisable—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: An insult to them and—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, and psychologically damaging to them. We rather found other areas in which they could work and be socially useful.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. And—

THADDEUS CLAPP: We were pretty acutely aware of the fact that these were public funds and were as conscientious as we could be in administering them.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. And the school was just for interested youngsters who were quite willing—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, and other [ph] people too—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But they were people who were quite willing to undergo instruction.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Yeah, they came to the school voluntarily because it was an art school.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. Yes, that clears that up. Yeah. Yeah. Did you find any kind of dominant style? Now, this is to get onto easel painting itself, which I got an easel paint is where the majority—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That was the core of the Project, yeah. Not necessarily the majority but the center of the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What strains of thought on the one hand, of social outlook on the one hand, or stylistic leanings did you find going through? Any clear-cut strains that you can see in retrospect?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, five or six different strains. There was a really distinguished academician, Mr. Oberteuffer.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oberteuffer.

THADDEUS CLAPP: An oil painter and watercolorist, and his son who was a brilliant watercolorist. Both pretty conservative but absolutely first-rate. It was then that I discovered that good academic painting was as good as good modern painting. I'd always had a leaning towards modern, the modern movement, so-called.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: See, but they were really very brilliant painters.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: They were they were on the Project, I gather.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Both artists on relief, father, and son. Separate families, both married and living apart. Then we had the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Had Oberteuffer been a teacher? Did he have any kind of following? Was he —

THADDEUS CLAPP: Not that I know of. He had done portraits. The older man was quite a distinguished person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He was?

THADDEUS CLAPP: In the area.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, he had had certain success and recognition?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But I suppose the art of portrait painting was a useless appendage to—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. It was a luxury.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —the world of art in the '30s, yeah. Of all things that weren't needed was portrait painting, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Then we had the inevitable sort of aftermath of Impressionism that you find particularly in the North Shore among the conservative so-called moderns, the Impressionist painters that have violently blue shadows and white snow and that type of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:35:01]

THADDEUS CLAPP: We also had a man like Arapoff, for example, who—and Heinz. Arapoff lived in Cambridge. Heinz was down on the Cape—who were proper successors of the French Impressionists, particularly the late Impressionists, Sisley and men like that. And very fine painters. Heinz was very curious. He was always insulted every time he showed in Provincetown because he was always put in with the moderns. He was a little bit like Cezanne. He always thought that he was a conservative painter, and he was not. He was an Expressionist, Impressionist Expressionist.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Not as fully developed out of Impressionism as Van Gogh, but in the same—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see what you're [inaudible], yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —terribly emotional type of painting. [Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, by no means a pure, artistic, and spiritual descendant of a Child Hassam or another sort of an American Impressionist.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Arapoff was much more in that tradition than Heinz.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Than Heinz, uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I remember a marvelous painting of his, of an A&P storefront and a gas station and the painting split by a pole right down the middle. A most difficult composition, beautifully unified with very strong primary colors and then modulated into all kinds of plays of light over the surface of things, lovely painting. But always thought he was conservative and always insulted that he was put with the moderns and one of the best of the moderns we had.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Really? Now, the subject matter there is interesting. Did that come from the simple, impressionist feeling that any subject matter is worthwhile? Or is that kind of a descendant of the Ashcan School—

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would say the Ashcan School.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It certainly sounds familiar.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Although I'm not sure he was consciously motivated by that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It sounds like a Sloane or Glackens, or something like that.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, he was—he was a curious person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But that kind of subject matter had been made— had been given the stamp of approval or—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —the stamp of acceptability in years just previous. And he did it in an impressionist—I don't know the man's work. I'd like to see it. Is Heinz living? I know Arapoff is dead.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I don't know. Yes, Arapoff is dead. I don't know that Heinz is living or not. I don't know how you'd find out either. He lived in Provincetown. He used to leave in the [summer -Ed.], if he could, as a good many of the artists did, if they could, to get away from the summer, with the arty group that moved in.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I plan to see Howard Gibbs, who I think still lives in the Cape.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And he may know.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, he may know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He lives in Brewster, I gather. And—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. And then there was another really brilliant painter, Dorothy Loeb, who never was recognized, but whom I think she is one of the subtlest women painters in America. She was a friend of mine and a friend of my mother's. She was an older woman.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is she living now?

THADDEUS CLAPP: She is. She's in New Orleans. She gave me—oh, a couple of years after the Project folded—a lovely painting that I have up in my room, and then on the wall here, there's a sketch for a mural that she did.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really? Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: A trio, string trio. She eventually did the mural in terms of the first page of the score of the Beethoven's Fifth Symphony [ringing] was still life with the instruments against it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really? Interesting.

THADDEUS CLAPP: This is a girl that has come to see me, but I can put her—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, listen, why don't we put this off for just a—

[Recording stops, restarts.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, to recap for a minute, you've outlined strains, Impressionism— Impressionism—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Expressionism, abstract painting.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Abstract painting.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think the best—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: —who was semi-abstract, not purely abstract, is Karl Knaths, who was on the Project for a while, he's been with the Phillips Gallery in Washington. He was never fully on relief, actually. He had left the Project by the time I came on it, but I had met him and seen his work, and I was very much impressed with it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was he influential at the time? Did he have an effect on other painters?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think he has had considerable influence, at the time and since.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And since, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Through Phillips Gallery and through teaching there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Was he teaching in Boston at the time or?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, he was living in Provincetown.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see. But what about Karl Zerbe, do you know much about him? I gather he—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —he's now in Florida but was in Boston then. Did—was—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: He was, I think, at the Boston Museum School for a while.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, I gather he was, and according to some people I've talked to, I guess Lawrence Kupferman seems to think that there was a certain coterie he had about him that fancied bringing Rembrandt up to date.

[00:40:24]

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But very much an old master, especially 17th century minor Dutch Master, or major Dutch master.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. I told you at lunch that he did a mural here in Worcester. That was not Karl Zerbe. It was another man.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, it was?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, I remember now. Yes, I remember Zerbe's work.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Then, of course, there's the isolated cases of Jack Lavine and Hyman Bloom.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. They would represent another school.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Another school altogether.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That was coming out of Rouault and Soutine. Expressionists—Central European Expressionists, and then French Expressionism out of Rouault, from Van Gogh with some type of modifications, and so forth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Now they, of course, we're both very young, I gather when they started on the Project?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think Jack was 18 when he came on the Project, Jack Lavine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I gather—I think, from Morrison's interview or from someone's interview, that

there was some kind of—there was a problem at one point because they were too young—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —and special dispensation had to be made.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right. And thank God it was made.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I should say, yeah. Now they'd both been working with Denman Ross at Harvard, I gather?

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Until that point. What kind of teacher was he? What kind of style did he work in?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, he was an academic teacher. He was brilliant—he taught them technically. Now, this happens to be one of my favorite themes, that an artist has to know technique.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: As a writer has to know English prosody and grammar. And too many contemporary artists do not know the technique and are not good craftsmen. But Ross taught them real craftsmanship. And I think Jack Levine's painting is brilliant in terms of craftsmanship.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And because he is a master of that, he can say anything he wants to. After all, I mean, Picasso went to the most reactionary school in Europe, the art school in Barcelona, and learned to draw and paint and can do anything.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And he was a fantastic—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: And that's what Denman Ross [inaudible]—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —draftsman before he was anything else.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —tremendously important person in training these young men.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I think we're seeing a certain renaissance of craft or respect for craft.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In art right now, after the ninth and 10thline abstract expressionists have given craft a bad name.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The hard-edge people and the art people [inaudible], and in sculpture as well. Although we still have junk sculpture as well, to go along with it. Which, well, in a sense, represents a certain amount of craft. But—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Then we had men like Harlow Lent.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Who was he?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, he was a painter, and not very good as a painter. But he was a magnificent designer, and a very good craftsman, and he did an encaustic hanging for the principal enlisted men's club at Devens called *The Education of a Soldier*. He was influenced by Central American art and by American funny page illustrations and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really?

THADDEUS CLAPP: —terrifically inventive person. Lovely hanging, about, I would say, 15 by 12 feet, done in—well, the vehicle for the pigment was wax, ironed out, finally, of the canvas.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sounds interesting.

THADDEUS CLAPP: A perfectly fascinating thing. He eventually got a job in a factory that turned out all kinds of things, and he was just delighted, he could design anything he wanted to. And he came back to the Project. They used to come back, you know, after they got in private employment. Dorothy Loeb's mural I referred to based on the score of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was for a private individual. She went off the Project when she did it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And then came back on, and he came around to visit, and I said, How are things, he said, Oh, fine. And he said, We have steak every night, and I'm so bored, I can't eat the steak. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] I do lampshades with Scottie dogs and wastepaper baskets with Scottie dogs, and I just can't stand it. Well, he couldn't. And he was a real designer—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —and this was commercial stuff. And he finally left and took a job in a factory, and this was the last I heard of him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I'd like to locate him. I'd like to have him do some things for my church. But I don't know where he is. He was in Connecticut the last—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: If I run across him, I'll get in touch with you.

[00:45:00]

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would like to, very much.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: So, it was a kind of a casual thing, people coming on and off the Project?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, as they got jobs.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As they got jobs. And generally, they just had a short duration, for a specific project?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, on the Art Project perhaps longer than the other Projects, because it was more difficult for them to get jobs. Now, my secretary went off the project for private employment. She went into the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Roman Catholic order, she eventually became the superior of the New England region of the Sisters. And recently has retired as mother superior and is now the superior of a convent on Long Island.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really?

THADDEUS CLAPP: She was not an artist. She was a very fine secretary.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I wonder if she's—

THADDEUS CLAPP: But people would do that. I mean, and as I said, the wood carvers would go off and then come back on. And her name is Mother Julia.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mother Julia. I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Now, Herbert Brown and his wife, who live in Natick, I can give you their telephone number—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —would be able to get you in touch with her if you wanted to, and you might get in touch with Herbie [ph], who was my assistant. He was an administrator, not an art critic— a very funny person. Let's see.

[Recording stops, restarts.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, to carry on with the stylistic aspects. Did—was there any significant, I should say, inroads of the Mexican mural renaissance, which was felt so strongly in Chicago? And so often comes in our publications and histories or superficial histories of the '30s, to characterize the work of the '30s, which is not really strictly true.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would say not a great deal in Massachusetts—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Not a great deal in Boston.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —no.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In Massachusetts, yeah. Did you think that there was any real regional feeling among the painters?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Not very much. It was pretty much individualistic.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I gather there was a certain fellowship among them. They [inaudible]—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. I mean, there was great camaraderie in the Project, and always an interchange. There were the two sharp divisions, there were the conservative painters sometimes coming, as I say, in the North Shore, typically out of Impressionism but with the exaggerated blue shadows. The type of thing you seen in calendars, and so on and so forth. Competent painters, but not inventive, not creative painters. And then the younger group, like young Oberteuffer, essentially, perhaps in the traditional of Raoul Dufy, but not deriving from him, but very nice, light watercolors. Charming painting, and charming person, his whole temperament was expressed in his painting. And then people like Hyman Bloom and Jack Levine. Bloom, I think, a profoundly religious painter, even though he might not be in the Jewish—I don't know whether he is a practicing Jew or not.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, I don't know either, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But a deeply religious person. Then a person like Jack Levine, tremendously ethically motivated, in terms of social criticism.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I was going to say, a rather sedulous social critic.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Yes. A leftwing critic. Very fine painter, much more than just a social comment. I mean, great depth to his painting, beautiful color. So that you would get that group.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was this characteristic of many of the painters this kind of deep social commitment?

THADDEUS CLAPP: There was a considerable number of them on the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: This kind of really deeply felt urge to reflect some of the anguish of the day—

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would think, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —some of the confusion.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah. Not the majority of the painters, but a considerable core of the painters. A man like Dante Giglio, who was not an awfully good painter, but who did some murals for a public school in Boston that—they had to be taken down. Professor Ford of Harvard, who was—well, if I may say so, an extreme reactionary—objected to the paintings. They were objected to by some of the Italians on the north end on the ground that they showed the Italian immigrants as depressed people and, and Professor Ford said, Well, everybody knows the Italians came here in a great spirit of joy and enthusiastic exploration, not out of poverty and depression. Which was somewhat of a shock to me. [Laughs]

[00:50:10]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: We were rewriting history right there.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think rather [laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Should say so. [Laughs.] And even by the '30s, the Italian immigrants had gone so far as to resent that kind of depiction, I guess.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I suppose that's only natural.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, I think so. Sort of tough on Dante but.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say. So, his murals—

THADDEUS CLAPP: I don't mean Dante the poet [laughs], I mean Dante Giglio the painter [laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes. So, his murals were painted over, or were they—

THADDEUS CLAPP: They were taken down.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Taken down.

THADDEUS CLAPP: They were done on canvas and they were taken down.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, now, did you run across very much opposition of this kind when the mural was done under the Art Project, not the earlier murals under the PWAP or such? Did you find opposition of this kind cropping up very frequently from—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Every once and a while—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —school boards or boards of alderman or—[Cross talk.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: —there'd be a red scare. I remember we had to spend a whole day going over some innocuous murals by an artist who lived in Arlington, wallpaper murals, I would call them. Delightful, sort of stylized scenes of the public garden in Boston. This man was a completely bourgeois painter, a completely, sort of, designer. And we had to go over all the foliage with a fine-tooth comb with a magnifying glass to see if there was a hammer and sickle concealed somewhere.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Who believed there was?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, various politicians that got up in arms.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, dear.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I think this guy had never heard of the hammer and sickle. He was a completely nonpolitical person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was this just a case of some local politician going in a red herring?

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right, for his own publicity. I remember there's a picture of Ms. Cleaves [ph], who was the supervisor of industrial art in Boston Public Schools, a very competent, fine person. A picture of the two of us looking at the murals and Ms. Cleaves [ph] saying, What, no swan boats? As Mr. Thaddeus Clapp, the director of the Federal Art Project explained to her that at the time of the period of these murals—depicted in these murals, there were no swan boats in the Boston Public Library. It was at this level, and this—yet we had to go over these, to prove there were no hammers and sickles. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] And I think I may have a clipping of that. If I do, I'll send it to you.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, we'd love to get it.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I may have a photograph, if I don't have a clipping. I'd rather send a photograph which would be much more durable.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But I'll see if I have it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Did you run into much opposition from politicians? That is from the politicians at the city level, or the state level, since you were right there in the midst of the Maelstrom that is Boston politics.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, it was very interesting. When we were a Federal Project, nobody could touch us. We had real immunity. When Congress abolished the Federal Projects, and we had to seek state sponsorship, we were very lucky. We had the State Department of Education as our sponsor. And Mr. E. Everett Clark [ph]—who may still be living, I don't know—was a typical,

precise schoolteacher, who used to talk about risibility, and terms like that, but who was a very fine person. And finally, not that type of schoolteacher at all. He was our sponsor's agent and a person to whom I feel deeply indebted for support of the project under state sponsorship when it became the Massachusetts Project. Now, there we did have people calling up, politicians putting the heat on to get their favorite sons on the Project. And I got Mr. Edgell of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the director, and Mr. Sachs of the Fogg Art Museum, and — Dr. Sachs and Dr. Edgell —and Dr. Koon [ph], of the then Germanic Museum, now the—what is it?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Busch-Reisinger.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Museum at Harvard. And Dorothy Adlow, of *the Christian Science Monitor*—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Who was an influential critic—

THADDEUS CLAPP: A very influential critic. To act as a reviewing board in case there was a dispute as to the worthiness of these applicants.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That's interesting.

THADDEUS CLAPP: So that we were, through them and their prestige, protected from this type of political pressure that was put on us to put people on. Now a sideline, was that all of a sudden Otis Hood, the head of the Communist Party in Massachusetts, a sculptor, applied for a position on the Project. That was about to raise a hell of a stink.

[00:55:17]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And he was a very decent person. And I went to him, and I said, Now listen, I can't put you on. I'm sorry, I cannot go this far. I'm going to ask you to withdraw. And he withdrew.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He did?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Did not make an issue of it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What was the date of all this? This was 1940—

THADDEUS CLAPP: This was, I'd say, 1940 perhaps, or 1941. Somewhere around there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Now, how long did you carry along—carry on under state sponsorship?

THADDEUS CLAPP: About three or four years. I left—I entered seminary. I graduated from seminary in '44. I went through seminary in two and a half years.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I left the Project, then, after about three months, went to seminary. So, it would be, oh, 1940, '41.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: '40, '41, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was perhaps in 1940 that Otis Hood applied.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Yes, now that's curious. Why do you suppose he hadn't applied before? He didn't find the need, or he was reluctant to—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, no—[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —apply for something that was federally sponsored or what?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I don't think so. I think that he suddenly got a bee in his bonnet. He was eligible. And he would apply and make an issue of it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Make an issue of it, yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But he was the type of guy, I will say, that was not willing to make an issue

to the detriment of a lot of other people, that would have been very much hurt. Because of the criticism of the Project for putting him up.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], I see.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think he was a really decent, very fine person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Even though I may have disagreed with him in regard to party membership, I still had a great deal of sympathy [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You had sympathy and a certain amount of empathy with him, sure.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As I'm sure did many of your compatriots.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, I think a considerable number. We were never the Red Menace [Geoffrey Swift laughs] we were supposed to be, [laughs] although I was pretty much to the left myself.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you suppose there would have been as much controversy or as much potential controversy if he had applied when the federal government was sponsoring the Federal Arts Project? There wouldn't have been?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, since the state government had no direct control, they had no way in those days, that pre-1940s—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. They would never have known whether he was on the Project or not.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And what would the attitude in Washington have been? Or—

THADDEUS CLAPP: It's hard to say.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I gather you really were not in that close contact with Washington anyway.

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, I knew Holger Cahill, and I knew some other people in the Washington office who used to come up and see us.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But I mean, each regional project was, by and large, an autonomous thing?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Pretty autonomous. The strength of the federal sponsorship was that we were left to our own devices.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The funds came from Washington, but the ideas came from Boston.

THADDEUS CLAPP: From a local situation, which I think was very healthy.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed, uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I'm not a states righter [ph], but I do believe in regionalism within limits, and we had that under federal sponsorship.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's probably—

THADDEUS CLAPP: When Harry Hopkins left the WPA, the whole thing changed.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In what way?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, we got General Somervell, I think was his name, who succeeded Harry Hopkins. And we had the most magnificent paper organization. And it became increasingly difficult to work within that. There was always the question of what were the standards for a professional. They used to be hauled down periodically, the state headquarters on Washington Street. And what do you mean by having this person on? I mean, how can you establish him as

a professional?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, you can't. I mean, objectively, you just can't do that. And I would finally say, Okay, what about Van Gogh? \$75, \$85 worth of painting sold in his whole life, and his collection now valued at \$15 million? What are you going to do? How do you know he doesn't have a Van Gogh?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Certainly. What kind of criteria did they want to set up, rather strict?

THADDEUS CLAPP: A person that had made his living at painting. No, this is very difficult. This would have cut out somebody like Jack Levine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say so, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: For example. Dorothy Loeb, Charlie Heinz, Vernon Smith, Carl Saxild. All of these people, Karl Knath, who didn't make his living at painting, he made his living through the Phillips Gallery in Washington, but not as a painter—just painter, per se.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And I'm sure you weren't alone in New England in finding that a kind of totally unrealistic sort of criterion—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —they set out. They tried a kind of unequivocal, rather military set up, I would say.

[00:59:55]

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. And, again, if I may use a sort of old-fashioned term, a certain philistinism, an unwillingness to accept creative experimentation. Now, under Harry Hopkins, we were wide open for that type of thing. And that's why we could have Jack Levine and people of his caliber on the Project. Or you could have lunatics like, perfectly frankly, Morrison and myself. I mean, who were terribly interested in promoting not just the modern movement, but also conservative painters, like as I say, Oberteuffer and people like that, who were first-rate painters, who were interested in the public use of art.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And we were considered lunatics, and I know it. And in one sense, we were.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But when the new regime took over in Washington, there was a—

THADDEUS CLAPP: It got more and more difficult.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —a return to a kind of the inherent distrust that the philistine, as you put it, or the bourgeois mind, or the Puritan mind as for—

THADDEUS CLAPP: I mean, congressmen [ph] did a tap dance down the aisle of Congress criticizing the Theater Project and that type of thing. After all, Orson Welles came out of the Theater Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Certainly, the Mercury Theatre developed right out of it, yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, I know [laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes. And so—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Kazan was on the Federal Theatre for a while. He was a Williams man, as you probably know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed, yes. About your vintage, too.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, in my class.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Your class, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Lovely person, lovely guy.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. I had a chance to meet him last year but didn't, when he received a degree, I guess from Williams.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Wrote a—and his lovely book that he wrote about the immigrant coming to this country, his struggles to get here, which I think is partly the history of his father, actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], sure. Sure.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Terribly moving book.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But you were all struck by the—practically struck down, I would say in the end, by the old Puritan mistrust of the fine arts.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, the bourgeois—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: A fear of—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Not just Puritan because it also exists in France, among the bourgeoisie.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, sure. It's terribly, is it?

THADDEUS CLAPP: It's a middle-class distrust of intellectualism and of a person who is outside of the confines of [cross talk] polite society. Yes, that's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Whereas all the time, ironically enough, the Federal Arts Project brought the artists as close to being integral with the fabric of society as he ever has been.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That was the genius of Roosevelt. And this is Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins, and all of those sorts of what I would call saints [laughs] of the New Deal.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Because while I was very left-wing, I was always a New Dealer.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you and Morrison—I don't imagine you do, I'm just asking out of curiosity—did you feel that there was any direction in which you could push the Project, other than fostering everyone in the following of his own development?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, only in terms of trying to get people that were really not properly artists into socially valuable work. I mean, work that would justify their earnings.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have a strong—I won't say a missionary feeling, but a strong feeling of the need for the artists to communicate with an audience—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Absolutely.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —have a dialogue back and forth?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Absolutely.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And so, to speak, an education or an enrichment of the public?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Even with Hyman Bloom, difficult as he was, I know that an artist has to have a public. And when he destroys his own work, it's because he feels that the public will laugh at him. And that he must—after all, he's speaking a language. Now an artist talking about his work very often talks pure nonsense.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed, they do.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But when he is painting, if he's a real artist, that is his language, and he should rest on that, and not try and explain his paintings. They explain themselves. It's for people like myself, I mean, critics and art historians, inadequately, to interpret what the artist is saying. And he can be awfully wrong. We like to see an artist dead sometimes so we can say the last word about him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Laughs.] Yes, yes. I'm often very happy to see an artist who resents having

to verbalize his work or where he doesn't verbalize it.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: There are, of course, some terribly articulate. I gather Jack Lavine is quite articulate about his work.

THADDEUS CLAPP: He is, but his work is more articulate than his words.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed. Yeah. Yeah. Indeed.

THADDEUS CLAPP: It's a sort of cynicism.

[01:05:04]

[END OF TRACK AAA_clapp65_8458_m.]

THADDEUS CLAPP: —the problem with Karl Knaths type of painting, and with Jack Levine's—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think he's a—I was very fond of him as a person. And I think he's a very fine painter, and I know why he's a very fine painter. But the lovely sort of beautifully organized surfaces of violets and blues and reds of Karl Knaths painting, coming out of Cubism but not Cubist and not abstract in that sense—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: —is much more my milieu [ph] in painting. As, well, Byzantine, early Christian mosaics are more of my period than Renaissance painting. As the marvelous design of Baroque art—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —is essentially, finally, abstract art is more my—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, I suppose, as you describe it, and has others have described it, in the work being done in Boston, Massachusetts, New England, in the '30s, you could—practically anybody could find something to satisfy his tastes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You could call it on one hand confusion, since there were so many diffuse ways of looking at the natural world, the real world, and so many stylistic strains all not coming together but diverging in the '30s.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That it was characteristic of the whole country.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And New England was a backwater, unquestionably.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed, it was. Sure. It wasn't New York and—

THADDEUS CLAPP: No. It had flowered in the 19th century.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And on the other hand, it wasn't Chicago, of course, in its own way. Everything, anyplace but New York, I guess you can safely say, is provincial as far as art in the 20th century in this country is concerned.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Whereas but Chicago developed its own specialized Central America-looking, you know, south [inaudible]—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, it was less European oriented than New England.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As I guess the Midwest always has been.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Perhaps less—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, politically, Mayor Thompson of Chicago and his blithering tirades against the King of England. [Laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Like some of the Southern Baptist's tirades about the pope coming over to the White House when Al Smith was running. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But was there any kind of strong or any kind of effect at all felt from the kind of Neo-primitivism of Benton and such, in New England?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, I think a little. Not very much. You get that more in the painters that would go off, say, off the Project to do Treasury.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Treasury murals?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Murals.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: The PWA under Ickes, that type of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Where you would—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible] and it's successors.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, you would get some of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Section of the painting and sculpture and all which was coincident with the Federal Arts Project.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah. And you'd get murals. I mean, Springfield has a mural, I've forgotten who did it. But he was at one time, I believe—yes—no, that was—he was director of the Western Museum school. What was his name? He had a school in Gloucester later. Where you get sort of Baroque postman tossing letters at each other with great vigor. Wondered why it took so much muscular activity. And then also some painters that did the type of folk distortion that you get in Benton and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In Benton.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —and those people, but not very many on the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Great swinging rhythms.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. And not as good as Benton, actually, usually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, probably not. As a just an example of that, do you know the mural that in the post office in Danbury, Connecticut?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It was done by John Steuart Curry.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I know Curry's work.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Curry's work. And of course—I'm not sure just why he came to New England, but he did. He was brought to New England to work and do the mural at the Danbury post office. Of course, he was a Midwesterner. And it was kind of an apotheosis of the hat industry, which of course—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's appropriate. Yes, [laughs] it's wonderful [laughs].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And there were kind of typical machines on the lower half of the canvas. I think it was on the canvas, as a matter of fact. Hat making machines and rows of workers lined up as you might find in a Rivera or something like that. But then on the top, this great open sky, almost a Tiepolo sky, there was putti flying, each one carrying a different kind of hat.

THADDEUS CLAPP: [Inaudible]. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: One carrying a straw boater, one carrying a derby, another one carrying a fedora. And just having a wonderful time. I'm sure it was—must have been tongue in cheek.

[00:05:03]

THADDEUS CLAPP: It must have been.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I hope it was, anyway, I hope the man wasn't serious.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I'll stop in and see that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's a splendid thing, splendid thing. Well, are there any other kinds of observations you can think of?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I don't know, excepting—I mean, if I can introduce a person [inaudible]?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure, by all means.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I mean, I would say that the experience of the Art Project, as one of the New Deal agencies, was one of the great experiences of my life.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: It was something that drove me into the priesthood, because after that, there was nothing else.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: You see, the ethical and social thing shifted over very easily into a religious thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I just thank God that I had the experience of being on the Art Project, and knowing the people I knew. I mean, people like, like Morrison. And we didn't always agree, we ended up in a big fight, partly a misunderstanding on his part of something that happened, which was very unfortunate. But I was always very fond of him and considered him a friend. And I never felt, myself, any actual break with him. But he was a magnificent person to know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And lots of other people like that, a person like Sam Green, for example. And the artists, I knew Dorothy Loeb and Vernon Smith and Jack Levine and Karl Knaths, and those people have tremendously enriched my life. And I feel terribly indebted to them. This, I would say is sort of a statement for posterity about the way I feel about the New Deal and about the Art Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, what was the strongest emotion you felt? A sense of purpose, I guess, or?

THADDEUS CLAPP: A sense of purpose and being part of a vital movement.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And the excitement that would be generated from—

THADDEUS CLAPP: And the whole Roosevelt—what you might call the Roosevelt revolution.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And the artists being generally in favor of his social legislation, and this, of course, bringing them even more close together.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Although, well, we had lots of people that used to come in with Landon

buttons on, and Willkie buttons on. I mean there was no regimentation put into the Art Project, you see. We had Republicans on.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But I would imagine, just by the nature of the people involved, a majority must have been probably Democrats?

THADDEUS CLAPP: The majority were, sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: By the mid '30s majority—

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I would say that the articular group were mostly left-wing Democrats.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Of course, by 1936, the vast majority of Americans were Rooseveltites anyway.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As poor Mr. Landon found out.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, I don't think it damaged him too much. He remained happy the rest of his life.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I think so. He made one very acute remark. And that was when the Republicans were talking about return to simplicity. He said they will never be anything simple in America again. Which I think was a very astute observation.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I should say so.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That made me feel much better about it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Good for him. Good for him. He learned a little something on the Plains.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, I think he learned it before he ran actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: [Inaudible] be folksy.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, how would you sum up the accomplishments of the Massachusetts Project?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I would say that it's—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Its strengths and its shortcomings?

THADDEUS CLAPP: In certain areas—it obviously preserved the wood carving craft for Boston.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: The laboratory was, I think, very important establishing standards for artists materials. The Index of American Design, you don't have to justify all in terms of interest in American heritage—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, it's—

THADDEUS CLAPP: —type of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That sort of thing is self-evident.

THADDEUS CLAPP: The teaching in the settlement houses and the art school was more ephemeral. But I think, probably enriched the lives of a lot of people that finally through exhibitions, and through art classes, and talks and lectures, got at least a touch of a different world. Now, how much of that really? I have no way of judging. I mean, I can't judge who's been touched by the church, really, who's been touched by works of art, really, and so on and so forth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Those things I don't question. And the fact that some very fine painters were allowed—at least on a material basis, were able to stay alive and continue painting and to develop their—we had a very interesting show at the Junior League in Boston, showing the work of some 30 selected painters—20 selected painters, when they first came on the Project and what had happened to them.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, really? No, that's interesting. That's in line with the question I just wanted to bring up. Just—I didn't know that—I was going to ask you, if you could sort out or could see, or could see at the time, or could see now any significant development among the artists?

[00:10:15]

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, we did, and I think you might—[cross talk]—they probably have in their archives there, a catalogue of that show. I don't, you see. And there were reviews by Dorothy Adlow and in *the Boston Evening Transcript*, and so on and so forth, that might give you a line of that. But I can't remember specifically, excepting some of the artists I've mentioned, I mean, to you.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I'll look that up, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And that was a very interesting show. And that made us finally solid in Boston, that show did. [Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: What year was that? Do you remember?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I would say it was towards the end of the creative aspect of the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, it was after the big New England show, which was 1937.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Oh, yes. It was a good deal later than that. I would say in the, perhaps, 1940, somewhere around there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, I just have to look that up. Yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But that would give you an idea of what really happened in terms of easel painting, you see. The mural painting was never very important here. We didn't have many people that could handle—in fact, we had nobody really that could handle at all.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And the difficulty of universal iconographical appeal and that type of thing. It was just gone. The University of New Hampshire murals, slightly leftish in tinge but not universal really, pretty special. And not left enough to have the type of thing that Rivera and the Mexican School, which was universal. I mean, the bourgeoisie loved that stuff as well.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, I gather that must have been a vast problem. It seems to me is it must have probably been a vast problem.

THADDEUS CLAPP: It still is, I mean, [inaudible].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: How do you establish in the 20th century, a meaningful iconography for a public display mural?

THADDEUS CLAPP: You don't. You can't do it. Even in sculpture or painting, it's very difficult. We're driven back to individual pieces of sculpture and to easel paintings.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As the artist looks more and more inward, he—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —it becomes almost impossible for him to communicate on—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Now, that was the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —immediately apprehensible level to the public.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yeah, that was the final weakness of the Project. And that was a weakness of our culture.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And the Project functioning within our culture where there is no unified iconographical possibility.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, it's a problem of art and its patrons, art and its sponsors, art and its public—

THADDEUS CLAPP: A pluralistic society, really.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —throughout the whole 20th century. Increasing patronage we get now is, I think, less to do—well, obviously has less to do with the real public appreciation of art and has to do with what's fashion.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right. That [inaudible].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Being on in with the in crowd.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Being [art proponents (ph)].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And of course—and of course, investing your money wisely.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And I must say that I find that I am now an academician. I give a lecture on modern art, who do I talk about? The old masters, Picasso, Braque, not pop or op.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the returns aren't in there. [Thaddeus Clapp laughs.] They're fashions.

THADDEUS CLAPP: I was avant-garde once, now I'm not [laughs]. I have to admit I've settled and comfortable in Zion [ph]. [Inaudible.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And you have to be altogether too agile to keep up with the fashions in art. You just continually want to keep pushing it away, get it at a distance.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: See it with a little perspective.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Motherwell and so on, I—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Rest your eyes.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —can't quite take.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Get a chance to see something develop, that sort of thing. One of the things I was going to bring up, your mentioning of art classes in the settlement houses brings to mind the question of community art centers. Now, this, in many parts of the country where there were no museum facilities, of course, the community art centers formed under the FAP became the basis, later on, of the development of full-fledged museums. [Inaudible] museums.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, that's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was this significant in Massachusetts, as far as you know?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, because we had—[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Because you had museums, yeah.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Now there were one or two things that we did that were sort of extra-legal.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: We were very much interested in the possibility of letting out—having a lending library of pictures for private homes. And through Holger Cahill—Dick Morrison talked about this to Cahill and Cahill talked to Mrs. Roosevelt—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

THADDEUS CLAPP: —and of course, she got very excited about this.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: This was right down her alley.

[00:15:02]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Part of her great genius in reaching people. And my roommate at Williams, Forbush Anderson, lived in Grafton. And that was a small, manageable community.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: And we took a selection of paintings out there. A pretty wide range from pretty sentimental flower still lifes and things like that, and pleasant watercolors to more advanced things. And the North Shore School and so on and so forth, perhaps 30 or 40 paintings. Which he hung up in the in the basement of the Unitarian Church, and people were allowed to take them to put in their houses. Well, this created—finally we were told we couldn't do it. The there was a ruling, a legal ruling against it. And when the project was investigated this became a source of great turmoil.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: But nothing had been stolen, everything was returnable and always returned without any fanfare or anything like that. I mean, there was no question but there were records kept of where the paintings were. They could all be—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Were they sent out on indefinite loan, or for periods of time?

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, for periods of time. For a long enough time, I mean, three or four years, they would have to be in a house for people to get used to them and find out whether they liked them or not. And then when they didn't see them anymore, we'd help to replace them. Because you don't see things on your wall after a time, with other paintings, you see. But the whole thing had to be withdrawn.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No minimal charge or anything?

THADDEUS CLAPP: There was to be a minimal charge, but we could not work out the legality of that. And we had to try this first and then establish that type of thing later. But the whole thing was declared illegal by the attorney general. So, we stopped the whole business, the paintings were all brought to one place and stored in Grafton, and then were all returned at once, under the hullabaloo of this investigation, but they'd have been returned anyway. Yeah, the whole thing was—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That's a shame.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes, it was because it was a good idea.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sensible, productive idea.

THADDEUS CLAPP: There other thing that I was very anxious to do, this was sort of my—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Did they try this any place else in the country?

THADDEUS CLAPP: No, this was only here. This one situation.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The idea came from Massachusetts and—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Came from Massachusetts, to Mrs. Roosevelt. And we went ahead and did it extra-legally.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THADDEUS CLAPP: Now the other thing that I was interested in, which we could have done,

because the paintings at that time had no value. With what I think a museum—I still think a museum ought to do—it ought to be a storehouse with racks of paintings where you could go in with a pass and look at anything you wanted to, but a very small exhibition area, and then ship things out to storefront galleries all over the cities.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Good idea.

THADDEUS CLAPP: This I would like to see. Now the closest thing to that is the Amherst Museum, where they have a big storage section and a very small exhibition section and change the exhibitions all the time. And no great marble [inaudible], or anything like that. I still would love to see done.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That's an interesting idea. Because there are practical problems in a museum like the MFA in Boston, where—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes. Or the Worcester Museum, there are paintings of great value.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, they wouldn't want those great treasures traveling around the city.

THADDEUS CLAPP: In a completely inflammable building in [the slums (ph)]. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You can imagine the—

THADDEUS CLAPP: But we could do that with the Art Project stuff. But we never [inaudible], you see.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Museums, especially good big ones, have enough other worthwhile art sitting in their basements—

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —that they should be able to do that.

THADDEUS CLAPP: And where there could be, as in Amherst, where the stuff doesn't go out. But at least where there's a constant change of exhibitions from their storehouse, where you can go in and see the paintings hanging on the racks, if you want to.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That's a good idea. But see it'd be difficult in Boston since the city and the MFA have little to do with one another.

THADDEUS CLAPP: That's right. That's right. Well, that's the trouble with most—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The only major American museum that has no city support at all, it's completely privately supported, yeah. But somewhat along that line, somebody pointed out to me that then and now, the Boston Museum nor any other—neither the Boston Museum nor any other local Boston museum, has facilities that has an annual show for New England artists. And this is something that they all found—was many years ago—they all found, you know, rather nice about the about the Project.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: That they could be sure of having some kind of a comprehensive show—

THADDEUS CLAPP: Now, we do have, here in Worcester, a Biennial [ph] of Worcester County artists. Sometimes very difficult, I used to be on the jury. One time the jury rejected so many pictures we were told to please reconsider or there would be a hell of a mess. [They laugh.]

[00:20:00]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, dear.

THADDEUS CLAPP: But at least they do try and show, in the Worcester Museum, the county painters every other year, which I think is very important whether the painting's good or not is beside the point there. It should be seen. And we do weed out the pencil copies of Saturday Evening Post covers and that type of thing.

[Phone rings.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Yeah. Do you want to get that or?

THADDEUS CLAPP: I think Mother will get it if it's important.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. Well, I think we've gone quite as far as we can go.

THADDEUS CLAPP: Well, I think we could go on endless.

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I would say we've covered a lot of—

[END OF TRACK AAA_clapp65_8459_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]