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Oral history interview with Wellington Groves, 1965 Apr. 23

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Wellington Groves on April 23, 1965. The interview took place at an unknown location, and was conducted by Dorothy K. Bestor 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. 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

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Inaudible.] Now it's on. And you might just say anything at all to see—

WELLINGTON GROVES: All right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —how the sound level is. And then we can play it back for—

WELLINGTON GROVES: All right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —a minute and then go on.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I can perhaps read a paragraph here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, fine.

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Reads from text.] And so far, he had been unable to obtain information about these paintings. No one is talking, he reports.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you want to say just one or two more things?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. [Reads from text.] A couple of years ago, someone discovered a roll of dusty maps which turned out to be sketches for murals for government buildings.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: There. Now we're set up to record.

WELLINGTON GROVES: All right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And would you like to start out, Mr. Groves, by telling me what you had done before you had any connection with the Project? What had your training and experience as an artist been?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, I had been working in a national advertising agency as a commercial artist.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And—until the Depression came. And of course, advertising art was one of the last things to more or less collapse.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I got into the Project later, of course. It had already started Mm-hmm [affirmative]. when I joined the Project. And I joined it as an artist, however I didn't actually put in much time as an artist. Mr. Inverarity seemed to feel that he needed more of somebody in more of a supervisory capacity.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And eventually, the way it worked out, I handled pretty much the WPA on the local level as far as the artists were concerned. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Mr. Inverarity on a state level.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And so, as far as my own personal production was concerned, mm-hmm [affirmative]. it was almost nil.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But—

WELLINGTON GROVES: It was mostly supervisory.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —before we get to what you did in the supervisory capacity, what was your own personal participation as an artist? Did you do—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mostly—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —oils, watercolors, easel paintings?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yeah, yes. But—well, that's right. But that's the Sunday painter route for a commercial artist.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And it was mostly illustrative drawings—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: —and the type of things the Agency uses.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And so that I rather looked forward to a time when I could develop a little bit more of the other facets, you might say.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. And then when did you become connected with the Project?

WELLINGTON GROVES: You mean what year?

DOROTHY BESTOR: What year?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I'm afraid I can't really recall. It was—it must have been sometime in the '30s.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Perhaps 1936 or so?

WELLINGTON GROVES: It—well it may have been earlier than that. It may have been around '34 or '[3]5. I would have to—there would—there must be some other way of checking—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —this more accurately for you.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. We have a lot of the files and correspondence in the University of Washington library. And I can—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —look it up—

WELLINGTON GROVES: You could check—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —there.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, when you got—well, how did you come to be connected with it? Did you apply? Or—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh, I applied.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —were you chosen—

WELLINGTON GROVES: No—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —in a competition?

WELLINGTON GROVES: —no, this was a case of my applying.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. To whom?

WELLINGTON GROVES: It's a case of—I applied to Mr. Inverarity.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what did you do in the local office? Did you supervise the hiring of people for the Bailey-Gatzert School studio? Or did you supervise the work—

WELLINGTON GROVES: It was—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —every day or what?

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: Production. No, I did not—I wasn't concerned at all with the personnel in that respect. But it was only various projects to supervise and to aid, and to many times aid them in their design. Of course, I did have this developed. It was a commercial developed—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —design sense, you might say.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And wherever that was applicable.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What do you think the most successful work turned out by the Project at that time was?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, we had so many different things going on and then it developed—it rather stepped up and developed further. At one time, for instance, we had a number of women doing hook rugs.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And we had a rather wonderful designer, quite creative. An Indian by the name of Twohy.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, Julius Twohy.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes, who would design these various rugs. And they were used in ski lodges.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And then some of those ski lodge projects were really quite extensive, and were quite exciting.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Hm. Which lodges? Do you remember where—

WELLINGTON GROVES: The one I believe—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —they were?

WELLINGTON GROVES: —that the one that is in Oregon. It's the one up near Mt. Hood and I can't
—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. Klamath Falls?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I can't recall. It's one of the largest up in there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

[00:05:07]

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think I heard, too, one of them that burned down, and all of these products went into these public use organizations. And we designed—we had a carpenter shop that was rather extensive and some very good craftsman. We designed such things as the bunks for the lodge.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And we had wood-carvers that would carve such things as animal tracks on the lockers and so forth. And we—in fact, it was quite an extensive design project. It took a good deal of varied talents, and was quite good. And we worked with University of Washington, with Dr. Gunther. And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, did you? I'm going to see her—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —again this afternoon.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. And we did dioramas for her. And we had sculptors and wood-carvers and worked in these various techniques.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You supervised on those Indian dioramas that she—

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right. Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —planned?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And then of course, we had this—oh, what was it called? Index of American Design.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And we were able to obtain Indian artifacts from her, which we reproduced very carefully. As well as the usual, you know, piggy banks and so forth and the antiques that are around a city like this.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What did you think of the Index of American Design? Some people admire it very much and some people I've interviewed say that people took such a long time doing each one—two weeks on the Project doing an illustration of a key or bank or a—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, I—no. I believe that it should have taken two weeks because actually the wage which was paid, which was minimal, naturally, it made these plates very, very inexpensive. And much of this stuff will go out of existence—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —be lost and destroyed and I think they have a very valuable collection in Washington, D.C. And some of these plates were very beautiful. Some of them I supervised and—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I know they were.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And some of these people had a wonderful sensitivity for color and texture and reproduced these just the way they were. And these plates, of course, came in from all over America.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think it's completely invaluable.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And then of course, there were other projects that we did, such as the entrance to the tunnel or—that short tunnel, you know, that comes off from—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —Lake Washington Bridge?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Fitzgerald did the bas reliefs, did he not?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I think it was Fitzgerald, I can't recall now. And they were done in clay, of course. And then reproduced very large and cast in stone.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And put in place. And there were murals which we did for high schools and various other places. Another thing that is rather good about the WPA is that it almost—it almost created, you might say, an art renaissance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Because there were traveling exhibits. There were studios where people could study.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: We would get out all sorts of little monoliths, little brochures, and so forth, on lectures. We designed them and it contributed to the traveling lecture pattern of having prints and etchings and book mobiles so that people could take them out like they would a book.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And enjoy them in their home.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Were they well attended out here, the book mobiles?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Very well attended.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did any of those go around Seattle itself? Or were they throughout the state in the rural regions?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mostly throughout the state in the rural regions. There were so many projects that I felt were quite significant. Another thing that it did, it gave the artist, the individual, an opportunity to develop.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: A man like Graves, for instance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: He did literally hundreds of yards of canvas, which were given to him, as well as all of his oils. And it gave him an opportunity to develop. And this, I think, was true of so many people and that's why so many good people came out of the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Tobey was connected with it for a while?

WELLINGTON GROVES: He was—yes, earlier. Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right. I think he was connected as an instructor. I'm not too sure.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I believe he did do some cartoons for murals.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, oh, yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And some paintings.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I do recall now, he did do that. That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And in one case, I believe the mural never got made from the finished cartoon he did [inaudible]—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, this could be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —various confusions and frictions.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh, yes. This could be. These things happened because it was a big organization actually.

DOROTHY BESTOR: About how large was it when you were—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, let me—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —in it?

WELLINGTON GROVES: —see. I think we did have 35 women just doing nothing but hook rugs for ski lodges, for instance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: As many as that?

WELLINGTON GROVES: And then we had all of the artists in town—that is the fine artists—because at that time it was not, there was no way of making a living in any commercial field.

[00:10:02]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this gave them that free time to develop. And out of—that's why out of the—clear across America came so many fine people.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: But any organization of that nature, which is—starts from almost nothing but chaos, is going to have a certain amount of irritation and frustration—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Surely.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —disruption, you know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Surely.

WELLINGTON GROVES: The usual thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. You don't think then that this had any more—

WELLINGTON GROVES: No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —than in any other—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, no.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —place—

WELLINGTON GROVES: No, because I was in—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —or any similar—

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —organization.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Because I was in a position where I had to make reports. I had to contact other areas.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And it gave me a basis of comparison. And actually, I think we ran as smoothly as any of them. I think—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —you just can't avoid friction.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Well that's interesting to hear. Some people look at greener pastures and say, well, we got sort of fouled up here, but in Spokane it was wonderful and in Portland it was wonderful—

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: —and look at all they did in California—

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: —but we never get off the ground here.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: But you don't feel that way?

WELLINGTON GROVES: No, I don't at all.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I think that it's relative to the population, and to the people that you have. And another thing that you always have to remember, that the artist is pretty subjective.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, he—

WELLINGTON GROVES: And he's going to take affront over things in a personal way, where if you look at it as an overall thing for a group of people and—which contributed to the development of that group of people, it isn't really a bad picture.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What do you remember, if anything, about the incidents in which the WPA and the PWA and other project works of art that were extra or that didn't fit were destroyed when they, when the Project moved? There was a great bonfire in Seattle, which this clipping mentions, and which some of the artists remember with horror and some with amusement.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, we sent—normally, we sent everything into Washington, D.C. and let them build the bonfire. [They laugh.] Because all work can't be good.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

WELLINGTON GROVES: They know that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And there wouldn't be enough buildings in Washington, D.C. to store it.

And so naturally, it was handled in Washington, D.C. on a selected basis, I'm sure. And out here, there was some pieces of work which we did not feel did justice to the individual artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think that the individual artist, if you looked at it objectively and started going over his own work, that there would be certain pieces of work that he would rather not have let out.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Definitely.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I mean, I've burned some of mine this weekend, digging through our basement.

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs]. You know what I mean.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I was not there when the Project ended. I had gone into war work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I do know that, naturally, these things have to come to an end. And I don't know just exactly what happened to the work. I know that some of it did wind up, I think, in the Goodwill, or some such place.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Some of it went to Saint Vincent's de Paul, I've heard.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Or Saint Vincent de Paul, I believe.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I saw some of it down there one time when I was prowling around.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Was it good?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I didn't buy any of it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, now that's—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Let's put it that way. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's another side of the story. I heard that priceless treasures of Callahan, Tobey—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —Graves, Cumming, were down there selling for five dollars.

WELLINGTON GROVES: These things are always relative. When you consider what happened to Graves, I dare say that, like Picasso, he could scribble on the back of an envelope, and it would be useful [ph] today.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Marketable [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Of course, nobody knew this, and they were watching the individual develop and trying to aid him to develop. And I'm certain that Graves himself—some of the stuff was really pretty bad. I mean, no artist turns out 100 percent.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No.

WELLINGTON GROVES: It's impossible.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Certainly is.

[Phones rings.]

WELLINGTON GROVES: I'm sorry.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now we're recording again. You were talking about the end of the Project and the—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes, that's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —destruction of some of the—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. And then—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —works of art.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And as far as Bruce is concerned, I feel that he did a—he did a good job. There were times, I'm sure, when his—in his eagerness to get things done, he probably overstressed disciplines. And—but I mean, he had this objective of making the thing function on a state-wide—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —basis. And the writers that he had on the Project were quite busy doing research and writing material to go along with traveling exhibits.

[00:15:01]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I have heard that he had—not he, but in the situation, there were difficulties, sometimes, in getting murals painted and installed because he would have the artist who had the plans for the murals, but the organization, or the school, or whatever public building where the mural was to be was supposed to put up the money for the supplies and they couldn't always find it. Did that happen often?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh, yes. This happened, of course, because no one had any money, if you remember. And people wanted the work. And they tried to finance it the best they could. And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: All right. A slight hum, I guess I'll turn it down on its side again. That's fine.

WELLINGTON GROVES: But as you can understand, in this type of a thing, you had various groups, various factions that were against the whole pattern of the WPA. You had artists who were quite reactionary.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I was wondering about the political slant of the reception of the Project here. Was enthusiasm for the Project pretty much on party lines in support of FDR or disapproval of him? Or—

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —was it objective?

WELLINGTON GROVES: No. And something like that cannot be completely objective. You had people who knew what the Project was doing and they were very interested and very enthusiastic.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Regardless of—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —of their FDR feelings?

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: But you had this natural political prejudice. And Holger Cahill, I believe headed it up in Washington, D.C.—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —and he was out here and he paid us a visit. And appraised the Project and found that it was good to his satisfaction. And you always had—you had such strange problems. I remember we had one charming little old lady who was emotionally disturbed, and she couldn't work with people. I mean you had problems—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —like this. And so we put her on a project of—and she painted beautifully—working with Dr. Gunther painting innumerable plates—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —of western Washington wildflowers and all of the particular types of shrubbery and, you know, flora that we have up here. And these are exquisite. And there's—oh, there must be several hundred plates. We just placed her in the university, and she worked there alone.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And they would bring her these shrubs and she would work on them. And these are invaluable, and they're beautifully done. So, I mean, you were always confronted with this emotional situation—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —various people—and how do you get the most out of them and how do you place them where the working conditions are best?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Were you the person—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Artists are different—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —who—oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —in that respect.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, indeed. Were you the person who decided where to place them pretty much?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, yes. I mean, many times it was up to me to try to make an appraisal of these people, and to try to assign them to projects, which I never did, however, without conferring with Mr. Inverarity so that we were agreed—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —something would be a good plan. And some artists had never learned to work with people. And many of those people, we would put them out on projects where they would be kind of freewheeling, but they were required to bring in so many paintings—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —a week.

DOROTHY BESTOR: On remote control—

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this worked. That's what they called it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —the phrase—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Remote control.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —seems to have been.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. Uh-huh [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this worked very fine—

DOROTHY BESTOR: That worked better.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —for those people.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: For that type of person. For other people, who were naturally, oh, much more gregarious and they could work in studios and work under those circumstances.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And see, another one—another project that we did—that we started were these big markers on the highways.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, yes. They're very—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yeah. Where the designs are created and routed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And the branding iron burning in the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: A great many projects. Many of them I have forgotten. But it was a continuing—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —and quite a vigorous thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: There's lots of reference in the correspondence to the highway markers. And to the state park work that was done. And then you made—not you, but the Project had people making a relief map for City Light [Company], didn't you? Or a relief map of Seattle?

WELLINGTON GROVES: It started—

DOROTHY BESTOR: How did that work out?

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right. And this was quite an interesting project. This started with a relief map, that's true, for the city. And then the military became interested.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: You see, the world was growing quite warm.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And so we were—they were sending airplanes up into remote parts of Alaska and among the islands and taking stereopticon views—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: —which they would give to us. And from these stereopticon views we would build relief maps—

[00:20:10]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —for the use of the military.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: So this became quite an extensive project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. Could it be true that one relief map for City Light cost \$10,000?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't see how it could.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I doubt it. I don't know where that cost would have been. Certainly not in materials and in wages, I can't conceive of that because usually only one or two people would be working on it, but they would be putting in full time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And—I don't know. I think this—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —this would have to be looked into.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I can't find any evidence of it in the correspondence, but this is one of the colorful tales [Wellington Groves laughs] that was told. In fact—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: —that a relief map of Seattle, done for City Light, and done in contours and with all sorts of elaborate technical details and running water and illumination and whatnot, covered over with a glass case—a huge thing—cost \$10,000 and then was found not to work because with a glass case over it, the running water inside steamed everything up—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Steamed everything—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —so it got moldy. [They laugh.]

WELLINGTON GROVES: That is a—that—I do now recall this project. This was done before I was there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this was not in the nature of these other big table relief maps that we did.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

WELLINGTON GROVES: That was a miniature, as I recall it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think that that was on display in City Lights—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —for a number of years. That could be looked into.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. See whether City Light knows—

WELLINGTON GROVES: But I think there was the falls and the dam and this sort of thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I could conceive that this could create, you know, a little moisture problem there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Well, in the memory of some it created a bad—

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs]. [Inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: —moisture problem, and a bad snafu.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well you—of course, I think that in any project—any project of this nature, which is starting from scratch and has no precedent, I think there are going to be lots of errors.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: There are bound to be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think that the thing has to be viewed in its overall pattern to see if there was any significance or anything that really came out of it was good.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think that this is pretty well acknowledged.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And you think that the main significance was for the growth of the individual artist and for the almost renaissance of American art, or—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes, definitely. Definitely. Because out of this came a great many very fine illustrators who eventually went back into commercial art—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —and illustrating. And many fine painters. And I think that this where there was a great contribution. I don't know what would have happened if these people hadn't been sponsored at that time. Because so many of them were young enough, they were in their developmental stages.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Some of them have admitted they hardly could have gone on in art at all—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I'm sure.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —without these two or three years of support. You say it almost created a renaissance in American art. Of course, some people think it really did. E. P. Richardson, in his history, says that it stemmed the tide of French influence in art and really got people looking around at American painters and American scenes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I think so. It is almost like a continuation of this particular group, you remember. What did they call them? The Garbage Can painters? You remember?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, the Ashcan School.

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs]. Ashcan. [Laughs]. Yes. And I really believe that that is true, because naturally the things that were painted were the local scenes in every instance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And that's where the renaissance started, we might say, if we can call it that, because the war came and lots of things intervened. People—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, indeed.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —again lost interest, you see, for a good many years. But at that particular time, there were all of these exhibits, there were these classes where people could attend. There was an art consciousness that developed everywhere. And the decorating of public buildings. And this was good and healthy, I think.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I think it was too. You—speaking of classes, now, in Seattle itself, there were not any classes, is that correct?

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Because—what was the reason for that?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mainly because—well, now, let me see. It seems—it does run in my mind that there were two or three classes. But mostly because the artists were the ones in need. And there were quite a group of artists here. And they were being employed on the Project—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: —doing these things. But in other areas like Spokane or [inaudible] Centralia—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —in these little outlying places, where maybe there would only be three or four artists, you might say, that needed employment, you could employ them by putting them into a studio and having them instruct the townspeople, you see.

[00:25:04]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: So that it made it a natural way of keeping those people occupied as well as creating interest within the town.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It wasn't then because you weren't supposed to have classes in places where you'd be in competition with established schools? That's what some people think, but—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: May just—

WELLINGTON GROVES: What the established schools were there—

DOROTHY BESTOR: May just have been—

WELLINGTON GROVES: —here?

DOROTHY BESTOR: —one of the myths that grew out.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yeah, well, that's it. I mean, what established schools were there during the Depression? And who could afford to go to them?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, that's a good point. Of course, there was the University of Washington Art School, and I presume—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Which was way down as far as people being able to afford to send their children there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

WELLINGTON GROVES: So that there wasn't any competition. I think that, no. I believe, though, this would have been correct—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —not to compete.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. There was the Cornish School, of course, was that in a—

WELLINGTON GROVES: It was weak—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —good state of health at that time?

WELLINGTON GROVES: No, nothing was. It was limping along like everything else. As a matter of fact, I think that's when it took one of its nosedives—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —during that particular period. And it's had that type of career, though it's a very substantial school now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I hear it is.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. And no, everyone was having trouble. And it was hard enough to get enough to eat, so that they didn't have the—even though they might desire to go to classes—if the classes had been free, I'm sure that people would have gone. But our first interest was to take care of those people who were artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Well that certainly seems reasonable. And it's certainly true that the amounts of money that were involved in the correspondence about the Project seem so small today, it just seems amazing that all you people had to spend so much of your good time writing back and forth about sending six brushes to Spokane—

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs.] Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —or two sheets of watercolor paper from one place to another for Vanessa Heller [ph] to use, and one box of pencils from one place to another. Why, really, there are reports in triplicate about things like that. That just running through the—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. But—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —correspondence, it's amazing you got anything done.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —every time you have a bureaucratic sponsorship, you make 15 copies.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I know. I know.

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs.] I mean, this is one of the [laughs]—

DOROTHY BESTOR: But these are such pathetically small—

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —amounts of supplies, and—

WELLINGTON GROVES: And yet no one had any money.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. And there was a great controversy I saw in one place about whether students in a crafts class sponsored by the Project would be allowed to contribute a dollar a piece during the course, because if so, the Project could buy some welding tool that it badly needed. Well there was so much discussion about whether it was against the rules for the students to contribute this voluntarily, which they wanted to do.

WELLINGTON GROVES: I know. You should have seen the volume that came out of Washington, D.C. It was larger than the average phonebook. And these were all rules and regulations. And you abided by them, believe me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I've seen some of them—

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: —they're on file, mimeographed directives in the library.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Because—that's right. But here again you have to look at it, I think, in a more—in a broader view. And that is Washington, D.C. had thousands—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —of Projects.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

WELLINGTON GROVES: They had to write their rules to take care of everybody.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And, again, there can always be minuscule injustices done—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —to us.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You don't think they could have simplified things just by leaving a little bit more up to the individual judgment in the regions?

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh, they could have. Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly. And if such a thing ever has to come to be again, I hope that they can benefit by what happened in the past.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. You say if it ever has to come into being again. Of course, as this clipping and other articles indicate, there's a possibility that there—well, it's been suggested that in the Appalachia War on Poverty Project—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —there'll be an Artist Relief Project.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, yes, that's right. What I meant is that if it ever comes into existence again, I was thinking of the national—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —catastrophe—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —of a deep depression, which naturally we hope not to see.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I should say so.

WELLINGTON GROVES: But I do think that this is going to happen in local areas.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think that then it can be administered so that the artist himself doesn't feel the great frustration that he invariably would feel.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this is understandable.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What would be your suggestions? I won't keep you very much longer, but what would be your suggestions if a Project were to evolve again?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I don't know, because my suggestions would be completely from a local level and I think that to be thoroughly constructive, it's got to be an overall view.

So that you could take an average of what is—what works and what is functioning.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:30:06]

WELLINGTON GROVES: And this becomes a pretty high-level administrative decision. Sure, I was perhaps as frustrated as anyone, and I would have these people, and I knew how eager they were to get at things, and that it was almost impossible to get materials to them. And I was writing panic letters like everyone else.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: These—but that's what I say, it was a local situation, which probably was

magnified, you know, many, many thousands—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —of times across the nation. And—but I do think that this is a kind of an appraisal.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: It must be objective and nationwide—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —to really function.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Right. Did you happen to have a chance to visit any of the other Projects—

WELLINGTON GROVES: No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Such as in Spokane or in California, or Portland?

WELLINGTON GROVES: No, I didn't. However, I was in direct communication with them, and we would receive some of the traveling exhibits, which were very good. And I remember one project, which I became interested in—though, we never did get an exhibit out here of this. And this was wood carving for blind children.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, yes, I read about that.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes. And this was a very intriguing idea. You know, where, by touch, they were able to explore all these forms and shapes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did they go very far with that? Was it successful?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I don't know. I don't know. Because I never got to the point where we were talking about [bell rings] an exhibit coming out, which I would like to have seen.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Well, I hear a bell. You probably want to get in and look at your—

WELLINGTON GROVES: Oh that's nothing, it's just—yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —[inaudible] work. But if you have a few more minutes, is there anything else you'd like to get on a record about the Project? Or about what the quality of experience of working or being connected—

WELLINGTON GROVES: No, I do think—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —with this was?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I do think this, that perhaps—though, I can't see how one could— that because of the time—at a time when, you know, economic emergency, you have an entirely different situation. But as there could be a little more careful screening, let's say of people aside from their artistic ability. I mean, their political inclinations

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's very good.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —all of these things. That—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Perhaps they could screen them somewhat as they do the Peace Corps applicants now. Not quite as rigorously, perhaps, but—

WELLINGTON GROVES: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —general, overall screening.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes, that's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And of course, today, we do have counseling services. And we have psychologists, psychiatrists, that sort of thing attached to—in fact, we have them here at school.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And so that these people are really quite carefully screened, you, see? In other words, there should be prerequisites aside from just their talents and their ability. Because I think one of the things that you are trying to do in a project like that is to rehabilitate people so that when there is an economic upturn, they are able to work with people and to fit in with the rest of society.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: I believe that's important.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, then you think the project should be sort of paternalistic.

WELLINGTON GROVES: If it has to be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I think at that time, it had to be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's a very good point no one else has made, that particular point.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yeah. And it was, to me, it was a very exciting time; things were going on. And I can see these people develop. And it was a delightful experience, as far as I'm concerned.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Who are the ones whose development you think was the greatest?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I would say—well, if we consider their—are you talking about their development while on the Project, or are you talking about their future success?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, on the Project at the moment is what I'm talking about.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Well, almost any one of them. These people worked hard.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: They weren't loafers. And if you give them a project that interests them, they will put in many, many hours. And so, that they developed quite readily, every one of them. And—but from a success standpoint, of course—because there are lots of factors in that type of success—I would say perhaps Graves because he has become internationally famous.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Many of the other people are perfectly excellent. I've lost track of them. Hannes Bok became an illustrator in the East and is a rather charming, whimsical boy with a wonderful imagination. He was able to develop that. Ran [Ransom] Patrick, a perfectly—rehabilitation there. He went on and got a doctor's degree and became head of an art department. All of these people, almost in relation to their personalities, have developed, you see.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: Some of them have become famous—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: —because their drive is such that they did the right things at the right time. [Dorothy Bestor laughs.] Exhibited in the right place at the right times.

[00:35:01]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And Mark Tobey, of course, as we know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

WELLINGTON GROVES: So—and Mark at that time was doing very wonderful and charming things in the public market, you know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And he was an inspiring person to have around for the others. And a lot of these people, they work together, they lean together. They had their little coffee cakes, you know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And a lot of good came out of these discussions, a lot of wild discussions, you know. And where a lot of people were rundown during the discussions. But at the same time, this was good. People got together, and they talked, and they developed. And I look at it as a healthy thing. Sure, you can always take certain isolated instances, and you find they're attached to the personal frustrations of one person or another.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

WELLINGTON GROVES: But I don't know. I feel that it was a successful Project among the many, many projects, and some of them weren't too successful. I'm talking about the whole WPA.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, right.

WELLINGTON GROVES: And I'm sure that it was just as successful in other areas. And the administrator had a big problem, per se, like Bruce.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

WELLINGTON GROVES: A very big problem.

DOROTHY BESTOR: This was his first administrative job, wasn't it?

WELLINGTON GROVES: I think so. I think so. And as I say, in his eagerness to make the thing function and to place disciplines on people to get out the certain amount of required work, I'm sure that he could be considered over-severe at times.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WELLINGTON GROVES: And it seems to me that sometimes [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I should think it would be.

WELLINGTON GROVES: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, thank you very much.

WELLINGTON GROVES: [Laughs.] You're welcome.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Was there anything else you want to get on the record?

WELLINGTON GROVES: May be a little different version than you've heard normally [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it's a very, very exciting version. [Wellington Groves laughs.]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]