



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Richard C.
Morrison, 1965 June 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Richard Morrison on June 8, 1965. The interview was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

HARLAN PHILLIPS: So let's see, before we ran into the difficulty with this damn machine you were going to [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: I was going to tell you that back in the 20's when I was in college, the attitude of an undergraduate toward education was that anyone who got a grade higher than a C was a grind, so the ideal thing was for students to try and achieve as low a C grade as possible, and when I graduated from college in 1926, I just barely got out with a minimum requirement. And there were no jobs for anyone at the time, unless you had a relative in a stockbroker's office, there was no work for anybody. I went back to school and got a small job teaching at Harvard and did graduate work, and studied abroad. I did my doctor's thesis on Spanish painting and when I came back to America, I came back from Germany after Hitler came into power. I was in Berlin at the beginning of 1933 when he came into power. And then in 1934, I got a job working for the PWAP [Public Works of Art Program] which was the precursor of WPA [Works Progress Administration].

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did that come about?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, there was a fellow I knew, a classmate of mine, who had been Director of the PWAP and he wanted to leave it to go to work for the Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY] as a photographer. And I took this job just as a fill-in job, it was a local Massachusetts venture and [inaudible] [Interruption] This Public Works of Art project was set up by a guy named Bruce and in Washington and he organized committees among museum directors and various states initiated state projects. There was a project in Connecticut at the time, as well as one in Massachusetts, but they had no connection with each other. And I took over Newhall's job intending just to use it as a fill-in for the summer, but then I've forgotten whether it was in late 1934 or 1935 that the Federal Art Project was founded. And I think this fellow Bruce had a lot to do with that too, because Bruce had been a victim of infantile paralysis the same as Roosevelt and so they had a natural sympathy for each other, and anything he wanted to do with Roosevelt he could persuade Roosevelt to do it. And so through Bruce's persuasion and Hopkins' interest the Federal Art Project came into being. And I received a telegram from Cahill, who was made director, to come to Washington and they had very modest plans for the Federal Art Project, because Cahill had had no experience and didn't know how vast a thing this could be. And I think at first they planned to have, to ask for money to employ two or three hundred artists. And when I came to Washington and told them about the numbers that were employed in Massachusetts alone I was able to persuade Cahill to change his request for more money. I think he was asking for a quarter of a million dollars, and I got him to change it to give million dollars, because in Massachusetts alone we employed four hundred artists. And eventually I think the project employed five thousand artists. But it was kind of a difficult thing to start because you had to go through all this God-damned government red tape and fill out your application, and break down your expense, and it all had to be anticipatory because nobody knew who was available or how much money you could use. But we all made out our application on the generous side and very shortly after the project started we were so overwhelmed with applicants that we didn't have enough money even then, and if Cahill had gone through with his original intention of asking for a quarter of a million dollars, the project would have amounted to nothing. Well, everyone was very excited about it, we were all supposedly professional employees, that is, we supposedly knew something about art, we had to work through the administration, and we had to regulate our desires for worthy artistic creation to the administration's demand for poverty clause in the WPA. But by a lot of finagling around we were able to get about 25% of our people as purely professionals, that is, and they didn't have to bother about the poverty oath. And some pretty good things started developing. Mostly at first easel paintings and some modest pieces of sculpture, and then through the influence of that lousy Yale School of Fine Arts the country was flooded with would-be mural painters. And all the things that were put on walls under the influence of these people from Yale were all invariably poor and, I suppose, since then most of them have probably been destroyed. Some good mural painters came out of the project and some of the murals are still in place where they were painted. I know in Connecticut I had the Kansas painter John Stuart Curry do some murals for a school in Westport and-- where was that other place where Curry did a mural? I forget now, there were two places in Connecticut he did murals and it was his first experience with real mural painting but it gave him enough experience so that the Treasury Department hired him to do murals in various buildings in Washington. Then he went on from there to do the famous mural in the State House in Topeka of John Brown. And then the

University of Wisconsin hired him as an artist in residence and he painted some murals there. Many of the easel painters who enjoyed a national reputation today, and some even an international reputation got their first start on the Federal Art Project. I was fortunate in being able to give both Levine and Blume their first exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. There were various projects though, other than painting, that were important. For instance, up until the Depression, the majority of woodcarving that was done for churches and public buildings and things in the United States was done in Boston through two or three firms, and when the Depression came these people lost all their trade because people found it was cheaper to import carvings from Italy. And so Boston was filled with all these experienced German and Italian woodcarvers who had no jobs or no means of livelihood. And I think at one time in Boston I employed a hundred woodcarvers. And they did a variety of wonderful work. For instance, in the old State House in Boston where the colonial lion and unicorn were falling apart they re-carved them exactly as the originals were and they did a lot of carving for ship boards, and all kinds of decorative carving, and it kept the craft of those carvers still alive and kept the carvers busy until the Depression was pretty well over and they were able to go back into private business again. There were some wonderful sculptors who had a chance to do some work. One sculptor I had in Massachusetts named [Arnold] Geissbuhler was a very famous French sculptor and he and he had done many fine pieces of sculpture in France. But he came to America and nobody would give him a job. I hired him on the project and he did a war memorial in wax, that is, in plaster for the city of Medford, but there was so much politics involved that the City refused to let him carry the thing through to completion and turned the commission over to a local incompetent sculptor in Medford who put up one of those stupid doughboy monuments, you know, that flood the country. But Geissbuhler, although he never did get a chance to complete a commission had a great deal of influence on many of the younger sculptors. I don't know whether Geissbuhler is alive today or not but certainly at that time he was the greatest sculptor in the United States. And it seems tragic that a man of his artistic capability couldn't even get a commission to do it at a time when these monuments were offered free to the various cities. I don't know-- there was so much excitement in those early years of the project. We had to spend a third, or half, of our time in Washington, which was like a second-hand railroad station to us, and we'd have to go down for indoctrination, lectures. There was a fellow named Tugwell who had trained a lot of brilliant young men in finding means of evading Congressional restrictions on how money should be spent, and they'd lecture us and indoctrinate us on what we had to do in order to accomplish what we wanted to do without seeming to break the intent of law. It was always exciting because we as supposed professionals on the project has only one interest and that was to achieve artistic aims and that interest was in conflict with the interest of everyone else concerned in the government and in the WPA too. So we were in constant conflict with the interpreters of WPA laws and with all the people who were in the administration of WPA. And eventually on the art project we had our own experts who were lawyers and accountants and business people and they were very severe towards us too. That is, we would have to fight through our own people before we knew we could accomplish what we wanted back in the states by fighting the administration there. But in spite of all the restrictions that were put on us it was a wonderful experiment and a great deal of worthwhile art came out of it. I don't know who thought up the Index of American Design but we were lucky in Massachusetts to find a woman employed in the Boston Museum who was so skilled in the techniques of rendering texture so accurately that you couldn't distinguish between a watercolor drawing of, say, a piece of fabric from the actual fabric itself. And in other drawings too that were made that were copies of shop signs and things like that, the three-dimensional effect was so real that a person was irresistibly tempted to touch the watercolor to make sure that it was flat and not actually existing in three-dimension. Well, this woman, Suzanne Chapman, taught a group of supervisors all the various techniques and these supervisors from the Massachusetts project then taught the people they controlled, and then the supervisors went into other states, went into New York State and Virginia and Kentucky and a variety of states to teach people there how to render these techniques and I suppose that tended toward a uniformity in the national output except in the Far West, in New Mexico and places where the Massachusetts influence wasn't felt. They rendered things a little bit differently and it seemed more like ordinary watercolor.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Let me take you back. When you joined the-- took over the PWAP-- what did you fall heir to in the way of program?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, it's difficult to remember, I think I had fifty professional artists mostly grouped in Boston with a group in Springfield but they were artists with established reputations and they were not employed because they were in monetary need, they were employed just because they were professionals. The PWAP when it started was headed by a fellow named Hatch in Boston who was Director of the Gardner Museum, but Hatch was so busy with his own duties at the Gardner Museum that he couldn't continue on with this PWAP so this fellow who was a classmate of mine, Newhall, took over and Newhall had a committee that was headed up by Francis Taylor who was Director of the Worcester Museum, and Hatch who was director of the Gardner Museum, and Sawyer who was Director of the Addison Gallery at Andover, Massachusetts. And when I took over from Newhall I had that same committee. Then when the Federal Art Project began that committee was expanded to include museum directors from all of the New England states. And it was headed by Taylor and Taylor was also on a national committee, and every once in a while while Taylor would stick his nose into the affairs of the project, I don't know why, just a desire to stir something up? I remember I had a fellow named Perkins working for me as a state director in Massachusetts and he had formerly been art editor of the *Boston*

Transcript, and he was a nice-enough guy but a little too gentle, a little too mild, and a little bit sissy and I had some difficulty with him. So Taylor, who was very fond of Perkins, was maneuvering around politically to have me ousted I think and to have Perkins take over my job. So Taylor arranged a meeting at Naumberg over in the Fogg Museum and he and Sawyer came there all prepared to lay down the law to me. And I went there, Perkins went also, but I brought a secretary and I took everything down verbatim and then after the meeting was over and the secretary had transcribed her notes, I edited them, I was the only one that had a copy. They didn't require much editing because Taylor and Sawyer convicted themselves by what they were saying, but some of the remarks I had made which I should have made I took out, and then I sent a copy of the transcript to Taylor and Sawyer so they stopped interfering with the project.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But the PWAP was a short-lived thing wasn't it?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it was. I think it lasted about a year. I've forgotten when the Section of Painting and Sculpture was established, I think Bruce had to do with that too on the Treasury Department, but when the Federal Art Project was established the Treasury Department also established another sort of Federal project based on Federal Art Project and they called it TRAP-- Treasury Relief Art Project.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Then you were in on the ground floor of the Federal Art Project?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I was [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did you [inaudible] I mean? [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: [inaudible] and I knew more about what had to be done than the Director of the project because I'd had the experience on PWAP. And he'd come in cold from New York and didn't realize all the problems and all the skills that were available too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well did you have responsibility for the whole New England area?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, the whole New England area, but there was a lot of freedom, there were five of us who were assistants to the national director and I think that division continued that way for about two years. And then Cahill began to rearrange it and I think he made Parker his assistant, he was assistant national director and then the rest of us were assistant to the national director. But Cahill would send me outside my territory. For instance, he sent me to Texas to try and start a project, he sent me to Kansas City to try and start one in Missouri, and he sent me to Kentucky and various places like that. For instance, on the Index of American Design one of the projects we had was to record the accomplishments of the Shakers and to do that we not only went into the existing Shaker communities in Massachusetts and Maine but we went to all the former Shaker communities that are no longer active, and no longer in existence even as far as Florida, and Cleveland, Ohio, and into Kentucky, in Connecticut, and New Hampshire and all the states where we could find historical evidence and physical evidence that the Shakers had left. Even though there were no longer any communities the buildings were still there. Then we went to various museums that had collected stuff and we worked with Andrews in Pittsfield, Massachusetts who were authorities on Shaker furniture and stuff and collected a great deal of it, the inspirational painters of the Shakers and the costumes and all. But although it began as a Massachusetts project it spread out to every part of the country where the Shakers had gone. And we had some wonderful photographers to photograph these things as well as the Index artists to record them. We had a photographer named [Noel] Vincentini, I think he came from South America, and he did some wonderful Shaker photographs. But he got into a little trouble with the Andrews's in Pittsfield, I think he had sexual intercourse with their daughter or niece or something and Andrews made quite a stir about it, and kicked all the rest of the artists out of their house because of that. I remember Ruth Reeves championing this fellow Vincentini, she said, "Why that brazen little hussy just turned over in the meadow and kicked up her heels and what else could the poor boy do?"

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did you order the New England area? Was it your function to pick up other people in charge of New Hampshire, let's say, or Maine?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. I picked state directors for each of the states. I had a regional office in Boston and I would go into the other states and select headquarters for them to rent and help them organize their separate state projects, and except at times when I was in Washington for long periods of time, I would visit each of these New England State projects at least once a week. And several times a year I would visit every individual artist in New England. For the most part I was pretty lucky about the directors, they were very competent people. The director I had in Maine was a Smith graduate and a competent artist herself. The fellow [Omer T.] Lassonde that I had in New Hampshire was a painter, competent, but no great artist, but he was very enthusiastic about his work and did the best he could in that state. And in Vermont I had a fellow named [Pierre] Zwick who was quite a politician and could accomplish a lot through the governor and through help from the University of Vermont, and did much better than anyone expected in that state. In Rhode Island I had difficulty because the administration in the WPA in Rhode Island was composed of Rhode Island high society, that is, the WPA State

Director was a man named Cheney, of the Cheney Silk Mills. And the head of the Women's Division was one of the oldest Rhode Island families. But then when you got down to the level of artists most the artists were Negroes or Italians or Jews from the slum areas of the city and there was no possible common ground of contact they could have with people high up in the administration. But Rhode Island turned out some wonderful work. And then in Connecticut my State Director was a wonderful chap, old family in New Haven, Yale man, and a very wealthy man, but because of some peculiar aberration he got into trouble on the project and I don't know whether he committed suicide or died from the shame of it, but anyway he died. And Connecticut, of course, is filled with these graduates of the Yale School of Art, and so Connecticut was filled with all kinds of bad murals, I think every village and town and city in Connecticut has thousands of feet of wall space destroyed by these awful Yale School murals. Most of them have been painted over since.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well did these various state directors have discretion in developing their own programs?

RICHARD MORRISON: At first they had complete freedom. After we experienced some bad work from them then we made them- for instance, on mural paintings we made them submit designs and then we would control them and prevent them from being carried out if we thought they were unworthy. It was a very delicate situation to handle because you'd have to go into a community, these people would have to go into a community and win over the popular support of the community for a project they wanted to carry out. Well, if it turned out to be a mural painting that was poor in design it was difficult to stop it because by that time the community would rise up, you know, and champion whatever was being done. We had to keep friendly with the community. So very often a lot of incompetent work was carried to completion because we didn't know how to win the community over.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You can't fight your own warfare from two hundred miles. Well, was this true of easel painting too, in Connecticut, for example?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, easel painting in Connecticut and every other state was a mélange of things, some of it was very excellent, and some of it was very poor. That was true in every state. There were other activities besides painting too. For instance, we would establish Community Art Centers, Defenbacher, who you will talk with later, would come to New England and I would take him around to various places where I thought we could start a Community Art Center. We'd gather the people together in the town and I'd talk to them and Defenbacher would talk to them and we'd pick out a location that the community seemed interested in and we'd get the town to give it to us rent-free, and these Community Art Centers were wonderful, and I guess there are dozens and dozens of them that have grown into permanent museums. I think, for instance, the museum in Wichita, Kansas here started out as a Community Art Center from the Federal Art Project, now it's the only worthwhile museum in Kansas. But the wonderful thing about these Community Art Centers was that the government put absolutely no money into it at all. It was a community enterprise, the only thing we did was to constantly visit these places and keep their interest active and awake all the time so that they wouldn't tire of it all, till they became so involved with it that they couldn't extricate themselves, and they'd continue it. And Cahill had a group of people around him in Washington that he would send out on various ventures, like Defenbacher on the Community Art Centers; and Parker too on Community Art Centers; and then he had this woman, Nina Collier, who he would send out to talk to communities on the Index of American Design. And some of those things were amusing. I remember the first time I met Nina. I met her in New Haven and she was lecturing to a group of grande dames in New Haven on the Index of American Design. They were all so disappointed because they didn't know what the Index of American Design was and they thought they were going to hear a lecture on birth control. And Nina could certainly have given them a better lecture on birth control. But all these people who were sent out from Washington were very competent, very diligent, and they were tireless, they worked twelve, fifteen hours a day, you know, no one to force them to do it, they could do whatever they wanted to do but just on their own initiatives they'd keep going into state after state, community after community, and everyone seemed to get a keen enjoyment out of the work he was doing and to think it was a worthwhile thing. And I guess people today are beginning to see that it was although at the time it came in for an awful lot of criticism. I remember one time I opened an art gallery on Beacon Hill. The building was owned by the Boston Women's Republican Club, and they were very poor at the time so they were anxious to rent the building. I had a formal opening and an elaborate tea and the hostesses were Mrs. Paul Sachs and Mrs. Edward Forbes and all the high society ladies of Cambridge and Boston and some of the old line Boston families raised hell about it. They said, "That's no way to spend government money." And some of them published things in the newspapers about it. But Mrs. Nelson Rockefeller paid out of her own pocket for this opening, for the tea and everything else. So I was able to make these people apologize and the newspaper retract.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's one hundred percent against another hundred percent.

RICHARD MORRISON: And I was very lucky because I had a good publicity agent in Boston, Elliot Paul, and Elliot had countless years as a competent newspaperman and he knew all the newspaper men on all the newspapers in Boston, he knew them so well that he could write in their individual style, and since most newspaper reporters are so damned lazy, he would write up what he wanted published in the style of the man that he wanted the

name under and every paper would print it, and then he would send letters of indignation into the paper, you know, and complain about these articles. And then he'd write the answer in the style of various reporters. God, it was wonderful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He knew his business.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. We had a lot of fun. I remember one exhibition we had, there was an artist named Landon, and an artist named Hoover. So Elliot thought it would be a god idea if somebody stole these pictures. And detectives came in, you know, and there were headlines in the newspapers how the police suspected that the Women's Republican Club had taken the pictures of Landon and Hoover out, you know, because they didn't want Republicans exhibiting with others. And there was a lot of finagling and trickery going on to get attention to the Project, and all the headlines-- and eventually I think people all through New England welcomed the project. At first there was a great deal of criticism, boondoggling and it wasn't only the Republicans who were against it but Democrats who-- for instance, in Texas Garner wouldn't tolerate spending money on an art program, the only thing he wanted to spend was to make dirt roads. Good God, Texas could have spent all the money in the United States on its roads because they sure as hell didn't have any in those days.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was that during that Fort Worth effort that you made?

RICHARD MORRISON: No, that was in Dallas; I couldn't do anything in Fort Worth. But in Dallas I got a hold of Jerry Bywaters who was a Western painter, painted cowboy pictures and was a wonderful pencil draftsman, and he did a lot of Western scenes in pencil and lithographs and things like that. And he did start a small project, was able to start a small project in Dallas but it never amounted to much. The most activity on the art project was along the Atlantic Coast and along the Pacific Ocean, and in Chicago. Now in Chicago they had a wonderful project, it was under the direction of Increase Robinson. Did you talk to her?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

RICHARD MORRISON: I don't know what her name is now, she married someone. But that fellow you worked with at Brandeis— Siporin—I forget the names but it was almost a Chicago school of painting, it was different from what they were doing in New York or in Boston or anywhere else, it had a local identification that you could see in the work. But they did wonderful work, and I think Increase was a pretty good director. You must see her when you go to Chicago.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: From what you said, you had a good press in New England, by and large.

RICHARD MORRISON: By and large good press, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did the press reach to the growing organization among artists? Was Paul able to control this too?

RICHARD MORRISON: You mean like the Artists Union?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: We didn't have any trouble in New England about that, but I think they had a lot of trouble in New York about it. But New York was such a beehive of activity and there were so many hundreds of artists there, and there was no way to control them, and even the supervisors on the New York project were as wild as artists themselves in a great many cases and very often would help the artists stir things up to try to make trouble, call attention to themselves. But it seemed to me that the dissention in the New York project was due more to political extremism than to any complaint about art. I think it was a very Red project and it was difficult to handle, and as you mentioned yesterday about Harold Stein getting taken prisoner there and locked up for a few days, I don't know what those people hoped to accomplish except they were revolting against the type of government we had, the type of life they had, and everybody at that time was interested in the noble experiment, you know, in Russia. I remember when I came back from Germany in 1933 I came back third-class and the entire class on the boat, with the exception of myself, was composed of people returning after two years in Russia. And it seems as if they had been selected from every craft and profession that it was possible to have in America, and they had been indoctrinated into Communism, and they were coming home to spread the doctrine through their own particular group, like the electricians, and the carpenters, school teachers, college professors, doctors, everything you could think of, butchers, ministers. And we ran into heavy storms and so the crossing took two days longer than it normally would take, and before we landed in New York every one of those people was trying his stuff out on me. They'd get me at the rail, you know, and give me the benefits of the education they had received. Well, when we landed in New York, these people were questioned about, "Why did you spend two years in Russia?" "Well, we wanted to find out about the noble experiment." "Are you a Communist?" "No, no, no, no, we're glad to be back home, we're certainly not Communists." Yet the last night before we came into New York harbor they had a Red party, all of them wore their buttons, and all of the German

crew on board were all Communists, and they joined in, and all the stewards and everything. But the next day when they landed, oh, they denied it, "Oh no, we hate Communism. We're so glad to be back." I sent a list of the passengers to the FBI and told them of my experience on the boat. I don't know whatever happened, whether they ever rounded them up or not, I don't think they were too actively interested in doing things in those days. But it sure was an indication of the thoroughness with which international Communism was attempting to insinuate itself into American life. And that same thing was true in the art project. There seemed to be something in the more extreme forms of artistic expression that went hand in hand with the more extreme forms of political or social belief. The wildest artists were always the leaders of a Communist group. Some of my supervisors in Massachusetts were Communist. One man who is now an Episcopal clergyman whispered to me one day, "Oh, I'm a card-bearing member of the Communist party." And all through Washington there were various cells in every layer of government and ever part of the Federal Art Project was filled with Communists. And there was, as you said yesterday, there was something in the air at the time but- and those people have changed since, many of them; some of them haven't. But I think most of the troubles in New York stemmed from that rather than from any artistic problems.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you have much in the way of contact with the other aspects of the art project, like the theatre, the writers, the musicians, in New England?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I had contact with them; I had more contact with the Writers Project as a whole in Washington. I used to quarrel all the time with Alszberg, who wanted to publish books on art, wanted his Writers Project to publish books on art. And I thought it was in the province of the Federal Art Project to publish its own books. So we made it pretty difficult for Alszberg. Eventually he quit, I guess he had to give up. And we had a lot of contact with the Music Project and with the Theatre Project and we'd do theatre sets and scene painting and things for the Theatre Project, and we'd do settings for a concert on the Music Project, and the funny thing about people at that time, everybody on the art project would take an active interest in these other projects. For instance, all the artists would go to these concerts, would go to the theatrical performances, it was like a complete cultural group. One would take advantage of what art the other offered at the time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. It was a sort of mutual massage.

RICHARD MORRISON: Sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, how much over-all direction did you get from Washington?

RICHARD MORRISON: Very little. Very little. The way instructions would come to us would be through meetings in Washington. We were allowed absolute freedom. The only time when we had to work through the Washington office is if I wanted to send somebody outside my territory. And I found it easier to work through Cahill in that respect than to try to work through the regional WPA director in Boston, although that man also had the authority to grant travel and stuff. But Cahill allowed complete freedom. And when we had projects like the project to send a group of people to Alaska, I could select the people that I wanted to send, and send them to the Virgin Islands, or Hawaii, or anywhere I wanted to, if I thought it was worthwhile. We got into some difficulty, you know. The WPA had an FBI of its own and when a state administrator wanted to use his influence to divert some Federal funds from the project to some pet project of his own where he could wield power, he would send these investigators to find something wrong about the project to complain about. And I had a woman who was a designer, her name was Susan Nash, and she was doing the design, decorating for Williamsburg, Virginia. Two or three times she asked permission from me to go to Williamsburg and I'd get that permission from Washington and she'd make the trip. But then she had to make those trips so frequently that she stopped asking for permission and she just went and made the trips herself. And they caught her and they threatened to send her to a Federal penitentiary, they were very severe about it and she had to return all the pay, all the salary that she had received since she was working on the project. And she didn't have any money. But Mrs. Rockefeller paid it for her.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's pretty stiff.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. You said it. Very stiff. But you see all these things were started through meanness because most of the state directors on the WPA, the state administrators were political hacks and they were the most difficult to deal with because they didn't like to see something coming into their state territory that they couldn't control.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I guess that was the purpose of the Federal Art Project, it was one that they could not control.

RICHARD MORRISON: That's right, yes. Because there would have been no professional standards if it had been-

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HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well Congress kept the project pretty much on a short economic bit too, didn't they?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That couldn't have helped very much.

RICHARD MORRISON: I forget now whether it was, whether these appropriations would come I think every six months, and usually Congress reluctantly appropriated the money long after the funds had run out so that there would be several weeks when there were no funds. And there was [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Deficiency at the time.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. It was very irritating and very annoying. Of course, it was a very exuberant period and this exuberance expressed itself in a variety of ways. For instance, in Washington there was a great deal-- and perhaps in all the states-- a great deal of sexual freedom. For instance, the women who held career jobs in Washington would try to be mannish if they could, and they argue as logically as they could for the points that they wanted to make. And when they failed in that then they would resort to their sex. And we used to hear rumblings of bits of information about what things were going to happen, and we could tell if these bits of gossip were true by somebody saying, "Well, this is mattress information." Because some of these women would be sleeping with the big men or with the Congressmen or with the Senators, you know, and then they'd come back and tell the people on the project, and then the news would get around, they'd say, "Well you can believe this. This is mattress information." That was the real gem of those days. All the husband and wife teams that I knew in Washington, I'll bet 98% of them dissolved their marital relationship in that period. People changes views about wives and husbands like you'd change your shirt. That too was in the air.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think so. Although more an expression of freedom really.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I think so.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Or the fact that the old didn't count any more in a way. You know boys' jobs were going begging on Wall Street. Wall Street was discredited.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's like that. Well, you know you indicated yesterday some, well you took your life in your hands on some occasion when you went around to supervise those people [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. There were a great many artists who were competent at their skills but who were insane in other ways. One time a fellow thought he was being mistreated and he came in with a 45 automatic, shoved the barrel right at my mouth in my office, was going to blow my brains out because I was mistreating him. And I had to talk, persuade him with that gun sticking right in-- and he was wild-eyed and crazy. And sometimes I'd visit people who lived in shacks or barns back in the woods on the Cape and I could never get in to see them, never get to see their work, and I'd find a double-barreled shotgun sticking out through a hole in the wall following me around, you know, but it made the job exciting.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What was the range in age? Was it a youth movement? Or no?

RICHARD MORRISON: Every age, but mostly youth, mostly people in their early twenties. Now this is a funny thing. All the art schools like the Fogg Museum, and the Art School at Princeton, Dartmouth, and Yale, all those people who had scholarly degrees in their fields, Ph.D.'s, no one could get a job, they couldn't get a job teaching anywhere. And I employed over a hundred Ph.D.'s.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A very high-tones place you had.

RICHARD MORRISON: Because otherwise they would have starved, there was nothing for them. Boy, what these universities would give for that kind of situation today.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you have to find the work to be done? For example, Index of American Design, how was that controlled in your region?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, yes. I had a supervisor, a regional supervisor I appointed. He was that fellow Smith you talked to in Buffalo. Then I'd make contact with various museums, for instance, the Whaling Museum in New Bedford, and various places- the Old State House in Boston, and places where folk art things were gathered together, and then we'd arrange to send groups of artists out to record them, and we would arrange transportation for them. They'd go in a group and work all day and come back. And then we had scouts out to find isolated things that were worth recording. And we planned on a map where a group could be done in a certain locality at a certain time. And then people kept turning in new information, we'd advertise in the

newspapers and ask about things, and people would write in to us and we'd find a variety of things, like unusual pieces of crewel embroidery, or unusual shop signs or unusual weathervanes, and things of that nature. And then these artists, some of them were more skilled in reproducing one type of things than in another. For instance, reproducing textiles we had a certain group who were very expert at that and we would let no one else work. Some were better at doing shop signs, or painted pieces of wood, poly-chromed wood, and things of that nature. And gradually these people built up their own groups and knew exactly what kinds of things they were best at recording.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were you able to control this sort of thing in New Hampshire too?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The same way?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, and in Maine, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were you the gathering point for work completed?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. And I would arrange exhibitions and have them tour New England, and when we'd have some very excellent pieces I'd have them tour the various art projects so the local artists in other states could see the type of work we wanted, they'd have a chance to study them and then they'd send supervisors out to help them in their deficiencies. Then gradually after I got through exhibiting things and had gathered enough things, then I'd ship them on to Washington.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were some of the plates-- I mean the standards were then developed so that certain things were acceptable, other things were sent back for improvement?

RICHARD MORRISON: That's right, yes. The standards were very, very high, and these plates had to be virtually perfect, or they wouldn't be accepted. And the work was tedious and slow but the artists gradually learned to make them perfect because it was such monotony to do the plate over more than once.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think you indicated yesterday that at some show you hung them [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, we had an exhibition at the Fogg Museum mostly of textiles that were copied from Boston Museum textiles and we framed them exactly alike, the original piece of textile and the watercolor and they were exactly the same size, and no one could tell the difference without touching them. They were so perfect.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was this the way in which new techniques were developed?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, I don't understand just how you mean.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, this was a tedious kind of [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, very tedious [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And it required a certain kind of skill which is not necessarily creative and then there's a question of how to make it work, how to make it walk.

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, these skills were taught originally by Suzanne Chapman at the Boston Museum, and she'd take perhaps a square inch of textile and show them how to reproduce the threads, and how to shade them, so that-- how to look at this textile. It was very tedious, had very fine brushes to work with but the results were amazing. Well we'd better stop now and eat.

[AUDIO BREAK]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How do you account for that?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, their economic status was changed, you know. They don't like to remember.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They can afford to bite the hand.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's a strange thing. I want you to tell me-- I don't know whether it was connected with the Federal project or not-- the lasso escapade.

RICHARD MORRISON: Oh! About Bloom?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: These two artists, Jack Levine and Hyman Bloom were studying at the Fogg Museum under a wonderful teacher, I forget his name, but he died of pneumonia shortly afterwards. They had developed a terrific craftsmanship and they had a lot of artistic ability, but Bloom was a very sulky kind of fellow and I think it was probably a racial inhibition thing, the Jews suffer so much inwardly, it seems to me to be a racial characteristic. And he never wanted anyone to see his pictures, and if I'd go into his studio he would never unlock the door to let me in until he'd either turn the pictures to the wall or put them away. But after he'd studied his paintings for a long enough time then he'd destroy them because he felt that the only value in a picture was what it did for the artist, and when the artists had achieved all he could from studying the paintings then the picture could be destroyed. But one time he had ten or fifteen paintings that he hadn't destroyed and I telephoned Cahill in New York and he and Dorothy Miller came up to Boston early Sunday morning and I had them wait outside of Bloom's studio and I had a cowboy's lariat in my hand and Bloom asked me what the rope was for and I told that I had bought it for my kids, that they were interested in Western things. So I got him seated on a wooden chair and got in back of him and tossed a loop over his head and had his arms under his side and I wrapped him up so he couldn't move. And he didn't know what was happening; his eyes were flaming in madness. And then I called the Cahills in and helped them gather up the paintings and we took the paintings out and they brought them to New York and put on a show in the Museum of Modern Art. It was a very successful show and Bloom became famous because of this show. And then his whole attitude changed completely. He became very mild and very normal and very sane in every way, and even got a job as artist in residence at the Fogg Museum at Harvard. And my brother was a famous physician in Boston and Bloom wanted to make some sketches at an autopsy. And he asked me if I'd ask my brother to let him watch. I asked him, and he said, "No, I won't. When I'm doing an autopsy I have to move fast and keep busy and I don't want to have to be stepping over somebody who's fainted on the floor. I haven't got time to bother with him." And I told Bloom, and Bloom said, "Oh, I won't faint, nothing will happen." So I kept nagging my brother and he finally agreed to let him come. And at the first slash of the scalpel, Bloom passed out, my brother had to stand on him while he finished his work. Bloom made a painting of an autopsy and it's owned now by the Whitney Museum, and my brother's hands are in that. I haven't seen his paintings lately but [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, but for the lariat no one would have seen his paintings.

RICHARD MORRISON: That's right, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You mentioned a fellow who figured not a little in this whole period, with special qualities all his own-- Eddie Cahill-- he's worth a word, a kind of vignette.

RICHARD MORRISON: Cahill was a very unusual man, very brilliant man, and a very youthful man, that is, he liked to do all the crazy things that a twenty-year-old would like to do. He'd like to go out and get drunk, loved food, and good food, and he loved to explore around the antique shops, and he had a great eye for Americans. He gathered the collection for Mrs. Rockefeller at Williamsburg. And he gathered a lot of collections together. He was a self-educated man, and a very thorough man. For instance, when he wrote a novel, his first novel-- *Look South to the Polar Star* [1947], since it was situated in China he spent a year and a half learning Chinese so he could write it. He was a very kind person and very affectionate, and I found him very loyal, and I found him very able, I thought that he was one of the most intelligent and well-read persons I had ever met. But he had a kind of devil-may-care attitude about things too, he never pretended to be something he wasn't, and he was always at home with every kind of person no matter what the language was. I remember one time we met some hobo-looking fellow in Greenwich Village and Cahill had known him before he had gone into World War I, and this fellow was telling him about incidents that happened. He said he was in Constantinople after the war, it was filled with Russian grand duchesses and all the female Russian nobility and they were surviving by whoring and this guy would say you know we were all so anxious to try one of these Russian noblewomen we'd get in bed with her and when we'd leave we'd think that the tingling we felt in our blood was Russian nobility, and all it was, was spirochete. And then this fellow would point out women on the street, "Here, look at this douche bag coming." But it didn't matter who was with Cahill at the time, he was never embarrassed by any rough conversation, he was always Cahill, all the time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How was he as a man of ideas?

RICHARD MORRISON: He always had wonderful ideas. Always had new ideas, always-- new things were always occurring to him. He was a man of great will power. When he decided, although he had no money, when he decided that he had to spend the rest of his life writing he just quit the art project and he spend the rest of his life writing. But he had a tremendous curiosity about everything that had to do with art particularly native arts of America, whether it was Indian sand-painting or crewel embroidery or Pennsylvania chalkware, he was very well versed, perhaps knew more about American folk art I guess than anybody alive. He had-- I think his influence was felt tremendously in building up that Newark Museum. He work with-- what was his name-- Dana?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Charles Dana.

RICHARD MORRISON: Worked with him for years and then he was very influential in building up the Museum of Modern Art. I don't think Barr could have done anything if Cahill hadn't organized it and give it life at the start. And he knew everybody, he knew everybody in the field of art, whether they were museum people, like Juliana Force, or Whitney Museum directors, or artists, or sculptors-- he was a friend of everybody and everybody was a friend of his. There wasn't an artist in America that he didn't know-- who was worth knowing that he didn't know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did he have a capacity for outrage?

RICHARD MORRISON: Do you mean lose his temper?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, a man with ideas who wants to make them walk and runs a cropper off a Congress that keeps him on a snaffle bit financially, this kind of thing.

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, no. I thought he was pretty calm usually. He would sound off but mildly about things, and when he'd curse, he'd curse gently. He was very sophisticated and he could see through any sham, nobody could him about anything. Everybody that I knew was very fond of him. He knew Roosevelt, he knew everybody, and fundamentally he was a very gay, happy person. I never saw anyone who would laugh so readily. He was always concocting jokes. For instance, in Boston there was the Museum of Modern Art and the trustees changed the name of it to 'Museum of Contemporary Art.' They changed the name because Luce, who owns *Fortune* and *Time* and that crowd, was going to give them money if they'd change the name. So Cahill sent a telegram from Washington to Boston, it said, "I think you're playing fast and Luce with the American public." He was always coining mixed-up aphorisms.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was he a good administrator?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, a wonderful administrator, yes. He was wonderful because he would understand every regulation but he knew enough to pass on the chore to somebody else to do. He kept himself free, but there was nothing he didn't know about it, he knew everything about it. But he knew how to delegate the authority to others too, to carry on.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did he get along with Mrs. Woodward?

RICHARD MORRISON: He got along fine with her. And she admired him very much.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How effective was-- when you were down in Washington not a little assessment of the role that Harry Hopkins-- was his influence a pervasive one?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I think so. He was admired by everyone who knew him, because he was a very unusual man in many ways. He had a phenomenal memory, he could be introduced to a thousand people and shake their hand, he'd never forget their names or where they were from, he'd see them again he'd remember every one. And I guess he was a very able man too. And of course he was ill all the time, had ulcers all the time, was on a sippy diet. And I think when he became Roosevelt's confidential agent and took over that Russian business that killed him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was there any change discernible in Massachusetts when General Colonel Harrington sort of took over? Like turning a, you know, a sensitive-- perhaps it was like turning a sensitive area over to a military man, like Somervell in New York. I don't know, but [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: I don't think so, but the last year of the project's existence I had nothing to do with it. I had left and formed the Camouflage Laboratory in Boston. But I could see-- I still kept visiting the project and I could see it gradually dying, I don't know why, I think it was mostly because the State Administrator gradually got more and more influence over it and eventually wiped it out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think Congress curtailed funds for the Theatre Project expressly in a bill which terminated it. Hallie Flanagan had written some plays and quoted some Congressmen correctly. "One Third of the Nation"-- the housing situation-- and congressmen I gather objected to being quoted correctly in a play. They were made to appear ridiculous. It wasn't very good public relations but it was Hallie Flanagan.

RICHARD MORRISON: Well I think Hallie Flanagan was a very able woman.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: Is she still living?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But it curtailed the funds and then I think they turned the Federal projects over into state administrative [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: I think so, yes. Well the Federal project was-- I don't know when Cahill left it, he left it

before it closed, I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, I think '41? '40? Something like that?

RICHARD MORRISON: But I don't think it was anything after he left it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, it became an eddy, I mean initially it had the desire to feed people, you know, but then self-concern have way to, oh, a debate throughout the country between Lindbergh and the American First faction, and William Allen White and the Committee to Aid American by Aiding the Allies. There were problems about shipping over-age destroyers abroad in return for bases, and somehow or other feeding stomachs ceased to have-- it became an eddy pretty much.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I wondered, you know, with the shift in emphasis to preparedness whether any thought was given to tailor making, or cutting the pattern of the work to fit the preparedness theme. Yours is a little bit different, that is, the Camouflage Laboratory-- or did that have, you know, the rationale about it that somehow we were going to have to get into this anyway sooner or later [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it did have that, but it was an amazing project, I don't know how they ever let me start it and how it could operate because was, all the information was classified information [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Every bit of it?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. Although the funds for supporting it came from the WPA, and I couldn't let the WPA know anything about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'll be damned!

RICHARD MORRISON: And it was set up by the Chief of Engineers and I had a lot of help from scientists at Harvard and M.I.T. and all the officers who were going as observers to off-shore bases would come and spend a month training with me in Boston. And our job was to write a new field manual, modernize camouflage, and we were interested primarily in camouflage, not in protective concealment, that is, not in concrete reinforced things, and we devised a lot of unusual things. In the first place I had physicists, color measurement men, I had the best architects in America, the best landscape architects in America, the best plant physiologists in America, and some of the best artists working for me. And we would devise new coatings, for instance, I mentioned to you the haze paint that Sam Cabot invented in Boston, a colloidal dispersion paint where the particle size is so small it is in constant movement and you paint a ship and put it on the horizon and it would build up a fog like sky, you know. And that's why we named it haze paint. And we'd make three-dimensional paints with chlorophyll base using the plants native to wherever an airfield happened to be. In Massachusetts we used spinach, and we put excelsior in and blow this stuff on the runway and the excelsior would stick up in box shadows, you know, and then the chlorophyll would change with the grass surrounding the runway. There were only two troubles: the pilots couldn't see the God-damned runway when they were coming down, and the other was that when these big bombers would land they would rip this stuff all off and we'd have to go out and squirt it again. Then we used this haze paint to simulate ponds from the air, we'd squirt it on the ground and it would look like a pond, have the same-- because sky and water are pretty much the same. And then we had various complicated machines for measuring color, for instance, we used the Hardy Automatic Recording Photoelectric Mega Photometer to measure exact color against a magnesium white, so that the color would be the same color under every kind of light. You know if you go into a store and buy a blue necktie and you take it out in the sunlight it may be black, or something else. But under exact color measurement these things would match under every conceivable kind of light. And then our architects devised various methods for boxing shadows in any construction so that from the air you couldn't tell whether it was a whole in the ground or a building coming up out of the ground. But one of the most effective things we did in camouflage was to-- in construction was to make the construction part of the natural landscape, that is, well-- say, take an airfield in Connecticut, it was in the midst of tobacco country, so all the buildings were made the size and shape and position of tobacco barns. So that anyone flying over couldn't see that their ground was messed up, you know, or that anything was out of place. In Bedford, Massachusetts where they had a big airport, it was a market gardening district and flower-raising place so we made the hangers out of-- they were greenhouses, out of glass, so that everything was in a natural setting, nothing was out of place. And in Springfield, Massachusetts, the big airfield there, Westover Field, we made a country village. The headquarters was a church with a white steeple and the non-commissioned officers and commissioned officers lived in New England village houses, and we had a hell of a time with the Army because they wanted military precision about everything. For instance, Bucky Fuller invented a circular house made like a place to store grain in, in the Middle West, you could carry fifty of these on a truck. But the Quartermaster Corp refused to accept them because the Army was trained at right angles. It didn't want any of this God-damned stuff. But in the first place, camouflage should never have been in the Engineer Corps. They threw it in there, in World War I they didn't know what to do with it. But if there's anyone

who doesn't have artistic imagination it's an engineer. And it's the worst possible place they could put camouflage. But we went on the assumption that camouflage doesn't mean concealment, it means you just try to hide the purpose, you're not trying to hide the buildings, you're just trying to hide the purpose, so that nothing is out of place, everything is where it should be. So we changed the construction to fit the landscape. And I told you yesterday how the British flyers used to come and give us their battle experiences, and we used this haze paint on airplanes too and they're still using it today on all these U-2 flights, those planes are coated with this haze paint. And I suppose they can be shot down through radar but they sure as hell can't be seen in the sky.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You had a regular research office, then?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did the Engineers exercise direction? Or were you given the problem?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, they did. They exercised very strict direction and the people I started with were General Bosford, a fellow who was a captain in the Army, and all the West Pointers that I had anything to do with were very intelligent, open-minded, fair people. And they would try any idea and even if it failed, if it seemed to have some possibility they'd continue with it and push it, and they were wonderful to work with. But as soon as the draft came and these wonders from State Street and Wall Street got into uniform, aw, they were bastards to deal with.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were they?

RICHARD MORRISON: Oh, they were nasty. And the people in the Navy who were on board ship, that is, the fighting officers they were wonderful, but the people in the Bureau of Ships were bastards without exception. They would never agree to anything new because they were afraid that they might lose their promotion chances if they had made a mistake. So they turned everything down. And this haze paint is an example. The British could see the advantage of using it, so when their ships would come in for repair after they'd been beaten to hell at sea, the British wanted to use it, but our Bureau of Ships wouldn't permit them, they had to use the Bureau of Ships camouflage scheme. And then, God, it was the same all over, for instance, we'd make D-E's-- what do you call them? Not the destroyers, smaller boat?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Destroyer escort?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. And we'd make them for the British but they had to be made according to United States Navy specifications with bunks and everything in them, and shower baths, and then they'd be turned over to the British but the British couldn't accept them until all that God-damned stuff had been taken out, and hammocks slung, you know. But the Bureau of Ships people wouldn't let the British paint their ships in our ports they way the British wanted, so they had to paint them according to United States Navy camouflage specifications. And then we got permission to let the British have the formula and set up a plant in England and they used it. Now the Army refused to accept the haze paint. Cabot invented it, and he gave them the formula and he didn't want any profit from it so long as no one else profited from it. The Navy refused to use it; and the Army refused to use it; and the Air Corps was experimenting with it all the time but finally two years after the British had already been using it for two years, the Army suddenly discovered it and they gave I think a ten million dollar contract to Devoe and Raynolds in New Jersey to manufacture this stuff. And Cabot waited till the war was over they took all the profits away from him. But all these people who tried to be patriotic, like Cabot, and like Professor Hardy, the professor of Color Measurement Physics at M.I.T. were all so disappointed at the treatment the government gives them. They offer their services and make wonderful contributions, they're ignored, and wiped aside, you know. Cabot, I mean, they just ignored him, and he was the best paint manufacturing plain in America and they gave his formula to a competing company.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He has the last laugh in that sense, though.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, but [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Not a happy one.

RICHARD MORRISON: Not a happy one. And those people are still irritated and disappointed at the treatment they got at the hands of the government.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Where was this quartered? In Boston?

RICHARD MORRISON: In Boston, yes. And that fellow who used to be head of the Ford Company-- the name began with K-- I forgot his name. They made him a general.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Knudsen?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, Knudsen. He used to come every month to visit the project, and Compton from M.I.T., and all the big shots from all over America, all the big top scientists and it was quite a place. The local state administrator got fed up with it because there was something going on that he couldn't keep his fingers on so eventually they took all the equipment and moved it to Fort Belvoir and that was the end of it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They incorporated it expressly into the Engineers Corp.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But the contribution-- this was an outgrowth then of the WPA largely?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it was, completely. And I had had experience in it before because at the beginning of the Federal Art Project I had a friend who was Chief of Coast Artillery-- I don't know if there's such a thing as Coast Artillery I guess today-- and I used to travel with this general from Fort Williams in Maine down to Fort Wright off New York off Block Island and visiting all these shore installations. And we practiced camouflaging then for him. And he was a wonderful man, very alert, and very forward-looking, he was interested in automatic fire power which was something new at the time. He kept pressing, pressing for it but Congress wouldn't give any funds. But we'd plan various types of camouflage for all these Coast Artillery installations so, how to hide those big sixteen-inch guns, you know, then we'd fire them every once in a while- two batteries of two sixteen-inch guns in Hull, Massachusetts. Every time you'd shoot one, every window in the God-damned town would break. That's how I got my idea for camouflage. And then when-- we had a group of people working Pearl Harbor. And the Navy wasn't interested in any camouflage scheme for it, they said it was impregnable. So the Chief of Engineers told us not to bother with it, there was no point. But we continued anyways and finished this camouflage scheme, and we turned it in to the officers at Fort Belvoir. And a couple of months afterward Pearl Harbor occurred and the Chief of Engineers was raising hell with these camouflage experts at Fort Belvoir and said, "Didn't you have any plan for this?" And they had all the plans for it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Incredible, isn't it?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well was this as exciting as the art project itself? I suppose in a way it's a wholly different kind of challenge.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it was a different kind of problem, it was very exciting in its way but there were a lot of disappointing things. For instance, we were going to experiment with this haze paint on submarines to see whether a submarine lying on the bottom would blend with the water or whether you could see it. So we arranged to go out on a submarine at three o'clock in the morning from New London. And the head of the submarine was a bastard man named Captain Cutts, C-U-T-T-S. And I got to the submarine base at 2:30 in the morning, and he said-- he started giving me hell-- he said, "You missed your ship," scolding me and I didn't answer him but I went back up to town to the Algonquin Hotel, I got a hold of a bellhop who got ma jug of whiskey, and I got outside with the jug of whiskey, and I went back to the submarine base and I lambasted that bastard, I said, "You talk to me as if I were one of your God-damned sailors, I'm a civilian and I'm doing this only as a patriotic duty and you don't have a God-damn thing to do about me." So he sent a report in to Washington and said that I missed my ship and then I came back to submarine base drunk. I'd like to meet that guy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the world is filled with them.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But this must have had a different kind of continuity than easel painting, or murals, I mean it had its own momentum, I would assume, after a while.

RICHARD MORRISON: It did a lot of good, it changed the idea of the people at Belvoir, it brought them up to date and to modern needs because until I came on the picture in camouflage they were still World War I nets, you know, that's all.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: And also the Engineers have an idea that camouflage is protective concealment. They think that you've got to have something that's bombproof, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Different problem.

RICHARD MORRISON: It's a different problem. But they learned a lot from it, they carried it on and I suspect

they're still carrying it on. But I don't imagine they've made much progress because an engineer's mind doesn't work that way.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I know if it's anything like the ordnance people in the First World War they were experimenting with machine guns, you know, and they would reserve judgment eternally, they'd never get-- because they were trying to make the perfect machine gun. Well, you know, nuts! Finally our troops went abroad without an American machine gun and used the French guns. This is how unreal they were in the light of things.

RICHARD MORRISON: The first machine gun we refused to accept and we sold it to the British.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But we didn't have any, we weren't equipped. But this is Ordnance ways.

RICHARD MORRISON: It was a Browning, wasn't it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: It was an American [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But, you know, where hardening of the whatever it is-- intellectual or arteries that make for curiosity is concerned, Jesus, it's like-- it's already camouflaged wall that you have to deal with, it's so deep [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I know it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: [inaudible] and such a vested right that somehow or other they look upon you as an enemy and all you're trying to do is take their expertise and extend it or relate it to something new.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I know. You can't budge them.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, no. Well in terms of military personnel, that is those that were directly connected with it they must have confronted the same kind of inertia on the part of [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. Well I had wondered good fortune in camouflage when General Godfrey was alive. As soon as war broke out they made him a liaison officer with the Air Corps, and the first flight he made he cracked up and was killed. Then Arnold, who I think they made him a colonel-- he was a captain when I first had contact with him-- and they sent him to Africa to observe and he got killed the first day over there. This was before we went in the war. And another guy—Seaman—who was a major at Belvoir, he was a West Pointer and a nice guy, he's a general now out here, Commanding General at Fort Riley. But I'm still so irritated by those people that I couldn't bear to go and see him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And, you know, this is an instance in which Elliot Paul couldn't be helpful.

RICHARD MORRISON: No, he couldn't be helpful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No matter how imaginative he may have been. You were just dealing with sprawling resistance.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What about the sense of new developments in paint, and application, machinery, techniques? I imagine that, you know, this being a frankly experimental place would have [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: Well we did a lot with- we devised all the blackout regulations [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, did you?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, and the materials to use for blackout and also all kinds of activated paints, how they should be used, and where they should be used, so in case of a night bombing people could find their way along the street because-- we had some paints where you could just flash your flashlight on it and they'd stay aglow for ten or fifteen minutes, police alarm boxes, fire hydrants, stuff like that, along curbs and directional indications. And we did a lot of other things, for instance, in Boston the Watertown Arsenal was making big guns, it was right on the Charles River and the old riverbed of the Concord River hit it at right angles right where the arsenal was, so we hired geologists to give us soundings of all the lands so we'd know what we'd have to go if we wanted to put this place underground. And we did that with Springfield Armory and Springfield and with all these places that made munitions and arms in case-- and at the beginning of the way there was a lot of fright about German bombers coming over. But they were all ready to put those things underground, and we had all the information necessary to do it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Jesus, you know, when you have to work with an artist like Levine or Bloom, what happens when you work with a plant physiologist or? Same kind of creative, in a way [inaudible] ?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well [inaudible] It's very [inaudible] yes [inaudible] they're as touchy to deal with as an artist. I told you yesterday how I tried to get information from Conant who was the greatest authority on chlorophyll in the world, and he was Ambassador to England, and David Niles would put my letters in the diplomatic pouch and get them over to him, and he'd reply. All the things that we did in camouflage were new, the ideas were new, and carrying them out was new. Now the Germans did a lot in camouflage, wonderful things in camouflage, but different from what we did. For instance, the Germans built a city of Hamburg 30 or 40 miles away from Hamburg, on a small-scale model, and it was so God-damn effective that we bombed it about a hundred times during the way with fleets of bombers before they discovered it wasn't Hamburg. We did a lot of other practical things too, for instance, we designed and invented revetments for isolating planes, so that if a bomb dropped on one plane nothing would happen to the others. But you know they've forgotten that lesson. See what happened in Vietnam. The whole God-damned thing went up lined up like ducks.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, the Army way. They have to be nose to nose right down the line or there's something wrong. Yet it takes a little time, I suppose it takes a disaster before they begin go re-think something that they should have known all along.

RICHARD MORRISON: Not only that, it takes two years of warfare before they can begin to fight the present war; they're still fighting the last war.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Get rid of the bum furniture.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I guess you're right. It takes a shakedown cruise to throw it away. Well you've had no little experience in the field of diplomacy, then?

RICHARD MORRISON: I don't know that I'm very diplomatic, I lose my God-damned temper so quickly.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But, you know, the diplomacy of dealing with creative people, regional directors, and so on, making them hew to, oh, at least certain standards, and then trying to knock your head up against a wall, in this case.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. But it was good experience.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I suppose while this was on there was termination of the WPA. You lost real touch with it, in a way?

RICHARD MORRISON: Well, before the WPA terminated, the administration terminated it, and the Army took it over, which it should have done. Because how the hell can you operate in secret inside WPA framework?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: But I think it was Woodward-- maybe it was the woman that succeeded her, I've forgotten.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Mrs. Kerr?

RICHARD MORRISON: Maybe it was Kerr-- came up to see me when the project was closing, she went back and told Cahill, she said, "Well, I can't figure out that Morrison. He certainly is doing a wonderful job, but he's not doing it for the WPA, and the Army says he's not doing it for them, I don't know who he's doing it for. He's doing something, but he seems to be doing it for himself."

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This is the consequence of restricted material.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. But I was telling you about these new spit and polish officers that came in from printer's ink and State Street and Wall Street, I was working with rivers' and harbors' engineers from various parts of the country and they'd send one of these officers up, you know, to listen while I'd carry on a conversation with these Army engineers. And every suggestion I'd make, they'd say, "I do not concur, I do not concur." They sat right at my side, you know, I'd get so God-damned mad, one time I bashed one of them in the nose, I said, "You son of a bitch, keep your mouth shut, let me finish this." We had to do things; we had to plan how to take curves out of rivers, and how to put curves in.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Sure.

RICHARD MORRISON: And I'll never forget the day I was telling him about our plan for the Bedford Airport, where

we'd put everything under glass. "How can you be so ridiculous? Why, glass hangers? What if a bomb hit it?" I said, "Jesse, if a bomb hit a steel hanger it makes no difference."

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. The gentle art of confusion.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Misdirection.

RICHARD MORRISON: And they were so God-damned stupid, you know, when they were building the airport in Bangor, Maine they were in such a hurry they started the main runway at both ends and then they got together one was twenty feet higher than the other.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: For God's sake!

RICHARD MORRISON: Imagine it!

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'd say they made a mistake.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. That was the jumping off place.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I saw some, you know, camouflaged industrial installations in Baltimore, airplane factories, and so on.

RICHARD MORRISON: After my project folded up they wanted me to go work for Martin.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Martin, yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: But, you know, I had so much opportunity to become wealthy if I wanted to be a thief, in Camouflage. For instance, manufacturers of cloth who couldn't get any goods, you know, I would give them the specifications for blackout cloth or something like that, one guy offered me \$50,000.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh really?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. But I was such a horse's ass that I was honest, you know; I wouldn't be tempted. But many of these manufacturers would hire my paint chemist or physicists at \$150 a day as advisors to them, and they'd get the information.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There are all kinds of ways to skin a cat; I suppose that's one of them.

RICHARD MORRISON: But you know I wish you could see the applicants that flooded in to me for jobs, fellows that you didn't want to go in the service. I think every millionaire in America came to me, would have bribed me, paid anything if he could have got work on that camouflage job.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: All dedicated camouflage experts.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Self-camouflage.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, self-camouflage. They could have been hidden away there. But none of them got a job.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you get much in the way of interest in, or interference, or any contact at all with Congress?

RICHARD MORRISON: None.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's interesting.

RICHARD MORRISON: But I was in continuous contact with the British Embassy. It was the most interesting group of people there from the British Ambassador down, interested in everything that we were doing all the time. And they kept sending wonderful people, sending naval captains, you know, and group captains from the Air Force, all people with battle experience, and they'd stay for weeks, you know, and study with me and learn from me and I'd learn from them. They were wonderful, all the way through.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, they had the problems firsthand.

RICHARD MORRISON: They had the problems firsthand, yes. There was no horse shit about them, they were practiced, open-minded, intelligent people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: Our own people that I had to deal with in the Navy were so hide-boned, immovable, stubborn, stupid [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You could forgive them all that except for being unimaginative.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. Well, we used to think a lot about it and talk a lot about it, we decided it was because when war came they all received new promotions and they didn't want to take a chance on not being promoted quickly again, you know. So they wouldn't make a decision that involved any risk.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was there ample funds for this?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. I figured out the money I needed and applied for it, and I got it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No problem?

RICHARD MORRISON: No problem. Cahill was responsible for that. Cahill urged Hopkins to give me everything I wanted. I was spending I think half a million dollars a year [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. This is before it became whatever it was-- incorporated-- it was like a trial balloon, wasn't it?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, sure it was.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's interesting that the WPA took the chance.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it sure is. It never would have except for the relationship between Cahill and me, and Cahill and Hopkins.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: And you might have thought that Cahill would have stopped this because it meant my leaving his project, and he wanted me on the project, but he was very fair in all this, and he took an active interest, although it had no official connection with him, he'd come and visit me, and I'd show him whatever I could, some things I couldn't even show him. And we'd do a lot of funny stuff. We had a lot of queer equipment, for instance, we had moveable cameras and we'd make models of various terrains for cities or something, and we'd have the camera fly overhead and then we had haze boxes so that when you'd take a picture through the fog, God-damn, these things came out on a movie film really. And we devised all kinds of things though, for instance, through the General Electric Company we used this machine of Hardy's-- the automatic photoelectric spectrum photometer-- with batteries of lights on board a ship and this machine pointing at the horizon so that the lights were always the same as the horizon, and they kept changing as the ship moved, you know, and the ship was absolutely invisible. The only trouble was it had so much God-damned equipment you couldn't use it for anything except nosing around and trying to spot something else with it. It had no room for guns or anything on it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But it was interesting where chance being what it is, problem being thrown in your lap, what the hell you can do.

RICHARD MORRISON: I know it. And other things we did to make ships disappear: we had spray nozzles all over the ship, you know, like a lawn sprayer and when the water would break up into bubbles you'd just see nothing but mist. There's plenty of water there in the sea, you know, you never run short of it. But there again a lot of equipment prohibited the use of this as a battleship.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RICHARD MORRISON: We had a lot of inventors, there was one fellow, a very famous inventor, I forget his name, but he was damned near as famous as Edison, who worked, you know, devising new stunts and new tricks. We investigated everything, and we devised all kinds of glasses and goggles for pilots that would break through camouflage, you know infra-red glasses and things like that. And then we'd devise coatings that couldn't be broken by infra-red. Well it sure was a fascinating job, and a thankless job. We'd work about twenty hours a day every God-damned day of the year, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Interesting.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know I suspect that generation partly because you were all working on the fringes of the now unknown, and you can't wait.

RICHARD MORRISON: You can't wait. I had this wonderful architect named Baldwin, the greatest designer in America, and he'd work sometimes forty hours through without stopping, you know, to finish an idea, and then one day his brother who was a market garden farmer in Concord, Massachusetts wanted him to design a new storage freezer building for him, so Baldwin took two days off to draw the plans for it, and one of those little bastards from the Engineering Department came up looking for him, and was going to send him to Leavenworth. Supposed to stay on the job. I said, "You stupid bastard, he's paid for forty hours a week, he works a hundred and forty hours a week."

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You have to expect it. Well, you know, I suppose those human relationships being what they were, it's just different emphasis really between the art project and the camouflage project, but the same kind of problems, that is in the relationship to the military. I don't suppose you had the same, you know-- you didn't confront searching old shacks and old haylofts for artists [inaudible]

RICHARD MORRISON: But there was another very serious problem because everybody in uniform resented civilians having anything to do with their profession.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They did?

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, they resented it very much. Everybody in the Chief of Engineers office, when I'd walk in there, God-damn, you'd think there were going to shoot me. They'd look hatred at me. They sure hated to have civilians come in. As I saw, the only good ones were the West Pointers, and unanimously throughout they were good. They didn't seem to have any-- well, they were self-assured, they a good, sound military background.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. They didn't have anything to fear, except unwillingness to adjust to the requirements of something new. That's all. And they were eager to do that.

RICHARD MORRISON: And they were eager to do that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, this has had continuing vitality, this question of camouflage.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, it has.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It sure has. I'm not sure, but I suspect we were the recipients of some of your handiwork somehow, someday, whether it was in clothing or whatever it was.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes, I'm sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There were some, I think, other areas that were aided by the WPA-- the sewing outfits, one in Brooklyn that was converted to the manufacture of uniforms; there was one in Los Angeles that was converted. And other people got into various problems of design, ship design.

RICHARD MORRISON: Well the WPA was [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A proving ground.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. It was wonderful, it was unbelievable that it could happen.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. And yet the manner in which we could turn to aid the nation in time of difficulty even when those in command in various areas weren't interested in being aided, nonetheless it was there and anything turned loose makes itself felt. Well, I suspect the further we get from the WPA, the more beneficial its programs will become. For example, the very first national health survey was done under the WPA.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes. Well I suppose Congress was its greatest enemy because it represented power that [inaudible]

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It couldn't control.

RICHARD MORRISON: That it couldn't control.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And then it may even in an intellectual sense have been something which they were against.

RICHARD MORRISON: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's a lot easier from their point of view to have a dole than it is to create jobs where people have an expertise and allow them to fulfill it.

RICHARD MORRISON: Right. Absolutely right. I'll roll some more cigarettes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I think we've just about run out of gas.

RICHARD MORRISON: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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