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Oral history interview with Phyllis Crawford,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Phyllis Crawford (Scott) on August 27, 1964 about her participation with the Index of American Design on the Federal Art Project in New York City during the 1930's. The interview was conducted at Phyllis Crawford's home in Santa Fe, New Mexico by Sylvia Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: First, would you tell us something about yourself; where you were born and something of your background and education?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and I went through the public schools there. Then I went to Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Got a bachelor's degree there. Two years later I went to the University of Illinois Graduate library School and got a now extinct degree there. I think my year was the very last year they required a bachelor's degree for entrance, kept you working two years and then gave you another bachelor's degree, Bachelor or Library Science. That dates all of us old timers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. When did you come to New York?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: In 1924 I went to New York to take an editorial position with the H.W. Wilson Publishing Company. They publish practically all the indexing services used by libraries throughout the country. My department there was standard catalogue series, a buying guide for libraries of the very best books in all fields. Then later I was editor of a new publication that was started called the Vertical File Service, a monthly catalogue of pamphlets and ephemeral material which libraries usually keep in the vertical file. I started that work at the format and...oh...that sort of thing....

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were you doing that at the time that you became involved in the Index of American Design?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, I was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, that obviously was your background for such a job. Was your work such at that time that it wasn't necessary to have any art background?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh the Index, you mean?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. I was hired to head up the research.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long had the Index been going on at that time?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh, possibly a week or two.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. When was this?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: This was in the fall of 1935.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was then very soon after it started. Who was the person that approached you on this?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: It was Romana Javitz who had written the original prospectus which was submitted to Mrs. Frances Pollak, the New York City head of the art project. And to Holger Cahill who was the Federal director. She had decided, Miss Javitz, that someone with library training would be better fitted to keep the records and to direct the research than a layman, you might say.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, what was your immediate work? How did you start in on it? What did you do?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I started in just standing around more or less. We had a rickety table that you couldn't sit on, no chairs, an immense room. A large number of artists who came in to sign in and then went out again. They were in the charge of Don baker, husband of Ruth Reeves.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What was Ruth Reeves' connection with the project?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Ruth Reeves was the one who sold the idea of the project to Mrs. Pollak. Romana Javitz, I

think, had the original idea. Ruth Reeves has long been convinced that she was the one that had the original idea, but at any rate Romana Javitz wrote it up in such a form that it would be understood--that it would make sense. It seemed to be a worthwhile project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How extensive was the project at that time as far as the other states were concerned?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: None. We were the only unit.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. I know that E. Boyd did a portfolio of Spanish colonial designs very early in the game, which she says was connected with the Index of American Design. It seemed to me it was just about that time, but I think that was sort of incorporated, wasn't it?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: It was, that was my understanding that it was incorporated after she had already started working on the Spanish Colonial things. This seemed at once to fit into the Index of American Design. It is very odd. One woman from Washington, I think her name was Pinckney--I remember it was a Carolina name--she came to New York to our office with one of the others, probably Cook Glassgold. And she said, "Oh, we have gotten some wonderful things from Santa Fe, New Mexico." I'd asked her if there was a unit here. She said, "They are done by E. Boyd, Ernest Boyd." I said, "I don't think Ernest is her name."

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You were right! You were one of the few people who knew, I guess. Where did the first research take place? In uptown New York or did it reach out into the other states around New York?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I think we were the only unit that did any research aside from trying to track down the origin of the pieces that the artists were rendering.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How were those found? The objects that the artists did renderings of?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: In New York, the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, Cooper Union, New York Historical Society. Any place that had pieces that belonged in our categories. Also, we rounded up all the private collectors. We were assisted in that by Homer Eaton Keyes, editor of *Antiques* magazine. He was quite interested although he was certainly not in favor of "that man in the White House." He still felt that this was quite worthwhile project. He was very helpful in giving us leads.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now, was the research that you and your staff did, that was done after these things were found? Is that right?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: We had independent research projects going. We had a number of people, relief people, who were assigned to us in order to support our quite large supervisory staff. We needed supervisors to take charge of each special category.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Such as?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Such as costume, furniture, glassware, and ceramics, that sort of thing. We were assigned a number of people who simply were not capable of doing adequate renderings, or people who were clerical workers but not needed in any of the other departments. These we trained to compile lists of silversmiths, oh, various categories of that sort from old city directories. I think you'll find a fairly full report on that in one of the papers that I've given to you. And we had one woman going through early newspapers making notes from ads in the papers on textiles--the names of textiles--and descriptions of the new fashions. See, these were independent things, not directly connected with our gathering of the renderings, but very often this information the independent research worker was getting came in very handy when one of the special supervisors simply could not get enough information from the records, let's say, at the metropolitan Museum.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now, the members of your staff, were they strictly research people, or were they the artists themselves--or both?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I was never in charge of the artists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. You headed research.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Research on the objects. I was in charge of the research work and the office and the records.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How was this coordinated:

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, at first, while Don Baker was there, he and I worked together rather than one over the other and we had no overall supervisor. But, a little later, Charles O. Cornelius was brought in as head of the New York City unit of the Index. Now, he was a particularly good person because of his background and training.

He had written several books on American furniture. He was the man who organized the American Wing at the Metropolitan. He knew what he was talking about. But, unfortunately, he was at that time on the verge of a breakdown and it was while he was still with the project that he jumped or fell out of the window. So he was not so useful to us, not so helpful as he might have been, had he been completely emotionally himself.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course. You said that Mrs. Pollack was the overall New York administrator?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. She was the administrator of all the Federal art projects in New York.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh!

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Mrs. McMahon was her chief in charge of New York and New Jersey, the whole states, you see. That's the distinction.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, well, I didn't know.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: New York, being so large, had its own head, Mrs. Pollak.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Then Mrs. McMahon then was under her?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, Mrs. McMahon was....

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, the reverse, just the reverse, I see.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Mrs. McMahon, in other words, was the regional director. Mrs. Pollak was the New York City director.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. How long was Mrs. Pollak in that position? All the way through?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, she resigned sometime in 1937. I think it was before the middle of the year.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you have direct contact with her?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, indeed.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did you get along with her?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh, she was quite a remarkable person. In the first place, she was an ideal choice for a relief project. I understand she had sat on the bench with Judge Lindsay for some years. She had a great feeling for people and an instinct about people. She had the grace to turn people loose on a job that she gave them, just "you do it your way. Let's see what you can come up with." So that she was a fine administrator, I think. She was always ready to listen, ready to give advice if you asked for it, but otherwise she kept hands off, just to see what you were going to do with it. She was interested in every phase of the thing. I liked her very much.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That certainly is the sign of a good executive to be able to turn things over to someone who is capable.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What was your relation to Lou Block on the project?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I think it was in 1937. I think fairly early in the year that Mrs. McMahon who had by that time decided--this is a mean thing to say but I think it's true--she had decided that the Index had more prestige than any of the other art projects and therefore she would take it over from Mrs. Pollak. And so she put in one of her own followers, Lou Block, and put him in charge of the Index of American Design. Now, you see, that was after Mr. Cornelius's death. We were really back again of having no overall head. I had the title but I wasn't running the artists' part of the project at all. Because I felt that I was incapable of doing that. I had no business poking my nose into the art end of it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who was responsible for that?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: After Don Baker left, a young man named Frank Hiteshow, who had been an animator for Walt Disney, and he was a quite skilled artists in just the ways we needed. He knew how to tell one of the artists how to paint a textile so that....

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You could see the threads...?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. Of course it was in that direction we also had help from a superb artist from

Massachusetts. I forget her name but it is somewhere in these papers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Really superb.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The rendering was so photographically perfect that I often wondered just how the artists were trained to do it so carefully.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Some were better than others, of course. Some simply never made it and sooner or later those were handed to me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, they were?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, ha ha! To make workers out of them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were they happy about that?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I'll tell you. It was always possible to sell the job to the individual. There was one man, I remember, who was quite a character and not quite all there. He was inclined to soldier on the job, but I got him by admiring his beautiful penmanship every day when he brought in his material that he copied from the city directories. And so he always produced about the same amount. He really put in a day.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Just on penmanship!

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, ha ha! There was another case where I oversold the job. It was a woman who was sent to us as a clerical worker, but I never could find out anything she could do. I tried her in a dozen different places. Finally I found something. She was very neat about covering renderings with cellophane.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh!

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: But at that time the union was organized on the project among the workers. I forget what they called their union--Artists Union. As soon as they had a grievance committee set up, this gal went to the grievance committee and told them all these things that she'd done on the project. Therefore she deserved a re-rating. This was very funny because....

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You'd tried her on everything.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Of course I'd tried her on everything, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How was the case resolved?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, there again it was an odd business. The chairman of the grievance committee was a rather belligerent...I think possibly she may have been a member of the Communist Party, I don't know. I really don't. But, she was going to be a belligerent grievance committee chairman. When I heard about the fact that I was going to be brought up on these charges, I went to her. I've been naive all my life, so I went to her and I said, "You know, I'm absolutely in sympathy with the principle of this case. There must be some way that a worker who is being discriminated against by the supervisor can get some justice. I'm awfully sorry your first case is the wrong one. It really is. I think the more you talk to this gal the more you'll find out that it is the wrong one." Just about that time Mr. Carl Trainum, who was the business manager of the federal art project, rushed out of his office and said, "Don't talk to her! Don't talk to her! You're being brought up on charges. She'll use everything you say against you." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I just felt I had to explain to her that I'm sympathetic with the principle at stake, but I think she'd better find someone else to establish this principle." Well, the grievance committee and Mrs. McMahon met after work that day or the next day, something like that, and the case was dismissed after I'd simply made a brief statement that I'd been trying to find some place where the gal would be happy and would be able to be useful to the project. So the case was dismissed! Crazy business! It proved nothing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did the union accept this?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They did, that's good. It is interesting to have a case of that sort because I know the unions were very active during that period in New York and I'm sure that a great many of the cases that they brought up for some kind of solution were not legitimate ones. I'm glad to know that at least on some decisions they are willing to admit that this was not the greatest artist in the world.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I confess that I was really astonished to be let off that easily.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long were you on the project?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I think it was about two years. I went to work in November and I quit in November. From '35 TO '37.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Why did you resign?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I resigned because I found it impossible even to get the materials we needed for the office and the research workers. I felt that I was a hindrance to the project rather than a help because I was quite obviously being edged out by Mr. Block.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh!

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Really. One of my workers, in fact my office manager, came to me in tears and told me that they were trying to get rid of me. So, it was fruitless to stay on, you know. You walk the floor several nights trying to decide a thing like this. "Am I a quitter?" You know, "You must be a fighter in a case like this." But what good would it do me to fight this when I was hampering my staff by staying?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wasn't there any person to whom you could appeal?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No. By that time Mrs. Pollak had left the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: And Mr. Block was Mrs. McMahon's choice. I could possibly have appealed to Washington but I don't think they would have listened. I really don't.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They probably leave such things to....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: They have to leave such things to the regional director.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, is there anything more that you'd like to say about that period? I mean, the transition from the time that you felt you were doing something effective until the time you felt you had to resign?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, all I know is that morale was so high for the first year and a half that you wouldn't believe it. We had 7 or 8 volunteer workers who worked a full day every day of the week. And I remember when the master writers, as our research people were called when they were promoted from the lowest grade, when they were put on a four-day week, I remember Carolyn Scoon who I gathered from your pamphlet has already been interviewed; one day Carolyn Scoon came to me on a Friday afternoon and she said, "I think I'll go home." I said, "What's the matter? You sick?" She said, "Well, Simon Legree, I'm not even supposed to be here." This happened all the time. People put in five days when they were only being paid for four because they were excited about what we were doing. We all were. Then the morale became so low after Block came on because no one ever knew whether he was going to be moved from what he was doing to something else for no reason that we could figure out. It seemed to be sort of a disruptive tactic, that's all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Can you explain that? Do you know why this happened?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, I think I can. I was told by more than one person that he was a member of the Communist Party and that he got his instructions from Communist Party headquarters from time to time, and I think it was just this matter of not letting anything work under the Capitalist system. I really believe that. I can't think of either Mrs. McMahon or Lou Block as someone who would deliberately make trouble except on a principle of that sort. I can't quite believe....

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It's very strange....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, I think so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I'm sure that you kept up your interest in the Index even after you left. Do you feel that that deterioration continued then until the end?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I do, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, that the real flowering of it was during the early part rather than the later part?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I should say 1936 was our great year. That was the happy year. We were all so busy that

we didn't have time to talk things over. We didn't have time to call supervisors staff meetings except for just strictly business and get it done as quickly as possible, but we all had so much to talk about, about the material of the Index that we used to meet.... I forget whether it was once a week or once every two weeks at somebody's house and it was always a picnic supper, you know, you bring things and we'd sit around all evening talking. Someone would say, "Well, I found the most wonderful antique shop. You know what they've got? Peter, you ought to go down there. They've got ironwork that you'd be interested in. They've got wood carvings. There is the most beautiful chest of drawers there." You know, this sort of thing. This was the place where we swapped ideas and kept track of each other, aside from the weekly reports (usually one page) that the special supervisors turned in to me on what they were doing, what they were finding, what the artists were doing. The artists were working more or less under the special supervisors who chose the pieces that the artists were to make renderings of, and the special supervisors did any research that was necessary. Got the information from the owner of the piece, or the museum, whatever.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know how many plates were done altogether?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I have no idea.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know that except for that book of Christensens that that's the only time any of this has been published except, I guess, there have been some smaller publications too, but there has never been a complete publication of the plates.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: That's right. That book of Christensens is more or less in line with Ruth Reeves' idea of the Index, just beautiful pictures. Oh yes, you throw in some information about what the objects are, but a miscellaneous collection; whereas we were from the very beginning aiming towards a series of portfolios--one on each subject that we were covering. In other words, you would have gathered from the entire United States a portfolio that gave you a pretty good notion of wood carving, of furniture, of costume, from the beginnings as far back as we could find the actual objects, up to the end of the 19th century. That was our object and I think you'll find again and again, in the papers that I'm giving you, references to the portfolios and some of the research that was being done by the research staff was towards these portfolios.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now, was everything coordinated in New York from all over the country?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, not in New York, in Washington.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: In Washington?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But, that was still the idea under which you operated--that this would be collected in one spot, as portfolios in these various categories?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. By the way, we were not permitted to go to the Washington office to see what was being done. I was coming through Washington one time. Mrs. McMahon was furious because I had stopped in to see somebody that I knew was in that office. We weren't invited to see what was being done or how the material was being kept or filed or anything like that. Mrs. McMahon ordered me never to have any contact whatsoever with the Washington office except through her. Whee...!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Pretty arbitrary, wasn't it?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh, yes! That's one reason why I felt that it would be impossible for me to appeal over Lou Block to Mrs. McMahon to Washington. It wouldn't work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. What was the final repository for all of this material?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I think the National Gallery.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Do you know whether or not that is available to the public now?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I must be. It's bound to be. You may recall that last year here in Santa Fe there were about a dozen renderings from the Index of American Design. I was delighted to see that two of them were from our unit.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where was that exhibited?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: At the Museum of International Folk Art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't know how I could have missed that, but I did.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: It was at the same time, I believe, as the Rockefeller collection of paintings and folk art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, maybe that was what threw me off. Because I've always been so interested in the work of the American Index of Design, and if I'd known about it, I certainly would have gone to see it. You said something before about the volunteers that came to help on this. These were aside from the ones that were actually a part of the paid staff, even though they put in more time than they were supposed to?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Our volunteers were unpaid but they were working as special supervisors, actually in special fields.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was wonderful.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: There was one woman, she was quite a collector of American furniture. So she made that her field and she helped our assistant project supervisor in charge of that section.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, and were these volunteers really helpful?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh! Mercy, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I'm sure she was, but in each case were they?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. There was another one who was going to write a book on silver, silversmiths, and she was so interested in the list that we were compiling from old New York City directories...she was not going to have any such list herself but she was so interested in the subject that she used to spend several days a week helping the man who was working for us steadily, doing other directories while he was working. Flowing straight through, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes. Tell us about Aline Bernstein, too, would you?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, she came on the project very early in 1935, very early would mean, let's say, November or December. At first, she was put on the payroll as a non-relief assistant project supervisor but this bored her--having to sign in and having to come on the proper day to sign her name on the payroll to get her check--so, she just resigned from the project and continued to work as a volunteer. You know, she was one of our outstanding stage designers and costume designers. Also a writer of great distinction. I once asked her why she didn't write more books because she wrote so beautifully. She said, "Heavens, one book takes me a year or two. I can design a stage set or costumes for a play in a few weeks and get paid 18 times as much."

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. I suppose that the work she did then for the project was in stage design?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, it was in costume. She knew every costume collection in New York City. She'd worked with all of them. She knew which were the beautiful ones, which were the typical ones, typical of a period. She was a great help in establishing that section of the Index. So that the one who took over after she left was able to carry on without a break.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many members were there on your research staff?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I'd have to look that up. I don't really remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many supervisors? Do you remember that? The number of supervisors you had? Or was that also part of the record?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. We had quite a few assistant project supervisors and, during the happy period, only two project supervisors--Frank Hiteshow and I.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You spoke about supervisors in the special categories--weren't there several of those?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: They were all assistant project supervisors. You want me to look that up?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, if it's in there, we can find it, but I thought just an approximate idea of how many there were would give a better picture of the scope.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: ...six, seven, eight, nine...there are nine at this period. This particular sheet isn't dated. I think nine or ten is about right. So, as you can see, since we were covering practically everything in the field of decorative and folk arts, we needed those volunteers that we had.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What were the main difficulties of the project aside from some of these personality problems?



PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I think our main difficulty in New York City was a fundamental split between our concept of the Index and the concept of the Index held by representatives from the Washington office, mainly Cook Glassgold and Mildred Holzauer. They, like Ruth Reeves, always looked upon the Index of American Design as a collection of beautiful renderings of what we consider beautiful today. Actually, what Cook Glassgold, Mildred Holzauer and Ruth Reeves thought was beautiful. We had one quarrel once. I remember words got quite heated because Helen McKearin who was one of the...by now, I think, because her father is dead, she is the authority on American Glass and one of the authorities on American Ceramics. She had had one of her artists do a superb rendering of a piece of Bennington pottery and Mildred Holzauer and Cook Glassgold were for throwing the thing out. They said it was ugly. She said, "This is a superb example of the taste of the period." At that time it was considered beautiful. You can't say that in the next decade it won't be considered beautiful again.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's true.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: "It's ugly!!! It's ugly," she said, "We don't want it." Now, you see this is fundamental.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Also, they were thinking in terms of miscellaneous collections of renderings, you know, here a figurehead, there a New Mexican santo, costume, you know. Whereas we were working towards portfolios in each subject.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I suppose a history of them, too?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Exactly, with a comprehensive introduction which would give the background and the history. Say glassmaking, silver, and so on. That's what we were working for. At one time also in 1936, Constance Rourke was on the Washington payroll as an overall editor. She came to New York and spent a great deal of time in our office, and her idea too was a series of portfolios with a historical introduction and something about the character of the objects. Well documented in chronological order, or some kind of order. In other words, an orderly publication of what we were doing. But after a few months she found that she had no authority. She had only the name of editor. So, she left. She decided that she was wasting her time. I'm afraid she was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What was Mrs. Pollak's position in this difference of opinion?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Oh, Mrs. Pollak was with us of course. This is one of the things I talked over with her again and again and again in her office.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: After you left, which policy was carried forward?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes? Ha ha ha!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It seems pretty obvious. Well, that's too bad that....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: It is. Of course we all of us knew that this was temporary. It would go on only so long as Congress gave us the funds, but I'll never forget the day somebody came back from lunch with an afternoon paper. Banner headline, the Supreme Court was considering the question of whether the WPA was constitutional or not. Whoever brought in this newspaper just held it up and we all looked up and burst out laughing. Because it was so funny. Here we were planning something that would take at least ten or fifteen years with all of us and a larger staff and more people all over the country, more than were employed on the Index of American Design at that time. It would take at least ten, fifteen, twenty-five years and we were planning this big, and here by tomorrow morning it might be unconstitutional and we'd be out of jobs. Ha ha ha! It just seemed to ironic.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I know all these alarms were constant during that period because I was involved in it too so I remember some. And I don't happen to remember that one. That might have been before I was involved in it myself.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I assume it was not declared unconstitutional.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, it wasn't. Ha ha!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Otherwise it wouldn't have gone on.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: But, it was still depending on Congress to appropriate enough money to keep us going and, while I was still working on the Index, Congress did cut the funds.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, the fact that the Index was one of the outstanding projects of the federal art projects if not of the entire WPA program, I would have hoped that it would have continued longer and even after the project was closed down. But, I guess it....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I guess the Ford Foundation grant started doing the sort of things they are doing now.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: But, you know, that fixed it, that sort of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it certainly was....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Let us, or people who were more capable than any of us, choose artists who could do those beautiful renderings, and go from place to place. Have all the material collected in one place and gone over carefully, and into portfolios. It's too bad.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Let's hope that somebody may still do it if the material is available, even if it is not in the organized state that you had hoped for the time you were working on it.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I'm still convinced that sooner or later it's going to be done, whether it will start from scratch, or start where we left off, I don't know. It doesn't much matter. But I think something is going to be done some way.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Just as long as it's done, that's the important thing. Well, who took over your work when you left?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Janet Rosenwald took over the research program. I'm not sure whether she got proper rerating at that time or not. I imagine not, because the whole atmosphere was different.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, as long as she lives here with you in Santa Fe, perhaps I can interview her too and find out something more about these trials and tribulations of the Index of American Design. It would be very interesting to continue that, so I'll make an appointment with her some day. When did you come to New Mexico?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, you see, I lived here with my then husband from 1928 to 1931. I had worked with the H. W. Wilson Company for four years, then came here, lived here three years, decided it was an unworkable marriage, so I sent a telegram to H. W. Wilson Company and the young woman who had taken my place there was just leaving, so I went back to the same old job. And I was homesick for twenty years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, for New Mexico? Well, I can understand that alright! Then you came back...?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I came back in 1951.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes. And what was the work you did after you came back?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I had no job. I still had that library school degree so I went to see the heads of all the libraries, even the law library, and it was the same story everywhere. No money, nobody has left, so there is no money. So in desperation we went to see Dorothy McKibbin who was in charge of the Santa Fe office of the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. I'd known her years before, so I asked her what I could do there. She said, "You wouldn't like it there. You'd have to live in a dormitory. You wouldn't like a dormitory." I said, "No, I wouldn't, but I need a job." She said, "Go and see Will Harrison, editor of the New Mexican." I said, "That's ridiculous, I never even had a course in journalism." She said to go and see him anyway. So, before I could change my mind and get cold feet I went around the corner to see Will Harrison. He asked me if I could read proof. I said, that I'd been reading proof since I was about ten years old. My father used to give me fifty cents if I could read proof on some of his law digests. Then I read proof in high school and in college on the papers and I'd been reading proof for eight years with the H. W. Wilson Company and then later when I worked as an editor with the Henry Holt and company and William Sloan Associated. So I said, "Yes, I can read proof." He said, "Well, if the budget can take you, after July 1. It might be June, I don't know." This was May. Fortunately I was staying with a friend who was willing to feed me until I could get a job. And two or three days later he called up and said, "Can you come to work tomorrow?" So, I read proof for a year and a half. Had my glasses changed three times on account of the baseball scores and the "legals." They are in very very fine print. No leading. I nearly went blind, so I started haunting libraries again and finally Mrs. Irene Pedi, head of the now State Library (but then State library Extension Service) called up one evening and said, "I have two openings." Two people offered their resignations, and I took 'em. So, I did two people's jobs.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I was just going to say that! And that's what you did until you retired, just recently?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. I was head of the Childrens and Young Peoples Division.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I knew that was the work you had, but it is interesting to know how you came by it. I know Santa Fe, from personal experience, is not the easiest place in the world to get a job of any kind.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: No, it isn't.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But if you love it enough, you put up with these odd kind of jobs in order to stay here.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Of course you do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What would you say were the reactions of the public to the WPA art projects in general?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I think my impression was that many people, especially those who opposed Roosevelt, of course, felt that the easel project was just pampering people who ought to go to work. And they weren't very sure about those murals. They didn't like them much, most of them, too modern. Ah...the graphic arts...well now, there you could see what a fella was trying to do, you know. And art teaching, they didn't know much about. That's the impression I got from the sort of people we dealt with, who were usually wealthy collectors. They thought the Index was marvelous.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that seems to have been a universal opinion. It seems to have been accepted.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: And the big museums were very very helpful because we did have enough people with attractive personalities to send in to make the contact and to keep the artists from crumpling up paper, throwing it on the floor, keep them from grinding their cigarettes on parquet floors, and that sort of thing. We had to be very careful in our public relations. I think, although it was rather rough in the first few weeks, the artists simply did not understand that they were not in a studio, but they got the idea and they were very very nice after that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What were the reactions of the artists themselves, or the research workers, or the ones that you came in closest contact with?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I think they were all pretty happy to be doing something useful and getting paid for it. They really felt it was useful. I had one research worker who had been a type designer. He was in his sixties. When he came in to try to get off the relief rolls and onto our project, he had a limp and he was deaf in one ear. After a week or so on the project, he came bounding in one day and he said, "You know, I discovered that my limp and my deafness were non-occupational diseases. Now, they are gone," and one said, "I'm having a wonderful time. As a matter of fact I'm making my debut at Metropolitan this week." I said, "What are you singing?" He said, "I'm the next to the last spear carrier." Ha ha ha!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, he did make strides, didn't he?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, he did. I met him several years later on the street and he was still...he was employed somewhere because he looked prosperous. He was relaxed. Oh, this happened to so many people. They had gone through such hard times. I remember one woman on the project who always looked very neat, very well groomed, absolutely spotless white blouse, giddy little red hat. You know, she went home every night and washed and ironed that blouse. It was the only one she had. She was one of our most valuable people on the research staff. Of course, after she'd been on the project a while, she started to buy some new clothes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, there is that spirit certainly among a great many of them. I notice that, in New Mexico, of the artists I've interviewed were almost unanimously grateful for this opportunity to go on with their work and not have to dig ditches or something of that sort in order to survive. But, in New York, I remember even though there was initial gratitude for this opportunity that then the demands of some of the employees became so great that it was almost as though they were....

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: The world owed them something.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. The world owed them something, rather than gratitude...has changed to a completely different attitude which I never was quite able to understand. But, I suppose there was some difficulty, some bad administration in some instances, and that they weren't allowed or qualified to do the work that they wanted to. Then also some of the turmoil of the left wing elements that stirred it up, even though it might not have been there otherwise.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I'll tell you one thing that happened practically throughout out project. All of a sudden all of us talked about it and began more or less collecting...we'd run across each other at antique shows from then on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, it started you as a collector?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes, and of the kind of things that we were making renderings of in the Index.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. You learn to appreciate them.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that how you got "The Peaceable World?" (Kingdom)

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Yes. That was one of the finest antique dealers in the whole region; Freehold, New Jersey.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: I have several pieces from her shop, because we used to go back there again and again. She always, always found things. It was interesting. She had great feeling for it, the primitive.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Are there any other comments that you'd like to make? We have about five more minutes on our tape.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Good heavens!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: About this exciting period in your life which I'm sure was...?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Well, I do remember when Congress cut the funds for the WPA and we got our orders from Mrs. McMahon to cut our staffs by such and such a percentage. There was a great to-do with the supervisors association. Some supervisors said, "I will not do it." I don't blame those supervisors because they were easel, mural, graphic arts, and it meant throwing out someone who was doing his own kind of work. But, we had a program and our orders were, "You cut your staff. You indicate which ones are to be dropped, or it will be done for you." Well, no one except our own staff would know who was valuable to us and who was not. We did have for a time some who were not particularly valuable. There was one young woman; she was supposed to be an artist, but she preferred to stay in the office rather than go to the museums and wouldn't take any direction. She always felt that she was being imposed upon. You know, really a psychopath, I think. She would go to the telephone, sometimes my desk or sometimes on Frank Hiteshew or somebody else's, pick it up and call Washington.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh! Well!

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: You simply had to use a little force to take it away from her and tell if she wanted to call Washington she would have to clear it through the Washington office. She'd have to clear the call through Mrs. McMahon. She was perfectly free to go to Mrs. McMahon and ask permission. So, I think she was finally fired. She was just too much trouble. Then there was another one who was a real one. We got her on the Index because she had thrown *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler at either Harry Knight or Carl Trainum. I forget which. So, she was regarded as difficult. We got all the difficult people.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. I thought I did when I was a supervisor.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Ha ha ha! Some of them were too difficult for some of the other projects, they always gave 'em to us. Well, we finally discovered that her brother was a very wealthy psychiatrist on Park Avenue who didn't wish to have anything to do with his sister. She had no right to be on the relief rolls than I have. So, naturally this was perjury, in her case.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: There were lots of strange personalities in those days.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Very strange. Ha ha ha!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: There was still a great deal accomplished in spite of all this...?

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Absolutely! The enthusiasm with which people work on a job that they feel is worth doing--this is not just working for a living--this is worth doing; that's the exciting thing. Several of us were talking one day and said that, in spite of the fact that we might be discontinued any moment, we all felt more secure than we ever had on any job in all our lives because we knew we wanted to stay with it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's a wonderful attitude.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: You know, so often on a job, you feel, well, I rather wish something else would turn up, or go out and look for something else. Not enough stimulation, I'm not getting enough out of this. I'm not able to give enough to it. But then we felt that everything we'd ever learned, ever known, came into play.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, we seem to be almost at the end of the tape so I'll thank you, Phyllis, for this very interesting and valuable interview and also for the documents that you say you are willing to give to the Archives of American Art as a permanent repository for this story of your participation in the Index of American design in New York.

PHYLLIS CRAWFORD: Some of those so-called documents are rather personal. They refer to me and my tenure but somebody might find them illuminating.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Very. Well, thank you again.

END OF INTERVIEW

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