Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with William Gaskin, 1964 Feb. 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with William Gaskin on February 28, 1964. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Lewis Ferbraché 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

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Recording February 28, 1964, with Mr. William Gaskin, G-A-S-K-I-N, at the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Art. [Recorder stops, restarts.] This was my fault, the time.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Oh. Now we're trying again?

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: We'll try again.

WILLIAM GASKIN: I was born in San Francisco. My early education in art was, perhaps the first formal education was at the San Francisco Institute of Art.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: We'll try that. [Recorder stops, restarts.] You were speaking of your art education, Mr. Gaskin?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. My art education has been, perhaps, rather an informal one, until I entered the San Francisco Institute of Art and there studied principally drawing and painting. About this time, the fair, the 1915 fair, was opened in San Francisco, which was the first opportunity artists had here to see any work outside of the local group of artists. For instance, by that, I mean that—for instance, the first Cézanne was shown at the fair.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: This was the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, the Panama-Pacific Exposition. And we spent—the younger artists spent a great deal of time there. And much of the interest was centered in the—not so much in the main art center, or rather, art galleries at the house of fine arts, but rather in the annex, and in the buildings of the foreign nations, such as the French building, in which was shown a painting by Paul Cézanne. We artists had not heard of this painter at this time. So it gave us the first inkling as to what was going on outside our own environment.

The painters—San Francisco at that time had some fairly competent painters who had—some few had gone to Europe and were under either the influence of Whistler or Manet, and so, we knew nothing of Cézanne or any of the great contemporary artists of the late 19th century.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you remember seeing the Italian futurists exhibition there, also?

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, I don't remember definitely the Italian futurists, because they came—I doubt if they were shown—[Cross talk.]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: They were.

WILLIAM GASKIN: —until after 1915.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Sorry. It was in the catalogue of the fair.

WILLIAM GASKIN: It may be, if they did—no one saw futurism at all because we were hardly aware of what they [inaudible]—we were hardly aware of the great movements, even though the Armory Show was started in 1913, you see. There are a great many things in the annex which were not in the main pavilions. And if the futurists were on exhibit, they would be in that department, and very likely we did see them but were not carried away, you see, because everything was very new to us.

I think, after leaving the fair, after the fair was over, in regard to my own work, I preferred to study with individual painters, and then I moved to Monterey. And there I studied with some of the—not only as a student, but as an associate, with such people as Armin Hansen and E. Charlton Fortune and other painters of note who came through. Even such remote painters, who seem so remote to us now as Chase, William Chase, actually passed through at that time. This will give you an idea—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: He had an art school in Carmel, I believe, in 1914.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, he was in Carmel at that time. And so we had that sort of contact. But I think most of us were pretty much working alone, maybe slightly under the influence of beloved painters, such as Hansen and so forth.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's H-A-N-S-E-N?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, Hansen.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: When you come to last names, if you could spell them out for the typists and [inaudible]—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, I will. Yes. Hansen, Armin Hansen.

[00:05:02]

That's A-R-M-I-N, Hansen, H-A-N-S-E-N. Hansen was, at that time—we might title him a marine painter. And so, we were a group of artists really living in that locality. Other painters from San Francisco would come down frequently, and so we were living in a sort of an isolated world, but working together. And among the people who worked from there were C. S. Price— that's P-R-I-C-E—who finally went back to Portland and, I believe, passed away there. But he did receive a certain amount of recognition.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: One of the first of the Impressionists on the Coast, I believe.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, breaking away from the work that we were doing. Price himself is interesting, because he was a cowboy, of all things. A cowboy painter, if you like. He had a sort of—in the very early days, he worked in Montana as a practicing cowboy, long before the popular idea of what a cowboy would be. And he was picked up and helped and offered an opportunity by some patron of his to send him to Paris, if he wished to study, and he said no, and finally came to California, and was rather an individualist who painted—pretty much, you might say, a self-taught painter. And I'm mentioning these people because I suppose the people you work with have some influence on your work, you know?

Well, anyway, this small group working, then of course, the war came on, the first war, and I left myself, and went on and was stationed in Lyon. At that time, I became greatly interested in the theater revival. In other words, it was the first—it was the period in which Robert Edmond Jones was coming to the fore as a stage designer, and there was a great interest in new scenic effects in the theater. And I was quite carried away with this, because I had an opportunity to see these plays first-hand, and was quite thrilled with seeing such plays as *The Jest* and the *Redemption* with Barrymore, and with the sets by Robert Edmond Jones. I mention this because you'll see later how this changed my way of thinking.

And coming after the war, I returned to California, and, in order to get established work for a number of years, I was forced to work for an advertising firm, Foster & Kleiser, as an advertising artist, in the field posters. And there, of course, I met some of the artists who became—and worked with them—who became nationally known, such people as Harold von Schmidt, at that time was a great California painter, Maynard Dixon, and Shepherd [ph], who became head man for the Wrigley corporation as a designer, and so forth. So, anyway, my life is always with artists in different fields.

But the theater began to interest me a great deal, and I decided to leave the force the Foster & Kleiser, and go back again to Monterey, where they were building, for the first time, a—what we'd call a little theater. And Mr. Kuster, who at that time had some money available, and he built a small theater called the Theatre of the Golden Bough, which was one of the first experimental theaters in the Little Theatre Movement. And he'd brought with him at that time Maurice Browne, who was supposed to be the founder of the little theater in Chicago, in America.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's M-A-U-R-I-C-E?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, M-A-U-R-I-C-E, Browne, B-R-O-W-N-E, I think.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: B-R-A-U-N, I think.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Was it? [Lewis Ferbraché laughs.] Well, he was—his wife was Ellen Van Volkenburg, the actress and also great teacher of art, and I believe taught at the Cornish School. Well, here was a gathering of, well, enthusiastic youngsters who were interested in the theater, as well as those who were interested in the Little Theatre Movement, and, in other words, a sort of an interest in the new theater.

[00:10:14]

And many people came to this theater, prominent dancers, [inaudible] as an example, and many others who came. And there were living at that time in Carmel a great many—I suppose it would be writers, who were semi-retired. I mean, Lincoln Steffens, was one, and we also had there at that time Edward Weston, the photographer [inaudible], and in some way, we were living, again, in a kind of a—I suppose an idealistic dream world, if you wish. But we were very conscientious and endeavoring to do something that we thought was new.

And, of course, were much alert and aware as to what was going on in the world of theater, in both New York and in Europe. And so, we read a great deal of, well, the history of the theater, and we put on many plays, and I—in my own field, was frankly interested in the scene design, and then had my first chance to do scenery, which was for my own conception of what I thought scenery should be. And there was a very good lighting system, and this gave me a remarkable opportunity to spend nights in the theater, operating the lights and experimenting with lighting for the stage.

This went on for a while, and then I went on to New York. And having always had an interest in painting, I heard of a painter whose works interested me very much, and this was Max Weber— W-E-B-E-R—who was teaching at that time at the Art Students League. And the reason I chose Weber to study with was that he was one of the few Americans who had studied with Matisse when he was first teaching.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Henri Matisse?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, Henri Matisse.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: M-A-T-I-S-S-E?

WILLIAM GASKIN: M-A-T-I-S-S-E. And also, was an intimate of Henri Rousseau, the customs house—so-called customs house inspector.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: [Cross talk.] [Inaudible.] French [inaudible]—

WILLIAM GASKIN: And so that brought me as near as we could get to, you might say, the sources of some of the modern art movement. I found Weber a very inspiring teacher, and worked—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: What year was this, by the way?

WILLIAM GASKIN: This must have been—this must now have been 1923 or ['2]4, I suppose. Because, you see, I had this interval after the war, at Foster & Kleiser, about two and a half years, then I was down in Monterey again, working with this experimental theater group and also finding my way as a designer, because I could do as I pleased.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: To go back a minute, did you attend the Mark Hopkins Art Institute here?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, that is what I did first.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: About 1914, '15?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, that must have been around 1914, '13. It must have been even more than that. The fair opened in 1915.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Yes.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, I was attending some classes there. I wasn't enrolled as a regular student. I never took, you might say, a formal course at any school. And so, when I went to the League, I—instead of studying, taking the entire curriculum, I studied only with Max Weber.

And during my studies with Weber, which was in painting, of course, I was there in New York, and becoming all more and more interested in the theater, and I met then a group of people who were harboring at that time or had an idea of starting what was rather an interesting theater because they—in some ways it was kind of a revolutionary theater. It was called the New Playwrights Theater, and the group—the founders of this theater, consisted of John Dos Passos—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: John Dos Passos, the writer?

WILLIAM GASKIN: John Dos Passos the writer. And this—Francis Faragoh, who later became very prominent as a writer for the motion pictures. And I think one of the key men who became very, very famous because of his supposed association, you know, with the Communist department. But he—but these people weren't. I think that they were more artists carried away with some idea of a new theater.

[00:15:25]

And I'll tell you the names. Emjo Basshe was one of the writers for this theater. He was one of the first men to be sponsored by Otto Kahn, who had sent him to—down south to write on the Negro problem in the south. And also, we had—well, along with our operating of the theater, we were in close contact with the Provincetown Player Group. So, in some ways, theater was—seems to be—we gravitated towards these new movements in the theater. And at the same time—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You're designing scenery also?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, I was designing scenery for the New Playwrights. And which plays, I won't go into the details, because they were very interesting, yes, they're a different—entirely different story. A vital period in American history of theater. I think very important, because of what they were trying to do. John Howard Lawson was the name for a moment I didn't recall. Lawson was a—had very interesting ideas as a writer, and I believe later also went to Hollywood, where he was implicated in government investigation of his background. But I think our theater at that time, it was sponsored primarily by Otto Kahn, who gave us a grand—quite a sum of money.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's O-T-T-O K-A-H-N?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Otto Kahn, K—in fact, there's a book out on him now, his life, so I know how to spell his name. Pardon my ignorance on remembering. I'm getting old, myself. But here we were, along with Horace Liveright, a great—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Publisher.

WILLIAM GASKING: —publisher, and interested in the theater at the time. And I thought it might be interesting, without bringing too much sort of laurels [laughs] on myself, I had—in my Carmel days, I had become acquainted with Robinson Jeffers, the poet. And when I first met him, I found him very interesting as a person, and I had found an old coin, a Greek coin, which I thought would be very interesting for him to have as he was building this Tor Tower. And I thought if he put it in the cement—and he rather thought that was an interesting idea. What he did with it, I don't know. But a few days later, Mrs. Jeffers came and gave me a copy of a small book of poems called *Tamar*. And I was—suddenly read the book, not knowing—only by hearsay that Jeffers was a poet, I was carried away with his poem, and I was so excited that I had to read it to everybody in Carmel at the time, and thought he was really quite a great poet.

I'm mentioning this because when I went to New York, the first little theater I was associated with was actually a poet's theater. And it was, I suppose, we'd say directed by—although there wasn't much direction to it—but it was directed by Harry Kemp, the Tramp Poet. And Mr. Kemp was a great friend of Mr. Liveright's. So I wanted to see how this thread goes

around. So one day, I said to Harry, Did you ever hear of a poet named Jeffers? Did you ever hear of a poem named *Tamar*? And he said no. And I said, I have a copy of it. I'd like you to tell me what you think of it, because I think it's really wonderful. Well, he showed it to Liveright, and I learned, as time went on, that Liveright became a publisher for [laughs]—so I thought maybe that's what these small, little groups do in spreading—innocently spreading culture, if you wish, [laughs]. Or spreading ideas in the country, because we didn't have so many means of communication as we have now. We had no radios, or we didn't, as students—I don't suppose we did anything much but go to our studios at night and either draw or go to bed. [Laughs.]We didn't see to—information—and I know none of us subscribed to the newspaper, so I suppose we were living in a strange world of some ignorance, I guess.

[00:20:20]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You mean, no parties in Greenwich Village?

WILLIAM GASKIN: We had—oh, in Greenwich Village was different. But I mean back in Carmel. In Carmel, you see, we were a serious little group of people living in a strange world, really. And I think that's a very good education for an artist. Because we were meeting living people and talking and ideas, and maybe, in a way—and I remember at Foster & Kleiser's, we used to work and we used to be so interested in poster that we would send to Germany and to England and places to get the latest posters, and finally, many of our associates went to New York they became the top designers. And we were very impressed with the remark of one of the San Francisco artists in the commercial field, who said, Well, fellows, when you go to New York, remember there are no geniuses there. And that gave us a little confidence. Because it turned out we became the geniuses when we went. As in a way—after a fashion, I suppose we did.

Well, that gives you a vague idea. Living in New York then and studying with Weber, and being very anxious to—I had the idea that I should go abroad, and it was very convenient for me to do so, as fares in the spring were quite reasonable. And I set forth to Italy, where I was carried away with, at that time, Renaissance art. And so, I would go each summer and stay as long as possible, and come back to work in the theater in the winter.

About 1929, I guess the famous period of the crash, why, I came back to California and started a small studio here in San Francisco for painting and sculpture and artists associated with the Spanish sculptor Soler, S-O-L-E-R. Who, I believe, did the statue of Christ at San Antonio, or some place. Anyway, a very competent sculptor. Well, things weren't going so very well for us, and so we were rapidly approaching 1935, and we come to the time when the project, the Federal Arts Project, was founded or opened.

Prior to that, the artists were sponsored somewhat by the Treasury Art Department. And we—I think the idea there was to try and stimulate, I would say, on the part of the government, putting art in public buildings. But many of the artists were asked to do work, say—such as easel artists were asked to work, or permitted to do work, on whatever they wished, which was other than mural work. And I remember making about nine watercolors for this project, for which we were paid about $42, I think, and 50¢ a week. Times were getting a little difficult for people in the art field.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were these landscapes, or were they buildings, or—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, these—what I—my own paintings were of San Francisco. They were painted outdoors, actually, on the spot. And what has become of them I don't know, but were quite well, I should say, received at that time, and hung during the project years—the Federal Arts Project years—were hung in the offices principally at 49 Fourth Street in various offices. What's become of those watercolors, I don't know.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's how you started on the

WILLIAM GASKIN: That's how I first—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —Project, was on the—

WILLIAM GASKIN: —was on the Project. But during the—about this time, I had Mr. Joseph Danysh—D-A-N-Y-S-H—who later became the, was appointed the federal art director—regional art director for the Federal Art Project in the West, who had formerly had been an acquaintance of mine in New York.

[00:25:09]

And I had met him casually in New York, and I believe, at one time, he took a few lessons in drawing from me, along with some friends of his, and we hadn't seen one another in New York. He was, at that time, attending Columbia University. Mr. Danysh told me that I was soon to receive a notice that I was going to be appointed to help him—he was rather vague about it, but what he intended to say was I was to help him found this Project in San Francisco. And I didn't hear very much more about this, except I was warned to be in readiness for it.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: This was about what year?

WILLIAM GASKIN: This was actually in October 1935. Or perhaps I had first heard about the beginning of October. And I think we started along about the—[inaudible] I think we started maybe toward the end of October. We finally—finally—the first I knew of my appointment was I received letters and phone calls from artists or art people seeking employment on the Federal Art Project. I was a little mystified as to what this was about, because I had received no official appointment, but I went down to—found Danysh, and found that he was negotiating for office space in—at 49 Fourth street, which has become a very famous number in government fields. Because I think it still is used as government—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Big office building in San Francisco?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, big office building in San Francisco. Mr. Danysh then acquainted me with, vaguely, as to what this was about, and I was also introduced to Mr. Joseph Allen, A-L-L-E-N. And was told that we three were to found this Project. Soon, things began to make themselves clearer. We would receive messages from the WPA headquarters at first, which came from Washington, authorizing us to employ all artists—all employable artists in this region who were in need.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Excuse me a moment—

WILLIAM GASKIN: This is the difficult part, because they had to be on relief. They had to—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: First, there was the PWA, is that correct?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, the Works Progress Administration was the name of the—the official name. But the Federal Art Project was a special project under the Works Progress Administration.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: I was trying to determine—[Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: That's as far as I can understand.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —determine when the first—

WILLIAM GASKIN: The Works project was in progress.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —Public Works Administration, PWA.

WILLIAM GASKING: Yes, that was in progress before the Art Project started.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And then, some—at some later time, they had a new name as Works Progress Administration.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, I think, while we were doing these watercolors for the—which we were doing, I believe, instead of the Treasury Art Department, that already was under the Works Progress, because we would be asked to go out and paint what would be called the— I suppose it would be called the passing scene, or the—sort of the local scene. That was what —

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Reginald Marsh sort of thing?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, it was simply—this was really a fellow named Watson, I think his name was Forbes Watson—had been a critic and a writer. I think there was a great emphasis on the painting of the local scene. In other word—which would be parallel with the Ukiyo-e in Japan, with the passing world. And not to—in other words, it was a kind of a—it was rather—

the artists were very antagonistic to this idea, because it was a kind of a breaking with European concepts of art. In other words, in the beginning, everything was to be—as a humorous example, we would say, Well, you fellows can go out and make paintings or sketches of men at work. You know, where the WPA already had men with wheelbarrows, and where they were doing the first—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Where the laborers are?

[00:30:00]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, where they were doing the first what we would call works.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Wood chopping and leaf racking.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Wood chopping and leaf raking. And this, of course, we found a little bit—sort of against the grain. That was something we just hadn't been accustomed to doing, but already—the Coit Tower people, who painted the Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The murals inside the tower?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Inside—were already the first movement in that. And I think this movement came about indirectly because of the rise of the great Mexican—revolutionary mural decorators in Mexico, and the coming of Diego Rivera to San Francisco. And all the artists were carried away with the idea of fresco.

Well, this all came up—well, like I think all artists jump on the bandwagon, and here, everybody was a mural decorator or a muralist, all of a sudden, and he also, not only was a muralist, but he was a fresco muralist. Well, fresco was an art that I suppose it was used, and rightly used, in Mexico, because Mexico—the climate and so forth paralleling, and the type of building they were decorating and all that. Where fresco is best is not in Nordic countries, for instance. The climate has something to do. But here, of course, with our heating and everything, the frescoes are safe enough.

But the point I wanted to bring out is this. That the man who actually did the plastering for Diego Rivera was one of San Francisco's prominent artists, and that was Matthew Barnes, B-A-R-N-E-S. And Barnes had been a journeyman plasterer from his childhood days. I believe he was an apprentice at 11 in Scotland, and had learned the processes of—methods of plastering, and was a very competent plasterer. But a Sunday painter, and a very interesting painter. Because he was one of our individualists, and I believe many of his things can still be seen in San Francisco. But Barnes worked then, and Rivera put great store by Barnes and even wished to have him come to Detroit to do the murals there.

Well, I had been familiar a little bit, personally, with the mural art, because, when I lived in New York, Orozco, the—I'd say, contemporary of Rivera, and one of the great mural artists of that group, the Mexican group, had been discovered or seen to—I'd first heard of his work in Alma Reed, R-E-E-D, Gallery. And Ms. Reed had many lithographs of Orozco which she was introducing into New York at that time, so we were aware. And later, Orozco was doing the works in the New School of Social Research. He did the frescoes there.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: In New York City?

WILLIAM GASKIN: And so, I was aware of this fresco movement firsthand. And so, anyway, Rivera came—because we were all excited and interested in this. But many of the artists immediately took up fresco painting. And of course, this was the idea that was fostered somewhat by the eastern group, with this idea that we would take the American scene and we would it place upon the walls, which was reminiscent of pretty much what they were doing in Mexico. And this didn't go down altogether with all the artists, but the younger artists, and then some of the older artists who were very competent people, could handle this technique. But I do believe that Barnes was responsible in the actual technical knowledge, which Rivera admitted he had learned a great deal himself as just to how this was done. And I thought it was rather interesting that would be an artist who would be able to show a thing [ph].

So, finally now, getting back to the Project, I think my feeling was—first thing was to find out what it was all about. And we immediately had—were requested to wire back to Washington

the number of people that were, say, artists and craftsmen. I must use the word craftsmen because we hired craftsmen, also.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were you given official—

WILLIAM GASKIN: We were given the authority to hire these people.

[00:35:00]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You were given an official position at this time?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, by this time, we found that we had official positions.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And your title?

WILLIAM GASKIN: My title was supervisor of art for the Bay Region.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: In San Francisco Bay Area?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. San Francisco Bay Area.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And East Bay?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, and East Bay, which took in Oakland.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Alameda County, San Francisco?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, and Alameda County, San Francisco, and Marin. And we—as far as Monterey. We—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: A large district.

WILLIAM GASKIN: –that was actually our district, which we were operating.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: From Monterey, California north?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, it was from Monterey. The actual work was carried on from Monterey, let's say, north—I'm trying to think what we may have done far north.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Sacramento?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, we did work in Sacramento.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: So, you were actually supervisor of northern California? [Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Let's say our field extended—yes. Later I became more or less supervisor of northern California. What I did personally was to—well, it might be interesting to say how we first got formulated. Because there was no plan. The only plan we had was to hire the artists, the professional or skilled artists, or recognized artists, was to receive $94 a month. And those we judged as—or not only judged, but who were, let us say, competent young professionals or students, were to receive $85. And this would apply also to craftsmen. In other words, top craftsmen could receive [$]94, and others—assistants—would be [$]85.

Well, in the beginning—at the very beginnings of the Project, our first effort was to employ as many people as we could, for numbers of reasons. I think one was it gave the—I believe we received revenue somewhat in relation to the number of hours—man-hours we put in. That I wouldn't know so much about.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: On the average, though, what did these people at [$]85 and $94 a month—how many hours did they work?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, they worked—their hours were from nine o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: It was an hourly rate like the Writers' Project?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Just about the same as the writers. But on the Art Project, the way it operated was this: we had succeeded, I believe, in interviewing, in the first few weeks, close

to 1,500 or pretty close to 2,000 people, not counting numbers who finally came into the office, which I never kept any record of. I had—we were very busy in forming the Project. We had to find places for headquarters, and when that was done, which was very soon, perhaps in November, we had the quarters at the old Washington School. This, I believe, you would know about.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That was in November of—

WILLIAM GASKIN: November '35. There, people had heard of the Project and were beginning to come and apply for work. And the thing was, they were to show—we had an application blank, which we would hand them, requesting information of their—some of their background or what they could do. We would prefer if they brought samples of their work.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were these all certified from the relief rolls or were there—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, some were certified from the relief rolls. Others came on their own and were told they could not be accepted by the Project unless they had been on the relief rolls. This, perhaps, was one of the great weaknesses of the whole Project, because it left out some of the most important artists in the city, people that we would like to have had associate with us on the Project, unless they volunteered to do work, in some cases free, and in some cases as supervisors of a Project.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Exempt from the rolls.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. For instance, artists who were—competent artists who were either in the mural field, or they were going to do mosaics, or they sometimes assisted us in finding walls, as we called them, to work on, or someplace where their work could be carried out. And if they—we'd interview those in charge, for instance, at the University of California, the Bruton sisters practically handled the negotiations for their whole project.

[00:40:16]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's B-R-U-T-O-N?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Bruton, yes, B-R-U-T-O-N.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Three—

WILLIAM GASKIN: The three sisters. And I believe they had managed somehow to find that the walls on the—there's an old—I don't think that building was used, perhaps some sort of an old dynamo house or some kind of a thing, but it was turned into a gallery. It was a brick building, rather presentable building, and it was turned into a gallery, and the Brutons found the walls were available for decoration. And so, they managed that, and perhaps Mr. Wessels could have told you more of the story. So, all we would—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's the University of California Berkeley campus?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. University of California Berkeley campus. I mention this because to show that if an artist could show us—I'd say a competent artist, would show us their designs, and there was an available space, all the Project did was to sponsor this artist. The artist was given full chance to do just what he wanted on there, with permission of the sponsors of the buildings, of course.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: These were both public and private?

WILLIAM GASKIN: There was never any work done in a private home. It was all public.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: None of the hotels were involved?

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, no hotels or private homes or, for instance, churches, or anything of that sort were—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: It had to be city, county, or federal building. [Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: It had to be all always—yes. You might say a tax-supported institution, that would come within bounds, you see. And we were expected—the first year was a little different from the others, because we were learning ways and means, and when we found

that we had a great many—see, the majority of the artists were perhaps potential artists, or promising young students, or competent people. Well, we had to find something for them to do. Because all artists who were, say, an independent artist—as an example, using a prominent—a young man who's become very prominent in the art world, Dong Kingman, the Chinese watercolorist.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's D-O-N-G?

WILLIAM GASKIN: D-O-N-G, Dong. Kingman, K-I-N-G-M-A-N. Yes. Dong Kingman became and is now, I believe, considered one of our prominent watercolorists. Well, when Mr. Kingman came on the Project, he—I had heard of him through one of the artists, actually, Dorothy Cravath.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: C-R-A-V-A-T-H?

WILLIAM GASKIN: C-R-A-V-A-T-H, who was working, at that time, on the Mother House at the Fleishhacker Pool, where they did the murals. And these murals were done in egg tempera, I believe, which was another medium. Well, Ms. Cravath mentioned this young man, and I'm looking at his work, there was no question about his ability. He was simply given materials to go home and work. And this was the same with many of the artists who had competence and were allowed to produce their work at their own studios, on their own time, only on this condition: that they would occasionally show us the results of their progress. And if the Project were to ask for such paintings—sometimes we would stipulate we would like a number, but the artist was given pretty much right to do as he wished.

But the other artists, it was a little different. We had a great many that we didn't feel it was wise to allow just to work on their own, and these artists—we had established a lithographic department. And all the artists, or anyone on the Project, for that matter, was permitted to make as many lithographs as he wanted, because we had a group of professional people to print these, and artists could print them themselves, if they wished. But, so we made—in that way, it gave younger artists an opportunity to do original work, it gave older artists an opportunity to do work in a medium which they weren't altogether familiar with, perhaps, and it also gave this—so we could conform to government regulations. We could keep regular schedules.

[00:45:09]

So artists came, then, to our main headquarters, which then were in different parts of the city, and we had—those who were working on the stones in the studio could work there all day, if they wished, and produce their work. And on rare occasions, we would allow artists to take the stones home, if necessary. So we also—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you remember who supervised the lithographs?

WILLIAM GASKIN: That was supervised by Ray, R-A-Y, Bertrahm B-E-R-T-R-A-H-M [*sic*] [Bertrand –Ed.]. Mr. Bertrahm [*sic*] had been, for many years, the instructor in lithography at the California School of Fine Arts.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Is he still living?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, he is, and where he is, I don't know. I really don't know. Ray Bertrahm [*sic* Bertrand –Ed.]. That project was very successful in a way, because we turned out about 52,000 lithographs. Some in color, and some—majority in black and white.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: I understand that these lithographs were sent to various communities and public libraries for exhibition on loan?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, they were. The lithographs were sent out on exhibition, and they were also—you know, public institutions, schools, libraries, and so forth, in fact, any tax-supported institution, could request from the Project—you know, request pictures from us for exhibitions, or for permanent keeping. Most of the—this is rather sort of paradoxical thing, we would work for public buildings, such as the city of San Francisco, or we might work—but we were requested—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Excuse me, we're coming to the end of the tape.

WILLIAM GASKIN: We were requested to get money for this. Now, I'm rambling all over the bush, mad as a March hare.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's fine. We're coming to the end of the tape.

[END OF TRACK AAA_gaskin64_127_m.]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Interview tape number two with William Gaskin, February 28, 1964. [Audio break.] And to continue, Mr. Gaskin, on the lithograph project.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. [Inaudible]—I feel that we, in continuing on the Project, besides the opportunity it gave the artists to work directly on stone, it was of immense importance to the Project, as it gave us readily available material for allocating or showing in exhibitions. It also gave us the opportunity to employ quite a number of artists we could not at that time trust to work on their own.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: How many were employed, in general, on the Project? How long did it continue?

WILLIAM GASKIN: The lithographic—the lithographic project to the best of my knowledge, as I left in 1940, continued on during the years of the Project.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And this began about fall of 1935? [Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: We very likely got started and were well underway in 1936. The next thing we had to do was to—because with so many artists available for work, we would—we were out to find a wall space for those who were competent mural artists, and also, I conceived of the idea that mosaic would be a very good medium for our use, as—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Excuse me, I don't know if we—[Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: [Inaudible] to the next field now, how we started the—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: I wanted to ask you about people on the lithograph project.

WILLIAM GASKIN: —yeah. Oh, the people on the lithograph project.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You mentioned—

WILLIAM GASKIN: I'm sorry, I wanted to explain the reason for these projects. The people on the lithographic project, we—first, of course, we had asked Mr. Bertrand, who was a competent lithographer and teacher, to set up the project. This was done pretty much by him, on his own. He owned a number of lithographic presses, and if you understand the lithographic situation, it's very hard to buy or purchase a lithographic press which is not registered with the United States Treasury Department. So we had quite a trouble in getting, or either leasing or borrowing from—we couldn't buy these presses from Bertrand, but he obligingly permitted us to use his presses, and later we got from—through, I think, someone connected with the parks—what do they call the parks—Department of Interior, Parks Department. They had a press which we also were permitted to buy. And so, then we had a few presses.

On the Project, we had a problem that was never really solved. There were—we could hire craftsmen. Now, we had a lithographic project. Therefore, lithographers, which would be commercial lithographers, would apply to the project or be sent to the project for—as possible—being employed, and it occurred to us that the best thing to do was to employ some, we would say, commercial lithographers, as they were quite familiar with—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The techniques?

WILLIAM GASKIN: —the techniques, and not only that, but the whereabouts of these stones which we had to find. And we bought most of the stones from old commercial lithographic houses, and many of them had can labels on and advertising matter, which we had to grind down. So, we had—sometimes much against the artists' approval, we did have on the project two men who were actually members of the lithographic—commercial lithographers union. And I thought, in some ways, technically, that was perhaps a wise move because they could —knew how to polish and rub stones down, and left Bertrand freer to working with the artists —

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Supervise the artists?

WILLIAM GASKIN: —supervise the artists better, from an artistic standpoint. But of course, these men were sometimes a drawback because our artists were apt to want to be experimental on the stones, and this would outrage their sensitivity as professional lithographers.

[00:05:03]

But it all went pretty well, and we did turn out enormous numbers of lithographs. In fact, I estimated 52,000, and of which we permitted the artist to run off a certain number for himself. The project kept either 20 or 50 impressions, and then the artist was allowed to keep samples for himself, which we thought was a fair arrangement, which was—this was done. So, many of the artists must—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Usually in a limited number?

WILLIAM GASKIN: They could have what they wanted of their own. They would only have a limited number because, naturally, they wanted them more for—you know, for their own purposes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were each print numbered and so on?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, no, we weren't so particular about that at first, about the numbering of the prints. We weren't so precious as that because many of the artists had never worked on stone before, and they were most anxious to get designs. And then, also, we did a few designs that would be semi-documentary. These we let—we had one old English lithographer who was a professional, work on these. These were, I say, documentary. I think we did a series of Indian, I say, Californian Indian costumes, or something like that. And we did a number of lithographs showing the petroglyphs, you know, found in rocks in nearby counties, or something like that. So, we had that as part of our—I used to call these our stabilizers because, when we had visiting officials, if we seemed to be doing something concrete, we seemed to feel that the things run a little eas—that was my feeling, that if we had competent lithographers, that at least there was someone that we could fall back on for, you know, to protect us a little. So, we had that. It was very successful in that way.

Now, of the lithographs that were turned out there, quite a number of the artists, I believe, made some very fine ones. I can say that Edward Hagerdorn—H-A-G-E-R-D-O-R-N—turned out some very interesting things, and I remember that—I know that, when I once showed these to—I guess it would be the director or the president of the Salinas Junior College, which was being formed at that time, he told me that he would love to have a set of these Hagerdorns, but due to the semi-controversial subjects, which they were war scenes, he admired—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were they anti-war scenes?

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, they weren't anti-war. They were actually—the one I have in mind was rather competent etching, I thought, of a—a—it was a soldier trying to get through a barbed wire entanglement. There was nothing very controversial about it, but the director of the school felt that he would like that type of thing because he, himself, had been in service. And he saw the beauty and the reality of it, but he thought it wouldn't be very appropriate for the school. And so, this gives you an idea of what we up against in presenting to the public works of art. And so, of course, this would have happened—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Were there any abstract works [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, certain abstract works were done because we had no—we didn't—it was very difficult doing anything abstract on public walls at the time. We managed to do semi-abstractions at the State Teachers College. It's now the, you know, San Francisco State College. But most of the—well, at the time—I'd continue on and share i—with the departments we had, and then we might go out and mention a few outstanding people. We had—again, the idea, as it occurred to me, we had hired Mr. Hiler, Hilaire Hiler.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Oh, how do you spell—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —spelling is—

WILLIAM GASKIN: H-I-double L-I-E-R. Hiler, H—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: H-I-L-A-R-R?

WILLIAM GASKIN: L—L-E-R.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: L-E-R?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yeah. Due to—through the—through, I suppose we would say—the WPA were building the Aquatic Park, and Mr. William Moser [ph], M-O-S-E-R—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: M-O-S-H-E-R? Mosher [ph]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: I don't know that there was [inaudible], you can get in that little—Moser, William Moser [ph], look that up in the form. Moser [ph] was an architect for the WPA department. He suggested that we take over the decoration of the interior of the building, and it occurred to us that Hiler would be a very good man to supervise this.

[00:10:19]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That entire building was put up by the WPA?

WILLIAM GASKIN: The entire building was put up by the WPA. That gave us—this was a little later. I imagine this must have been about the third of the Project. So, we could leave that temporarily, but Hiler made for us a series of paintings that occurred to me looked like tapestries, and I decided then that we should have a tapestry department. But how to go about this? I knew there were a great many weavers available, and weavers who had been trained by quite competent weavers in San Francisco, you know, Mrs. Gravander, who was a Swedish weaver over in Sausalito. And I thought that if we could put these weavers to work, it would give us a chance to—in public buildings, perhaps to weave tapestries or drapes or something.

And so, we immediately started the weaving project and placed it in charge of a young lady by the name of Maya Albee, A-L-B-double E, who was a trained weaver and also had attended this school, the Schaeffer School of Design, where she had learned color and the dyeing of materials. And Ms. Albee very competently organized the department and had the looms manufactured for us locally, and also the sample looms for apprentice people, and we set up the department. And the first thing we did was to weave one of the small Hiler panels. And I believe that was the first tapestry ever made in the United States from the designs of a—say, of an American artist. I believe that would be the best way I could put that. That was woven here. They were woven right here by local people, and Mr. Hiler, though not a local artist in the true sense, was living here at that time. He then—that was very successful, the first one.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The design of the—

WILLIAM GASKIN: The first design was a very simple design. It was actually two cows, I think, sitting in a—but quite abstract, stylized. It was very nice. I—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Was it a large tapestry?

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, it was about to size. [Inaudible], let's say, that would be about, oh, perhaps 40 by, maybe about 30 by—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: About two feet by three feet?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yeah, about two feet by two-and-a-half, something—it was rather small because we wanted to experiment. And I would say, It must be in the true Gobelin tapestry technique. That's all I care. It must be tapestry, you know. It couldn't just be ordinary weaving. It had to be tapestry. Yes, yes, and they did. Then we decided that we'd make others, and we—which we did, and these took quite a time to weave. And—but finally the Hiler collection was somewhat complete. I think we had three, and these we sent all over the United States, and the last I heard of them, on exhibition. I don't know what happened to them.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: How many were done? Do you know off-hand, approximately?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, of the Hilers, perhaps three. I know we had one large one, *The Minutemen*, and we had these—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Minutemen at Concord and Lexington?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, it was all done in a sort of a stylized way, you see. Very good for tapestry. Then, we decided that things were going pretty well, and we would—we had succeeded in allocating a number of drapes among the places. We allocated the drapes for the—to the assessor's office in the city hall in San Francisco. And these were woven on the project by this department, which led to our going—doing a photo mural for the assessor's office. And this photo mural—I'm jumping kind off the bat, because one thing leads to another. So, we did have a sort of a—we had sponsored a photographic department that—when the Project was founded, the photographic department, which was under the Works Progress Administration, needed a new sponsor, so we sponsored a photographic department. So, in that way, most of the photographs of our work were done through this department. They did no creative artwork, but photographers coming to the department as independent photographers were employed by us.

[00:15:15]

Now, Abbenseth, A-B-E-N S-E-T-H [*sic*]—his first name [inaudible]. I asked him to—I said, You're on your own, and I want you to make this mural for us in the assessor's office. And he —we thought it would be wise, in doing the mural for the assessor's office, not to have any public buildings, or as few public buildings as possible in the mural because they were tax free, and so, we thought it would be nice to show all the different types of—sort of—of San Francisco. We showed San Francisco with a minimum—we had no city halls in it, or anything like that. So, Abbenseth then toured the city and made a documentary collection of photographs showing old doorways, you know, of the 1880 buildings, and he would show, maybe, columns from the beginnings of San Francisco down around Montgomery Street, and he showed Telegraph Hill, and he showed all the different districts. And these were all cropped, and compiled, and made into a mural, and I believe he was assisted through the use of some of the equipment, via Ansel Adams permitted him to print this at his studio.

So, the artists were not actually in the sense worrying so much about being employed. They were actually all working together. They would help one another with their presses, or with their equipment, or whatever, to help an artist get going with some kind of a project.

Then, as there were wood-carvers who came in requesting work, we would find—wherever possible, we would find something where wood carving could be put to use. Then, also, our biggest project was the sculpture department. I say biggest. It was really the—they took up a great deal of space, and we did the most monumental work there. This, of course, was headed by Bufano. And not at first as a supervising—in other words, he was on $94 a month. But we provided him with space to work in and a great deal of granite, which we got through the city of San Francisco, and also through the WPA, and where he was permitted to work. Well, we had to have something to, say to—people said, What are these for? So, we—when Mr. Moser [ph] suggested that we do the interior of the Aquatic Park, why, Mr.—the Project suggested to Bufano that he make a series of animals, on his own, anything he wanted, but we would like 20 or 30 of them. We were going to put them in the lawn in front of the Aquatic Park on the beach, near the railroad track that runs through there, and we thought it'd be a wonderful thing for children to see and to play on, and so, Bufano was a very good idea. So, he was to churn out as many animals, or whatever he wanted. So, he made—very soon, he made a seal. And then he, also, which we—I believe is in the Aquatic Park now, and he made a penguin. And so, then, that launched that, and that gave us an opportunity to employ a number of granite workers, people who were skilled in roughing and carving granite, who were—and these men were assigned to Bufano to assist him in the moving and shifting of great blocks of granite, and to help him carve, and, you know, do the grunt work.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Polish?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, see, they were the assistants for—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: He did the designs?

WILLIAM GASKIN: He did the designs and, perhaps, the finish work. And so, his park

department was going on pretty much under his control, and then he—we were working on a grand—of course, this was all the circus part of the Project. We were working on this grand concept of Bufano's to put up a gigantic statue of St. Francis of Assisi on Twin Peaks.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you remember what years this sculpture project [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, this sculpture project went right along. We began that sculpture project as soon as we got the Washington school, so it must have been practically—we must have started in 1936, just immediately. At first, Bufano was working down in a—under the—I think it was on Minna Street, or some street downtown where there was a metal pressing shop.

And I believe those fellows let Bufano have his space. And there, Bufano was hammering out things in copper before he got to the stone. And then, he was also—

[00:20:15]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That was on his own, or that was on WPA?

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, he was working on WPA. Whacking something out. He got—then he was going to make St. Francis. Well, he did enormous numbers of studies and models for St. Francis, from everything from—in copper, and in plaster, and in plaster with gold leaf, and silver leaf, and all sorts of things, but he was making a series of studies for this great statue of St. Francis. The project was involved in a great deal of going and coming between the city hall, and the archbishop, and the—and all sorts of things to get the permit. We finally got from the city of San Francisco the permit to put the statue on Twin Peaks. The land was allotted to us. The city of San Francisco gave us 2,000 something dollars for the making of the head and hands of this statue in copper—that is, the main model of it, which was quite large. So, while this was carrying on—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: It was going to be a gigantic statue, as I remember.

WILLIAM GASKIN: It was going to be 250 feet—200 feet high, but of course with Bufano, as all these creative artists, it was gradually growing higher [they laugh] every day. But I still think, and with all our ups and downs on that, and all the controversy, and the energy that was put in, it was a very good thing for the Project because it really stimulated us all because we—it was maybe—we never got this statue, and I think that was only due to the war coming on towards the end of the Project, when there was no copper, no metal, no anything, no Project even. And I think with Benny Bufano, the idea was very great, and I do believe that if we ever put that statue up, it today would long ago have paid for itself if we only sold postcards. I still believe we [inaudible]—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: It would be a great tourist attraction.

WILLIAM GASKIN: I think it would have been a great thing, and we had grandiose ideas, I—maybe some far beyond our, maybe, ability at that time to complete, but that was one of the great things we had.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: He did finish the head and the hands though, [inaudible].

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. Oh, he did. He finished the head and the hands. In the meanwhile, he had made a head of Sun—of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. And this we were working on, and it was one that we first had this—where he worked in the stainless steel. And we had rented the use of a copper and metalworking shop here on South San Francisco. And Bufano—and we put some men in to help him. Well, while we were working with the copper, you see, there were copper workers who would show up, and we succeeded in making some very nice things out of copper. And one of the nicest things we made was made by Clay Spohm, S-P-O-H-M. S-P—Spohm? S-P-O-H-M. Clay Spohm [*sic* Spohn -Ed.]. And it was a panel hammered in copper. Clay designed it. It was of a fire engine and a fire. It might sound a little odd, but it was rather beautifully executed, and it was made for the Carmel Firehouse. This they bought the copper for and—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Carmel, California?

WILLIAM GASKIN: California, yeah. And so, you see, from one thing would lead to another, so we—and we also made, for the San Francisco Boys Club, a mantlepiece, which was

hammered and done—there's a name for this type of work, in copper. And so, we did a number of things—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: A relief [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, sort of a relief in copper. And so, you see the Project then drew not only from a need, but from the types of people that gravitated towards the Project. Copper workers, marble workers, and then I will tell you about the gold leaf layer, you see?

So, we were now—we now have a large mosaic project in operation, in which many semi-skilled, or people who had some art talent, could work. These people were paid perhaps $85, where they could help set the stones. The stone—in starting the project, the Bruton sisters were instrumental in doing some of the early mosaics, but we had also heard that there were available some workers who had helped lay the mosaics for the San Simeon—Hearst's place at San Simeon.

[00:24:53]

And it occurred to me that it might be wise to find out who they were, and they being unemployed craftsmen, we hired them to instruct the artists somewhat in what was required in the technical side of putting up a mosaic on a public building. And they were very helpful for us in that, and showed us the types of materials which were required, and were very helpful in helping us find unpolished marble, and also many stones which had been imported for this Hearst project that were available on the market. So, therefore, we set out and managed to find sponsors for small mosaics at first, and then we went on into our mosaic project. And this project was fairly successful.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And that began, do you remember [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: That began sort of the mosaic renaissance in San Francisco, you see?

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you remember what year that would have [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Oh, this must have been going on in 1936, or '37, you see, because always it was—we were just—it took a long time to make anything.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That was in San Francisco and Oakland both?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, well, Oakland—no, we didn't do much of the mosaic in Oakland, excepting the Bruton sisters were working out of the university, but I believe they did their work alone, more or less, at their own home in Alameda. In finding the marble, and also finding the opportunity to find a wall of good proportions. And they would give us something really outstanding to do. We found the Alameda County courthouse was available, and there was where we—our knowledge of where to get marble and how this marble might be polished and used in a public building in a pictorial manner all kind of came somewhat by itself. So, we thought it was a good opportunity, and there we did have this opportunity to put in these marble panels, which are 18 feet high, and there're two of them. And now, these panels took us two-and-a-half years to make, and they were made by skilled Italian marble workers, as far as the technique is concerned. And also the putting up of the panels in the building with professional workmen. These were all bona fide professional union men who held union cards, but were unemployed. And these people could put the marble. I think—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: For the tape, would you describe the designs of the—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, I'm going to describe the designs, and I'm going to show you what we did with them. The designs are—in searching for a design, one of the artists, Marion Simpson of Oakland, or Berkeley, I believe, had made some very presentable designs on her own for these two lunettes in the courthouse. As she was working for the Project, one [inaudible] sponsored this set of murals, knowing her as a competent artist—I personally may be held accountable for this, but I decided that it would be a very good idea to make her murals in marble because I knew, from the architects, they would not accept anything in the usual medium, such as oil paint or tempura painting. And to—Ms. Simpson, I believe, at first resented, rather, the, say, the idea that someone was going to change her medium, but I think we persuaded her after showing her the samples. I think she was very cordial and permitted us to use her models in whichever way we—her—which we didn't deviate from.

We made her the supervisor of the project so that the art side would be under her control.

The panels were very well received by the county officials, as well as the architects, the architects, partly, because the lobby of the building is already finished in marble, and these lent themselves to a very durable medium and very effective for a public building. The board of supervisors were a rather hard bunch to get to accept this because they had no concept of what we were talking about in this, but they took the word of the architects, but also asked us to do one thing: they would like to have someone in Oakland or Alameda County officially okay these panels and this project.

[00:30:00]

In discussing this with Glenn Wessles, W-E-double S-L-E-S, who was our project manager in the Oakland area, we thought the best man to get would be Dr. Myers, who was the founder and head at that time of the College of Arts and Crafts.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's Dr. Frederick Myers?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Dr. Frederick Myers.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: M-Y-E-R-S?

WILLIAM GASKIN: M-Y-E-R-S. Dr. Myers agreed to—very friendly—through Mr. Wessel's auspices, I suppose, we—he walked down to the city hall with us and the county courthouse with us, and we met the board of supervisors, and he approved the panels. And on one—this is a little maybe on the side, but on one little stipulation that we put a black border around them. Well, I won't like to go on record, I was rather opposed to this. I hadn't consulted Ms. Simpson, but anyway, if you go there today, you'll see the black borders, and because of his high reputation in Alameda, Dr. Myers recommended it.

We were, of course, supposed to have built the whole entire project in Alameda County, but now, as the years have passed, we can tell you the availability of workmen, the availability of materials, and the availability of shops, San Francisco seemed the logical place. When the panels were finished—I believe this took us about two years, so the panels must have been finished '37—somewhere in 1938, perhaps. I don't know, you could find it. We were asked by the San Francisco Museum if we would exhibit the panels first in the museum for the public to see. This was rather alarming to me, as I was a little alarmed at having to have my panels transported and set up in a museum [laughs], but I was assured by our very highly skilled craftsmen that this could be done and done with great safety. So, the panels were shown in the rotunda of the San Francisco Museum [inaudible] and the—

[END OF TRACK AAA_gaskin64_128_m.]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Tape number three with Mr. William Gaskin, February 28, 1964. We were talking about the—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Panels [inaudible].

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —panels at the Alameda County [inaudible]—

[Audio break.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: —very interesting boy. I believe he was also interested in this Rosicrucian place in San Jose, so he had certain cosmic ideas. That’s all I could tell you about him, but I thought it was very interesting, and I know that a great deal of very interesting work was done there. Our work with the mosaic department, I think—in going back over the subject of the mosaic department proved very successful, not so much in employing the artists, but also giving us an opportunity to do some mosaics here in San Francisco, but it was taken up by the Los Angeles Project and carried to great heights because they had many more people available, and it was a wonderful opportunity to use many, many assistants. And they did great mosaics at Long Beach and in all sorts of places, and Macdonald-Wright was the director of the Project, and I remember we used to have great controversies as to whether—because the smooth type of mosaic they were doing down there was superior to what we call the broken method, which we were doing up here.

There was a—there was always a little controversy among artists as the right techniques to

be using. Because the Los Angeles mosaics were quite interesting in a way because they were set as tile. Now, in doing the Aquatic Park, the tile came into our orbit as a wonderful medium, partly so the work they were doing at Los Angeles, as we would visit these parks. As supervising directors, we would go to Los Angeles and communicate, and we'd arrange exhibitions here of their work and our work, and—so we were quite conversant with what was going on in the Project.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Those were usually the square tile of [inaudible] bathroom tile?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, they were usually the bathroom tile that they used. And they also did a great deal of what this—terrazzo floors, as we—you know, all the European floors are always, especially in Italy—were always made of this mixture, you know, of granite stone and colored stones, so this lent itself very well to pictorial decoration, and some of those were quite attractive. They had a sort of a—maybe reminiscent of Persian or Indian art. They were quite flat and smooth and lent themselves. And so, that was their contribution down there, which was somewhat in our experimenting, using these tile pictorially as we used the marble. But then in our tile experiment here, I didn't know how—we didn't want to use the small tile in the same way as we use the mosaic, which were small tesserae, you see?

So, it occurred to me—I had also on the Project a fellow who used to come in, and he was a Moroccan, and his name was Mohammed—I'm not sure about the last name, but Mohammed Miami [ph] is the nearest that I can tell you now, and we will perhaps be able to correct this name later on. Miami [ph] came in—I believe, came originally to San Francisco as a rug merchant. But he came to the Project in seeking work. And I, as director, felt a little embarrassed at not being able to do anything for a rug merchant, but one day he told me that he could lay tile, and I became quite interested in what he had to say because he told me his father had been the architect for the Khedive of Egypt. And he said that he and his father had built—had done the mosaics in the mosque in Paris. Well, this all struck me as very interesting, and I told him I didn't have any mosques, but I was going to see what I could do. But I wanted a sample of his work, which was my method of protecting perhaps myself, or seeing if I could get an idea.

[00:05:04]

And I gave him a bathroom tile, that is, the small tile, four inches or so, and he came back, and he had that in the shape of a star. And I knew that he—anyone that could cut a tile as efficiently as the sample he showed me, without any cracks, was pretty clever. And finally, interviewing some more, I found out that he could work in any tile we could bring. It then occurred to me that there was a great deal of bathroom tile. We'll use this term, because it is the standard tile that's on the market, and I wanted someone who could make a creative design with this that wouldn't be too geometrical in the sense of just squares, you know—using squares. And so, Sargent Johnson, a prominent sculptor here—a Negro sculptor by the way, which I thought would be of interest—a very, very fine sculptor who had done some work for the Project and was also—I asked him if he would take over the designs for the tile for the Aquatic Park. And also, to give him something he could do personally, would he carve the slate for the entrance, which—the slate was polished at our marble polishing place.

That appealed to Mr. Johnson, and he made, I thought, a very interesting design, which had a great many curves in it, and—which is to be seen now on the north wall of the Aquatic Park, and it covers a good many square feet, as it takes up part of the up and down stairs of the building. And this—all of this tile was set by this Moroccan tile expert, and he cut these curves with such skill, and in making this, these were all cut by hand, by a hammer, which he showed us the design for, and these hammers were made by a hammer maker which we had found, a skilled hammer maker. The tile were never quite finished due to upsets, I think, towards the end of the Project—or just what the reason was that this tile was never finished. But I think if people understand the technical efficiency of this, it would be a marvel to them because there are subtle curves, so subtle. They were all done by just chipping a tile with a hammer. The—Mr. Miami [ph]—Mr. Miami [ph] later did other tile cutting for us on work which we were doing for the fair, and also for the Balboa High School in San Francisco.

So, you see, we—there we found another case where we had a worker with—skilled, from Armenia, who was very valuable to us, and we had a young man who had learned tile making and setting in Morocco, his native country, and we had copper smiths who came and taught us hammering in copper, and we had some wood carvers from—that were also descendants of Norwegian carvers. And in this way, we felt that we were trying to put these

—but what we needed were great creative artists, if possible, to set—to place a very, very high standard. Now, some of the very important artists on the—in the city, or in the Bay Area, perhaps didn't come on the Project due to the—at the first years, the necessity of being absolutely on the relief rolls. This might have, through the pride or through—perhaps these artists didn't really need to be—perhaps they weren't absolutely destitute, but [inaudible] they didn't rally to the Project too quickly. Later on, as we went on, you will see where a number of the artists—as an example Mr. Hiler—were willing to come if we gave them jobs which they could be their own creative artists and could control the workers we gave them and actually manage their own projects. This was true somewhat of Bufano, true of Mr. Hiler, and true of Mr. Lucian Labaudt, who did the chalet. We found the space, and. Labaudt was allowed to put what he wished on there, with the approval of the city authorities responsible for the building.

[00:10:03]

But now, fortunately for the Project, we were approaching the years of the building the World's Fair. At this point, an entirely different picture of the art world in relation to the Project and to the artists in this field, because—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That was the San Francisco [cross talk] Exposition of 1939?

WILLIAM GASKIN: The San Francisco—yes, to commemorate, you know, the Pacifica [ph].

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: On Treasure Island?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes. On Treasure Island. This put us in a—it was greatly to our advantage, from a Project standpoint, because there was a great deal of work to do which could be done by a large number of artists, student artists, and craftsmen. It also was valuable for the experienced artist, or we say the professional artist, who did not work on the Project because he was immediately employed by architects in the city and elsewhere to work. And so, as we know, a great many of the artists were employed as sculptors and decorators for the public buildings. We have examples of Jane Berlandina doing work in the City of San Francisco Building, and Mr. Labaudt who did large murals in either the Californian Building or the San Francisco Building. And so, many of our artists were employed directly by the fair officials for creative work. But the Project—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Apart from the WPA?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Apart from the WPA. This was all privately granted. Now, this took many of the important artists away from the Project work, you see, those that were on it, and those that weren't, they were then not too interested so much in the Project. But the Project had one advantage, that the federal government had large—a large number of exhibits, and especially the Federal Building, which was one of the largest buildings at the fair. And this was designed by Timothy Pflueger, you know, the prominent architect in San Francisco, and Mr. Pflueger had put up some of the principal buildings in the city—commercial buildings. And Mr. Pflueger was a very great champion of the Project. He assisted us in finding a great deal of work that also, in the case of the George Washington High School, he—through his efforts, we did a great mural—a sculptural mural there. And Mr. Pflueger was anxious that we have something to do on his building at the fair, being a federal Project, and George Creel, the federal director of the fair projects, was most cordial to us, and through cooperating with us, we did a great deal of work.

And one of the things we did, which was rather interesting—perhaps not world-shattering in the world of art—but we made perhaps the largest mural in the world because we painted the entire façade of the space between the two buildings. Now, this was quite an interesting project for us because we wanted to give it to a young artist, and we had selected, through a slight process of discussion with the artists—and mainly that many of the—as I mentioned, many of the very prominent artists were working—already employed privately by the fair. It left us to give a chance to a young artist, or rather an unknown artist, on the Project, and so, we gave this to work to Mr. Herman Voltz, V-O-L-T-Z. He was a boy, I think, who had training in Switzerland originally. His work was not too extreme and not too—it certainly was not controversial in any way, but he had some very set ideas on what he wanted to do.

When the panels were first sent to Washington, they were rejected by whoever was in charge in Washington.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The designs?

WILLIAM GASKIN: The designs were.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: What were the designs [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, they were the history of California, I believe, was—maybe the subject would be the history of California. I—this was a great disappointment—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: What was the reason they rejected [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, I'm going to tell this story, if you don't mind. I don't wish to bore you with this, but I want to show you how the workings of the Project—and I think sometimes the back scenes tell you more than all the big things we did.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's right.

WILLIAM GASKIN: I want to show you the funny things that happened. Mr. Voltz was a little—I thought, a very, very promising artist, and also a very vigorous one, and also one who we felt had under prior—some work which he did on the Project before, for instance, he did some paintings for us, and he had won an award at—say, at the San Francisco Museum, he won a high award for a watercolor which was painted when he was a member of the Project on his own, and this was greatly pleasing to us because it was a new type of watercolor, and all thought a very great contribution to watercolor in America.

[00:15:28]

Well, in giving Voltz the project, he was—as all young artists, he was not going to allow anybody to interfere with his design. Now, I don't suppose there was any intention on our part to interfere with him. We thought, perhaps, the old artists might guide him in some phases of the work, but we were going to give him a carte blanche. But his work was turned down in Washington. Just how this came about, I don't know. But, strangely, under governmental bureaucratic systems, the work is finally referred to the government appointee in the Bay Area, which in this case, happened to be myself. So, I then decided to tell Mr. Danysh to wire to Washington and say that I approved of these murals. The—which was accepted. Of course, they had to, then. And I thought a very good person to have come out, and—as sort of an invitee on the murals then—to invite, say, to maybe help our artist in his subject, which was the history of California. And we invited—jeez, his name, I can't think—a very—it wasn't Creel—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Historian?

WILLIAM GASKIN: It was a very prominent writer and—I'll give you his name in a moment. I'll tell you his name in a moment. And I knew that he would be just the man to have. And to tell you the funny side of this—oh, I may be condemned for how one had to get going—I told Mr. Danysh that when I was going to have—it couldn't have been Creel—well, the—we'll call him, the historian, the authority—he was a writer and an authority, come, I knew that his—anything that he—because he was in a position to approve—so it must have been Mr. Creel because he was in a position to approve these. Yes, he was. He was the—he had—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Creel had done some [inaudible].

WILLIAM GASKIN: Creel—oh, yes. Creel was the head of the federal project at the fair, therefore I thought I would invite him to give us his advice on what he thought would be appropriate in these problems in the history of California. Now, being from an artist's standpoint, I was afraid Mr. Creel had rather conservative ideas of what a historical mural should look like, and knowing my artist, Mr. Voltz, who was a little bit apt to be a little, say, less conservative, I thought maybe it would be a wise idea not to have our artist on the scene at all when Mr. Creel gave us his great knowledge of what was going in the mural.

So, in order to carry out this, I asked Mr. Voltz if it would be alright if he would stay away during this interview [laughs], and—I told him—I said, If you stay away, Herman, I'm sure that you'll have the job. If you come, I think we might get—come to blows. Well, as it turned out, Mr. Creel was very cooperative, and of course, he would tell us about the history of the newspaper in San Francisco, and so forth and so on. We said, Why, yes, of course, there's so-and-so, and over here is such-and-such. Well, anyway, he accepted and approved this.

Which if he—with his acceptance, the mural was all ready to go. Therefore, we had a lot of room for numbers of young men and assistants to help Mr. Voltz. And the mural was completed in professional order, and it was—and I remember standing one evening with Voltz, looking at it, and if we stood quite a distance from the building, there was a lake, or I suppose we would call it a pond, in which the entire mural reflected in the water, and I thought it was a rather stunning effect, and it was a great feat on the part of the Project.

[00:20:01]

Whether the director had anything to do with [laughs], I don't know, but you have no idea how we pretty near didn't have the mural. Because artists are not—now, perhaps, they are much freer than they know. People are frightened they might make a mistake. In those days, there were an awful lot of people who knew what they wanted, and so it was very difficult to give an enormous mural such as that to a young artist. Well, fortunately, it all came off very well. But I thought the funny side was how we had to get it approved because I know that if Voltz were there we never would have because—later on though, he became very friendly with Mr. Creel, and they did a number of other things for the fair, and found him a very competent artist.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Did Voltz do the historical research and—

WILLIAM GASKIN: The historical research must have been gotten from the Writers' Project, you see. We were somewhat thorough in our methods. I mean, we weren't just wild men, and in the case of Mr. Creel, I presume, his advice was quite helpful because maybe there were small scenes or incidents that—I doubt if anyone ever saw this at the fair, because the mural was quite large, and maybe the details never really did reach, but he had some rather interesting work in that mural. His style of painting lent itself to mural, as it was not too representational, and it seemed to be very colorful, which was one thing which, of course, was in his favor.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: What did it show? Pioneers, and gold rush, and—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, it showed the discovery of gold, you know, the founding of Sutter's Fort. It showed—oh, it showed everything. I haven't got a picture of it, but if you looked at it, I guess everything's in there, because it was huge. It had to have something because it stretched—I don't know how many square feet. I think it was the largest mural in the world. I know it was bigger than Sistine Chapel. [Laughs.]

Well anyhow, to bring it—now, with our associates with the fair, I think it became rather interesting because we met there—through Mr. Creel, we met René d'Harnoncourt, who was with the Modern Museum of Art. Now, how to spell his name, I couldn't tell you, but you can jot it down and remember it. Mr. d'Harnoncourt was—he—putting in the Indian exhibit—exhibition of the Indian cultures, you know? The Indian. Well, he approached the Project and asked if there was some way we make some posters for this—for this exhibit. Well, there again was an opportunity for us. I immediately thought who could, and I would ask the other supervisors on the Project, which we always discuss rather informally as to who would be a desirable person, who we thought we could get, and it occurred to me that I would ask Louis Siegrist, who is an Oakland artist of great skill, and now has a very fine reputation as a painter. But Siegrist I had known a number of years, and I remember him many years back on the Foster & Kleiser days. He had done work for Foster & Kleiser.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's L-O-U-S—L-O-U-I-S?

WILLIAM GASKIN: L—Lou Siegrist, L-O-U-I-S, S-E-G-R-I-S-T [sic]. S-E-G-R—he and his son are both prominent—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: [Inaudible.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: —yes, are both prominent Oakland artists. Well, Lou decided that he would like to do this. And I had—we had, I will say, on the Project established also a silk screen processing department, which we could use for numbers of purposes. Especially, maybe sometimes for the Theater Project we could do work, for, you know, posters, or we could do—anywhere we could use semi-poster work, we found it was very good. And so, we set up the silk screen project at the fair under Mr. d'Harnoncourt's assistance. And we turned out the posters for the Indian division, and I believe Mr. Siegrist has copies of these posters, and I think they were the most creditable and outstanding posters made in the United States

during that period. They were very, very fine and were highly commented upon by Mr. d'Harnoncourt and, I believe, were circulated throughout the United States.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's on the subject of American Indians?

WILLIAM GASKIN: It was on the American Indian exhibit, and these show—all the way from Alaska, too, you know, all the Indians of North America. A beautiful—it was one of the finest exhibits ever shown of American Indian culture, from the Alaskan Indians on down to the Plains Indians, and the Pueblo Indians. And it was beautifully done, and the posters, I think, were excellent.

[00:25:03]

So, you see the Project then began more and more to be doing more and more professional work because the public were having more confidence in the Project, you see. And I think we were now coming towards the close of the project because 1939 the fair opened. And we continued to do more work because the fair was opened again the second—was it the—was it 1939, it opened or closed?

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Opened in 1939, and then it [cross talk] continued for another year.

WILLIAM GASKIN: And then it continued—yes, it continued into the next year.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: 1940.

WILLIAM GASKIN: There were some modifications, and I remember—to tell you one interesting incident of the fair, which again—of course, I tell these from a personal standpoint because I was obligated to go and attend to all these things, whether I liked it or not. I had gone to the—over to the Federal Building, practically daily, to the fair just to supervise the work going on under the auspices of the Project. And walking in one day to the court of the Federal Building, I looked at this court, and I was appalled at how so many things were—for instance, they had the weaving, and they had different crafts and things shown—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: [Inaudible.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes—or, well, I'll show you how this [inaudible] came, you see? They were showing—there were—there were mounted photographs and samples of spinning wheels, and there were all sorts of things showing the different crafts, in cases. And there was a pool out front which had some goldfish in it, and it had some rocks, I mean, some sort of posters hanging on a sort of a stylized kind of a rack. And all this struck me a kind of a dead sort of an institution, so I brazenly went in and said, Mr. Creel, your court is just dreadful. This is an awful place. I said, What's it for? I said, All these dead objects of—pasted up on the wall, weaving—and I don't know what it was all about, and I said, Some of the buildings haven't any doors. You can't get in them. And I said, "t's a beautiful piece of architecture, but nobody's going to go in there. So, and about—I'm going back to San Francisco—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: I thought this catalog of the fair will help refresh your memory—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yeah, this will help. Yeah. Yes, it does.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —of the names.

WILLIAM GASKIN: So, I said to—I went back to the Project of 49 Fourth Street, and I was hardly in the building when I had a letter to come immediately up to Mr. Danysh's office, and he says, You must give immediately your reasons why that project—that court is not satisfactory. Well, I said, Heavens, I certainly put my foot in, because I hadn't given very much thought. I just thought there was something wrong with the blasted place. Well, after two weeks of negotiations and investigation and everything, we—not only on my own suggestion, but I said, If it's weaving, there should be people weaving. If there's that pond, that fishpond, it means nothing to the hundred thousands of people that are going to come. They've all got fishponds. I said, I want to see a man casting nets out there. And so, we put up bleachers, and they had lessons in fly casting, very popular. We had Bufano bring in his cat, and so—and put sand around so the—so the children could play on his cat and got the recreation department to put some sand lots in there. And I said, It should be like a country store, and not like an—well, we were severely criticized by—I don't know whether it was the

architectural forum. But this was a very beautiful layout on paper, but it was so precious, and nobody dared walk in it. And so, we wrecked it. [Lewis Ferbraché laughs.]

But I think that it brought a wonderful horde of people. I was there one day, I think, everybody in the world was in the court. But this was how we worked, sometimes with great —more enthusiasm, perhaps, than brains, you know—I mean, or maybe we didn't think these things out, but we knew instinctively that that must be what had to be there. And then we did some of our first, what we called, Art in Action, actually before the public. Well, now as—then, later in the fair proper, as the fair opened—this was before the fair opened, you see, in 1939. But then later, we had inside the fair buildings, we had large exhibits of—Ms. Ruth Cravath was carving a horse and she had a regular horse as a model.

[00:30:07]

And Volzt and his people were whacking out mosaics and I think Rivera was working with that group. Why here's Jay Risling and Marian Simpson, and Jane Foster [ph], and Marion Cunningham , who became a great silkscreen artist in her own right at one time and made— she was the wife of Ben Cunningham, one of our supervisors. And Maxine Albro, the Mexican girl who did many, many lithographs on the Project. And of course, Ms. Genevieve [ph] Sargeant who was one of the early pioneer artists here, you know, of the—I guess the generation just before myself. And she's the mother, you know, of Winthrop Sargeant the famous critic of music, you know, for *the New Yorker*. And Ethel Wallace, I remember very well, Philip Nesbitt, Ann Rice is now the wife of Richard O'Hanlon who is in the sculpture department at the University of California. And she herself is now teaching on the University extension. And Matthew Barnes as we mentioned.

And Fred Olmsted did two large pieces of sculpture for us. At the—he did work at the fair in the Art in Action and he also did two large pieces of sculpture for the Balboa High School. I believe one is of Edison and Leonardo, I believe. They were huge heads, I don't know anything more about them than that. And Mrs. Terrebova [ph] who was a Russian woman who lived in Salinas, and she made a very strange sort of semi-primitive pieces of sculpture, of wood she found— driftwood she found on the beach there. So, using her as kind of a folk artist, we actually incorporated her into the Project as a folk artist. That's interesting, I think. So, I think we tried in our humble way, you see, to give these some people a chance, I guess a good many very brilliant people might have been left out.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: They would work certain days and—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well yes, and for instance, with Mrs. Terrebova [ph] would be allowed to work at home on her wood carving and she did some very interesting, and very, sort of— what we would call native, primitive sculpture of driftwood with color, maybe a little insertion of things, some pebbles or something. It's rather striking and competent enough to be exhibited.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Others would work right—[Cross talk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Some—oh, this was just a sculpture. But the people who were doing the Art in Action were right there demonstrating right before the passing public at the fair. Hundreds of thousands of people could watch them and of course they would have time off and there'd be substitutes. So, they'd make prints—they would make prints, they'd carve wood, they'd carve sculpture. As I said Mrs. Cravath, a prominent San Francisco sculptor, actually was carving—had a horse there as a model, carving a horse. The other men were working on the mosaics, and the tapestry weavers were weaving, and weavers all were people—and it's one thing that the public love to see is an artist at work and now this is a common thing in any annual little street fair or at the fair in Sacramento. Why people are doing art in action, I suppose it's done all over the United States.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: But this was one of the first instances?

WILLIAM GASKIN: I think this was one of the first instances. Now who was actually responsible for that? It could have been some of the artists themselves, it might have been Mrs. Ryan [ph], it might have been the people in the art centers who needed someone to show the public how things were done. And we might send an artist up—I know I gave many talks at the art centers, and I think once in a while we sent an artist up, show them how to make how to make an etching, how to make a print or something like that. And so that was how that was done.

And now looking over some names which is very, very interesting—there was Charles who was an independent artist and one that we—he was a very good wood-carver and I had suggested to Surendorf that he also do some wood engraving. And so, of course he was given engraving tools, and wood, and things which he needed, and he was allowed to go home and make this work and bring us prints right from his own studio.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: He's now a well-known—

WILLIAM GASKIN: He's now a well-known print maker and he's up in—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Columbia State Park.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Columbia State Park. And so there he was, there was a chance for him. Now you see in the textile group is Mya Albee [ph]—here's her name, Albee [ph]— and Jean Fray [ph]. And those were the two leading weavers. And these were the people that we asked to found that little project and they were left alone to do that.

[00:35:14]

And, gee, there's a lot of people's names sort of come slowly to me. Tom Ball [ph], of course, I think, was an Oakland man who was very good at ceramics and things like that. This maybe is more Oakland—some of these are Oakland people. David Tolerton was a very fine metal worker, and David later became a potter. And it's rather interesting because years later when I moved to the desert, and we had a friend, and we opened a pottery on the desert. We had invited Tolerton down to show us how to make pots. And we also had other people that didn't apply to the Project of course. So, it's very interesting to see these names of people. Of course, Cindy Gram's [ph] a sculptress— what she did—she may have done work for the Oakland Project, which I wouldn't remember, you see. Antonio Sotomayor, a very prominent artist, a very famous cartoonist who would do caricatures—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Book illustrator.

WILLIAM GASKIN: —book illustrator, who does all sorts of things you know, has done ballets and everything. Works at the—used to be down at the Palace Hotel [ph]. And of course, Matt Barnes, his great contribution was towards the advancement of the technique of plastering, although he did not paint anything for the Project. He was an independent artist who wouldn't— didn't need relief or would refuse to accept it, you see.

So, that's how that went. Now ask me a few things that I may have overlooked because there are lots of things that I haven't the slightest idea of what is what. Now this Art in Action —oh yes here are the names of the people. Well Mrs. Abdy—I'm reading a few names so this is for the—I'm reading a few names. Rowena Meeks Abdy—A-B-D-Y—was a very kind of say an artist who worked pretty much on her own as a watercolorist, draftsman, and I had the I—

[END OF TRACK AAA_gaskin64_129_m.]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Tape number four with William Gaskin, February 28, 1964. Would you continue, Mr. Gaskin, with some of the other points concerning the Projects? For example, what were attitudes from Washington or from—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —people—

WILLIAM GASKIN: We were going to speak also a little more about, you know, the sculptor Beniamino Bufano's work on the Project and how his department was conducted and some of the works that he did. And there's no question about it, he did an enormous amount of carving and sculpture pieces for us. And these—many of these were to be incorporated in different parts of the city of San Francisco, as much of the granite was given to the Project through the WPA Work Projects and their building department, whatever we call that. And so Mr. Bufano worked a great deal on that and we were also going to have Bufano do certain mural decorations for the California State Teachers College. I guess it was called the San Francisco State Teachers College, which is now the—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Extension Center, University of California?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, now is used as the Extension Center for the University extension

courses. We had—in the auditorium were a series of lunettes, quite good size, and the director of the school at that time was interested in having us do some work for the school. He was quite interested in the Project. And I notice on this list here a young man who is listed as a sculptor here, a Jack Moxom did a series of—Moxom was spelled—as you can see, Moxom was spelled—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: M-O-X-

WILLIAM GASKIN: M-O-X-O-M. And Jack was a very young man and had some ideas. And he and Reuben Kadish worked in that building. And I see Reuben's name is on here. So those were young artists working in the fresco medium. And at the same time, we felt that these panels—these large panels were worthy of maybe a very experienced artist, and I suggested that Mr. Bufano make the drawings—the cartoons for these panels. And we were going to use such figures, say, as the History of Philosophy, perhaps. We were going to use figure—they were to be figures. And I remember that we were to have great artists and philosophers of all the ages.

And so Benny had made a series of what were really rather magnificent drawings. But he—when we showed them to the director, he didn't feel that he could accept them. Probably because he was—he wasn't, I don't think—from an aesthetic standpoint or an arts standpoint he knew nothing about these, I know. But he wouldn't accept them on other grounds because some of the figures were nude. And I think you'll find—and I know that we thought that it was rather odd, say, maybe, in your various methods of thinking, that Washington very likely be standing next to Pericles. But anyway, he was putting great figures of world—who made great contributions to the world, or its betterment [ph], [laughs] in his panel.

So there was a case in which some very magnificent designs, regardless of what their message was other than their aesthetic, were turned down. And it's that in this case—so with Bufano, we had much—not so much public opposition to his work, but opposition on the part of sponsors of the buildings or people who had the responsibility, you know, of the walls or areas that were to be decorated by Mr. Bufano. And so we had that problem.

[00:05:00]

Of course, our great interest with Mr. Bufano was, that we were to—we had championed the idea of putting up a colossal statue of Saint Francis. How this started, whether it started originally with Mr. Bufano or not—but the Project enthusiastically backed the idea of putting a gigantic statue on Twin Peaks which would represent Saint Francis of Assisi and would also represent many other things which many attributed to the virtues of this statue as a statue to peace and humility and love and all sorts of things. But anyway, the whole idea was and we thought it would be a magnificent thing—and at that time Alcatraz [ph] wasn't available, fortunately. But so, we did finally get to the point where he made the copper hands and head, which the city of San Francisco appropriated the copper—the money for the copper. And also, we had been given the permit to use the property as laid out on the site, up on the Twin Peaks. Which we seemed to get the approval of from the city. But due to other circumstances, the project fell through.

So with Benny, as one of the chief and most controversial and outstanding artists on the Project, he did give many men—craftsmen an opportunity to work with him and, I suppose, we could say that perhaps the work that he did there on that Project was of great value to the city. And I think it will be in time. Regardless of what people think of him as a sculptor, his work is very competent.

And then going on to the other things, of course the great thing was—fortunately for the Project, as we had worked together, and the assistants and the Project artists and then the outside artists who weren't on the Project had rallied around and then came the World's Fair which gave us an opportunity to work on the fair grounds. And as I told you, we did certain important pieces of work there. The rest of the Project days I presume were carrying on unfinished work. Now I left the Project in the first of the year of 1940. I think I retired in 1939 on December 31st. And I left the Project and Mr. Beck Young [ph] took my place. But after that, there were many interesting things going on which we have spoken of, and I would like to suggest that you talk, you know, to Mr. Beck Young [ph] who was there, or anyone else. Mr. Danysh, I suppose also. I don't know whether he stayed to the Project to the end or not, but I know in time went on to New York and when the World's Fair started there he had something to do with that. But then the artists—then of course, shortly after the Project was

closed—the country— everything was closed down. Entire Projects were closed down.

But I think it was one of the great experiments on the part of any government in the history of man in actually suddenly deciding to hire all available artists in need of employment. And I think that many great mistakes were made, maybe some great, outstanding art was not produced. But many of the young artists of those days have become the prominent artists of today in the recent past. And we could mention outstanding artists if we think—I think of the artists in the East and I think of many other Western artists—in fact, all, most, all the Western artists who've risen to any prominence now who were then comparatively young men were on the Project and I think that experience was very wonderful for them. And maybe we regret now that we haven't left any immortal works, but we've left an immortal idea, by goodness, I think.

And I think when a country can employ its artists and employ them usefully, and not only for commercial reasons, then they will get something quite remarkable. Because the artist has to be left alone, if he's not, he can't produce anything. [Laughs.] He can only get us all into a terribly chaotic state of mind. Because, you know, one of the reasons the Projects were started—and it's hard to believe this, and may be disputed—one of the reasons the Projects were started was the fear on the part of the—I suppose we must call them bureaucrats or people—of the power of art and the pen to change the—a man's destiny.

[00:10:12]

And they saw this in Mexico with the rise of the revolutionary artists. And the people were frightened to death and maybe they thought, We better hire the artist and let them do something creative from a beauty standpoint and not suddenly—and I guess that's about all I can say about it. I know that in my own life—I really think personally, for myself, I didn't do any creative work in those four years. It may have been better for me if I just had decided to stay home and maybe become a painter and member of the Project. But they were very exciting days and as many people as I worked with or people that I knew personally. And I think we felt someone had to do these things. And I enjoyed it. And as the work piled up, we went on and on and on. I don't think we [inaudible] up for any particular gain, but some of us who worked as supervisors did have to give up the time. Because we couldn't do work of our own. Because we didn't want to be impartial and we would never take any work ourselves in a large scale, a mural job or anything like that. Wouldn't be right. But anyhow—and I think when many of the artists look back now, I think they look upon it as a great thing which may never happen again. I doubt it.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You mentioned—

WILLIAM GASKIN: I doubt it ever could happen again.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's a very good statement for the record. You mentioned to me off the tape that there were some strikes on the Project, just for the historical record—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Oh, yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —if you could say—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Now I'm trying to—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: [Inaudible.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: I'm trying to think what was the cause of these strikes. I don't really—now I'm in a little bit of a dilemma as to just what they were about, because I personally—no one had ever brought anything to my attention. Now whether these were just against the Art Project or against the whole WPA, I'm not certain. They—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Was it over wages, or—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, I haven't—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —do you think over the Project [inaudible]—

WILLIAM GASKIN: —the slightest idea. I suppose about the only person who could tell you what that strike was about was an artist named Bernard Zakheim, who was also an artist who had not had any great mural experience, but we did trust him with a great series of

murals at the affiliated colleges, in the clinic—you know, UC clinic. And I believe these have been painted out since.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: That's at the medical school?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, at the medical school near—yes, of the University of California and Chauncey Leake helped us get those in there. Now they were rather interesting murals because they were also—their theme was also somewhat the history of medicine in California. And of course, were done in a vigorous and a rugged way. And perhaps from an aesthetic standpoint did look a little violent in the room. But anyway, they finally covered them up because they felt they distracted the students. Now that, I don't know what the real reason was. But they were among the first murals that were painted out.

But what that had to do with strike—but Zakheim I remember very well was one of the strikers. And I can't remember what the strike was about. And I don't think it was about any more work. I can't remember just what it was about, myself. But I remember going to—arriving at the office here on Potrero, which is just a few blocks from where we're sitting, and I arrived one morning, and I saw all the pickets out. And so, there I met some of my friends and among them was Mr. Zakheim with his sandwich—what do you call it—banner, on his chest, right. And I said, Well, good morning, Zak, what are you doing? He said, Well you can't—you're not going to cross the line, are you? I said, Who are you picketing? What's it all about? Well we're picketing the Project. I said, Gee, Zak, I'm in a terrible state because I'm one of the directors of the Project, I suppose I have to go in. So in I went [Lewis Ferbraché laughs] and we didn't know what it was all about. But there was something going on in these Projects somewhere. And I don't remember. Maybe Glenn [ph] might know.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: They didn't send in a committee to—

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, we had no committees—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —talk to you or anything?

WILLIAM GASKIN: —came in and talked to us. I'll tell you, this might not be too good for the record, but I'll show you one time a thing that did happen and I'll show you a little bit. And this happened personally to me. I'm sitting in the office and I was unaware of, as I explained, how people came about getting jobs on the Project. They would come and they make out their application and we'd interview them and talk to them. And they were we usually sent from some other Project, you know, on the idea that they wanted to be on the Art Project as artists and they were sent to us.

[00:15:14]

So numbers of people came that way and if they seemed to have any ability whatever or any—being able to draw or could do something, if we had some—an opening on the Project, why, I would say, Well, sure, I can give you something to do. And you may go in the lithographic department or you may help in the Index of American Design, which was another department which was a rather pet of Holder Cahill's which, I believe there now are publications out explaining the whole Project. So many of our artists and graphic artists in particular worked on that Project. So sometimes we could put artists with talent to work.

Well, one day, I had, mistakenly or indirectly, I had to—we were planning on closing the lithographic department in which a couple of young men were assigned to do work. Now, their work wasn't terribly outstanding, but it was an example of what young artists could do, so all was satisfactory. But I found out to my dismay a few weeks later, when they were transferred from that project to another project, that I was held accountable for, say, more or less dismissing these people. And which I don't think I had intentionally thought of doing, but I was asked to come down and to—and some kind of an investigation.

But before going down, there had been a committee coming and they announced to me that they were sick and tired and so forth and so on of my sitting there in this dictatorial position. I said, Well, I was very sorry they felt that way, but I told them that I would be perfectly happy if that were the case, that I wouldn't mind resigning or anything. But I said I didn't quite understand what they meant. Well they said, Well you will, because we are going to have an investigation. So we went down and I found that this investigation—which was held at 49 Fourth Street—just who held the investigation, I don't remember, but there was quite a group of people.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you remember the date [inaudible]?

WILLIAM GASKIN: I don't remember the date either. It was the day that this—it wasn't during this strike, you see, it was somewhere along there. And so I thought, well—there was arguments there that, oh, well, you fellas were very dictatorial about the types and you censored the subject matter of the artist. I said, no, I don't think so. I said, We have many lithographs which were made and I have sketches of people depicting the current scenes such as strikes and also things. And I said I believe there may be sometimes some violence in these drawings. And I said, we always—we never admonish the artist for doing this, but, of course, it was very difficult for, in our case, to be able to allocate these in public schools and so forth. So many of these are on file at the office, but we never did prohibit anyone.

And I—so they asked then, Where is the person who is filing this claim? And it was on the grounds that I had dismissed this boy from the lithographic department. And I didn't quite recall the incident until they told me his name and they asked if the man was present at this inquiry. And they said no, but his representative was there. And when I looked at the representative, here was the man who had denounced me as the one who was sitting in the position of dictatorial authority and so forth.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: I wonder if that would be—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Now, I—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —Levon Mosgofian. —

WILLIAM GASKIN: No, I don't know. Now I'm going to show you—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: He was quite an agitator in those days.

WILLIAM GASKIN: —a little—it might be. [Lewis Ferbraché laughs.] And so I'm going to show just what happened. And so I said, Oh, you're friend Mr. So-and-so? Yes. I said, If the committee would like, I have on file his pornographic drawings. They said, The hearing is dismissed. That was rather an amusing—[Lewis Ferbraché laughs]—an amusing—because I saved everything, you see?

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Yeah.

WILLIAM GASKIN: I saved every scrap of paper or letter that came to the office and which I just gave to the secretary, and we filed it away. And we were very proud because when the archives department came, they said, well, our files were in perfect order because we had all these filing cases which we filed everything in. Because we needed sometimes for reference. So we just kept everything. If anybody wrote us a letter, we saved it.

[00:20:00]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Yeah.

WILLIAM GASKIN: We didn't know anything else to do with it. We didn't throw it away. And so I thought that was rather an interesting incident and I often wondered, as the years went by, that maybe I had been kind of dictatorial. But I thought that that was—but sometimes, you know, there are funny things. And this is a little beside the point, but in operating a Project, you get all sorts of odd ideas. And I'm going to show you a funny one that I thought was maybe not too ethical, but I thought at the time, struck me as an original idea and rather amusing.

When I was working with the—Mr. Creel, he—we wanted to put some murals pertaining to the National Parks in the court—opposite the main federal court on the other court, near the Indian Division. There were lunettes where we were going to place murals which Hiler was very anxious to have designed, representing the National Parks. Because they had to do with the National Parks. And so they had made some rather abstract designs of National Parks, you know. There would be, oh—in fact, you wouldn't know they were National Parks, excepting if there was a name underneath it. They were abstract design.

So I took them up and showed them to Mr. Creel. And he said, Well, by golly, blank, blank, he said, Those—I don't think anybody'd ever know those are the National Parks. Well, I said, Well, the architects approve of them. They'd make beautiful panels in the court. And he said,

Well, I've got a lot of very fine photographs. I've made thousands of dollars in beautiful photographs, you know, advertising the parks. Well I said, Well they could be below. But he said—well, I said, Mr. Creel, really, I said, These were done by a very, very prominent artist, Mr. Hiler, and I have to—I have his confidence that they can be executed by himself and his assistants. And I'm sure that they're going to look very fine. And he said, Well, I don't know. He said, I've put all this money on these photographs.

Well I said, Now Mr. Creel, I want to show you something funny. I'm going to show you something. And I said, You got a pencil and piece of paper? And I said, now, look. I drew a little sort of an *m* shaped line on the paper. And I said every child in Japan would recognize that as Mt. Fuji. I said, it's just a little—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Cone-shaped—

WILLIAM GASKIN: —a little cone shape. And I said, turning the paper over, I wrote WPA and I said, Everybody understands that. And he said, How much do you need for the pamphlets? [They laugh.] So I said, About $2,500. And—well, I mean, these are the funny ways we did business in our ignorance. And, you know, in a way—because I knew it was important that the Art Project did something at that place. So those are the stories. But I can't remember too much, excepting—I believe you have lists, you know, of the prominent things that were done throughout the area. How much we did in the outlying districts, I don't remember.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You did mention off the tape to me the Community Arts Centers—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Oh, yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —clear up to Montana—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —in fact that—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: If you talk a little—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, I—you see, of course, a good deal of that was carried on—the founding of the community arts centers was one of the great moves on the part of the Project and I think was originated here. I'm not positive of that. But the—we—the idea was that if we could open—rent or get allocated to us some desirable space in different towns so that the outside communities could—smaller cities, could see works of the Project other than just an exhibition, and could participate in some way, it would be a good idea to open little arts centers. And we could supply these centers with work from the various Projects, sometimes our own and sometimes eastern Projects. But the idea was that it would bring the communities—the people in these various communities together, a little center where they could come and discuss art, see examples, and also participate in some in maybe doing a little painting, or maybe we have a class, or—we have some, any number of things. And so we—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Also, to hire the local artists.

WILLIAM GASKIN: And also to hire any artists there that we could use. And that's quite true because, you see, the supervisor of that Project could. And I remember we did some work—when we had the Project in Sacramento, we actually supplied one person, I think, to help sometimes do some theater designs.

[00:25:04]

But we had—these Projects were liked by the people. How many we had? I think Ms. Ryan [ph], and I believe that there was a young man named Foster who was a writer of some prominence but also a very skilled craftsman himself who was also helping Ms. Ryan [ph] in that department. His name is Foster. He's a relative of Mr. Wessels’s by marriage.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Willis Foster?

WILLIAM GASKIN: Willis Foster. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Willis was there.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Brother-in-law.

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, brother-in-law. So Willis was at that time, had something to do with—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: And Mrs. Ryan [ph] was head of the exhibits?

WILLIAM GASKIN: And Mrs. Ryan [ph] was there. And so a lot of that was done at the central office. We might say the regional office, where we wouldn't have as much to do. But I visited many of the Projects because I would go to—you know, to supervise the aesthetic sides, see how it was set up and see what it's about. And I remember that we also gave, we did a number of exhibitions, say, at the State Fair—the California State Fair in Sacramento. And we also did other things that would seem, perhaps maybe, more or less just sponsored by us, but for the University of California we supplied a photographer and also a craftsman who made cases for slides—you know, to store slides. And we supplied a cameraman. In fact, it was Mr. Abbenseth who took thousands of manuscripts for them. You know, made copies of many manuscripts. And so the university was very—in some way a sponsor for us because—and later on, it was necessary for us to do some going abroad. One doesn't know that these things are going to happen, but there were times when we actually had to go to Sacramento before the legislature and ask them to sponsor the Project for us in the later days when there was great controversy, nationally, of the desirability of these Projects. And so we were in a very favorable position. The university approved—or certain departments of the university, I'm sure, approved of what we were doing. And also, we had the sponsorship of the state legislature of California.

And I remember it came out at that—when we had sent our representative up to explain our position and what we wanted was a sponsorship, we could show them that we had done to date, at that date, which was a rather late date in the Project now, about, we estimated, $14 million worth of artwork on the evaluation of labor and so forth at that time. And we thought that was rather a good thing, you know, from, you might say, a practical standpoint. And so I couldn't—I'd like to tell you more. I could tell—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: You already—

WILLIAM GASKIN: I could tell you many funny stories of people because there was always something amusing going on every day, you see. I mean, there would be the most amusing things, you see. What goes on on a Project, you know? And I'll tell you a couple of funny stories just to make it interesting. I remember I was sitting in my chair one day introducing someone and something—somebody was crawling around on the floor around the back and I suppose all government officials must experience this. And I looked around to see what it was, and it turned out this was just a man from the archives department checking the number on the chair. [They laugh.]You know? And then one day a man came into my office with a large sheaf of papers and he said, Mr. Gaskin, I have to ask you a few questions. He said, Now, could you tell me the exact location of a plumb bob—[Lewis Ferbraché laughs] that was purchased on requisition so-and-so? Well, I said, Yes, sir. And we had kept such remarkable files. And I said to Ms. Collins [ph], who was the, you know, head secretary, Ms. Collins, the plumb bob? She said, Yes, it's at the Fleishhacker Pool. [Lewis Ferbraché laughs.] And so we used to get a great thrill out of being able to be so efficient. But we certainly were considered by many slightly mad. But I think the archives department probably thought we were efficient as the dickens [laughs], because we always had everything. We never lost anything. And I thought it was so funny.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Do you know what ever happened to the records, all these records of—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Well, I don't know. I think what officially what happens is this. You see, each year, as we approach the end of the fiscal year, the government's fiscal year, which comes along, you would find that every—the entire Project would have to be re—

[00:30:12]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: [Inaudible.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yes, new appropriations must be made by Congress. And this was when we would go to Sacramento, you know, to get the state legislation to sponsor us as a help. And so, every year at the end of the year, the fiscal year, all buildings and all things that we had rented and everything would automatically be finished because we were done. And so here we would be, and we wouldn't know what to do. We have all this property and all this

work going on. We had [inaudible], so all we had to do was quietly wait. So, we just didn't say anything. And then we were very fortunate, I think very fortunate, each one of those years we got ample appropriations to carry on that Project. Whether that was due to our efforts or not I don't know, but we did, and I think that that was always a thing to us.

So when the Projects are closed you simply turn over all records, I presume. I don't know where the records of the—employment records and all that must have gone through the payroll departments pertaining to the WPA. But the all the records and correspondence of the department, and I believe all the works on hand are taken over by the department, the San Francisco—I suppose you would call that the archives. It isn't the archives department, it's the property department. So, there's a name. In which—so when you had 25 or 30 typewriters, you see, they would be returned to the city property office and so that would be with all the furniture and, I suppose, at that time al—I think all property—all real property pertaining to the project was turned in.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The easel paintings, for example?

WILLIAM GASKIN: The easel paintings and lithographs and all that must have been saved and all little statuettes or anything we may have had must have been sent there because there's no other place to send it.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Perhaps they may be—[Crosstalk.]

WILLIAM GASKIN: Some may be—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: —some storage—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Some may be. But I can know from the New York Project, I had read in the papers, you know, many of those paintings, and we've heard recently that they were just stored in and dumped somewhere, and many were finally destroyed. Many were sold, and many were—even people got them, you know. Whatever happened to them it must have had tons of stuff in New York. But what became of all our lithographs—and we didn't have such great piles of easel paintings. Most of the easel paintings—millions of them made in Los Angeles, I remember they used to have room fulls down there. But we didn't have, because our artists were— those artists who worked for us and made easel paintings were expected to turn out high quality work and whenever we got a nice piece we had little trouble allocating it to someone.

I mean, so many, many schools and many places have easel paintings that were allocated by the project. I mean schools and quite a number—and some of the artists were rather popular and naturally there would be many of theirs, or maybe all of theirs, would be allocated. But small things, like many lithographs and like that, they very likely weren't all allocated. But I don't think there were really many pictures left. Most of our work were publics works, and especially our fair work was—took up lots of our work. So, our easel paintings were rather, I guess a small group. What became of the Kingman watercolors that were made, I don't know. They would have been interesting to see.

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: Very valuable today.

WILLIAM GASKIN: I imagine so. [Cross talk.]

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: The prices that he's getting—

WILLIAM GASKIN: Yeah. I imagine so. I don't know what happened to a number of the people —even Voltz made some very nice watercolors, and I suppose others did. We didn't have too many. I know that Rexroth's wife, Andrée Rexroth—his first wife, I guess—had made some very nice watercolors. Now what ever happened to those? I never did see them, I don't know what happened to them.

So that's the way it goes. So that's the rounding story. I don't know what else I could think of that might be of very pertinent—I suppose I left out all the important things. But there's no use in saying we did all this, and we did all that, and all the artists did all that because I don't think they did anything of the kind. It was a case of artists finding a place, and giving a wall, and then putting what they themselves—occasionally with advice, as you said, with advice on the history of California we had to have that and that was the way it went. And I don't think—but what the strike was about I haven't the slightest idea. It had something to

do with Benny. [Lewis Ferbraché laughs.]

UNIDENTIFIABLE SPEAKER: Evidentially has—

LEWIS FERBRACHÉ: This ends the tape with Mr. William Gaskin, who was supervisor in Northern California Arts Project. End of tape number four.

[END OF TRACK AAA_gaskin64_130_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]