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Oral history interview with Nan Sheets, 1964 June 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Nan Sheets on June 4, 1964. The interview took place in Oklahoma City, OK and was conducted by Richard K. Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RICHARD DOUD: This is an interview with Nan Sheets at the Oklahoma Art Center in Oklahoma City, June 4, 1964. The interviewer is Richard K. Doud. So, Mrs. Sheets, if you don't mind going back pre-WPA and telling me something about how your interest in art developed, and I know you were active a good many years before that. And just tell us a little bit about yourself .

NAN SHEETS: All right. We'll start out with Nan Sheets then. Well, my husband was a physician here, and before we were married I was interested in art. I graduated in pharmacy at Valparaiso University in Indiana, and Dr. Sheets was studying medicine in Chicago, and during summer vacations he came to Valparaiso University to take extra work, and he received a degree in pharmacy and graduated in my class. And that's where I met Dr. Sheets. Well, he was the sort of person that always is interested in anything that I wanted to do, and my mother had done some painting. In the early days, Indiana didn't have public schools. She was born and reared in Logansport, and all of her schooling had been in private schools, so her interest was in art and in music. And of course they gave them sort of a superficial, I would say superficial courses probably, in painting, but in the right way because she knew how to sketch from nature and seemed to have a pretty good understanding of art. Well, my home was in Illinois, and she enjoyed art magazines, and I think this is interesting, because it does show how parents can influence a child. The magazines I looked at as a child were art magazines, and when we went into Chicago to shop, always I was taken to the art museum. And this wouldn't really come right in at this time, but it's interesting enough to tell it. This interest in an art museum evidently was in me quite strongly as a child. The whole institution impressed me so, when the WPA came along, I became director of the Federal Arts Program, which developed into our Art Center, and we lost WPA help in 1942. I was left with this gallery, and I had no help. And I knew that if I got out of there we'd lose our place of business, so I stayed. And I would close at four o'clock in place of five, and I'd get my big broom, and I was afraid to ask them for help for fear they might put me out, because I was just staying there trying to hold the thing together. And a little boy came in one afternoon while I had this great big long broom, sweeping the floors of five galleries, and scared to death that they'd put me out, and didn't want to ask the janitors in the building to help me. Like you do with a child when he comes in, I said, "Well, little boy, do you like pictures?" "Yes," he said, "I just love pictures." And I said, "Well, you just go ahead and look at them, and I'll get my work done pretty good, and after closing hours, you stay with me." Like you do with all children, I said, "What are you going to do when you grow up? What are you going to be?" "Oh," he said, "I'm going to be President of the United States." And I said, "Well, that certainly shows that you have aspirations for something pretty high. What makes you think that you can become President of the United States?" "Well," he said, "My mother told me that if whatever I did, I did the best I could, and would stay with it and really work at it, I could be anything I wanted to be in the world. It would be up to me." And he said, "That's why I know I'm going to be President of the United States." And I said, "You know, that's rather interesting to me, because I'm going to tell you something. When I was a little girl, my mother took me into the Art Institute of Chicago very often. We'd go there to shop, and she'd take me to the Institute, and often to galleries, and I can remember distinctly standing in the Art Institute one day, and thinking what a wonderful thing it was, wonderful building, wonderful paintings. The whole atmosphere thrilled me. And what a wonderful thing it would be to be head of an institution like that." Of course I thought the little boy knew who I was. So he thought a little bit and he said, "Well, you know, lady, you are a good janitor." He said, "I watched you here, and if you just keep on being a good janitor, someday you can head this institution." And he didn't know that I, of course, as the director of it. So that was rather interesting to go back to that. But back to the days when the Art Center was first set up. I'll start with that Thomas C. Parker, who was the assistant to Holger Cahill in Washington, came out through this territory to go to the cities where there never had been a start made toward the organization or setting up of a public art museum or art gallery under non-profit institutions of any kind. So he came through Kansas, down through Texas, and into Oklahoma, and he called me one evening at home, and he said, 'Mrs. Sheets, I'd like to have a conference with you." And he said, "My idea is to discuss with you a program organized by the federal government to set up art galleries over the United States, or art centers. We were considering Oklahoma City, and I would like to talk to you. I've been in several places, and they've all told me to come, if I came to Oklahoma, to go to see Nan Sheets." So he said, "I would like to have this conference." And I said, "Well, you know we have guests out here tonight. Could I see you tomorrow?" Well, he said, "I really have to get out of town tomorrow, but I will tell you a little bit about it, and if I could see you tonight, I would like to do it." And I said, "Well, you're not serious when you say that the United States government has in mind setting up an art institution in Oklahoma City and financing it?" "Yes, that's the idea." And he didn't mention the WPA program or anything; he just called it the Federal Art Program. And I said, "Well, if you're not drunk, and you mean what you

say; you come out here." So Mr. Parker often laughed about that afterwards when I said I felt sure he was drunk or he wouldn't have talked that way, you know. So when he came in, he sat down. My husband was a physician, and he always enjoyed hearing the artists and different people, in our discussions on art. He was in the room when Mr. Parker was talking. Mr. Parker was a very refined gentleman, and he didn't look like a promoter, and so we listened to him. And his idea was to set up a center here if we could find . . . the government did not pay rent for a building. We would have to get a building rent-free and with the utilities furnished and the government, their part of it, would be to pay the salaries of the director, and later on, if more supervision was needed, we could get that, but we were to employ WPA help, and it really was a WPA program. And of course that was a new program there at that time, and I didn't know much about it, and the only thing I really was interested in was if the government had some money to give away and could start something in Oklahoma City, I was for it 100%. When he said that we'd have to have a building, I didn't know where to go to get one. I thought, "Well, that's the end of that." So I told him that I didn't know where we'd get a building, and I didn't know what to do about it, And he said, "Well, you think about it tonight and call some people." And he said, "It would really a shame not to start one, because Oklahoma city was a growing city, and, you should have had an art museum program here going along while ago." And I said well, I knew that, but I had brought in exhibitions at my own studio and it carried on quite an active art program, because I had felt the need of it. And that was the only thing we had, was right there in my own studio and I had built a very lovely art gallery in connection with it, and it served the purpose very well. So he said, "Well, you think about it, and I'll call you early in the morning." So I called Stanley Draper, who was the manager of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and a very good friend, a very alert person. So I said, "Mr. Draper, I don't know where I could get a building." And he said, "Well, you come down and we'll discuss this." So I went down to his office, and Mr. Parker met me there, and we went into Mr. Draper's office, and he told me . . . Mr. Parker told Mr. Draper all about the program, and what the idea was, a little bit vague, because it really hadn't been set up. It was just in the formative stage. So Mr. Draper would try to pin him down, and Mr. Parker would be a little evasive, because he couldn't give an exact answer and when I said, "I don't know where to get a building. That seems to mean we're out right now." Mr. Draper said, "Just wait a minute." So he picked up the phone and he called Dudley Callahan, who owned the building in which the Chamber of Commerce was operating, it was in the Commerce Exchange Building. And he said, "Dudley, Mrs. Sheets is in here, and we want to set up a public art gallery under the WPA program. And we wondered if we could use that room on South Robinson that's vacant." And of course it was during the Depression, and there were a great many. So we had a place of business. Mr. Callahan gave it to us and, in about ten minutes, we had it set up, so that I knew we could do something. And I didn't have any furniture, and I mentioned that to Mr. Draper, and he said, "Oh, there's a lot of old stuff around here. I think there's a room here that has some desks in it that are stored. We'll just take those down and put in it, and you can use them." So then I had to find out how to get my help, and I realized that I was involved in the government project. Of course I didn't know really what it entailed, because I'd never worked on any governmental program, and the red tape in connection with it. Had I known that records had to be kept and what one had to do to move, I'm sure that I would not have accepted it or I would not have gotten into it, because it was all so new to me. And I really feel quite sure that I wouldn't have gone into it had I known that. But the state office here, they were very cooperative and of course I had lived in Oklahoma City for a long while, since 1916, and my husband was a prominent physician here, and they knew me, and they wanted to help me, and they did in every way they could. And I had to find out the artists who were on relief, and we did find that there were two or three, and we had other artists that needed to be on relief, and when they heard of the program, they did get on, and they deserved to get on. I will say this about that program: You had to prove that your business, whatever it was in the cultural world, was not making a livelihood for you in order to get onto the program. And they were very strict about that. The interviews were long and sometimes it took quite a little doing for a person to get on the relief rolls. But I was permitted to have all the secretaries I wanted, or all the janitors, and art teachers, stenographers -- everything that I wanted -- of people that I could use that were on relief rolls; they were available to me for this program. I often think of that today. What a wonderful thing it would be if I had something like that to draw on when I need help out here so badly. And this may not be the time to say it, but I may forget it. I was with the program from 1935 until it closed in 1942. And I had on my program people who came to me who were hungry, who were desperate; out of my own pocket I used to buy lunches for them because they were hungry, and it was an experience that I had never had. I had never done very much work in the rehabilitation, not at all in the rehabilitation field, and it was something I really knew nothing about. And it affected me, and I felt so sorry for these people that, if I had kept track, I guess, of some of the things I did, it would probably amount to quite a sum, because they had to have help. And of course, I didn't loan them money; we were not permitted to lend them money. And I watched these people who came onto my program, who were so down and out, become rehabilitated, and to become fine citizens. I'm not going to mention names. We have a boy over in our educational television who is on my program; we have a young man who is the head salesman for the A&E equipment company who was on my program. We have a young man who left the center, and he was the one that was more down and out than anyone that had ever been on my program -- so desperate that I think he would have committed suicide had we not helped him. He became interested, he really was an inventor, he had that sort of mind, and he invented a boot for the aviation men that saved them thousands of dollars. Some sort of a boot that they wore, and he received several citations for the work he did in helping them. He helped the war effort in making model airplanes, and it was a big program, and I've had a number of people who were very clever with their hands.

They were craftsmen. And we made these little model airplanes. We had an air tunnel built and they used these planes some way out in their school here. I don't know how they were used but we made hundreds of those. Another program we had was the silk-screen project. We made posters and our boys learned to do the silk-screen work. We made posters for every non-profit organization in Oklahoma City. We made papier-mache figures for the Easter pageant at Lawton. We made a Christmas creche out of papier-mache and had all of the figures. It was used for many years. I think about three or four years ago it became in such bad repair they couldn't even have had the donkey that Mary rode on. It was a beautifully-executed thing, and I have photographs of that. Those were just some of the things we did besides conducting an art school, and we had a very active lecture program. I was just looking through these clipping books, and every picture I see of a crowd I'm lecturing to. So how I found time to lecture, and to operate the program, and to do all the things in connection with it . . . why I guess I was younger than I am now, because I don't see how I did it. But it was really a very active program. Mr. Deifenbacher, who was the head of the regional division, came in here after we'd been in the building about a year, and told me that we'd have to move; we'd outgrown the quarters and we couldn't stand still, that it was necessary for us to move into a larger building. And I said, "Well, I don't know again how to do it." He said, "Well, you remember now that we don't pay rent, and you also must know that we cannot put in the electric wiring and things that may be needed. There are a lot of things we can't do. We can give you help, we can even requisition lumber, and you can requisition carpenters, we can get them onto your program, and we'll give you all the help we can, but there are a good many things we cannot do, and that will be up to your sponsors." And I said, "Well, I have no sponsors." Mr. Diefenbacher said, "well,it's time you're getting some. So now you're going to have to start out and do it." I said, "Well, I've never solicited any money. I don't know how to do it." And he said, "Well, I'll go with you tomorrow morning," and he said, "We'll just go out and you have a good many friends; we'll go to their offices and tell them what our idea is, and see what kind of a response you get." So he went with me one day, and we went to several offices, and Frank Butram, an oil millionaire, here was a very good friend of mine, and he was interested and said, "Why yes, I'll put some money in." We went to another man, oil man here by the name of W. R. Ramsay, and I often think back on this. When we got into Mr. Ramsay's office, he knew me very well, because the young lady that he was keeping company with -- he was a widower -- was in my classes. So I knew him. And he said, "Well, now, ma'am," he said, "You're going out and soliciting money here. You have to have some sort of a something for people to put their names down and the amount they're going to give." And I said, "We were just feeling our way today. I expected to come back." He said, "I'm a busy man. I wouldn't want you to come back here." He said, "I'll do what I'm going to do right now. You fix out a paper." It was something new for Mr. Diefenbacher, so he wrote out, and Mr. Ramsay gave us some paper, and he wrote out that the federal government would do the remodeling on the building and he said some things that he shouldn't say, that I made him hold to later, that they didn't do on other projects, because in his hurry to write this out, and then he signed it, so we put Mr. Ramsay down for a hundred dollars right then. So that night when we went home, why, Mr. Diefenbacher said, "Well, you can do this with no trouble whatsoever. Every place we visited today means a hundred dollars for you." "Well," I said, "I suppose I have to do it. I've never asked for money and it's going to be hard for me, but if I have it to do, I'll do it." So when he wasn't with me, one of the first places I went to was the Liberty Nations Bank, because I knew Ned Holdman and he was, I believe, the president of the bank at that time. So I went in, and I was very apologetic, and I said, "Now, Mr. Holdman, we want to remodel a building here in Oklahoma City, because our present building, where we have our art program, is not large enough and it's not adequate. We've outgrown it, and outgrown it within a year. And there's a building over here on Second Street, right next to the Wirt-Franklin Building, that we can rent for, I believe, it was a hundred dollars a month, a hundred and fifty, and with some remodeling, we can make a very nice art center out of it. And the government will give us the plans for an architect on it, and tell us how to do it, and I could use WPA help, and we'll build a nice little temporary art museum for Oklahoma city." So I said, "I've never asked anyone for money, and this is sort of hard for me to do." And in fact, I was quite apologetic for asking him. And he listened to my tale, and when I got through, he said, "Why do you come in here and apologize for what you're doing?" He said, "I know you, you wouldn't be doing this unless you believe in what you were doing a hundred percent." He said, "You don't have to do this." I said, "No." "Well," he said, "Why do you apologize? Why don't you come in and say what you want and what you want it for and you'll get your check quicker than to apologize for coming." And he said, "Make up your mind what you want. We all have to do things like that." And he said, "How long have you lived in Oklahoma City?" And I said, "Since 1916." And he said, "Do you mean to say you've never worked on a civic project?" And I said, "No, I never have." I'd been busy with my art classes, and I just never had done it. Well he said, "It's time you learned. The next place you go, you go in and ask for what you want." So I knew Harrison Smith here real well, and I thought, I'll take him for the next office. I'll just go up to his office. It was up on Broadway, North Broadway. And it took a lot of nerve for me to get up the stairs, it was on the second floor, and I got up there and I went in. And Mr. Smith knew me of, course, and was glad to see me and I said, "You know, Mr. Smith, I've come up here, we're going to do so and so, and Ned Holdman told me that he thought that I would have no trouble in raising money," And of course Mr. Smith was busy, and he didn't want to fool with it, and he said, "Well, how much are the other boys kicking in?" I said, "A hundred dollars apiece." So he gave me a hundred dollars. Well, it was so quickly that I was almost startled, you know. So I raised around thirty-five hundred dollars, and I had to do it by myself. Well, that money, I felt, would remodel the building, with the help I could get from the WPA. The plans they sent out were very difficult for a person who had never done anything like that to carry through. Mr. Diefenbacher, I think he did a good deal, he

was a hard worker, and I think he did a good part of the work himself in designing these, and it ended up, I knew, a very attractive place. Well, of course I could get my lumber, and I had the money to put my wiring in and we had to do the plans as they were outlined. They wouldn't let us use our own judgment at all. We had to do what they said. So one thing was we had to have a cheesecloth ceiling, because it made a soft light to have these bulbs up under that cheesecloth. It was an enormous room. The gallery was large. So I didn't know how on earth to get cheesecloth on that ceiling, and you see I had no experts, no one to tell me. And I had the WPA sewing project sew these strips. We got them, my boys gave me the measurements, and I had these made in strips and all sewn together ready to be put up. Well, I got my boys in there, and we started to put it up, and we didn't know how to do it. We took poles,everything in the world, to try and get that ceiling up. So I went home at night so discouraged that I was just about ill, because I didn't know how to put those up, and we didn't know where to turn. So my helpful husband said, "Well, I will go down tomorrow morning and maybe I can help you." And he was quite distressed that I was so worked up over it. So he went in, and he was a heavy man, and it was hard for him to stand, he took a chair, and put it out in the middle of the floor, and he got all these WPA workers in there, and told them how to put that ceiling up, to tack it here and tack it there. When we found out that when we had to change the bulbs, we had to get through that cheesecloth, as we had to make holes to put the new bulbs in. Well, that was a big problem, and we painted it, and it really was a very interesting gallery, and I have pictures which I will show you, that it was very attractive. And we stayed there about a year, and in the meantime, our new Municipal Auditorium was being built, and in this building, I believe that the government either . . . . Well, they did a great deal towards building our Municipal Auditorium. There's WPA, they put in all the paving all around it, and I want to say this: that the best paving in Oklahoma City, they've talked about the WPA men, the program, the kind of a program it was, how the men stood out on the streets with their hoes and shovels and didn't work, and I think that the explanation for that is interesting, and it certainly is true. When this program came into effect, it came in to help people who were starving. There's no question about that. The Depression was very bad. And they had no program worked up, they had no work jobs, they were sent out to do these things, and they didn't have to program worked out, so all they could do was stand there with their hoe and their shovel. But later, and I will say this because, when that program closed, it really operated. The plans for the work were made long ahead of the program, and everyone was a worker. That is all forgotten, and the other part is the part that the people remember. And I think that's interesting. And all you have to do today is to go down around the Municipal Auditorium, all of the paving around the new Municipal Auditorium, the big apron in front of it, all of that is stamped with WPA. And there's not a crack, there's not a break, that's the best paving in Oklahoma City, and it was done by WPA.

RICHARD DOUD: It says something for the program.

NAN SHEETS: It says something for the whole program. And I believe that, of course, there was a political angle, but we had almost as many Democrats as Republicans who felt that it was wasted money. But when you rehabilitate the life of a person, it can't be wasted money, and that is what that program did. Well, when this municipal Auditorium was being built, I wondered if there might be space in that building where we could move the center and have it worked up into an art museum. So I went over to the architect, and his name was Parr, and I went into his office and I said, "I'd like to know if there's any space in that building where we could move our Federal Art Program, and operate where we wouldn't have rental to pay, and build something more permanent for Oklahoma city and be in a city building." And he said, "As far as I'm concerned, you can have the whole top floor. That's the floor that we have big cement partitions up to hold the ceiling, and it's the entrance to the top balcony of the auditorium, and that's a hallway. There are five big rooms up there and we haven't specified any use for them whatever, and we're not going to finish them. There'll be the partitions up there to hold the ceiling." And I said, "Well, I believe I'll go and look at it." So I went up the ramps, and the ramps were in, but not finished, and there were boards and everything else I had to crawl over, but I got up on the top floor, and I found these rooms, and it looked like an ideal thing. Ralph Hemphill (?) was the manager of the Municipal Auditorium. so I went in to see him, and I told him what I wanted. And he said . . . I knew Ralph Hemphill, because he had been managing director of the state fair here for many years, and I had furnished the art exhibitions for the fairs. I had had an exhibition at the Oklahoma State Fair, in Oklahoma City, and I had taken a show to Muskogee. I had a trailer and I put my paintings of Oklahoma artists or others in them, and I'd take them to Muskogee, I'd take them to Topeka, Kansas to the fairs, and I had been doing a fair circuit without remuneration of any kind, because I felt the need of it, and I, well, I don't know why I did it, but I did it. So Mr. Hemphill knew me, and he knew that I was very active, and that if I went into anything I usually carried it through, and said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." I sort of forgot it, and I didn't know that they really were considering it, and I was busy and I kind of let it slide. So one day I went to a Chamber of Commerce Forum, and Mr. Hemphill was right beside me as we went in. And I said, "Mr. Hemphill, what are we going to do about that fifth floor? Do you think we can work that out?" He said, "We already are. I have it almost finished for you." And I said, "Do you mean to say you've gone ahead?" "Yes," he said, "We decided that would be a good thing and I thought you knew about it." But I didn't; I had never kept track of it. So I went down, and there was when I had an opportunity to do a little helpful work. We put white pine behind the monkscloth on the walls, so that we could nail into it, and that was about all I had to do with it. And they finished it off and painted it. I think it was in January or February of 1937 we moved into the Municipal Auditorium, into rather permanent quarters. Now that

was set up on '35, we started operation in '36, in '37 -- in '36, we moved from South Robinson over into a building we'd refinished on Second Street, and now into the Municipal Auditorium. And we did all of that moving in that short period. Well, we were in very permanent quarters. It gave an entirely new aspect to our program. People thought that we had more city support, and of course the only support I had was the building, our space, without rent. And I had a very good store room, and we could use the basement for the shipments to come in, and box and unbox in the big barn of a building, and it was not occupied. And later, they gave me the second floor for the art classes, and it was a big space, and later when we moved the Tulsa project over here, and combined the two, and started our extensive work in the silkscreen process, and in the organization of the little galleries, eleven small art centers over the state; we had fine offices. We had practically the entire second floor. And we had sort of a mezzanine between the two and all of the top floor. So we really had a very good plant there. The fact that we had no rent to pay enabled me, with the money we had -- and I became better organized and got more support -- I formed an advisory board, and we didn't incorporate because it was a federal program, and we thought that would come later. And we just worked under the federal government, and we really . . . I went back the other day to look through our files on the program, exhibition program alone, and it is amazing some of the exhibitions we had. See, I had five galleries. The government sent paintings for one gallery. That meant that I had four other galleries to keep in changing shows. Well, we had an organization here known as the Art League and the president of the Art League was very friendly to the program and she was delighted that this was something that was in effect, because the Art League long had had in mind just such a thing as having an art museum. So Mrs. Shartell (?) was anxious to get their pictures. They had collected over the years -- what they had done is collected paintings. So she had their collection brought up, and I put them in one gallery, and had enough paintings to keep one gallery completely hung and changed the exhibitions with their collection alone. And they had some very fine etchings. I borrowed from local collections and I did something when we first opened that was rather unusual. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Butram here, some of our millionaire families, they had collected through the years old masters and had some very fine things. They were anxious to get this little project going and their children had been pupils of mine in my art classes, and I knew them well. In fact, I spent a month with them in Switzerland the year before this program opened. And they wanted to help me personally, as well as the project for Oklahoma. And they loaned their pictures and I often think of that. Our first gallery was on South Robinson, not a good part of the town, and the . . . just had an ordinary lock on the door, no protection, no guards, and we had, I suspect, near a million dollars worth of pictures hung in that little place on the walls, and evidently I didn't have sense enough to know -- I was so new at it -- that I was in danger, and we got through all of that without any trouble. And I think it is interesting to know that, in the twenty-nine years I have directed the center, we've never had one thing taken except a little statue in my office where I had left the door unlocked at night, and it was off of the main hall of the auditorium, and they took that little statue. And that's the only thing that ever has been harmed or hurt in all these years. The first thing I do, when I'd get a new worker, would be to train them how to box pictures. And the first thing I told them was that you only have one thing to remember -- that the picture must not move in that box. Doesn't make any difference how many slats you have to put across it, no matter how packing, that picture must not move. And I seemed to be able to put that over with our workers, and we never had any damage. And I think that is quite a record, and I doubt that any museum in the country can equal that. And it still exists, and we have the ADT protection here in our new building, but we're all alert to what could happen, so we have never worried very much about thieving. Well, we stayed in the Municipal Auditorium and carried on this program until 1942. In 1942, just overnight, the WPA officials felt that the war was on, the men were needed, and jobs had opened up and there was no further use for the WPA. So without warning, just overnight, we received notice that that was the last day of the WPA. And I think this is interesting, that during the time that the project was in operation, I've always been a very saving person, and I felt it was just as essential for me to train my people to not be extravagant, and just because the government furnishes, that we not waste things, and I was so saving on my programs, and didn't permit any waste, that -- you may not want to put this on tape, but I'm going to tell you, you can cut it out if you want to. Mr. Deffenbbacker came in one time and he said, "You know, Nan," he said, "you use less supplies and you have one of the big projects in any program we have." And he said, "When these other people put in these orders for supplies, and you're not using them and yet you're so active, it looks bad. You're going to have to use more supplies." And I said, "Well, you know, I'm using everything that is needed. I order everything, and if you want me to order more, I will." And he said, "All right, you just order some more supplies." So I carried out the orders, and I ordered supplies, and when this program folded up in 1942, I had enough paper, paper clips, everything in connection with supplies, to last me . . . I supposed they'd pick them up, but they never did. They checked out the fans and the typewriters and cameras or whatever we had of value, but the supplies were not taken. And I had enough supplies in my cabinets to last me, I would say, five or sic years, and even today I have envelopes in the store room, that we still use, but they're becoming so rotten that it isn't very good, that we had from that program. And I carry out that same idea here, and because of that feeling I have, that we should not be wasteful, we've accumulated money, and it's helped a great deal in making this program what it is, and to have enough backlog so that we were in shape to carry on our big museum here. But to go back to 1942, when the project closed, my first thought . . . "Well, I can lock the place up." And I thought after all these years here of building this program, to just close it up overnight, it just is not the thing to do. It was set up to continue. There was a hope that they would continue and really start something for the city. So again I went to Stanley Draper, and he said, "Well, you call a meeting. You get these people here. Don't close it up. You get the people all

together, and we'll have a luncheon. Get your leaders, and we'll discuss this thing." Well, of course, they turned it right back to me, and they said, "Well, the thing for you to do is to sell memberships." And I said, "How can I sell memberships, hang the pictures, take care of the place, and operate it?" One of the girls there was a Junior League girl and she said, "We'll help you." And I said, "All right, what can you do?" "Well, we can sit at the entrance desk, and we can help you file, and we'll have someone that can type." And I said, "All right, we'll take you girls on." They did help me. And it's rather interesting that we had permission from the WPA to use WPA help anywhere in the building that led to our galleries. Well, the Municipal auditorium was empty. They hadn't rented any offices, and they didn't need an elevator. But we were up on the fifth floor and had to have an elevator. Of course WPA had it well taken care of with WPA workers. We had the WPA workers wash the windows all around, even downstairs in the lobby as you came in, because that was the entrance, and that helped the Auditorium and helped my workers -- I could keep them busy. Well, all of that stopping, you know, the auditorium of course, the manager should have come in and said, "Now we will give you help," but they didn't. I was afraid that if I got out of there, I couldn't get back, so I just decided to stay there and keep the place open and not act like we didn't have all the money in the world, so that's what we did. And it came back again where I had to get exhibitions from friends and local artists and do anything I could to keep the place in paintings. The Tulsa program, they developed a center in Tulsa, but it was placed in charge of a young man there by the name of Maurice De Vinna. He is a talented boy, he is a talented boy and he attended school at Harvard. He had been to the Sorbonne in Paris, and he had a good background, but he is the kind of a young man that didn't have the push to use his knowledge to make a livelihood even for himself. So he was placed in charge of the center. Well, it was not his fault that the center closed. He did not have a cup of co-operation of the people in Tulsa, and later, I found out the reason why. Because they organized a Southwestern Art Association, and Waite (?) Phillips gave his home as an art museum, and they were not really in accord with the WPA, and they didn't want WPA workers in their building. And I know that this is true because later, I offered . . . when I became state supervisor, I offered the Philbrook help. And the director, Eugene Kingman, who is now the director of the Joslyn Memorial Museum in Omaha, he wanted to help, but we could not give it to them because they didn't want WPA help in their building, which was their prerogative, but it was hard on Mr. Kingman, and there was nothing to do but close the project in Tulsa. So we brought Mr. De Vinna to Oklahoma City and we started. Whether this started before he came . . . I think it did. I think he started with working on these little art centers over the state, and when he came to Oklahoma City we continued it, and we had eleven small galleries over the state, and there's scarcely a week when someone comes in here from some of these little towns and reminds me of the program and what it meant. And, while the art program is going on in some of these towns now was not carried on from the WPA little old center that we established, the roots were there. And that was their interest, and that is the thing that started the interest in art whereby they have some sort of little art museum. Now I judged an exhibition over in Ponca City the other day, and Ponca City is . . . well, I guess they're practically all Republicans there, and they didn't want an art center, and I can remember distinctly going over there and holding exhibitions, and having a crowd come and lecturing, but they did not really set up a program. But I was reminded just last week when I was over there of these visits that I made, and of course, it was travel allowed by WPA. That even in my lectures, out over the state, today, I'm reaping benefit from that, and even members, because I am known over the entire state for the work I did in WPA days.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you remember where the other . . . I think you said there were eleven of these. Do you remember where they all were?

NAN SHEETS: I can't tell where all. There was one in Bristow. I think Mr. De Vinna, when you interview him, would be able to give you a complete list because he was the one . . . I only went around with him occasionally, and I was not the state supervisor when we organized it. Homer Hecht at Norman was the supervisor. Then when he left or resigned or something and I was put in as state supervisor, and at that time then I began to know more about the program, and I'm sure that I'm right in that these were started in Tulsa when the program was there, and then we brought it to Oklahoma City, and we had one in Claremore, and we had nothing to do with the Will Rogers Memorial there, but we started a little art class and a little exhibition program above the fire station. We'd put these in anyplace, and in Altus they had built . . . WPA had been largely responsible for financing, that is, giving the help, towards their auditorium, and on the top floor of their auditorium, we started a very nice little art center, because the space was there, and they finished it off for us, and it was a very attractive place, and all the clubwomen met there; it was very nice. The one in Bristow was in the hotel, and I'm going to leave that part for Mr. De Vinna because he can give you a complete list, I'm sure. And on Mr. De Vinna's project, the fact that he had a good background in art was very valuable to me when we brought him to Oklahoma city. He wrote a column for the Tulsa World. I wrote a column for the Daily Oklahoman, and both of us had been on the papers prior to the WPA. I was on the paper from 1932. We had these columns established, and that was very important to us, and I think had a great deal to do with the success of our program, because we could control our own publicity, and we were very active. So when Mr. De Vinna came to Oklahoma City, he carried on his column in Tulsa, and he visited these little art centers. And he had a mind that . . . he was very good at organization. I became very fond of Mr. DeVinna while I was with him; we're very dear friends now. He could outline a program for these little centers to carry out, and he had the educational background to write the material and get it to them, and then we had people on our program with a little help that could do it. We sent

out press releases to every nook and corner of Oklahoma on our program, on our activities, and all of that had, oh, such a bearing on our present beautiful art center that we have now. We struggled on through the Municipal Auditorium, we organized the Beaux Arts Ball, and out of that Beaux Arts Ball we realized around $10,000; first it wasn't quite that much, but I made up my mind when we had that ball that I could get along without it, and I was going to save that money. And every cent of that money was saved, and it was saved for the purpose of sometime having an art museum and getting a little backlog. I had a summer home in Taos, New Mexico, and I was in my little studio and decided to go down after the mail, and I had written to Mr. and Mrs. John Kirkpatrick here. They were very dear friends, and they're very wealthy people, and Mrs. Kirkpatrick had been very much interested in the center, and helped me in every way she could, and Mr. Kirkpatrick hadn't paid much attention to it, but he'd gone along with hi wife. And I heard about the Rembrandt painting that seemed to be authentic and it interested me, and I thought what a wonderful thing that would be to have that for the art center, and knowing that it was very difficult to ever find an authentic Rembrandt, the authentication was such that I felt that this was all right to bring to their attention, which I did. And John wrote back to me, and started the letter -- I have the letter in my files -- "Dear Nan, I don't believe we're interested in the Rembrandt painting, but I meant to tell you this. I neglected to do it before you left Oklahoma City, but I have $250,000 that I'm going to give to the center towards a building. I am sorry I didn't tell before." Just casually, you know, like it was an everyday occurrence with him. And how I ever got back out to my mountain cabin from this little town of Taos I'll never know, because I was never so excited in my life. I thought, "Well, my dreams have come true." So Mr. Kirkpatrick is the kind of man that he never, that's why he's a millionaire, I guess, he never let any grass grow under his feet. When he had an idea, he carried it through. So when I came back in the fall, why, he had some ideas, and we got an architect and he designed the building for us. We worked on it pretty much that winter, and in the meantime, Mr. Kirkpatrick began to think that there was a great need for young people to know more about science. And he found out that the school board had some planetarium instruments that they never had used because they had no place to put them and the instruments had been bought through donations from the school children and different sources, but they had them and never had a place to put them, and they were in storage. So Mr. Kirkpatrick conceived the idea of a different type of art center, and utilizing some of our space for the start of this idea he had of a science and arts foundation, and to organize that. So he went along that line, and the next summer I went to Taos, and when I came back, this building as it is designed now was on the drawing board. And I said, "Well, Mr. Kirkpatrick, why a round building? When I went away it was square." "Oh," he said, "I've had all my ideas changed. I'm going to build a round building. Over on the other side, if you're willing, I want to start this little science and arts foundation and put these planetarium instruments into use and get it going because I think it will be . . . Oklahoma City needs this." And I said, "Well, that's all right with me." So we went on, and developed the round building. Well, his $250,000 did the hull of the building. He was going to do the whole thing on $250,000, and we were going to add wings. But he ended up with this round building with a sculpture court in the center, and it cost more. So his $250,000 built the hull of the building and the center matched his money, and we did the interior. I didn't want to use all of our money for the interior and he wanted to get his program started, so we completely finished half of this round building, and let him use the other half to get his idea into operation, to see whether it was something that was needed in Oklahoma City or something that could be something fine for the city. He was a very civic-minded man. We soon had our building in shape, and I hadn't exhausted our resources at all, and oh, I expect I had around $100,000 or more saved after we had completed the building, and the center put in the air-conditioning after the building was built. They put the ducts in, but the next year, I made everyone go cautiously, because I didn't want . . . I wanted to know that we were going to support this before I spent all our money. So we didn't put the air-conditioning in until the next year, and we closed down that summer and had the air-conditioning installed, and the center paid for that, and that was $30,000. Now Mr. Kirkpatrick's idea was to give the money for the building, and then it's to support itself. And if he works up a program, they have to be self-supporting. His interest in the center was that he had this money that he could give away and, due to the tax structure I think it's necessary for some of these millionaires, in their foundations and all, to do these philanthropic things to tax-free institutions. The center profited by his philanthropic ideas, and accepted his $250,000 without an endowment, and ordinarily a museum, a gift of a building, is not accepted without the endowment, but Mr. Kirkpatrick had faith enough in the way we operated the center that we would be able to continue, and we have. We've continued our program out here, and we developed an endowment fund, and we have over $150,000 in the endowment fund. We have liquid assets of probably more than that we could use if we wanted to. Mr. Kirkpatrick moved out over a year ago. He built a building across the street for the science and arts program, and put in . . . he built the building entirely himself. They had no money. He built the building, completed it,bought the instruments for a new planetarium, much superior to the old instruments. He traded those in, and he had a growing institution of arts and science foundation across the street from us. He has made quite a center of that, because he has ballet in his building, they have art classes, and it's a little mixture of everything. And in fact, their program is the sort of program that could be combined with the art center, had it been thought out, and it would have made the art center much better. And that may come to pass; but if it does, the art center has the money and they have no funds unless someone would donate the funds to match our funds. I don't see how it could be done. But, well, it's being talked about now, that possibly these buildings we have out here, this building, the one across the way, could be sold to the state fair board and a big art center built down in the downtown, and the Mummer's Theater, through a Ford Foundation grant of, oh, around a million dollars or more, I don't know exactly that

amount, but they received a big grant for a building, and program, and Oklahoma City had to match it and they did. That is to be downtown, and there is enough ground to develop a center, and that may come about, but that is just something in the thinking, and my own thinking on this is that it would be very fine if that could be done, and this building used for the state fair. They need these buildings, and could buy them, and we'd take that money and develop a center and then combine it. But as it is now, this center had developed quite a little backing here, and we support this, believe it or not, through the sale of memberships. We get no money from the city.

RICHARD DOUD: Is that right?

NAN SHEETS: And when you consider that we have a $65,000 budget, and we raise that $65,000 in a membership drive each year to support this, we are a growing institution, and it's very unusual to support a building of this size through the sale of memberships, and all of this had come out as an outgrowth of the help we received in the early days of the Federal Art Program. And I wanted to say too that the people with whom I've had to work on these government projects could never have been finer people. And I made contacts . . . oh, Dorothy Miller for instance. I don't know on this new tape how much I may repeat here, but I do want to say that the people with whom I worked on the Federal Art Program were wonderful people, and everyone wanted to help the center, and I can recall very well one time in Washington Miss Holzhauer was on the desk of one of the programs. She's in a museum somewhere in the East now, and every once in a while when my literature goes out or I'm writing to a museum for something, a little note will come back, a little personal note stuck in with the material or on it saying hello, that they recall very well working with me in the early days on the Federal Art Program and Miss Holzhauer is one of those. And there was never anything that I asked for that, if it was possible to give it, they did. And when the program closed, Holger Cahill was in Chicago, and he called me on the phone, and he said, "Nan, we're going to give away the WPA pictures that have been developed on the program to museums over the country. Do you think . . . you're not incorporated, and your program has closed. Now do you think you could work it out whereby we could give you some paintings?" And I said, "Yes, we'll work it out some way. If I have to go over and get it incorporated." And he said, "Well, we're in Chicago, and if you can work it out, you can come in and make your selections, and if you can't get away, we will make the selections and send you some paintings." And of course I was very thrilled, and he said, "We can also send them to other places in Oklahoma City if you want them, and when you have time to work it out, we have these paintings to give away." So I thought very quickly, and the city of Oklahoma City, we were in their buildings, if they could be allocated to them for the Oklahoma Art Center, and so we worked it out that way. I have paintings by some very good artists, not always a fine example. We have an Aaron Bohrod, rather an early Aaron Bohrod, and well, we have a good many paintings that are very nice and we use them right along in our program, and some of these artists are much better known now than they were when we got the paintings. So we have some early examples of some of them, and we had a very alert man who is the principal of one of our grade schools, Wilson School, and when we had our Public Works of Art program, that was the program prior to the WPA, that was organized and put into effect in this region by the director of the Dallas Museum, by Oscar B. Jacobson, who was then the head of the school of art at the university of Oklahoma, and myself, and of course I had my own studio here at that time. That was before, of course, WPA days, and I was well-known for the work I had done in bringing in exhibitions, and naturally they thought of me, and I went on. And that was a program in which the directors received no remuneration whatever; it was just a gesture on our part to help the program. And if we had time this afternoon, and could get over to the State Historical Building, we have a very lovely mural in there, painted by our Oklahoma Indian artists. We had, at that period, a number of Indian artists that their work had been encouraged by Mr. Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma. In fact, he'd taken a group of these Indian boys and kept them separated from the other students so that their art would remain true Indian art, and he was very interested in these Indian boys. So we had Sotopi and Mop_i_ and Oshai -- I think those are the three that I recall -- worked on this mural for the State Historical Society, and I think it may interest you to know that one period, not too long ago, they were painting the walls, and they were just ready to repaint over these murals, and they're priceless, because some of these artists have passed on, and it really is a priceless piece of art, and someone in the building called me. So I had to take it upon myself to not permit that to be done. And they said, "Well, the walls are dirty." And I said, "Well, you paint around that mural," and then it showed a few cracks, and needed a little attention, and we were able to get one of the boys that worked on the mural to come up and work on it, and that was saved. We had A.C. Blue Eagle who is one of the most prominent of the Oklahoma Indian artists, the best known, I would imagine, the best known of any of the Indian artists. He was an artist who knew how to publicize his work. He was a good artist, and that is not against him, but he had a different personality . . . the others were very retiring and you'd have to help them up. But A.C., he liked to dance the Indian dances. In fact, he was on the New York stage for a while in some of these Indian dances. He was the type of person who became, as I say, very prominent, and he passed on two or three years ago, and his work is priceless. Well, he painted the murals in the Central State College in the Auditorium in Edmond, and those murals have been painted over. We had murals painted in the Wilson School. As I say, we had a teacher, the principal, who was interested in art and everything he could get for his school, he did it. And we had a young artist here by the name of Audrey Yates. She painted two-dimensional type things, and did wonderful things for children. So we painted a mural on linen for this kindergarten room. A young girl, in whom I had a great deal of

interest because I knew her, we were together in school, she was the instructor there. So of course I wanted her to have them, and we painted those murals in her kindergarten room. And they were handsome! I've never gone into a room where you had the feeling when you went in that it was just so different from the average schoolroom, a wonderful mural. And after Mr. Connor left, and even before, this Miss Moore left there, who was the kindergarten teacher, they wanted to do something to the room, and the murals were pulled off -- they were on cloth -- and evidently destroyed. No one knows where they are. And this little Audrey Yates went in, and made quite a name for herself. So it seems that after these things are done, it almost takes a caretaker to keep them. Well, the paintings that I had allocated to the Wilson School, some of them had disappeared and there's no record or way of keeping track of them. When the program folded up, we were not required to keep any of our records, unless it was something personal that we wanted. And that is something I have never known on a program. It was such a huge thing that they knew the warehouses they would need to take care of it would be so huge that it didn't seem . . . that the thing had folded up; it was the end of it. They should be destroyed and if there was anything of great value, why it'd be kept. And that's why we have so few records left, even to be photostated for use as a reference. And I doubt that you'd find very many projects. Now I saved mine for many years, and when we moved into the building, we had about two boxes of things that the water -- we have hot water heat that runs around the building in the floor -- and one of these sprung a leak back in the storeroom, and it was just about the time we moved in an inaugural exhibition. And some of those boxes got soaked. And some of the books, and one box of WPA material I had saved, really was in that lot. And I have here just a few documents from the WPA, but of course my clipping books, we started in immediately to keep clipping books, and I have a record of the program of the art center, from the day it opened its doors, from publicity, up until the present time. So it is really quite a valuable record, and if we have time, we'll go through some of the things, and you can see what has been done. And really, when I look back over, it seems like I've lived a century, because it doesn't seem possible that any one person could have stayed with a program and really watched it develop as I have, and I'm glad, very pleased, that I have had the health and the opportunity to do it, and I don't regret any part of it. And if I had it o do over again, I think it's made my life very interesting, and I had to support Dr. Sheets all through, besides I wanted to do it. Now I was a painter, and I gave up a career in painting, and as I will show you in some of my records, I had gained considerable recognition in the early days as an artist. In fact, I have a book right here on the New York World's Fair, where I had a painting in it that this, I think, was organized by your program, and . . . .

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

NAN SHEETS: There is a painting that was sold to the museum, one of my pictures, right there out of that show and I never did find out the museum where it went. But I think it's rather interesting. Well, as I say, the whole program was interesting and the government right now is figuring on another cultural program, and Mr. Hechscher, I believe his name is, Mr. Heckscher was here,who is working on the program. I heard him in Fort Worth at the American Federation of Art, and I had . . . we entertained in Norman. We had a little conference over there, developing a cultural program under the state government now, and the girl who is in charge of that was -- she called this meeting, Mrs. Hightower, and we were having dinner in one of the homes there, and we had little card tables, and Mr. Hechscher was fortunate that he was placed at my table, and we had a nice visit, and he was giving a lecture that night, and I was telling him some of the things that happened on the WPA program. And he asked me, I remember very distinctly, what I thought, whether the program had been worthwhile. And I said, "Undoubtedly. I can't see . . . of course, the program that was developed was fine, and what it had meant to Oklahoma City and this center is, well, to me, it's very wonderful. We probably would have had an art museum or an Art Center here sometime, but it would have come a little slower than it has." It's come slowly enough now, but it would have taken longer, and that I felt that it was not only a program, that it meant a great deal to the cultural life of our city, and our Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra, which is a very very fine orchestra, was WPA. It started a month or two before the art program did, and the first conductor was a young man by the name of Ralph Rose, and then we've had several conductors since then, and it is a very fine symphony orchestra, and I don't know just exactly how it ranks among the orchestras, but I know that it ranks very high, and we have a program each year that is taped and sent overseas. And that was a WPA program, and it received a great deal of ridicule, much more than the art program, because they felt that the tooting of the horns . . . and they had all kinds of jokes about it. But we never would have had that had it not been for this federal assistance.

RICHARD DOUD: Was there any federal theater active in Oklahoma?

NAN SHEETS: No, no theater. We had a little start -- I remember Mummer's Theater started about that time, but I do not think that it had any federal help whatsoever. I'm sure it didn't. We had a writers project and one of the finest guidebooks in Oklahoma was written on that writers project. It really is a book that is very valuable now, because anyone that can get a hold of one; why, it has information in it that you can get from no other source. And that proved to be a very fine project. But I think on the Federal Art Program, from the production angle, one of the finest things that was done was the design, the American -- I forget now the name of it -- but the work that was done on that is housed, I believe, at the National Gallery in Washington.

RICHARD DOUD: Index of American Design.

NAN SHEETS: Index of American Design was the name of it.

RICHARD DOUD: I think it is in the National Gallery.

NAN SHEETS: And the work that was done on that is the most astonishing thing. It just doesn't seem possible that they could have ever found workers who could have recorded for us in art all of the early arts and crafts of this country. You would think, to see some of those drawings, little paintings, that it was actual piece of cloth. It is a tremendous thing, and invaluable to the history of the cultural projects.

RICHARD DOUD: Did you have an active group on that Index?

NAN SHEETS: No, we didn't. We never developed that angle of it. We did not have an active program in painting. The only thing that we did have, A.C. Blue Eagle was a little hard up one time, and he got on the program for a short time, and I had him develop the paintings from which we made silkscreen prints. And the silkscreen prints, then, were sent out, and that, I believe, was the only production program we had for Works of Art, except of course our silkscreen program. We developed these posters that were used in all of the non-profit organizations in the city and state. That was a tremendous program. I think possibly, the finest silkscreen project in the whole United States was developed right here. I had forty workers at one time, in the Municipal Auditorium. And that includes, of course, the office workers, and included Mr. De Vinna and his staff working on the extensive divisions, and I think that anything that I haven't given you here, Mr. De Vinna will be able to fill in, because he was in the program from the start until the very end of it, same as I was, and when I became state supervisor, of course, his work was done under my supervision, but he is a very capable young man and, as I showed you in these little pictures we had in the back, where the printing had all been done on the program, and it was an educational chart that we'd made, and we'd made all of our own catalogues, all the covers of all of our catalogues. Here we organized a lithography show that was a national show during WPA days and we got thousands, well, we received thousands of lithographs from all over the United States, and that was a big program. And that was developed under WPA. To be able to have all of the color we wanted for everything that we did helped us a great deal. I certainly wish we had something like that now, because, whenever I have anything to be done in color, it cost a fortune, and you don't seem to be able to get this done in silkscreen anymore, and I don't know why, because it should be available. But I don't know where to go to get anything like that done, just plain old silkscreen.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't suppose it is too common.

NAN SHEETS: Here are just a few little clippings that I picked up here loose that may interest you, that is, about the Wilson School winning a painting. Oh, we did everything in the world. I don't think there's anything that could ever be done on an art program that we didn't at least try. And they were not always successful, but we made a stab at it, and it was due to the fact that we had workers who could do many things. And that is my handicap now. We don't have a staff whereby you can just turn things to them and have a supervisor over them, and develop any one angle of this program. I have to keep pretty . . . well, I have to do a great deal of it myself. I have one boy here who hangs the pictures with enough art background so he helped me a little but I don't have the help that I used to have and I have a much bigger institution.

RICHARD DOUD: Were you given your own head, so to speak, as state director of the art project? Was it up to you to decide what you thought should be done?

NAN SHEETS: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: Did they suggest things from Washington or . . . ?

NAN SHEETS: They suggested things, but they appreciated the initiative of a director and that program towards the end was very, very well organized. It was from the start. I think probably the art program, due to the caliber of the people who headed it. They had me as a director. Now, Edith Halpert in New York, who is one of the good art dealers, well, she really ranks high in the estimation of the art authorities for her knowledge. She even worked on that program. She was in Washington one time I was there and I became very well acquainted with her at that time. Dan Rich at the Art Institute of Chicago was 100 percent for the program and helped in every way that he could, and utilized help. See, it was a great thing. If you had a museum going, you could call in these WPA people who needed work. You could get everything almost for an established museum to help you on your program and the making of posters and all that. Even teachers. Now, we had an active art school. I found a girl over in Enid that had been a pupil -- Enid, Oklahoma -- who had been a pupil of Robert Henri. She had a very good art background and we found her living in almost a hovel over in Enid. Some of the people there told me about her and she painted a mural . . . I think there were possibly only two or three that we did for the WPA program. And she did one in the county courthouse of the early history of Oklahoma and she did one for our Oklahoma City zoo. In some department she made some . . . oh, murals with animals and things in it for

something they wanted out there. But ours was not really a mural program. That was on the PWAP where you did that.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

NAN SHEETS: But on some of these projects, just like with . . . once in a while I go someplace and I see a fine mural, especially in New Mexico -- I have a summer home there -- and in the small towns they had these big artists. You see, it wasn't a relief program. So, anyone that, because of the depression was not making money, they could let the government know that. We'd start them out. And Victor Higgins and Bloomenscheim, and E. Martin Hennings, and Burnihghouse . . . all of those old fine painters that established this little colony in Taos -- all of those men worked on the PWAP, prior to WPA. They have these murals around in publish buildings and it was really quite wonderful. Those . . . you know they are, why you are able to . . . Ila McAphee, I remember a mural she did and I happen on to them. I don't know where they are but every once in a while -- I always drive out there -- I hear about these things and I go to see them. There was really some excellent work developed on that program. It was a competition, you see. These artists would send in. I know the work we did whereby we selected the mural work that we had done here. It was a competition and the works all were sent in and this clipping I showed you where we worked with these, that was the competition. We were making our selections from these small designs. We told them the size of the space and they would work from that. We would select a small design and then put them to work. It was interesting when we were doing the historical building work, it . . . . These Indian artists used tempera paints and they didn't . . . had never used oil paints. So of course they had to be done in oil. And I remember taking one of the artists, Tokey -- Mr. Jacobson was better equipped to check on their design because he had worked with the Indian artists and he knew what he wanted them to do much better than I could do -- I took these boys in hand and to . . . to watch their work and to help them. I had to take this Tokey down to the . . . . They had to furnish their own supplies, because the government didn't furnish supplies. They had to be charged or purchased by the artist and then his salary paid for it, out of his salary. Well, of course, he hadn't had any salary yet and I took him down to ATA Equipment Co. to buy his oils. He didn't know what to buy. He didn't know what you mixed with it or anything. So, I had to take that boy . . . first I had to establish his credit and Okay it whether he paid it or not. Believe me, he wasn't very good at paying his bills. I had to keep after him, Tokey, every payday to make him pay for that. I had to teach them; I had to get them palettes and teach them how to mix their colors and they got a great kick out of it because it was a new thing for them. How to mix their colors and how to clean their brushes and . . . . They soon caught on to it because it wasn't too different from tempera. It was interesting that we had that to do.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, how do you feel about another . . . well, not another WPA project, but I sort of got the impression you are in favor of some sort of federal support for the arts.

NAN SHEETS: Well, I'll tell you what I think is fine about them. As I understand the program, it is to be administered by the states and not by the federal government and through local committees and that takes it out of the politicians' hands. If you get a program whereby it's going to be under the hands of politicians, I'm not in favor of it. That did not happen on the WPA program due to the fact that the person in charge . . . . They were very careful, I think, in their directors of these programs and they tried to get in each community a person who would be above taking sides or anything. We were instructed even by the WPA to never let our feeling for politics come into it. That is true. But, under this setup, as I understand it correctly, the money is to be allocated to the state. The state has this cultural committee and the decision will not be made by the government or particularly supervised by the government, but the money allocated. I may be wrong in that but that's what I gained. The impression I have of this program and there couldn't be anything wrong in that because every country in the world has supported art except the United States government. This one little flurry we had was all and we should be ashamed of that because artists are very important to our civilization and down through the history of art there is nothing, there is no record better than the record left by artists. It's much better than the written word. While we get a great deal of criticism on our contemporary artists, the ones who are trying to express this hectic time in which we are living and they are trying to express the age. It is a record of the time in which we live and that's what art is. And why the federal government doesn't feel an obligation to assist, I don't know, because if it is worked in every other country and we spend millions of dollars sending people over there to see their art, it doesn't speak too well for us if we've never had any support of the arts in this country. It is time that we were getting that support. I'm for it 100 percent.

RICHARD DOUD: Good. Was there much political sniping in Oklahoma? I know in some states there was a good deal of this. Just between you and me, I think New Jersey had a definite problem with politics and the WPA. Did you people have much trouble?

NAN SHEETS: No, none at all. I don't know whether I ought to tell this. You can cut it off of your tape if you want to. There was only one instance in the whole program that irritated me, and I could not understand and never will understand. It was a decision made to send out over the United States to all of these little art centers someone from New York and the East who could help us in designing our shows. In fact, even to design one show for us. Because, in many instances, directors of these little centers had never done anything like that

before and they wanted to step up the program by getting a little professional help in there. Well, they could use these men that they would send out and the government paid them. Well, one came to Oklahoma and I don't like to say this but the boy was a Communist and while he was here he tried to organize a group of artists and I caught it in time to stop it. He took a vacation. He went to a Communist school that was in operation over in Arkansas and he left his map, he didn't mean to, of his route marked on the map exactly where he went for his little vacation. He was allowed two weeks vacation. If I had not been alert to this and talked to him and stopped him, I would have had trouble. In talking to the directors of other places -- I believe one of them was Vernon Hunter from New Mexico -- he had the same experience. Now, that irritated me to no end because we have enough true American people to handle things like this and the government was so careful not to get anyone who was inclined to be a Communist on the program. That's one phase that I never will understand and I would really appreciate having someone explain to me why that was done because this boy came with a purpose whether the government knew it or not and the fact that he was not the only one that was sent out that was inclined . . . that is something that I don't know anything about. But, the WPA workers were watched very carefully and we had these WPA investigators who would come every so often and ask all about your workers. I had one boy who was inclined that way and they watched that boy and later he went to some other government project and I think for at least ten or fifteen years, every so often, the government man would come into my office and ask me if I'd heard of this boy. And did I know what he was doing and did I think that he was . . . that it was all right to let him have access to government files. The last time they came, I said, "Well that boy has not been with me either ten or fifteen years. I would have no way of knowing and if you people who investigate haven't found out in that length of time whether that boy is a Communist or not, you're a petty poor bunch of people and every one of you ought to be fired and I don't want you coming back here again and asking me because I have not heard from the boy and I know nothing about him." Well, if they were that careful on that program and the government watches that closely, how did this boy that was 100 percent Communist ever got sent to my art center? I don't know.

RICHARD DOUD: That's a good question. I think . . . .

NAN SHEETS: I guess I shouldn't put that on tape but it is an absolute fact!

RICHARD DOUD: No, this is, I think, important and the answer must lie somewhere with the people who hired.

NAN SHEETS: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: The particular people who went on this job.

NAN SHEETS: Well, I never did get an explanation. I asked the ones who were over me, Mr. Diefenbacher. I even talked to Mr. Cahill and they were unaware of that. No, I don't know how it happened, but if it had only been this one project, I would have thought the boy . . . he exhibits in New York right now. He is a pretty well-known artist. He didn't do such a good show for me. He was a little too active along other lines, but my boys on the project spotted him and I was just lucky that I had an opportunity to tell him that if he had any ideas along that line, this was not the place for him, and . . . we had the privilege of sending them back if they were not satisfactory and I told him that. I said, "You're going back on the next train unless I have an assurance from you that whatever you've done you're through with and you're not going to do any more. I know that you took your vacation down at that Communist camp and you evidently are inclined to be that way, if you are not already one." So, I never had any more trouble with him but he didn't like me.

RICHARD DOUD: I think maybe we'd better bring this to a close. I want to see some of these clippings you have here and I want to thank you now officially very much for giving us all this.

NAN SHEETS: Well, it's . . . a lot of it is vague in my memory. It was a long while ago but I lived it and I again want to say that federal support for the arts is needed and it would give the biggest boost to art in this country if it can be handled so it is not in the hands of politicians and becomes a political football. I wouldn't want that to happen in Oklahoma and I'm sure that it shouldn't happen in any state. I think, as I say, if it's handled the way I think it is to be or the thought is to get the money into the state and they administer it themselves.

RICHARD DOUD: I think if people of your caliber are that interested, it's bound to work out all right. I want to thank you again.

NAN SHEETS: You're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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