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Oral history interview with Margery Hoffman Smith, 1964 April 10

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Margery Hoffman Smith on April 10, 1964. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Lewis Ferbrache for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Mrs. Smith, if you would give us some of your early art training and then go into the . . . how you came on to the Art Project and the date.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I had a mother who was intensely interested in all forms of creative art and not music but the fine arts, sculpture, the crafts. When I was a child I went to drawing classes from the tender age of six. Although I went to Bryn Mawr College and at that time there was only one course in art and that was the history of art, I only became seriously interested in painting after I graduated from college. I was interested in becoming a professional painter and actually was one for a while. I used to exhibit in the northwest here in Los Angeles, and my paintings were purchased, but I became rather dissatisfied with what I was doing and I turned from painting to design and decoration. I had quite a fabulous training in all the crafts. I studied metal work . . . . May I go back? My mother subsidized the first art teacher for a museum and went to that class. She frequently brought instructors in metal work, design. Dow was one of them, Douglas Donaldson was another, Herman Rossi was another. All these men were quite well-known in their day. They taught summer courses in Portland, Oregon. I went to all of these and then there was Mary Atwater Weaver (this is Mary Meigs Atwater) whom she brought to Portland. She was also a well-known weaver in the early days. So my early training included drawing, and painting, and metal work, weaving, some pottery, and a good many courses in design. Can we stop it for a while or go on?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: We can go ahead for a while.

MARGERY SMITH: Then do you edit it? You edit it, do you?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes.

MARGERY SMITH: So that is my background and when the Timberline Lodge . . . . Well, first of all comes WPA and I've given you my letter, sort of a resume of my talk that I gave up at Timberline of the Depression and how . . . the way in which WPA was organized by Harry Hopkins. One of the projects that our state administrator (Mr. Griffith) had very dear to his heart was a ski lodge on the slopes of Mt. Hood. There really were no ski lodges at that time of any consequence in the Northwest. I say of any consequence; there were some ski lodges but nothing in which you could stay and be fed and be comfortable. So he started this plan for a lodge on the slopes of Mt. Hood, sponsored by the U. S. Forestry Service.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: He was out here on a visit?

MARGERY SMITH: No, no. He was the state administrator in Oregon. As you know . . . or shall I reiterate about Harry Hopkins who realized that something had to be done about these enormous . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Well, Yes, that would be very good.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, as you know, this was a Depression worse than . . . . More and more people were out of jobs; being jobless was no respecter of persons. Every type and kind of human being in this country seemed to be destitute for the time being, and Harry Hopkins formulated this works. It was called Works Progress Administration, then it became Works Projects Administration later. Almost overnight, the state administrators very quickly put the thing into action. It had various divisions of construction work, like white collar work, and under white collar work came the art projects. Out state administrator was a very fine man with a great deal of vision. He built two highways to the sea which, had the Japanese kept on coming after they hit Pearl Harbor, would have been invaluable assets to our military. They are still great assets to us as tourist approaches to our coast.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: His name was . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: E. J. Griffith and he was extremely sensitive to the furtherance of art and, when the lodge was formulating plans for building this lodge, he was casting around for some women's advice to help the architects, who were forestry architects, because he felt that a building of this size should have a little understanding from the distaff, you might say, and so they asked me to go on this Project for a couple of months, just as a consultant

for the architects.

[NOTE: Mr. Griffith lives in Burlingame, California, but is [heart trouble] too ill to talk./LEWIS FERBRACHE]

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This was about what year?

MARGERY SMITH: This was about '36 and I suggested to Mr. Griffith that here was a wonderful project for furnishings and for the artists, the furniture, the rugs, the draperies, the decorations, for the lodge, and I also said to him that we could weave the furniture upholstery. We can use scraps from the sewing rooms for hooking rugs. There was a terrific amount of scraps and we can make appliqued curtains for the bedrooms. Then we can put the artists to work on murals, wood carvings, wrought iron, and it was a terrific outlet for every type of fine arts and every type of crafts. Well, when I mentioned that we could use Oregon linen and Oregon wool and help two industries in which Griffith was greatly interested, he was delighted with the idea and we immediately put into existence the Timberline Lodge Art Project. And our personnel finally amounted to, regularly, about 126 people.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This consisted of the craft workers and the artists?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. You see, the construction work was in charge of the construction projects. That, of course, employed an enormous number of different artisans, stone masons, carpenters, architects, plus building painters . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Electricians.

MARGERY SMITH: Electricians. So we had this going concern. Now when I say one hundred and twenty-six people, I'm only talking about the Art Project of which I had charge and . . ..

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did you have headquarters in Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. And we started out putting . . . having a toe-hold whenever we could get one to do our work. We didn't have organized shops. We worked in schools that would give us basement room. Our progress over the four years was quite remarkable because we started out in basements or anywhere we could set up a few workmen, and we ended up in one of the most delightful old buildings in Portland, in fact, right down in the old section. It was originally the First Commerce Building, I think, or a bank, something like that, and opposite the Skidmore Fountain, which was a lovely part of Portland. But in those days it was simply a skidrow area.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This was on Front Street down near the river, close to the river?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. We ended up having beautiful shops with 18 crafts going full blast. In the beginning, of course, when the artists were working at home and the craftsmen were crowded in basements, we had a difficult time keeping track of them, checking on their time. By and large, I would say that almost 99 percent of them were extremely honorable people. We had a few chiselers, as one would. It was wonderful when we could all be in one building. It was inspirational to the workers and it made keeping time much better plus watching the progress and so on. Because, as I say, we ended up with 18 crafts in one building, which was very exciting. Then I was put on this project, presumably for two months, and I stayed for four years. In the meantime, I became, eventually, ... First I started as an assistant to the state director of art, and then I became director of art and we started getting state sponsorship. You know, WPA only did work for sponsors who contributed material costs and who had to be state- or federal-supported institutions. So, we were able to do work for the colleges, universities, and when World War II came along, we did a great deal of work for military installations. We worked for Fort Stevens, Tongue Point Naval Airbase. We did quite a fancy building, a fancy bachelor officers club, but we did some murals in it, and hand screen-printed curtains, paintings from the various artists and all the furniture which was hand-upholstered and hand-woven fabrics. That was one of our more decorative projects. If you stop that a minute and give me time to catch my breath, I'd think it would be better.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: All right.

MARGERY SMITH: Timberline Lodge was undoubtedly one of the really colorful projects because it did involve too many types of labor, even to road building, you know, because when we went up there was no road and our visits to check in the work were highly diverting sometimes. We quite often ate in the construction camps. These were big tents. I can remember the best meals were the onion and potato soup, great bowls of potato soup with slices of raw onion in them and I've never tasted anything better. I almost froze to death going up there with the blacksmith one year. Actually when I say one year, it sounds as if we worked on it several years. Our first project was set up for one year. Then we found we had enough work to do in finishing details to set up another project. Timberline was really completed in a year, but we had two projects and the second project also took a year. But I was going up with the blacksmith one year and I think it was the first year, to check on the andirons. Andirons were interesting; they were made out of railroad ties. We'd cut the flange and took the rail and made a twisted

spiral of it and then left the rail and the flange and the wood. It that clear?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Umhmm.

MARGERY SMITH: They were very handsome. When you think of Timberline, you must think of everything over-scaled. Everything was enormous. There was nothing delicate. The newel posts were made out of telegraph poles with carved animals on the tops. The stair treads were railroad ties. The arms of chairs, for instance, would be oak ten inches wide supported by strap iron. The body of the chair would be made of strap iron. So you were thinking of a style of architecture and a style of furniture design that is unique, very durable. I think the proof of that is that all those furniture frames are still going strong. All they have to do is recover the cushions. When the project originated, of course, all those cushions were covered with hand-woven fabrics of Oregon flax and Oregon wool.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were these woven on hand looms, or . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh yes, yes, everything, you see, everything. You see, our idea was hand labor. That's why the project was so rich in results, because never in the history of our country has hand labor had such an opportunity. That was our whole point of giving people work to do.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: There were enough unemployed craftsmen of all types, the blacksmiths, the carpenters, and upholsterers?

MARGERY SMITH: No, no. There were unemployed people. We trained a great many. For instance, we took carpenters and made them into cabinet makers. They made our furniture but they were really carpenters out of work, We took blacksmiths which still existed in those days -- there aren't any more, I don't think, or if there are I don't know where they are -- and made them into wrought iron ornamental art workers highly skilled. And the weavers, that was an extremely interesting experiment. We went to a sewing project. Now the sewing projects were all women and they were making clothes from donated materials -- donated by the government or purchased by the government -- making clothes for people on relief, children's clothes, women's clothes, even men's clothes. And had an enormous quantity of scraps and there we worked that material into rugs for the lodge and other places. That was our lowest, most unskilled labor. The women who hooked rugs were mostly washerwomen, janitresses, rather old, mostly over weight, and very slow, and so this was ideal work. Because rug-hooking, you sit at tables, and just hook as you go along. So we had quantities of rug-hookers. To get back to the weavers, we stood at the doorway of one of these big sewing projects -- I would say there were one or two hundred women in the room, big room and called for volunteers who would like to learn to weave. We got three women, only three volunteered and three was all we needed. It took an experienced weaver to teach these women to weave. There is where our supervisory personnel came in. I should really know how many supervisors we were allowed out of one hundred people. I think we were allowed three or five non-relief people to every hundred relief people so the woman who taught weaving would not be a relief person. She would be somebody we would have to pay to teach these women. She happened to be a weaver who had worked for my mother's art and crafts society. My mother had sponsored the arts and crafts society, starting in 1905. I have to bring my mother into this because it was really . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I don't mind. I wish you would.

MARGERY SMITH: It was really her training of me, or giving me the opportunity to be so highly trained, that it was possible for me to work in this big craft project and art project. I don't think we ever had as fine artists in Oregon as you had in the East or down here, so my theory was that it was better to have a good craftsman than a mediocre artist. The artists were most cooperative. They enjoyed being trained in this other sort of work and so we had a very high quality of design in our craft work. Well, we got these three weavers, and then we acquired a professional Swedish weaver, an old time weaver, and she taught them how to set up a loom and how to weave, and we wove thousands of yards literally, of hand-woven fabrics. Eventually we furnished Harry Hopkins' office when he was Secretary of Commerce in Washington.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The material from Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: Well no. We didn't, we used Oregon flax in the warp but we used silk and rayon in the weft, not necessarily Oregon wool, because that had to be a very sophisticated job. Timberline Lodge you would call -- well it had lots of rough texture, durability, coarse weaving, heavy weaving, and the office of the Secretary of Commerce, if you've ever been in it, is a very sophisticated panel room, you know, in the Commerce Building in Washington. We made coffee tables for that, inlaid, modern in feeling. We did, besides the curtains and the upholstery and besides building the couches, we did andirons, very slick, sophisticated form, and we also did smoking sets and things like that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I'm most interested in the wood carvers. Did you find experienced wood carver supervisors?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Could you stop that a minute?

We were extremely fortunate because you see WPA was almost twenty-four years ago, '36, thirty years ago is when that project . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The beginning.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, '36, practically, well, twenty-eight years ago and they were still old time craftsmen, and especially in Oregon which is a wood, lumber country . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Many Scandinavians.

MARGERY SMITH: Many Scandinavians. We had . . . . The average age limit for Timberline Project was sixty years so you can see there were older men because that's the average. Some our people were twenty and some of our people were seventy. So we did have excellent wood carvers and we also had some sculptors who were excellent wood carvers. So that was one of our strong points. Then we had a very interesting old man named Karl Fuerer whose life work had be copying old masters, making reproductions.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Would you spell his last name?

MARGERY SMITH: Fuerer (F-u-e-r-e-r), a very fine person and so we put him to work doing watercolors studies of the flowers around the lodge. These watercolors studies were hung in the bedrooms.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the flowers were . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: All native. You see the theory in which we worked at Timberline was to use indigenous materials. We used lumber of the area. We used stone from the area, beautiful masonry up there. We used strap iron and rawhide in our furniture and we used it in wonderful, interesting scale.
The rawhide we used to lace the chairs would be about two and one half inches wide. That, as you know, is an old pioneer technique to make chair seats out of rawhide lacing.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And Oregon pine and Oregon fir.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Oregon fir more than pine. And our color scheme at Timberline was based on the flora-fauna indigenous of the area. In other words, we used "woodsie" colors, greens and browns and soft muted oranges, moss colors . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the names of these flowers that he . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we named the rooms . . . we did something that no hotel manager should ever do. We made each room a different color scheme. That's very bad business because good business you have a predominate color scheme and then you can replace, but here we would have our rooms, every room a different pattern, a different bedspread, different rugs, and we named them for the wild flowers. For instance, we'd have the Blue Jenson room, the Skunk Cabbage room, which we called the little eve . . . I don't know what we called it but the people didn't like Skunk Cabbage. He made these meticulous, accurate, really could be mechanical, studies of the flowers. Then we later had those lithographed in black and white on the project and colored and then we would . . . they would be sponsored by, say, the Portland Public Library or some other state institution. There should be a lot of those studies.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were these sold, these copies?

MARGERY SMITH: No. We never could sell anything. And we never could take anything. I was very stupid because I could have bought a C. S. Price or a Darrel Austin. I was suffering from the Depression myself, you know, money was scarce those days and we, in our particular job, felt that we must set an example and never adapt anything for our own uses. I could tell you about some very tragic things about people who were not so meticulous. There was a man, I don't know if you want this in your . . . ?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes, we do.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, there was a magnificent tapestry done down here on the San Francisco project, beautifully designed. It occupied a good many skilled weavers and it was taken by one of the people on the project, project directors, and hung in his own house. He and his wife got a divorce and she took it with her and vanished. Well, that represented really thousands of dollars of labor. That's what we ran into. We didn't . . . I mean, in the final dissolution of the projects, a lot of paintings were in Congressmen's offices in Washington. Can't blame the congressmen exactly, they didn't realize that it was all government property. I think a lot of them thought they were given these things. Anyway, they took them with them when they went. And you know, we had a very hard time tracking down some of the best art that was done on the project all over the country

because of the lack of knowledge of the people who were being loaned the material. I know, Dorothy Miller of the Modern Museum was trying to have a WPA artists exhibition. She had a very hard time running down the paintings. That's one of the sad things that happened. You see, the project was dissolved, when it was dissolved, the whole WPA . . . . There was no carry-through . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No caretaker.

MARGERY SMITH: No carry-through organizations, really. It was just dissolved, period. Now to get back to our work. That was toward the end.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Who were some of the artists, also that perhaps did some sculptor work, paintings and murals? Were there any murals?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, oh yes, we had lots. C. S. Price did murals and easel paintings. Darrel Austin did easel paintings. Virginia Darcy, she did a very interesting opus sectile of Paul Bunyan in the bar.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Do you know what size these paintings and murals were?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, the C. S. Price paintings were probably 9 to 10 feet wide by 6 feet high.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Quite good sized.

MARGERY SMITH: Good sized. Howard Souel did some murals which are still there, about the same size, 9 by 6.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the subject matter of these works?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, the C. S. Price paintings were the "Berry Pickers" and another was entitled "The Cowboys," I think. And the Howard Souel murals were construction workers of Timberline Lodge. Over the mantle at Timberline was a woodcarved mural, very charming, of the wild life by a man by the name of Eric LeMayde. Thomas Layman who did a very fine sculpture of Benjamin Franklin for the Benjamin Franklin High School, did wonderfully beautiful mosaic of -- in the basement of a . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Of the Lodge?

MARGERY SMITH: No, no. It was a drinking fountain, quite large, ten feet high by five feet wide, and I think it is mostly . . . people call it flora and fauna of the environment. Douglas Lynch who now teaches at the art museum did an interesting mural at the coffee shop, carved linoleum.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes.

MARGERY SMITH: And it was all the things that would go on, like fishing in the summer, skiing in the winter, swimming, walking through the forest, and so forth. It's still there. Lots of these things are still there, you know. Not the C. S. Price murals, which was rather a heart-breaking story. Shall I go over that one again?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Oh, was this in the Lodge? When you were finishing up on the Lodge?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, this was in . . . . Well, the head forester, who has now passed away and gone to heaven, I hope, did not understand contemporary painting, and he didn't understand the C. S. Price murals at all. So he ordered them taken out and that was heart-breaking to C. S. Price and to me. And the eventual disposition of those paintings is very interesting. We found one of them rolled up in the basement of the Portland Auditorium. This points out the lack of follow-through.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: These murals were oil on canvas or fresco?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, oil on canvas. And the other one we managed to keep track of, but it is just the grace of God that we saved that one that was in the basement of the Portland Auditorium, because it could have been easily thrown out in a basement cleaning. Now the two murals, one is in the Portland Art Museum and the other is at Reed College, but they do belong to Timberline Lodge. The Forestry Service sponsored them and that means they are practically owned by Timberline. Many of the watercolor paintings have been stolen from the bedrooms. We've had problems with thievery up at Timberline. The people would like the lamps, the lamps of course were made on the project. The were handsome, overscaled, wrought-iron lamps, very simple designs with rawhide shades, and the people who would spend the night would toss them out the window into the snow banks and then go and pick them up and drive off with them. We suffered great losses with our handwoven bedspreads. People would pack them in their suitcases. You certainly live and learn when you run a hotel. I know that. Now Timberline . . . did I tell you about the time the blacksmith and I started up on a snowy day?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That would be nice to get that on the tape.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we started up on a snowy day. It seems that I should have always reported to the Forestry Service that I was going up to the Lodge, but I didn't know it and we'd been going up and we started up in my car and we ran into a powder snow blizzard and we were on this sort of temporary road. But it was the only road up there and the bank, the snow banks were higher than the car, and pretty soon the wheels began to spin, visibility vanished, and there we were, in a blizzard, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, I think. So I had visions of myself and the blacksmith spending the night wrapped in one another's arms to keep warm, but probably being frozen stiff by morning because it was bitterly cold. Fortunately somebody down at the foot of the road, somebody in the Forestry Service, had seen us, they telephone up to the Lodge and they sent a caterpillar tractor down and dug us out and dragged us out. That was a fairly close call. Incidentally, the workers the Lodge, because they worked through all kinds of weather, had very dramatic experiences, too. They discovered two men were missing at supper time, and it was another blizzard, so they made a human chain of the workers in the building to go down the road and there they found them and otherwise they would have froze. There were all sorts of stories of unselfish sacrifice and consideration. The great thing about Timberline Lodge was the respect and affection that all the workers had for the job. In the first place they were extremely grateful for the livelihood. Not grateful but appreciative, let's say, for the livelihood. For once in their lives, they were doing something that was really creative and they could see the results of it and it was their building, their lodge. We had three openings when the Lodge opened. One for the workmen, one for the press and top brass executive, and one for the general public.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Do you remember when it opened?

MARGERY SMITH: I can get that date for you. It is in the . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Was it about 1937?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, 1937 or '38. It might have been '38. And it was . . . when the real opening happened, you know, we were caught in a blizzard; we were caught in a snow storm and we had to spend a couple of nights there that we weren't counting on spending up there. It was all right for a lot of us, but for the press that had come from various parts of the country, it was a most frustrating experience. They couldn't stand being away from their jobs and being snowed up on Mount Hood. But it was great fun. Well, I tried to tell you, the workers' party was a wonderful party. A lot of those men cried. I wouldn't have believed they could be so moved but they literally cried, thinking the project was over. That points out something. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people did like their work better than they do today. I think that's one of the things the matter with automation, don't you?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I agree.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, now, does that pretty well take care of Timberline?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Who were present at the dedications?

MARGERY SMITH: Franklin D. Roosevelt came out to our dedication.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Very good.

MARGERY SMITH: That was in summer and I can find the date on that. I'll have to look these things up, they are not in my head. That was very impressive. I remember we had to build a special chair for him, you know, because of his physical . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Disability.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. And there is a picture of the chair in that book, I think I showed you, or else I have it. It had to have arms that he could lean on to bring himself to his feet. Well, the people who are important, of course, the Forestry Service and the architects and a man named Turner was one of the most important. Another man named Wright, very important. Of course, E. J. Griffith was the overall director and, as I say, most sensitive and appreciative one. Miss Gladys Everret was head of the White Collar Project and the Art Project, like the Writers Project and the Theatre Project were all under her supervision. She was one most sympathetic and understanding. I think I mentioned the outstanding artists. Oh, there was a Miss Thomas who, I've forgotten her first name, Florence! Florence Thomas designed the newel posts, although she did not carve them. Some of the wood carvers cared them. Very charming. You know, there are animals on the top of these newel posts. I've showed you pictures of them.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Wild animals and so forth.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, wild animals. They were done with great sympathy and understanding and humor.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Such as wolf . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, bear, eagle, owl, now you've got me. I'd have to look at the pictures. It's amazing how you can forget.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Many of the things were your ideas, though.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I was very definitely in charge of the design of the furniture and the fabrics and the upholstery because I was the only one at that time who really knew . . . well, I knew weaving and I knew metal work. I think I told you about the gates. When I arrived on the project, this is where my troubles began, I found them working on a very Renaissance design for the gates that go from the main lounge to the dining room, most unsuitable. So the design is really bastard because part of the gate . . . . We just couldn't throw that much labor away but I was able to introduce more suitable motifs, the timber wolf one of them, into those gates. You know, the designing of this was very terribly interesting. We didn't have time to make a design, make a blueprint of it and hand it to the weaver or the carpenter. I would stand over the weavers, having ordered the yarns, and I'd say throw so many . . . let's throw it this way and let's throw it that way through the shuttle. With the carpenter shop, we had an extremely intelligent head cabinet maker there. His name was, we'll have to get his name, because he was really good. He and I would say, we'll do it this way, we'll bend it here, we'll make it so big, so wide. Of course, I did some very rough sketches but, after we built the furniture, then we would make working drawings of it. [Laughter] And those we photographed it, and we made the working drawings and made those volumes. One set we gave to Mrs. Roosevelt, one set to the Portland Public Library which I think I still have. Oh, I think we made three sets. The one I have belongs to the Portland Public Library.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That's photographs of drawings . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Photographs and the scale drawings. Apparently our photography project wasn't too good, because so many of the photographs have faded. But we did try to keep a record. We'd done this Timberline Lodge which was a ski lodge and has become a great tourist attraction. We did so much other furnishing that was interesting. We did a circuit court. We did . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: No, the circuit court was in Bend, the circuit court in Bend, Oregon. Oh, we had this beautiful myrtle wood which somebody . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Native to Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, and which is beautiful. It is so hard and eternal as far as its lasting quality is concerned. A man was logging off some myrtle wood and gave it to us. Well, we did a lot of murals in public schools, both in Portland, in Pendleton and Salem. We did an iron fence at Eugene.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The University of Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: The University of Oregon. We did furnishings at the University of Oregon Medical School in Portland. We did handsome draperies, hand woven of course. You see, when it comes to Timberline we used the techniques . . . . I'm not doing this too well.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: It's quite all right.

MARGERY SMITH: At Timberline, we used these techniques that were pioneer techniques, as I mentioned, rug hooking, wrought iron, rawhide . . . . What was the other one?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did the various supervisors provide the designs or . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: No, no. Unfortunately the supervisors . . . . The artists were trained. Virginia Darcy, for instance, provided her design for the "Paul Bunyan Bar. Douglas Lynch provided his design for the linoleum murals.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: C. S. Price . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh yes, oh yes. When it came to our fine artists, they were free to express themselves. But, when it came to such things as making designs for draperies, rugs, furniture, we didn't have any furniture designers or drapery designers, so I did a good deal of that designing. When I could, I mean the idea was to spread the work to people who could do it, but it was pretty hard to create a furniture designer in ten minutes, you know. That takes a certain amount of skill. But this head cabinet maker who ran the carpentry shop was very good. He had lots of ideas and . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Was the material purchased from local sources or was it given to the project?

MARGERY SMITH: No, we had to requisition it, in that we had lots of trouble, delays and so forth. Oh, we went through lots of red tape before we got it. Paint. You see, everything that the sponsors who sponsored a job, they were supposed to pay for the material costs but, even so, it had to be requisitioned. Well, that myrtle wood was not requisitioned. It was donated. Very few donations. The money came in, I think it was, I don't know whether it was 5 percent or 25 percent. We can find those things out.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That was the budget?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. For the furnishings but we didn't have the money. We had money for labor, unlimited labor, but not money for the materials. That's where the sponsorship came in. Getting sponsors was a real adventure, too. I would have to go down with Miss Everret who was the head of the White Collar Projects, sell a board of supervisors of a small town on letting us do . . . . For instance, the County Infirmary furnishings or the Bend Circuit Court, because there was an awful lot of prejudice against WPA. Lot of people didn't really . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: People thought there was boondoggling.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. It definitely had poor publicity, didn't it? Only the people who understood it and worked with it realized what a terrific job it was doing, how constructive it was for our country and the people that took part in the program. Well, we'd go down and see these good, tough, hard-boiled politicians and sell them on furnishings. Of course, it was unbelievable. I think they only paid 5 percent of the value of the project, because they just gave the material and we provided all the labor. How they could look a gift horse like that in the face I'll never know. But we had to sell them.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: They were suspicious.

MARGERY SMITH: They were suspicious, but when it came to such places . . . . Well, even in Tongue Point Naval Air Base the commanding officer there was a little reluctant. We had to sell him on the idea. His wife was a great help. But in other places, we had no problem at all, other army locations. Now, should I talk to you about the World's Fair or do you want to hear more about . . . ?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Let's hear some more about what went into these various other . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: About the project? Well, I haven't said anything about the art centers. Shall we come to those later or shall we go on?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I think we'll come to those later, if we just go down this list here of what went the various locations. Details as to what the items were that went into these locales and who did them.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I'll tell you about . . . . I spoke . . . . You have a good idea about Timberline.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Very good.

MARGERY SMITH: All the furnishings were made by WPA, the furniture, the hangings and the rugs.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The whole building.

MARGERY SMITH: And the whole building. The only things that were out of our were the mechanical things like light fixtures. Oh, we did some beautiful light fixtures, yes, beautiful light fixtures.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Wrought iron?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Great, massive . . . three big lights in what they call the "Head House." That three story central section, that is the main lounge with a big balcony going around it. Those were extremely handsome and, if they ever fall down, I'd hate to think, but I'm sure they won't. They weighed tons, I think. We made fixtures in the dining room and . . . . Now to get to the other types of furniture. At the Tongue Point Naval Air Base, we had murals, two kinds, one highly humorous in the bar, based on an old time aviator song of World War I called "Beside a German Waterfall." The young observer lay where we illustrated that song. Then we . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This is fresco work?

MARGERY SMITH: No, that one I think was just a straight painting, but I think we had two glass inlays, mosaic inlays, in that building of murals. Those were very successful opus sectile in art.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the artists?

MARGERY SMITH: Sorry, I've forgotten. Oh, yes, yes, here is a very big job we did, and we did it for who is now a senator, Senator Greuning. He was then Governor of Alaska. We did his mansion.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: His mansion in Alaska?

MARGERY SMITH: In Juneau. We made furniture for the guest room, furniture for his reception room possibly, not really a reception room, more of an informal reception room. I'll go back to the Tongue Point Naval Air Base. There we furnished draperies, but we didn't do applique because . . . we did silk screening. By that time we had a silk screen, a very good silk screen project. We did the ballroom, the furniture and the upholstery, a very dramatic color scheme. We hung paintings in all the bedrooms and we made bedspreads. We made furniture for the main lounge, the reception room and the dining room.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The paintings were of Oregon scenery?

MARGERY SMITH: No, not necessarily. Well, they were done by the Oregon artists, whatever they wanted. Some of them were abstract, you wouldn't know what they were. We weren't quite as abstract in those days as the world has become since, but it was pretty good painting. Greatly influenced by C. S. Price. He was the "dean" of our group of artists. Now we did some army furnishings for Fort Stevens. We did for the Department of the Interior. We did a lot for the governor's mansion in Juneau. For the Department of Commerce, we did the office of the Secretary of Commerce, then Harry Hopkins. We did the Klamath County Poor House. [Telephone ringing]

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Would you continue, Mrs. Smith?

MARGERY SMITH: Where are we now? Let me see.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: We were talking about the Tongue Point Naval Base.

MARGERY SMITH: Oh! Well, I'd like to tell you the color scheme of the ball room, because I thought that was so very attractive, and it was quite different. The curtains were scarlet, brilliant scarlet handwoven silk, but with a rough texture. The furniture, which was bleached wood, had bands of the same scarlet on a chartreuse background, and the bands, which are not so revolutionary now, but they were then. The bands were about twelve feet wide so that when you put the chairs together around the room, you had a very fascinating effect of broad stripes against the walls which were turquoise blue. It was a very exciting room. Then we used for one of the reception rooms, we did the elderberry tree and fruit. The elderberry fruit is very delightful, and we made a silk screen of that. That was one of our better textiles because we used three screens to get a nice range of color. I wish I had a sample of that. I wish I hadn't been so ethical.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: [Laughter]

MARGERY SMITH: I think I mentioned that on our Project nobody who was supervisory would dare adapt (I think that's a kind word) any of the things that were project property or government property. We used our artists for the paintings on the walls for the murals, and we did have enough of them to do very creditable work. I'd say we had a few outstanding ones and quite a group of others.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Experienced muralists for the opus sectile . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Virginia Dorsey. As a matter of fact, that was very interesting. Her painting was so much more decorative than it was anything else that this idea about the opus sectile came to me, and we diverted her mural into a glass mosaic which was terribly good. As I say, it's still in the Lodge.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the subject matter?

MARGERY SMITH: Paul Bunyan. The only problem is, the bar is a very small room. We were still, I think, having a hangover from prohibition, and the government didn't want to emphasize the fact that we were going to have a bar so they put us in the basement. There were lots of inadequacies about the Timberline Lodge. The help situation was very bad. The rooms were dormitories. They didn't realize that help wouldn't sleep in dormitories. This was the fault of Forestry architects. We did this little bar and the murals came right down to the seats, the benches that go around the room and the playful guests eventually take a coke bottle or a . . . and hit the opus sectile and break it. There is a lot of vandalism. You get quite discouraged about the great American people, don't you? Well, we did another very interesting project in Oregon. Of course, we did do other things. I'll tell you about those in a minute. We did girl scout camp furniture. We did state park furniture, outdoor furniture. I mentioned the . . . I can't remember what we did in the City hall but I see it is listed here. Oh yes, we did two servicemen's centers.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, both in Portland. One was for the white contingents in the armed forces and the other was for the colored section of the city. Segregation, as such, was not an issue in those days, and the colored boys preferred to be with the colored boys, but some of our farsighted Art Project workers didn't approve at all.

They said that was segregation, even in those days there was an anticipation of it. See, Portland only had 1,000 Negroes when the War started. Then Mr. Kaiser bought another 10,000 in for his shipyards. They created quite a housing problem, created a lot of adjustment.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did you have any murals at these centers?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, we did, but I don't remember what they were. They weren't too . . . . You know, when we made . . . we naturally thought the war was not going to last forever, so they were of a more temporary nature than the murals in public buildings like the colleges and schools. We had some very sympathetic artists of children who were put into some very fairy-like things and some of the public schools, and I don't even remember the artist's name. But they were charming, not serious.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You mentioned Benjamin Franklin High School. I graduated from that school. What did you put in that building?

MARGERY SMITH: Do you remember a large, over-scale, I mean larger-than-life stone statue of Benjamin Franklin standing in front of the school? Were you in school after . . . ?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I graduated in June of '35.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, it wasn't there then.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, that was one by Tom Lehman. Now he did the design. This was done in the true sense of real stone sculptory. He had a stone mason doing a lot of the work and that was causing a great deal of problems, because the stone mason wanted the credit for doing this statue. We had lots of petty, not lots, we had very few, but we had occasional problems. Not too serious. As I look back, it is simply amazing the way the people got along together.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Cooperation.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, and the people who were being supervised were generally very happy with their supervisors. You know that sometimes can cause a lot of trouble. We did have some problems about tools and the carpentry shop, because, in the beginning the carpenters had to use their own tools, but eventually everything was government-supplied. This project went on for four years and we were able to build up a real going concern. And, as a matter of fact, it was too good because the people who were on the project didn't want to get off. We were running kind of a permanent set-up which was not the purpose of WPA. We were supposed to take on new people. Another thing that happened, if people like this Karl Fuerer who did the very meticulously-accurate botanical watercolors of wildflowers inherited a small sum of money and he reported it and had to go off WPA. He ended up very tragically because he ended up without any money at all. It didn't last very long and then he couldn't get back on the project. He was such a charming old man. I felt very sad about him. We had one of our woodcarvers, when we took him on, was living in a piano box and eating cold beans, beans soaked in cold water. That was how destitute he was. I ran into a lot of really tragic instances. I would be happy to tell you about them. One of our project workers was accused of being a Communist and I know he was one, and the FBI came to see me and I said, "Well, I don't know. This man has children, one of them needs a tonsil operation. He can't possibly afford it." There was no medical service. And I said, "I'm not so upset when these people become radical because I can see their point of view." As you know, we had to close up the Theatre Project because it was completely dominated by Communists, especially in New York. I remember going to the Theatre Project building and they had armed guards with pistols, and the sight of it was awfully militant. But, by and large, my experience was that the workers were appreciative, cooperative and often very happy in their work. Now, to get back to our art centers which I haven't mentioned at all, and which I consider one of the . . . . Keep my "I"s out of this as much as you can. I don't want . . . I'm saying an awful lot of "I"s.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No, it's good. It's first-person material.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we had art centers and the point about having the art centers . . . this was a later development of the project. We found we could do this. It was to put an art center in a town of less than ten thousand people, where they had very little contact with the arts. And we, of course, Salem, the state capitol, had more than 10,000 people, but we started in Salem and had an art center there. Then we went to LeGrande which was a small community.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: LeGrande, Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. And we had a Curry County Art Center and I don't know where that was. Anyway, we had three art centers. We sent weavers down to teach weaving. We sent artists down to teach the fine arts. We had

traveling exhibitions, and we even had material coming from the East for the traveling shows. By that time this WPA Art Project was so well organized that we were having traveling shows. I think all of this contributes to the fact that we did create a renaissance in American art world.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: It brought art to the people.

MARGERY SMITH: It brought art to the people and it . . . and I think it is responsible for the great appreciation there is today. It had to grow from somewhere. Well, anyway, these art centers were very interesting, especially the children's classes. And we always had children's classes and, as you know, children do fabulous work. This is another one of the tragedies of when the project disbanded. Where did those children's paintings go? I've never been able to trace them. Because I didn't have any paid mechanism to run them down. They tried to keep some of the art centers going after WPA closed up and, since I've lived in California for twenty years, I don't know whether any of them are going or not. But they did a very splendid work.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: They were quite popular with local . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Very popular. And there we were able to get advisory committees and work with the art centers. Remember I mentioned to you that, although we set up an advisory committee in Oregon, it never functioned. The people that we asked to be on our advisory committee were too busy. They couldn't just drop everything and come and advise on this and advise on that. So we gave it up. We apparently had enough good critics on our own rolls. But the art centers were excellent and, as I say, they taught painting. They had painting classes, weaving classes, sculpture classes, children's classes and traveling shows. It's too bad that the Theatre Project had to be dissolved because I think live theatre in those small communities would have been a great asset. That's water over the dam. Now, now Salem, Curry County, Gold Beach, Curry County, I said that, that was Gold Beach. I told you, I believe that, when we finished up, having moved from one school basement to another school basement to find places in which to work and also the Masonic Temple in Portland was vacant for a while, and we had a lot of offices up there and sewing rooms up there. Of course, the sewing rooms were not under the Art Project, only those people that we took off and put on to our own sewing projects to do our curtains for Timberline Lodge. Incidentally, the women that made the curtains had never made curtains before. Now, you know drapery-making is a highly skilled profession and we made excellent drapery makers out of them. They are still using the same hangings in the dining room up at Timberline Lodge and quite a few of the rooms, but they are in sad need of replacement. Oh, we did work for the public library.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What type of work was this?

MARGERY SMITH: We furnished the staff room. Also, we have some C. S. Price paintings, not murals but paintings. C. S. Price did some beautiful paintings in one of the schools somewhere in Oregon, very fine. And I don't remember which school it was. They were not taken down by unappreciative school supervisor; they are still there. I told you, I hate to be repetitive, but I mentioned the fact that many of our people were physically handicapped. Our silk screen operator was paralyzed and moved around in a wheelchair. Our art metal worker was a man that we . . . a young man we found applying for work and we sent him to the arts and crafts society. They gave him a scholarship and they taught him metal work and then they came back and did some very beautiful metal work for Timberline. The best ceramist we had, who did loads of ceramics, those were stolen like mad.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: From Timberline?

MARGERY SMITH: From everywhere, because they were so portable and so attractive.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Was this a Chinese . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: This was a Chinese boy who did small . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Boie Kei, I think.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Boie Kei. He did small table ornaments.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did you have a full-fledged ceramic project or . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: No, I'm trying to remember. Yes, we must have had a kiln. I don't remember. Isn't that awful! Because we did a lot of ceramics. You know, the Oregon Ceramic Studio, although it was not, it has never been, we've never been given credit for what we did for it, but I'd like to tell you that story. The Oregon Ceramic Studio put in an application to the Board of Control in the State of Oregon and asked them to build a building. You see, we built a lot of buildings, WPA built a lot of buildings, and it was turned down. Well, I was on the project at that time so I went before this Board of Control and I said, "I think you are making a great mistake to turn this building down because it is such a healthful creative outlet, and it will be using Oregon clays and it will have a

future." Well, you know that a future it has. It has been one of our outstanding sales rooms and kilns in the city.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Was this a public organization?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. A lot of people worked . . . the woman who ran it, Mrs. Lydia Hodges, ran it for years. From a sense of love. I don't think she was ever paid, a lot of volunteer help. And then it became an outlet for the professionals, an excellent salesroom. They have fine kilns. Whether we went up there to have our firing done, I don't remember. We could have. I don't remember any kiln in our building. I can remember the iron shop. We had the forge. That was downstairs on the main floor. I remember all the workshops but cannot recall a kiln. I mean, I remember most of the workshops. Well, I think I've told you a pretty long story. Can you think of anything else? I've told you about the art projects, I mean the community centers and the art projects. There was only one Timberline Lodge Project. Everything else was just general under the Art Project as a whole, but Timberline was written up, and the bookkeeping was done for Timberline Lodge Project. That was because it was being sponsored by the Forestry Service and our materials came a little more easily because it was all government.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Of the art centers, you had three?

MARGERY SMITH: We had three. And we had an art center director, supervisor.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What was his name?

MARGERY SMITH: Val Clear. Tom Layman was my executive assistant in Portland eventually. Mr. Bert Brown Barker was the, shall I say, an honorary director of the Art Project. He was very highly thought of, and was interested in it, but actually such a top level interest that he didn't . . . l I mean he didn't get into any of the working details. He is still alive. I imagine they'll talk to him.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were Mr. and Mrs. Carl Morris in Oregon or were they in Washington?

MARGERY SMITH: No, they were in Washington. Carl Morris and Hilda Deutch were brought out. She was brought out to be an instructor in sculpture and he was brought out to direct art projects in Seattle, headquarters in Spokane. He was director of an art center as opposed to being director of an art project. I was director of an Art Project but art centers were under the Art Projects. So he was under . . . what was his name? Do you know the name of the Seattle art director?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No, I don't.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, he would have been under that man, but he ran the center and very ably, I understand. As you know, he has become an extremely well-known artist and Hilda has become a very well-known sculptress.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You mentioned Bess Witcomb as head of the Theatre Project in Oregon.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, she was extraordinarily capable.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: There were enough actors in Oregon to form a theatre group?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh, yes. There were. If there weren't, she made . . . she did what I did. She did good material and trained the actors. I think they were quite good actors. They put on some excellent shows.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In Portland or traveling also?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, now, you see, I was not involved in that. I wish you would get in touch with her. I really don't know. I'm so busy, you know, we were awfully busy. We worked terribly hard every day. It is hard to have a vacation even, because there was a great urgency about everything we did. We couldn't take time of to go off on vacations as the spirit moved us. I think the state administrator, Mr. E. J. Griffith, had unparalleled understanding and sympathy for all the art projects and helped us always in every way he could. Also, Mrs. Florence Kerr in Washington. And, of course, Holger Cahill whose whole idea it was in the beginning. He was always aiding and abetting me, in every way, in my work. So, I'm most appreciative of those people and of Miss Everett with whom I worked constantly. Miss Gladys Everett who was head of the White Collar Project. Everyone was wonderful. Everybody felt the importance of our work, and the value of our work, and in our upper echelons of executive work we had no problems at all. Then I left. Do you want me to talk about the World's Fair? Or not now?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Well, I have a few notes from talking to you the other day that I would like to check out with you, and then we'll go on to the World's Fair.

MARGERY SMITH: all right.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You mentioned Mary H. Isom, a regional director?

MARGERY SMITH: No. Mary Isom was the head of the Portland Public Library and Mr. E. J. Griffith, the state administrator, went to Miss Isom and said, "What woman do you know who would be a help to the architects of Timberline Lodge? We feel that we need a woman's help, or advice." And she suggested me because she had known of my mother's work which was so important to the city and the state. My mother had started the Institute of the First Traveling Library in the State of Oregon. Bought the books in the East and packed them up in a box and sent them out West. So, through my mother really, I was asked to do this work. Through Miss Isom and her respect of my mother's ability. She had nothing actually to do with . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I see.

MARGERY SMITH: . . . with the project, and I went on to the Timberline Lodge Project for two months and stayed as Art Project director for four years. Ending up with the two World's Fairs. One here and one in New York.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You spoke also of loaned personnel from the other states for the art centers . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we had Merlin Hardy come up from San Francisco.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And Merlin's position?

MARGERY SMITH: Merlin came up to teach painting and he still lives here. I can't remember too much. We did have art loaned. We had some paintings up in Timberline which were never too successful, because the paintings which were done by the local artists were much more suitable than the paintings we got from the East, but we had some art loaned to us from Washington, D.C. You see, they had a collection in Washington all the time from all over the country.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did Beatrice Judd Ryan come up to see you?

MARGERY SMITH: No. I came down to see her. We had regional meetings down here, and she was another delightful person, excellent worker for the project. I think she must have been director of exhibitions. Oddly enough, when Eddie, Mr. Cahill, would come out from the East, the director from the State of Washington and myself would come down here and we'd put on several tours of the work to see what was being done. See how the other states were doing. It was supposed to be beneficial. We didn't do too much traveling. But, you see, I came down here because I . . . we put a room down here, a Timberline Lodge room and we put a Timberline Lodge room in the New York World's Fair, a replica of the room, in the Fair. But I was sent East as sort of a chairman of the World's Fair Committee from the West to . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Could we finish up on these notes first?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. I thought we'd . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What were the topics you discussed at regional meetings?

MARGERY SMITH: The projects and what were the best projects and techniques.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The regional meetings were held in San Francisco?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Actually they had some very skilled workmen down here. Remember I mentioned the tapestry to you?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we did not do tapestries. This was real tapestry weaving, beautifully done, beautifully designed, and they had far more artists down here than we had real artists. Here again, I can't tell you what the State of California did because I had . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: It's quite all right.

MARGERY SMITH: I'm sure they did a great many murals, opus sectile mosaics. I've seen some of them. We did go to see some of them. Usually their people were so skilled that the artists were both the designers and executors of the works. We frequently had an artists design something and then we would put our less skilled labor to work on finishing it up. The regional meetings were important so that we took notes from one another. We tried to . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: People from several states came?

MARGERY SMITH: It was regional. It would not be . . . . I think only . . . . Are you going to talk to Joseph Danysh?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes.

MARGERY SMITH: Because he was a regional director. He'll tell you what states came. There is no use in my repeating it. I should be awfully interested to know what data they'll get from Oregon because I don't know anybody in Oregon with the exception of Mr. Griffith, who is now paralyzed and doesn't talk very easily, and Miss Everett and myself, who are fairly conversant with this project or projects. You know, we have, not this . . . . I don't think you'd better take this. You'd better cut this off.

The New York World's Fair. Mr. Cahill suggested that I come to New York before I went to Washington, in order to meet some of the artists. As you know, there was a great deal of work being done in New York, the easel paintings, mural work and everything. So I did and then I went to Washington. Now I did make some side trips to see the various art projects, but I didn't make as many as they wanted me to make, because there was too much to be done right in New York, after we moved from Washington, to do our work in New York. As I say, we got ourselves a place in which to work from. From a design point of view, that was the 19th floor of Rockefeller Center. That was through my knowing Mr. Foou (sp), the firm of architects that built Rockefeller Center. That, of course, I think is an awfully interesting story but I've already told it to you. Have you a recording of it, or do you want me to repeat it?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No, we'll work into that if you can tell us about your Washington work.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I met the artists in New York and then went down to Washington and Mr. Cahill said, "I wish you could get the committee moving. All they are doing is having meetings and nothing is happening by way of action."

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This was the committee for the WPA building at the World's Fair?

MARGERY SMITH: Building at the New York World's Fair which was a big building, very big building, and it was to be a complete survey of all the projects that WPA was doing. So I went down there and it was true that they were just having meetings. And I had been with the projects long enough to know that you have to work fast to et things going and to get things done, and the Fair was to open in April. So I suggested that we go to New York. We got up to New York and we had no headquarters. We had to get a designer for our exhibits and we had to find a place from which to do our work. Well, WPA at that time had a rather bad name in New York. Nobody wanted us. They thought that WPA was a group of starving radicals. So I happened to know Mr. Foou of the firm, Andrey, Hood . . . . Who was the other man? They built Rockefeller Center. Mr. Foou had been a partner of my brother's in Oregon before World War I, and I went to see him and I told him . . . I said, "This group that will be working on the World's Fair building are all non-relief people designers that want to explain the program to the United States people." And we had acquired Donald Deskey then to be the designer in charge. He is a well-known designer still, and so Mr. Foou was very sympathetic to me. He knew me and he knew that I knew what I was talking about. So next thing we knew, we had the 19th floor, right opposite the St. Patricks Cathedral. There were no partitions in it. It was an ideal workshop, every centrally located for everyone. So we went in there and the designing was done from there. I thing the building won second award. I think Anton Refregier's murals won the first award for the best mural painting.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What was the subject matter of Anton's murals?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh, I don't know; I can't remember. I don't even . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: He is living in Woodstock, New York now.

MARGERY SMITH: Is he? You know he did the murals here at the San Francisco Post Office.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes. Which were quite controversial.

MARGERY SMITH: We had to go to the bat for those. It was so silly. It was Bondaro . . . was that his name? The congressman who tried to say they were Communist-inspired. Well, of course, there isn't any question about Refregiers having been a Communist. We all know that. But the murals were works of art. It was ridiculous. Even my husband, who represents the conservative side of the United States, went on the air to protest the painting out of these.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: So did local historians here. They said they were accurate and representing longshoremen and . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Of course they were. They are very good murals. We succeeded in saving them but it was quite an effort. i, too, went on the air to protest. We got all sorts of people to speak to save them, but this

congressman wanted to paint them out. Well, let me see. I'm back to the World's Fair. So we worked from Rockefeller Center. We had Donald Deskey as our chief designer. He brought his staff of designers with him and so we planned the setup of the building.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: How did you use Deskey? How was . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Andre Foou had nothing to do with the design. He was the man, one of the architects who built, designed Rockefeller Center.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Just for the tape, how do you spell that?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh. Andre with an accept, Capital . . . .

[END OF TAPE 1]
[TAPE 2]

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Tape 2 with Mrs. Marjorie Hoffman Smith.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, we are now in New York working on the New York World's Fair. I'll start with a really tragic thing that happened at the New York World's Fair Building. It was when the Theatre Project was found to be too Communist-dominated as far as the workers were concerned . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The Theatre Project in Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: No, that was in New York. And the whole Theatre Project was closed up all over the country. It seemed to have become pretty violent. They were afraid of it. Well, anyway, on this World's Fair Building we had a magnificent revolving stage, outdoor theatre, wonderful seats, lovely planting all ready to open when the Theatre Project was dissolved. I only stayed for the opening of the Fair. Always had hoped to get back to see it, so I don't know what they did with that lovely garden. I imagine they must have used it for something but certainly not for the Theatre Project. We were, all of us, crushed by the fact that we couldn't use it. Juanita Hall was opening with a chorus of Negro Singers and had already rehearsed. I had heard her rehearsals. So it was quite a blow from the art point of view. Well, to get back to the building. The building was a complete survey and it was based on that book I loaned you, Inventory. We covered every project, all the construction projects and all the art projects . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Throughout the country? This is to represent the entire WPA?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Throughout the country, yes, the entire WPA. We had very competent men. You see, none of these people who worked on this were relief people. They were all designers and project heads. I don't think there were so many project heads. I did go to Detroit. You know, I can't remember where I went. I was asked to go to Florida and said I couldn't. I just couldn't give the time. But I think we had a very superlative collection. After the project was set up and Donald Deskey's designers took it over . . . . I can't think of who the WPA people were besides myself. I only took over the Arts and Skills Projects after that, just one section. They must have had heads of various construction projects . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Crafts?

MARGERY SMITH: No, that came under the Arts and Skills. I was in charge of Arts and Skills. So we had a fair-sized section of the building, and showed the work from all over the country, including the American Index of Design. The State of Oregon was one of the few states that wasn't given the opportunity to do anything for the American Index of Design. The reason for that being that our pioneers were too hard up and too busy to have much arts and crafts. and they didn't want Indian artwork which was a great shame because we had magnificent Indian things. And we had quite a few tribes of Indians. And we could have used the whole coast. But the powers that be in Washington said, "No Indians" recordings. Of course, the American Index of Design -- this is a fabulous recording. And the work was beautifully done from all the states that did it.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Watercolors that you're speaking of?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, all the furniture, it was all, I think, watercolor, all uniform size. It was everything, glass, furniture, pottery, everything that was made in this country by Americans. I've always hoped that the Ford Foundation would sponsor a complete publication of that, and of those plates, but only a few of them have been published. There are a great many plates. I imagine it would be a terrifically expensive thing. It would be a wonderful thing, though, if it could be circulated to all the public libraries on the country. Well, the Fair, we opened up, we had a very successful building. I will have to say, and I have said this several times, WPA began to have a black eye. People didn't understand it; the leaning on the shovel was, you know, heard all over, and we were trying to show people what . . . how really fine the work had been. But I know people that didn't even go

to the building. I would say, "How did you like our building?" "Oh, I didn't go." That was a very good building.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You had easel paintings and sculpture and furniture?

MARGERY SMITH: We had everything. But we also -- they showed particularly -- you saw those two big photographs I had here. They showed all the construction work, dams, bridges, public schools, public libraries, that were done all over the country with WPA labor. You know, there was an awful lot of construction work done by WPA. In fact, a half mile from my house is a tunnel that was built by WPA labor. I mentioned those two highways to the coast . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: In Oregon. That would have been a great benefit had we had war with the Japanese, and they landed on the coast. There was some thought that they would, you know, after Pearl Harbor. WPA did all sorts of construction work. The World's Fair didn't over-emphasize the Art Projects. It was just one section of them, of the building. I wish I had gone back the second year to see it when the Fair was in operation.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You were in New York how long on this?

MARGERY SMITH: I was in New York until after the Fair opened and I think it opened at the end of April or beginning of May.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did you get the work done in time for the opening?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, yes!!! There was a little work left, but we really opened, but we were frantic! The last week, you wouldn't have believed it could open. I imagine they're going through the same thing now. You just don't see how you're going to get it whipped into shape. We had a diorama. In those days dioramas were made by all the Art Projects. And they had a diorama of Timberline Lodge and the powers that be looked at it almost the night before the opening and they came to me and they said, "I hope your heart won't be broken but we don't think this is very good." I said, "I don't think it is, either. Let's take it out."

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Was it made in Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: Made in Oregon. No, I don't believe it was. I think it was made in the East. But it wasn't good art. We really . . . we hitched our wagon to a star as far as quality was concerned and there was a great desire to have only the best in every way. So we took it out. But we had an interesting thing. We had a replica of Timberline Lodge in miniature, made in Oregon, and it was fabulous. It was at the Fair. And I think now it's in some state part. I hope it is. You know, this is the sad part of much of WPA work, without any program of -- what would you call it? custodial program . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What happens to the material afterward?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. What happens to the material afterward is heartbreaking. It's just melted away. Nobody realizes the value. You see, never in this country has labor been spent so lavishly, hand labor, art labor. Now we pay by the hour, terrific wages, for a carpenter. In those days we got our carpenters for bare subsistence wages.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: What were the wages paid to artists and craftsmen? Do you recall?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, I do recall. I have that in one of those letters. Very small, the week . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Eighty to ninety dollars a month? Something like that?

MARGERY SMITH: I think that was it, yes. Eight-hour day.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: More for supervisors.

MARGERY SMITH: First we started out with a forty-eight hour week; then we dropped down to , I think, a thirty-five hour week. Supervisors and the non-relief people, of course, were paid more. They weren't paid too much. Money was scarce for everyone.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Money went a long ways in Portland in those days, though.

MARGERY SMITH: Oh, yes. It did indeed. Of course it's something you hate to think about, lamb chops selling for fifteen cents a pound. Imagine what that meant both to the people that raised the sheep and the butchers. In those days you could buy lamb chops for fifteen cents a pound.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were there several of the important people coming from Washington for the dedication of

the WPA Building?

MARGERY SMITH; No, not so many. In fact, I can't . . . I remember the President and his wife, Eleanor. I can't think who else came. I think people like Joe Danysh might have come because he was a regional director. I know he came for the opening. That was the time we all got snowed in.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That was Timberline Lodge. I'm speaking of the WPA Building in New York.

MARGERY SMITH; Oh, in New York. I don't remember anything about it. Maybe I left before it happened.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And from New York you came back to the coast?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: For more of the project work?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. And then we had approved, by the President while I was East, an art center. He signed the letter . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Art center for Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. It was going to be a marvelous thing, with a theatre, a craft center. We had the plans and everything and then the war loomed up and the state administrator said that we can't do this. And then, with the war looming up, we . . . . Labor found a place for permanent employment. I closed up my Art Project -- don't let me say "my" -- I hate that. I closed up the Art Project because we were just losing people too fast and there wasn't any point in keeping it.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This was about when?

MARGERY SMITH: I would say this was 1940. It could have been a little later. Yes, you see Pearl Harbor was in 1941, and then WPA as a whole closed up. I couldn't give you that date. Do you remember that?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That was about the summer of '42.

MARGERY SMITH: Was it?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: From what I can check.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, those figures should be available somewhere. When I go home I'll look at my diary and see. I didn't keep a diary; I just kept a calendar, you know. We should have kept a diary.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: We all do now. We didn't know it was going to be a historic period.

MARGERY SMITH: No, we didn't. And I guess you felt, as I felt, that we were so pushed for time. I personally was so pushed for time that I would get up at six in the morning and do furniture design before I went down to the office.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I imagine you were often working six or seven days a week?

MARGERY SMITH: Oh, yes, quite often. See, supervisors paid no attention to hours. We couldn't. I'd have to take trips to all these places where we were doing work and where our art centers were. I'd have to go down to Astoria to check on the Tongue Point Naval Airbase, and I'd have to go to all those three art center places and wherever we were doing. I'd go all over the state and Miss Everett would go with me and it was terribly interesting. As far as my experience with WPA is concerned, I look back on it as one of the great experiences of my life.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: A kind of an interesting, you might say, Renaissance period?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. I had always been taught -- I mean my mother -- her idea was to bring artists and the public together. And I'd been brought up on that theory. So here I was, bringing artists and the public together. So it was a natural for me. I look back at it with great pleasure. So does Mr. Griffith. We talk about it. He lives right down here.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Where does he live?

MARGERY SMITH: Burlingame.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Burlingame. You say he suffered a stroke, though?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, and a heart attack. You might be able to talk to him. I think he'd like to see you if you have the time to go there.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Fine! At the conclusion of this tape, I would like to get some of these addresses.

MARGERY SMITH: I think -- I would. Come back and I'll do anything I can because I think this is very important. So sorry that Eddie Cahill, Mr. Cahill, didn't write it, from the point of view of the man who was in charge in Washington and who knew the artists. Now his wife, Dorothy Miller, of the Museum of Modern Art, I think, could give a great deal of information. And I know that Mildred Baker could give a great deal of information on the art projects because she was in charge of the Washington office. Dornbush, I'm sure he ought to know . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Dornbush?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Didn't you mention him. Oh, no, Al Dornbush. His name came up last night; he was in Washington and I think he lives in -- let's find out where it is. He can give you a lot of information. Now I can call up the people I was at dinner with last night, and they know Al Dornbush, and he'd be a great source of information because he was in Washington. I think he's in Carmel or someplace like that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I'd certainly like to have this information.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, you call me. I'll just have to call the guests where I was at dinner. There were 12 guests. I'll have to find out who spoke of him. He's living somewhere here. He would know quite a bit. Of course, Joe Danysh would know an awful lot really, I don't know how well he'll record it. Maybe he'll do very well. Are you taping this? You shouldn't tape this.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Well, in case I fail to get some of these notes, it will help. Are there further statements you would like to make about the WPA as a whole?

MARGERY SMITH; I think there is that letter I wrote; why don't you just take it out of the letter? The weakness of the program was people tended to make a career of it. They wouldn't leave to make room for other people. It became a rather static organization toward the end. It was like running a business.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Even though they had opportunities for other work?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. They preferred staying. It was pleasant. The hours were short. It was a bare subsistence but it was assured. And the hours were shorter than the average work week. Of course, the older men like it because they were . . . we'll have to confess and have to admit that there wasn't the pressure on our workmen . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That there would be from an employer?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In private business.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Well, not so much that as private business was . . . as far as the Art Project was concerned, industrial work is entirely different from creative work. I'm talking about the Art Project when I speak of the weakness of the project. I'm only speaking of the Art Project now, not construction projects, because I really don't know. I think there probably was a good turnover there because employment came on and they could earn so much more. But our older men and women preferred to stay on the Project if they could. I don't think I have much more to say except I did believe it did a terrific work. I think we'd have had a revolution without it. I really do.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I think so, too; I would agree with you. When people go hungry, all sorts of things happen.

MARGERY SMITH; You see, the average citizen didn't come in contact with the people who were in such desperate straits. The people I came in contact with literally didn't have anything, clothes or food. Well, they seemed to have automobiles, though. That will always be a mystery to me. These men were on relief and they were allowed to have automobiles, encouraged to keep them, as a matter of fact.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Sometimes it's the only means they had to find work.

MARGERY SMITH: Well that was a fact.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Sometimes this work would be berrypicking or something out in the country, hop-picking . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: Well, the people on the project had automobiles, such as they were. So, I think I've contributed my . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Are there any personal anecdotes, or problems, that came up that may be of interest to future historians?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I'll have to think that up. I can't really come out with it right now. Give me a chance to think it over and I'll see if I can't jot down some of the more interesting things. Of course, there were always things of interest like the time I thought I was going to be frozen to death. In going to our various projects, we went regardless of weather. Our automobiles would fail us and we'd get stalled. Of course . . . shut that off for a minute. Superb furniture, whatever we built we built with great quality. As I say, we had hand labor; everything was custom-made.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You had many experienced people, I imagine, though, for furniture. Weren't there some furniture factories in Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Our furniture makers were recruited. Ray Neuffer was the name, it has come to me, Ray Neuffer was the foreman on our furniture factory and he was very skilled. In those days, carpenters were practically cabinet makers. We didn't get any out-and-out furniture people on our project at all. We didn't get much in the way of upholsterers. We taught people to upholster.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: You mentioned the infirmary at Klamath Falls.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, we did a lot of furniture for that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Also art work?

MARGERY SMITH: No, I don't think we did any art work. It wouldn't be too suitable down there. But we put lots of paintings around wherever we could in Federal and state-supported institutions. That was our limitation, you know; they couldn't go elsewhere.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Often in the San Francisco Bay area, the artists were always hunting for walls to make a fresco on. Did you have . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: No, because we didn't have enough mural painters. Remember I . . . I keep emphasizing this, but I don't want to . . . because it sounds as if I were deprecating the project. We did not have many artists of top rank. So we weren't looking for walls.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were there any murals painted at the University of Oregon?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, I think so, but I'm not too sure. Mr. Barker would remember that because I think he was a regent at that time.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: And the University Medical School in Portland, any mural work?

MARGERY SMITH: No. I don't think so. Furnishings.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Veterans' hospitals?

MARGERY SMITH: I don't remember any.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Federal court buildings? Post Offices?

MARGERY SMITH: Well, I'm sure there were Post Offices but they were done under the . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: PWA earlier?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. And I can't give you the information on it because it didn't have any records on it.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: That was before you came on?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, that was before I came on. You see, I came on in '36 and PWA Federal Art Project started when? Do you know?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Shortly after that. (Before 1934).

MARGERY SMITH: I thought it started before that. Something started before I went on the project.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Still checking on the dates on that.

MARGERY SMITH: I can look up some dates for you. I'll try to. I must have them. If I go up and find them in my calendar. But the thing that Eddie Cahill started, started in Washington before the Art Projects started, the Art Project had started before I came on it, I think, in a very minor kind of way as part of the Federal . . . it was something Fine Arts. Do you remember what that would be? I don't.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: No, I don't.

MARGERY SMITH: I can dig it up. I can get it from Mrs. Cahill in New York. I think she'd remember. Do you want me to try to get you . . . ?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: If you would. Every little scrap of information will all help the picture.

MARGERY SMITH: Sure, I can get something from her. I'll do that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: How many artists would you say you had in Oregon that were on the projects, professional artists, or young art students who were becoming professional?

MARGERY SMITH: I can't tell you that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Of those groups of artists . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Let me say I doubt if there were more . . . you wouldn't call Bouis Kee, the ceramicist, one, would you?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Yes, in this sense.

MARGERY SMITH: Then I would say we had twenty-five, thirty, maybe more. Around that. We had plenty of craftsmen. I think probably we had . . . we might even have had more. We might have had as many as ninety that we called artists. I wouldn't be surprised.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Mostly concentrated in Portland, though?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Very few artists actually operating in other areas outside the art centers?

MARGERY SMITH: No, not until we started the art centers.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: All these artists had to qualify from the relief roles?

MARGERY SMITH; Yes. I shouldn't say all. Douglas Lynch was put on, not as a relief artist. I'm not sure that Darrell Lawson was on relief. We had to have a few. Our art rolls were so slim we had to have a few professionals and we were allowed, I think, five people in a hundred that weren't we, for supervisors. You see, like the woman who taught the weaving, she was not a relief artist. Darrell Lawson, probably Douglas Lynch, were not. We wanted Douglas Lynch to do those murals up at the Lodge. Every so often, we'd have to get someone in to fill in where we badly needed special training.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Clayton Price, was he on relief?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. His history is something you could cry about, really. He was eating coffee and doughnuts when he went on the Project. He was absolutely strapped financially, people weren't buying his paintings. He lived in a downtown office building, had a very small studio. And, of course, he didn't live very much better when he went on relief. You know, there wasn't a great deal of money but it went an awful lot farther in those days than it would now.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Particularly in places like Portland.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: How long was Clayton Price on the Project?

MARGERY SMITH: I think he was on it until it folded.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Several years?

MARGERY SMITH: Four years, I would say four years. Very few of the artists who went on the Project ever left it,

because, you know . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Until they were removed.

MARGERY SMITH: Until the Project folded. Because, you see, there was still no patronage for art. We were still in the . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Very little commercial art work in Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, very little. There were quite a few commercial artists on the Project. Now that you've asked me, I think now I could say that we possibly had eighty that would call themselves artists, commercial artists, advertising artists, draftsmen.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Were there some young art students who later became well-known?

MARGERY SMITH: No. We didn't take students.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Well, I mean people who qualified and had some art training and later developed their skills . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Became famous? No, we didn't have a Morris Graves or a Mark Tobey or . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Developed skills and became artists, otherwise . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: You're touching on a rather disappointing facet. Of course, with the old people, most of them have died, the young people I don't think that we produced any famous artists. Carl Morris is a famous artist but he was never on relief. Yes, he was, I guess, to be a supervisor.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Morris Graves was already well-known.

MARGERY SMITH: No, he wasn't well-known. The story about Morris Graves is, when he was on the Project, he loaded up his little Ford truck with a lot of his drawings and went into town and sold them to anybody who would buy them for two dollars and a half apiece.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: This was in Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: No, he was in Washington. And Mark Tobey was in Washington and, you know, he's very famous. His work is highly prized and very expensive. Price was our very best artist. I don't think there was anyone else that . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Did he become a supervisor or just remain as an artist?

MARGERY SMITH: No, he just remained as an artist. Well, I think we've kind of run this a little thin, don't you? Can you turn it off?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Well, I was just picking up little details that occur to me, of interest.

MARGERY SMITH: I'm trying to think of some. I told you about the time they decided I needed a male assistant director because this one artist who was supposed to do a study of the Barlow Trail. He lived near the Barlow Trail. See, that was one thing we tried to do . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: The old pioneer trail of the covered wagons?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, and he produced the most dreadful picture of a pregnant woman in bed that was a deliberate insult to the Project. So they decided I couldn't handle my . . . some of the artists; they'd better give me a male director who'd be a little . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Stronger with them . . . ?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. I was very glad to have him. He turned out to be extremely competent. Well, I think we'd better call it off because I've run out of ideas. Now, if I can think of anything else, I'll let you know.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: If there's any final statement you'd like to make on the picture as a whole . . . .

MARGERY SMITH; Only that I feel that the WPA Art Projects are responsible for the great Renaissance of interest in American painting and international painting in this country. I think it's been better for the artists than it has been for the laymen, because artists have really become appreciated, and the laymen are behind the artists, of course, in their art understanding. But there's no question about it in my mind that it all stemmed from the WPA

Art Projects. And I believe people are beginning to realize it.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Do you know where the Oregon Project records went?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, I think they're in the Office of the State Forestry Building, wherever that is. And I'm sure, I know there are a lot of films of our work, and I think there's a lot of microfilm there.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Microfilm and motion picture film?

MARGERY SMITH; I don't remember much about motion pictures. You know, photography wasn't so much done in those days and, of course . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: A lot of still photographs in those days.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. I don't think we had any movies at all. Now I'll tell you someone who is terribly good that we had on our project: Minor White. Do you remember him? Do you know of him? He's a very well-known photographer. And he went on the Project and did some beautiful pictures of the old castiron buildings, historical pictures, a complete set of which is in the Public Library.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Castiron buildings in Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. The ones that were brought around the horn by ship. Minor White is very, very well-known nationally. He taught down here at the San Francisco Art Institute for several years. I remember when he went on the Project. Whether he was one of the people who went on because he was on relief, I wouldn't know. I would be inclined to think he was put on as one of our five that we were allowed, because we wanted these historical records . . . .
LEWIS FERBRACHE: Of Portland?

MARGERY SMITH: You see, this is where I'm on very delicate ground because a person who wasn't on relief might resent having it said that they were on relief. You can see that.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Artists don't mind today because I've talked to some of them and we were all in the same boat, you might say . . . .

MARGERY SMITH: Artists don't, that's what I say, "There, but for the grace of God go I." One of New York's best and most expensive jewelers, David Webb, was on the WPA rolls in New York. No, I don't think there is any harm in it but some people might resent it. Now I'm just . . . .

LEWIS FERBRACHE: They often leave it out of their biographies today.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes, I think they do.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: They're quite glad to talk about it because it's an interesting historic period now.

MARGERY SMITH: Yes. Very important one.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I was thinking of the personnel records and letters and things from the Project; these records are in some source in Oregon stored?

MARGERY SMITH: I doubt it. I've asked Mrs. Griffith to look up her husband's files. They went to Japan to live and I imagine their files are probably thrown out. But I'm sure that Forestry Department is a repository for our records.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: In Portland?

MARGERY SMITH; Yes.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Or Salem?

MARGERY SMITH: No, I think it would be in Portland. How long is this investigation or recording to go on, because Gladys Everett will be in touch with that situation?

LEWIS FERBRACHE: I think to the end of this year.

MARGERY SMITH: She'll be back. We'll find out.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Fine.

MARGERY SMITH: And when I go up to Portland this time, I'll call the Forestry Service. You see, everyone who was in charge in those days has since died. Just everyone. You see, they were all middle-aged men at the time. But try to get in touch with Bess Whitcomb. She probably has a better memory that I have.

LEWIS FERBRACHE: Thank you very much, Mrs. Smith. I certainly appreciate your giving so much time to this.

MARGERY SMITH: Well, my heart is much in it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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